

The librettist's adaptation of source in collaboration with the composer

RED ANGEL: SCRIPT AND ASSOCIATED DOCUMENTS

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Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of
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RED ANGEL

**The libretto of a full length opera
set in the Southern Sudan in 1990 and 1991
by Adam Strickson**

**An adaptation of Yasuzo Masumura's 1966 film, *Red Angel*,
based on the novel by Yorichika Arima, written by Ryoza Kasahara.**

2008

Cast

14 singers

Lead soloists

Soprano (Sophie, an Acholi nurse)

Tenor (Ben, an English doctor)

3 boy trebles (Kur, Dut and Dur – Dinka child soldiers)

All other singers are part of the Chorus as required:

Soprano 1 (Amel, a Dinka nurse)

Soprano 2

Mezzo-soprano/alto 1 (Sister Catherine, a Belgian nurse)

Mezzo-soprano/alto 2 (Leura, a Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA) camp follower - Dinka)

Tenor 1 (Deng, a Dinka SPLA soldier)

Tenor 2

Bass/Baritone 1 (Isaac, a Nuer SPLA soldier)

Bass/Baritone 2 (a Dinka SPLA instructor)

Bass/Baritone 3 (Colonel James, a Dinka SPLA commander)

As well as the above parts, the Chorus play villagers, nurses, doctors, patients, SPLA soldiers, Nuer soldiers and child soldiers; and sounds of the hospital, the bush and the war.

Ensemble

7 musicians and a conductor:

String quartet

(Kora)

2 percussionists: Instruments including marimba, snare drum, tenor drum, bass drum, cymbals, woodblocks and xylophone.

RED ANGEL: musicians on the recording of scenes 1, 2, 9 and 10

Conductor: Ayanna Witter-Johnson

Soloists

Solo tenor - Ben: Sam Weatherstone (University of York music undergraduate and Yorkshire Bach Choir)

Solo Soprano - Sophie: Aniko Kilpatrick (MA student University of Salford/Hallé Choir)

Chorus and other parts

Soprano 1: Emily Browne (Leeds College of Music, recent graduate)

Soprano 2/*Treble part - Dut.* Jenny Daniel (University of Leeds, School of Music PhD student – Opera Studies)

Soprano 3/*Treble part – Dur.*: Rachel Taylor (Leeds College of Music Graduate/Hallé Choir)

Treble – *Kur.* David Payne (St Robert's Church Choir, finalist BBC Radio 2 Chorister of the Year).

Alto 1/Sister Catherine: Rachel Taylor & Charlotte Heslop (University of Leeds, music undergraduate)

Alto 2 – Katherine Jarvis (Leeds College of Music)

Tenor 1/baritone – Isaac & Instructor: Philip Rayner (University of Huddersfield, MMus Composition student)

Tenor 2: Tom Morss (Recent graduate, University of Leeds, School of Music)

Bass 1/Baritone: Scott Penn (University of Leeds, music undergraduate/University Opera Group)

Bass 2/Baritone: Adam Hunt (Leeds Youth Opera)

Bass 3/Baritone: Phil Wilcox (University of Leeds, music undergraduate)

String quartet:

Violin 1: Ellie Cox: (Music Graduate, University of Durham)

Violin 2: Eddie Armitage: (Freelance musician – jazz, folk, dance)

Viola: Katie Allen: University of Leeds, music undergraduate/Leeds orchestras)

Cello: Emilia Ergin: (Freelance musician/Grammatica)

Percussion:

Percussion 1: Enrico Bertelli (University of York PhD Contemporary Performance student and percussion teacher; leader 'Brake Drum Percussion')

Percussion 2: Karl Kramer (University of York, music undergraduate)

Recorded by Ben Schrecker (MA Music and Technology student, University of Leeds School of Music)

RED ANGEL(*Version 6*)

1. GOVERNMENT GUERILLAS ATTACK.

Low light. Metal hospital beds are arranged in a large archway with a rough metal cross, slightly askew, on the top. Within the arch, sheets of thin netting blow about, like a giant curtain in the wind. Behind, there is a rough wall, like hard, pitted mud. Above and beyond the wall, there should be the feeling of endless space. Images projected on the netting and the wall: they are like X-rays or archaeological photographs of bones and skeletons, melting into each other. Three boys (Kur, Dur, Dut) are clinging to the beds; we are almost unaware of their presence. Sudden bright light reflects off the metal, with a suggestion of flames. Travelling across the bones, we see images of tanks, jeeps and horses.

A rumbling, like horses' hoofs coming closer and closer; this continues throughout the boys' singing.

The chorus sing Dinka (pron. DEEN-kuh) words and sounds underneath the boys' text; the Dinka words are a list of what is being destroyed:

röör (men)mīth (children)wæɛŋ (a village corral for cows)nyan bäär (a tall girl)
buɔt kee rou (two hundred) raan pieth (a nice person)

The three boys run in and out of the netting – like playing a tag game - while singing:

Kur: We race to the church.

Boys: The church is a safe place,
a shining place.

Dur: We race to the church.

Boys: The church is a safe place,
a shining place.

Dut: We race to the church.

Boys: The church is a safe place.

Kur: My mother told me.

They return to their original positions, clinging to the beds. Lower light.

Boys: Safe in the shadows
by the thatched wall
we watch with hating eyes.

Kur: We see the yellow dress
splayed in the dirt.

Dur: We hear the dogs' howls.

Dut: The Arabs' shouts.

The Chorus are in the wings, unseen. The invocation is accompanied by gunfire.

Male solo (Chorus) Allah-o- Akbar!

Chorus: Allah-o- Akbar!

Weeping women: the chorus use Dinka vowel sounds:ka, oah-oaha, kaak, yaah with appropriate emotional intention.

Boys: Oh Lord. Oh Lord.

Kur: We will stay here.

Boys: Oh Lord. Oh Lord.

Dur: Until we do the same.

Boys: Oh Lord. Oh Lord.

Dut: We shall be soldiers.

Boys: Safe in the shadows, we wait.

Dur: We shall do the same.

Dut: We shall be soldiers.

Dur: We shall be boy soldiers.

Dut: We shall be the Lord's soldiers.

NOT IN CURRENT SCORE:

Kur: He who would valiant be –

Kur, Dur & Dut: He who would valiant be 'gainst all disaster
 Let him in constancy follow the Master.
 There's no discouragement shall –

*Rapid, louder gunfire. They freeze, and then Dut slumps forward.
 Darkness.*

2. SOPHIE'S FIRST NIGHT AT THE HOSPITAL

*Bus noise. The bus stops. We hear 'Erokamano', 'thank you' in Acholi.
 Sophie begins singing at the back of the stage, and – as she sings - comes
 forward to stand in front of the archway. She is carrying a bag. She sings in
 Acholi as she makes her way to the archway.*

Sophie: Opak ruoth (God is good)
 Opak ruoth
 Opak ruoth
 Nyasage ber (God is great)

No moon tonight
 You have not seen darkness
 like our darkness.
 The night is a hiding place,
 a fearful place.

You see shapes –
 they are not there.
 You think you see –
 you see nothing.

(Sophie:) The night is a hiding place,
a fearful place.

Sister (*running with light*): Who are you?

Sophie: I am Sophie. I am a new nurse.
I trained in Nairobi.

Sister: Quick. Oh, venez m'aider!

Sophie: But –

Sister: Vite! Quick, quick!
A boy soldier – he has just arrivé.
He walk for five days.
blood in the stomach.

Sophie: Oh...but my uniform –

Sister: With me, come...wash the hands! Wash the
hands!
Put on the mask. Vite! Quick, quick!

Cries of a boy (Dut). The chorus dismantle the archway and make the beds into a ward. The netting is pulled round. Naked light bulbs hang and swing. Drips. The chorus sing as they assemble the hospital ward. There is a sung drone/or electronic sound imitating the sound of ceiling fans.

Chorus: Life to death Death to life
Belly to knife Knife to belly

(Chorus:) Gob to spoon Spoon to gob
 Noon to night Night to noon
 Needle to bum Bum to needle
 Sun to moon Moon to sun
 and yet our work is never done.

Our hands shake, our eyes shut,
 our feet stiffen, our tongues dry.

(Repeat)

The surgeon and nurses work on Dut, who is on the operating table in the centre. Kur and Dur, in beds, are sitting up.

Dur: His hands shake.

Kur: His eyes shut.

Dur: His feet stiffen.

Kur: His tongue dries.

Dur: The dead shall rise.

Kur: We learnt this lie.

Surgeon: We were too late.

Sister: C'est finis. C'est finis.

Chorus: Too late! Too late!

Old socket eyes
was at the gate.

Sister: Close his eyes
and cover his head.
Take him from here.
We need the bed.

They carry Dut's body away.

(To Sophie) So...your uniform.

She draws a screen across and hands Sophie a packet.

Sophie: I saw claw marks on the boy's arm.
He escaped a forest lion
but a bullet runs faster.

She puts her uniform on, partially hidden by the screen.

As a child I would sit in the sand
and let sparkles sift through my hand.
I was daughter, cousin and friend
till war brought that life to an end.

I shall be light, I shall be hope, I shall be rain
to these people whose language is pain.

(Sophie:)

I lost mother and sister and home
and my heart almost turned into stone.

I fight hard to hold on to my faith
in the teeth of such unholy waste.

I shall be light, I shall be hope, I shall be rain
to these people whose language is pain.

My teacher came up with a plan
so I fled from the shrieks of Sudan.
Now I've trained as a nurse I've come back
to serve in this football field shack.

I shall be light, I shall be hope, I shall be rain
to these people whose language is pain.

I'll button this floury white shirt -
and I'll sponge and I'll scrub till I hurt.
In this pinafore brown as a rat
I'll work till I'm breaking my back.

I shall be light, I shall be hope, I shall be rain
to these people whose language is pain.

I shall be light. I shall be hope, and I shall be
rain.

Adwaro nindo. I need to sleep.

Sister:

This way. I show you.

The Sister leads her through the ward. The beds are now full of men.

(Sister:) These men, some I think they are not so ill:
they are not wishing to return to their units.

So of these Liberation army men beware -
they are not too sick to pinch your derrière.

(She points) This!

Isaac whistles.

Male chorus: Hey sister! Who's the new girl?
Come on Catherine, (Pron. 'Katreen')
don't be mean.
Love is all we need.
Hey, where you from girl?

Sophie: Near Juba. But I am Acholi.

Isaac: I know some Acholi.
Ciandani dong'o dongo'o nywasore
(Your buttocks sway like a bell)

He makes gestures to illustrate the words. The men laugh and make bell sounds, wiggling their buttocks from side to side in their beds and singing 'Bell bum, bell bum' repeatedly. Sister Catherine shuts them up.

Isaac: Hey I am from Juba.
You know Paul's garage on the paved road.

(Isaac:) I am his son and chief mechanic.

(Nuer) Engene, Engene, Engene
Gore oh deiye lar gise –
(It's like this, like this, like this
I want to tell you part of my story-)

Sophie: Your story?

Isaac: How old are you?

Sophie: I'm twenty three.

Sister: Come, come.
He has one thing on his mind.

She leaves, with Sophie.

Isaac: Yes Sister Catherine, I have one thing on my
mind.
To grab a handful of a Juba girl's gorgeous
behind!

Laughing. The men sing 'Bell bum, bell bum' again.

3. HER SECOND NIGHT.

*Sophie is getting ready for the night shift. She is wiping her face with a towel
and adjusting her clothes.*

Sophie: My second night in this place.
They let me sleep until noon.
Mothers without milk,
children who have eaten only leaves,
boy soldiers with no legs, and men
up to their usual tricks,
They think only of their –

Sister: Nurse Sophie, time for your round.

She hands her a torch. Sophie enters the ward and lights up each bed in the torch beam. As she pulls the sheet over a patient, Isaac grabs her from behind and pulls her on to the bed.

Sophie: Let me go! Let me go!

Isaac: And who will hear you pretty girl?
Who will help you, my Juba girl,
my swinging bell, my bell bum?

Sophie: Let me go! Let me –

He covers her mouth. Freeze with Isaac and Sophie in this position.

Chorus: You know you like it.
You know you want it.

You know you like it.
You know you want it.
Want it/like it.

(Sophie:) Like it/want it.

Unfreeze. Isaac pulls up her dress and her blouse over her face, as another man holds her down.

Isaac: Hey, it'll be fun to watch.

Chorus: He'll give bell bum a good seeing to.
He'll screw her. He'll shag her.
He'll poke her. He'll nail her.
He'll give her a ring to remember.

*They pull a rudimentary screen around his bed. Muffled sounds of rape.
The soldiers pull the screen away. Sophie runs out.*

Dur: Hey Kur, did you hear?
Kur, did you hear?
He was doing her.
Isaac was doing her.

Kur: She had it coming.

Dur: Maybe next time,
if we ask him,
he'll let us watch.

Next day: the ward has returned to normal, with a nurse doing her rounds.

Male chorus: *(whispered)* Women are cattle.
with trebles Women are goods.

in the next life.
Can't wait to taste
your wild honey lips.

Male chorus: (*whispered*) Women are cattle.
Women are goods.

Isaac sings the SPLA song over this as he leaves.

4. BLOOD AND THE DOCTOR.

Sophie: I think I'm tough, I think I've done well
but two months later, they fly me to hell:
a mobile hospital on the frontline,
a sighing tent with a Red Cross sign.

Each night I cry. Each night I die.
Each night I cry. Each night I die.

Aywakga pile gotieno – too atw agaa pile gotieno

Chaos. Vehicle engines. Projections to suggest large numbers of casualties. A sudden freeze of everything except the doctor and Sophie, who thread their way through the scene.

Doctor (Ben): Mid-tarsal amputation.

Sophie: We...we can't do that here.

Doctor: There are no evacuations.

Sophie: But we don't have –

Doctor: Dead.

Embedded shrapnel –
below knee amputation.

Soldier 1: Kill Me! Kill me!

'The hanging of the meat' – during each of the three amputations a limb (wrapped white cotton, trailing red ribbons) is hung from the frame, ceremonially. This contrasts with harsh music which could use harmonics - undertones and overtones. A suggestion of the continuous buzz of a small electric saw. A low ground beat; the action is in slow motion. It is important that the action is tense, and not farcical. A gurney is used for the patients who are then lifted off onto the beds.

A soldier screams in pain. A pause, then he screams again. Each scream is much longer than we would expect. Over, and between the screams, words interweave and overlap from this text, sung by the chorus:

Blood kenning

Limb-pour

war-daub

floor-spatter

Heat-spurt

wound-weep

sheet-splash

Flesh-oozer

breath-choker

death-warner

Knife-dripper

strife-bringer

life-ender

Another soldier screams in pain. A pause, then he screams again. Each scream is much longer than we would expect.

Doctor: Morphine, give him some morphine.

Doctor & chorus: Hold him down. Hold him down.
Hold him down. Hold him down.

*A third soldier screams in pain. A pause, then he screams again.
'Blood kenning' words still part of the texture.*

Doctor: We'll cut below the knee.

Chorus: Hold him down. Hold him down.
Hold him down. Hold him down.

Sophie: Will he make it?

Doctor: Maybe the plane will get here. Maybe.
Maybe tomorrow. Maybe the day after.

Duet

Sophie: Twenty hours.
Twenty hours without stop.

We feel forgotten.

Doctor: Twenty hours.
Twenty hours without stop.

We feel lost.

Sophie: Each night I cry. Each night I die.

Aywakga pile gotieno – too atwagaa pile gotieno

5. BEGGING FOR HIS LIFE.

Another patient is brought in. It is Isaac.

Doctor: *(To Sophie)* This one won't make it.
He's bled too much...
and I'm too tired.

Isaac: Nurse Sophie. Nurse Sophie.

Sophie cries out.

(Isaac:) Forgive me. Please save me.

Pause.

Sophie: If we could just try...

Doctor: (*Angry*) It's a waste of clotting pads,
a waste of antibiotics, it's...
a waste, a waste, a waste.

Sophie: He's a special case.

Doctor: How do you know him?

Sophie: He was my patient...before.

Please. Please.

Doctor: If you come to my tent tonight.

Pause.

Sophie nods.

Two long screams again.

Sophie: We couldn't save him.
I don't know what came over me
but I couldn't let him die
(Sophie:) even though, even though –

Life is sacred, life is sacred
whatever he'd done to me.
I couldn't let him die
even though, even though –

6. DOCTOR BEN.

The doctor's tent, set up in the midst of the metal beds. A low bed, with a mosquito net. The doctor is sitting up, drinking a beer. Sophie is outside the tent.

Sophie: Doctor. Doctor.

Ben: I didn't think you'd come.

Sophie: But Doctor you said –

Ben: Yes I said.

Sophie: I'll go away.

Ben: No stay...

You want a beer?

I have two, Tuskers, Kenyan –
they came on the last plane.

Sophie: No. No thank you.

Were you joking when...?

Were you joking?

Ben:

Maybe. Maybe not.

I feel like the doorman to hell.

Come this way. You burn.

Or this way? Hey, you burn too.

This war is just about power and greed
when people can't fulfil their basic needs.

Different tribes, wrong borders,
gun dealers and road builders.

It's all oil money, poverty,
flies and ridiculousness.

Hail China, Hail the USA.

Hey Sudan you need a hand?

We'll grab the lion's share
after you rip each other up.

Kneel down, say a prayer.

Did anyone tell you

Christ and Mohammed
are lost in no one's land?

Christ and Mohammed
are lost in no one's land.

There's an old cool bag in my sack.

(Ben:)

Hand it to me; it keeps me on track.

He takes out a syringe.

Don't make me do it myself.
You're a nurse.
It's just pethidine. For sleep.
It makes me feel...not here.

Sophie: I can't.

Ben: That's what I meant.
The bargain.

Sophie finds a vein and injects him. Sophie cries.

Hey, hey...

Sophie: But you're a doctor –

Ben: I'm Ben, Ben...that's my name.
Stay with me Sophie.

Sophie: But you said –

Ben: Stroke my head, that's all.
I just want to sleep and forget everything.
Just...stroke... that's all.

She does and he falls asleep. She looks at him, then lies down beside him, in her clothes, and falls asleep. (Reprise of melody for 'Each night I cry. Each night I die.)

Nurse, I need a pee.

Nurse, I have no arms.

She puts her hand under the sheet to help him. She takes the bottle away.

Deng: Nurse, be good to me.

Sophie: What?

Deng: I have been here six months.
I am going to die.
I will never see my wife again.

Sophie: But...

Deng: He's snoring. Be good.

Sophie: I walk in a scorched river valley
and half a man lies in the dirt.

Does it hurt me to offer this?

Does it hurt me to be kind?

Sophie brings him to climax with her hand, under the sheet.

Deng: Kiss.

Sophie kisses him on the forehead, slowly.

Sophie: Does it hurt me to offer this?
Does it hurt me to be kind?

Deng: Once I was a warrior
with proud forehead scars.
Now I am a hateful man,
a blood-sucking tick
on the back of my song oxen.

My foot, I can feel with my foot.
Let me put it between your legs.

Sophie raises her pinafore and lets him.

Sophie: Does it hurt me to offer this?
Does it hurt me to be kind
when a warrior's alone?

She walks slowly out of the ward, without looking back.

8. SOPHIE'S KINDNESS.

Sophie: Sister, why is Deng not sent home?

Sister: You know – they will not take him back.

Sophie: May I take him out. To the town.

...like a carved god.

She takes her clothes off.

I told him he could look.

I told him he could do anything.

I didn't feel dirty. I felt...I felt...

Deng: Why are you doing this for me?

Sophie: There is no reason.

He made good use of his foot
and I gave him what I could.

I didn't feel dirty. I felt...

I felt...I could help.

And then I held him.

I held my carved god.

Deng: I am very happy.

Sophie: This is the first and last time.

Deng: I know.

Sophie: The first and last time.

Deng: *(softly)* The first and last time.

Very faintly the chorus sing **So happy** and **Meet pou** (Dinka). *The stage gradually gets darker until it is as dark as possible. The darkness is held for a moment, and then the lights come back on suddenly. Spotlight on Deng's body, spread out on the ground.*

Sister: He killed himself.

Sophie: He has no arms.

Sister: He threw himself in front of a truck.

He left this for you.

It is not my business.

She leaves.

Sophie: *(reads note)* 'You are so good. Today I was so happy
I will never meet anyone like you again.

Today I was so happy. I will never...'

I thought I could help.

Isaac, now Deng...

Solo

Shall I go to a broken hut

and weep on an island in the wetlands?

Shall I mourn to blue sky and storks,

then rinse the blood from my helping hands?

(Sophie:) I'll weave a grass roof for shade

and rage at the absence of peace.

Shall I catch barbed fish and make fire,
invite my two corpses to feast?

My chief mechanic, my warrior Deng,
did my curves split your war-bruised minds?
Though I soothe with my whispered words,
is the blame for your deaths really mine?

When I'm alone in that hut among thorns,
I'll reply to the hyenas' cries.

There's a man who cannot sleep through the
night.

Should he wait for my love-longing eyes?

The curse of my love-longing eyes?

9. CHILD SOLDIERS/RE-UNION WITH BEN.

A repeat of the chorus from scene 1: Dinka (pron. DEEN-kuh) words and sounds underneath the instructor's and the boys' text.

röör (men)mīth (children)wæɛŋ (cows)nyan bäär (a tall girl)

buɔt **kee** rou (two hundred) raan pieth (a nice person)

An SPLA soldier gives Kur a gun. Dur watches

Instructor: Glad to be here eh?

Glad to be Jash Amar?

(Instructor:) Glad to be Red Army boys.

Kur: Are we winning the war?

Instructor: We are always winning the war,
Jash Amar are always winning the war.

Dur puts his finger in the barrel of the gun.

Dur: It's so small, the opening.

Instructor: The bullet is not wide.

Kur: Is the bullet hot?

Instructor: The gun makes it hot.

Dur & Kur: The bullet is not wide
The gun makes it hot.

We are Jash Amar.
We are Red Army boys.

Sophie: I feel... I feel I'm not doing so well
but one month later, I'm back in hell:
a mobile hospital on the frontline,
a shrieking tent with a Red Cross sign.

Ben looks up from operating on a patient.

Ben: I thought they'd forgotten about us.
And now they send an angel.

Are you well, angel Sophie?

Sophie: I'm here again.

Ben: Well, welcome to the plague-days,
our gory spectacle of blunders.
It's all going down, angel Sophie.
We're all going down, so gloves on.

Sophie assists Ben.

Ben: I had a wife. The day before the crash
we sat and watched the terns bathing:
they spread their wings, in the snow,
rising and falling over a grey Lincolnshire sea.

Sophie: I didn't know. I'm sorry.

Ben: When I sleep I can forget her.
I can forget all this blood.
I can forget the hundreds
of bullets I've removed
and I can forget... the flick
of her just washed hair.

He's done. Take him back.

Nurses/orderlies remove the patient from the gurney.

(Ben:)

Next. Next. Next!

Another patient is placed on the gurney. He is moaning. Ben inspects him and then lets out a sigh.

Give him some morphine,
and then take him away.
A bullet in his skull
and his balls blown away.
I won't waste my knife
for a vegetable life.
There's a queue out there.
Thirty men
in a queue out there.
I can sew him up,
but he'll have no balls,
just a lifetime of pain
and a Weetabix brain.

Next. Next. Next!

Sophie has turned away, clearly upset.

Hey, angel Sophie
this war just got a whole lot worse.
Didn't they tell you?
They should have told you.

She shakes her head.

(Ben:) If I make it to the end of the queue
will you come and mop my brow?

Sophie: I'll come.

Fire. Kur and Dur are eating almost raw meat. They are bloody. Their voices overlap.

Kur: This is the best elephant
I have ever tasted.

Dur: It tastes better than glucose biscuits.

Kur: This elephant will make me kill an Arab.

Dur: That is what Dinka boys are for.

Kur: Dinka boys are the best army boys.

Dur: Dinka boys have the biggest pricks.

Kur: Dinka boys will win the war.

Kur & Dur: Dinka boys will win the war.
Dinka boys will win the war.
Dinka boys will win the war.
Dinka boys will win the war.

10. BEN'S SUFFERING AND SOPHIE'S LOVE.

Lamps light up a tent. Ben is inside his mosquito net. Sophie bangs a rhythm on the outside of the tent. There is no reaction. She repeats the rhythm, louder. No reaction. She repeats the rhythm even louder, shaking the tent.

Ben: Come!

He draws the net slightly aside and looks at her.

I've missed you.

My pethidine. Please.

Sophie: Please stop.

Pause.

Please want me.

Ben: What?

Sophie: I love you.

Ben: You love me?

He points to the syringe, lying on the open cool bag.

Be good, eh? My pethidine.

Sophie: Please touch me.

Pause.

Ben: My pethidine. Please.

Please Sophie.

Sophie hesitates and then injects him.

Stay till I fall asleep,
like you did last time.

Sophie: I will.

Ben: I'll try to stop. I will try.

She strokes his head.

Sophie: Hey khwaja, my white man,
you sleep among crocodiles
and the river churns with blades.
The banks are collapsing
and the antelopes drown.

My love is a boat stranded in the war-storm;
rosy flamingos knock on the shell with their beaks

(Sophie:) Hey khwaja, my white man,
God must be angry with my country.
Is he angry with yours?

I hate this bush darkness,
the cold hack of the night.

My love is a boat stranded in the war-storm;
rosy flamingos knock on the shell with their beaks

Hey kwaja, my white man,
your people have skin like angels.
They are Adam and Eve in our books.
Such fragile messengers
flare up in our bomb-blast sun.

My love is a boat stranded in the war-storm;
rosy flamingos knock on the shell with their beaks

Hey khwaja, my white man,
you are trapped like a tsetse
in this Acholi queen's spider silk.
Taste my baobab, not the apple.
I am a town on fire – rush in.

Hey khwaja, my white man,
I am a town on fire – rush in.

11. GOVERNMENT ATTACK/DEATH OF THE INNOCENTS.

Sound of planes (noisy propellers) and bombs dropping. Silence.

(The propeller noise could be done vocally by the chorus)

Fragments of this Dinka mourning song, softly in semi-darkness. (No 4 from 'Dinka Malual'); Dinka and English words and phrases can be interspersed

Adut ah che nock ba jal maa jal ah tang ah gam
 why-maa jal ah tang ah gom why. Manager maa
 adut man ah che nack. Ba jah ah tang ah gom why
 ba jal tang a gom why manager mou ba maa gah ah t
 tang ah gom why manager mou

Maa adut arol. Aaah, ban du ah ban kong raik
 nyaar-ya maa adut arol aah ban du ah ban kong raik
 nyeer. Ah bandu a ban kong raik nyeer
 yah ban kong raik nyeeer – roap peen nyeer roap panah
 roap peen a panah

Translation:

The singer is talking to his brother about his the loss of the women of the house, including his sister:

Adut got killed in her house.

She was beaten with a club.

Oh Manager-maa (*son of my mother*) she was beaten with a club.

She was beaten with a club, with a club.

Manager-maa, she was beaten with a club.

The singer is now talking to his mother:

Mother, is your home a house that can be destroyed?

Can it be destroyed with my sisters (*the women of the family*) in it?

Can your home really be destroyed with our unmarried girls inside?

Flattened to the ground with the girls inside it, with the girls inside it,
with the girls inside it.

Frantic movement back and fro in the hospital tent. Sophie comes running in, adjusting her uniform.

Sophie: (*Shouts*) Amel!

(*Sung*) Amel!

Amel: (*dripping blood*) It's just a graze, just a graze.

Government bombers -
they hit the cattle camp:

Sophie: The cattle camp?

Amel: The boy said:

a cattle camp

with no soldiers

no tanks

no guns

(Amel:) no phones

no bicycles

just women

old men

children

and one boy -

over there.

He has lost his mum.

Dur is singing the mourning song; the chorus join in. Sophie watches.

Sophie: I know you.

Dur: I am Dur.
This was my mother.

Sophie: Dur. Dur and Kur.
I thought you'd be a soldier.

Dur: I was a very brave soldier.
We were both soldiers
but my father was killed.

Dur: The cattle. Our cattle.
I am the only son.
I am the only –

I was -

Sophie reaches out to him. She seems almost frozen.

Sophie: Dur. Dur and Kur.
Dur, it is really you.

Amel: Sophie.

Sophie, are you alright?

Sophie: *(loud)* We need blood.

We don't have any blood.

Why don't we have blood?

12. BEN'S POSTING AND SOPHIE'S DECISION.

Dawn. Ben is packing his bags. Sophie is asleep.

Sophie: Ben...Ben?

Ben: I am leaving.

Sophie: Just you.

Ben: They are sending me to the White Nile:

Cholera. .. cholera!

Sophie: But you will need nurses.

Ben: Not you. Not you. Not you.
The rebel army is based there.

Sophie: But you will need nurses.
Take me with you.

Ben: Not you. That's an order.

Pause.

Sophie: You should not give me orders.

Ben: That's true
but you may die.

Duet

Ben and Sophie's words overlap and interweave.

Sophie: Yes, I may die. I may die anyway.
I will come with you.

Ben: I am not worth this Sophie. I am not.

Sophie: I am afraid of one thing most of all.

Ben: I am afraid of everything, and nothing.

- Sophie: I am afraid of one thing most of all.
- Ben: I am afraid of everything, and nothing.
- Sophie: I am afraid I will die in a different place to you.
- Ben: I am not worth this. I am so different to you.
- Sophie: We are all different.
- Ben: I am so different to you.
- Sophie: What do you mean? What do you mean?
- Ben: Let's see shall we. Where shall I start?
I'm English. I am white. I am a doctor.
I am an addict. I don't believe in Jesus.
I am not brave. Sacrifice is my escape route.
- Sophie: You are my –
- Ben: Sacrifice is my escape route
but I cannot escape from myself.
- Duet ends**
- Pause.*
- (Ben:) We will need another nurse.
- Sophie: Amel. She is a Dinka speaker.

The rebels are Dinka.

Ben: She is inexperienced.

Sophie: I will look after her.

I will look after you.

Pause.

Ben (spoken): You better pack your things then.
The truck will be here by this afternoon.

13. CHOLERA.

A bright orange plastic tape is wrapped all round the outside of the 'ward' structure – probably a commandeered classroom. Buckets and a low tray of a chlorine solution are placed at the entrance. Sophie and Amel dip their shoes in the tray and wash their hands in the bucket. Plastic buckets everywhere (which could be used as part of the sound texture).

Chorus

Cholera seeps and cholera spills
on the banks of the River Nile

Cholera creeps and cholera kills
on the banks of the River Nile

(Chorus:) We're fire-fighters, death-spitters,
hope-writers, fate-biters,
on the banks of the River Nile

where we'll face off this bitter trial
with salt and sugar, sugar and salt,
salt and sugar, sugar and salt.

On the banks of the River Nile
we'll hold back the inferno,
wrench away the sadness...
with salt and sugar, sugar and salt,
salt and sugar, sugar and salt
on the banks of the River Nile.

Boy: Nurse, nurse.

Sophie: Another bucket.

A bucket!

Amel: We have no more buckets.

Sophie: We need more drips. We need buckets.

She sits down on the side of a bed with her head in her hands, exhausted.

A tooled up rebel commander, Colonel James Agok, and side-kick come in; they are supporting a woman, Leura, who is obviously in great distress.

Whispered chorus: S. P. L. A. S. P. L. A.

Liberation. Liberation.

(Chorus:) Liberation Army. Liberation Army.

(Overlapping words) S. P. L. A. S. P. L. A.

We cannot hide. We cannot hide.

They're on our side. They're on our side.

Colonel: I am Colonel James Agok
of the People's Liberation Army.
You will treat this woman.

Sophie: This is a cholera centre.

Colonel: She has cholera.
The cholera must not spread to my troops.

Sophie: What is her name?

Colonel: She is called Leura.
She is very popular with my men.
She...she brings them comfort.

Amel: Then she is akuaj(*a prostitute*)

Colonel: (*angry*) You will treat her!

His side-kick threatens Amel.

Sophie: We will treat her and now please leave.

Amel: She is akuaj

'Akuaj', and an English equivalent like 'ho', is repeated by the chorus.

Sophie: Fetch a treatment pack.

She is our patient.

The chorus add the word 'patient'.

Leura cries out.

Leura: Do not let me die.
 I had a husband –
 I had a baby.

The chorus add the words' thiak' – wife, and 'maa' – mother in Dinka and English.

She cries out again.

I had a baby.
Now I am a pot-stirrer,
a shirt-scourer,
a prick-milk –

The chorus add 'pot stirrer, shirt-scourer, prick-milker' mixing these with the previous words.

Sophie: Wash her face
 and get a drip in.

Duet

As Amel fixes the drip, Sophie starts the lullaby-like song; they sing it together and then Amel takes over. Sophie goes out with the bucket.

Sophie/Amel: When the rains come,
 the antelopes stampede
 and the lions wait.
 As the herd foams the river,
 the weak-legged one
 does not know her fate.
 The shoulders of the pride rise:
 the lioness spots her prize.

Sleep tight Leura.
 You will make it
 through the night.
 It is not your time
 for the claw-ride,
 the bringing down,
 the moon-white bones

the bones
 the moon-white bones

Pause.

Two men interrupt – they are roughly dressed soldiers with the orange tape trailing from them, obviously drunk.

Rebel 1: You have our woman here.

Rebel 2: We need our woman.

He makes lewd gestures.

Rebel 1: She's our cook.

Rebel 2: She's our slag.

Amel: Get out. Get out.
She has cholera.
This is a cholera hospital.

Rebel 1: I need a woman.

We kill men.
We eat and fuck women.

Rebel 2: Eat...and fuck women.

Soldier 2 points at Amel.

Rebel 1: She... she's a woman.

Rebel 2: A bitch with a hole!

Soldier 1 grabs her and pushes her across the bottom of the bed, raising her dress as Sophie comes in. She pulls the soldier off Amel, but is herself grabbed by soldier 2.

Sophie: Stop! Stop it!

Rebel 2: Bet you're gaggin' for it,
 gaggin' for it,gaggin' for it.
 Bet you've never had one
 as big as this, as big as –

Ben rushes in.

Ben: What the –

He grabs the soldier who is attacking Sophie.

 Jerks! Psychos!
 Do you want to die of cholera?

Rebel 1: Hey doctor you're lucky:
 you fuck nurses.

Rebel 2: You fuck nurses.

Ben: And you'll be lucky not to die.

Rebel 2: We live. We die.
 We do what the fuck we want.

Ben: Get out!

A commotion outside. The colonel shoots a gun into the air repeatedly.

Colonel: Who's in charge?

The rebels run out.

Ben: I'm in charge.
You must get control over your men.
This is cholera.
Don't you understand?
Hundreds could die.

Colonel: You must move everyone out.
My scouts say the Nuer are coming.
They're toting AKs from Khartoum.
Move everyone out. Move everyone out.

Ben: I can't. We only have one truck.

Colonel: This is my order: get everyone out
even faster than you white men shit.

Ben goes to the ward.

Ben: We have to pack up, get out.
That rebel Colonel – he says
the town will be attacked,
we will be attacked.

Sophie: And who's that Colonel?
We are nurses.

(Sophie:) We're going nowhere.

Ben: There's a split in the rebel army.
Hundreds of Nuer are just up river.

Amel: We have patients.

Ben: Yes we have patients.

Sophie: We say, 'When elephants fight,
it is the grass that gets trampled.'

We say, 'When elephants fight,
it is the grass that gets trampled.'

Amel: *(softly)* We're going nowhere.

Sophie: *(softer)* We will look after the grass.

14. INTIMATIONS OF MASSACRE AND SOPHIE'S STRUGGLE

The noise of shooting and vehicles, some distance away. The hospital is busy.

Chorus: Sleeping circles break
and hate fills the day-break.
Soon we will hear distant shots.
Brother will kill brother with Russian guns.
Soon we will hear small screams.

(Chorus:) Later the sky will split with bullets,
the streets will litter with death:

soldiers, old men, mothers and still boys,
still boys.

Ben: Everyone stays inside.

Sophie: We're running out of fresh water.

Ben: Everyone stays inside.

Chorus: By noon, the stench seeps into our food.
The Dinka are holding back the Nuer.

The noise of shooting increases, and dies away.

By dusk, the roofs are not yet burning.
We are promised life for one more night.

Ben is examining a patient while Sophie looks on.

Sophie: We have no more rehydration solution.

Ben: Then he will die. I must stop.
I've been working sixteen hours.

He leaves.

Sophie: Amel, can I leave you on your own?

Amel: Sophie, you must go to him.

Chorus: fragments of speech, groans, snores, sighs, very quietly but constant throughout the rest of the scene.

Sophie knocks on the doctor's door.

Ben: Sophie?

Sophie enters.

How are the patients?

Sophie: I think we'll lose two tonight.

Ben: My pethidine. Please Sophie.

Sophie takes overalls off and something that is tying back her hair.

Withdrawal.

I am shaking.

I am sweating.

Now is not the time.

If I don't take it –

Sophie: You will not take it.

It is keeping us apart.

Ben: And what do I gain?

Sophie: It's what I gain.

Ben: I can inject myself.
Are you going to tie me up?
Are you going to force me?

Sophie: If that's what it takes.
I love you. I love you.

Sudden loud gunfire.

Ben: This could be our last night.

Sophie ties his hands together tightly.

We will be attacked tonight.

Sophie holds him. As he twists and turns, she holds him. It is a difficult struggle. Sophie's song is fragmented by the struggle.

(The clicking sound of a frog is made with the voice: it is not the WORD click-click, and has a slight 'rolling' feel to it, like a guiro)

Sophie: **(Frog song)** There was a time before my sorrows
when I was a girl who dreamed of love
and held no trouble in my heart.

Click- click. Click-click.

Click-click. Click-click.

Click-click. Click-click.

(Sophie:) After the rains, that creamy frog
whose eyes popped up in puddled sand.

I knew I'd catch him in my hand.

Click-click. Click-click.

After the rains, that frog with claws -
he thought he'd stare me out and win.
I waited, knew I'd haul him in.

Click-click. Click-click.

After the rains, that slippery frog
was sure he'd beat a bare-kneed kid.
She'd turn and then away he'd skid.

Click-click. Click-click.

After the rains, that clicking frog
could not have guessed that I would stay
until the dark bewitched the day.

Click-click. Click-click.

After the rains, that fed up frog
I wanted to be mine leapt up
and landed in my fingers' cup.

(Sophie:)

After the rains, that quivering frog
lay still and let me stroke his skin

before he hopped to earth again.

Ben, at last, stops struggling and lies still.

There will be time after my sorrows:
I shall pull the trouble from your heart
and we will lie together at the day's beginning.

Eventually they both fall asleep.

A woman shouts out in the night.

Woman: Nurse! Nurse!
 My baby's eyes are dry.
 I think he has the cholera.

Amel: We cannot take your baby.
 We have no more medicine.

The woman steps in.

We cannot take him.

Woman: I will wait.

Please give me some water.

She sits down and leans against the outside of the hospital.

Ahel brings her a very small amount of water in a cup.

Ben: How long did I struggle for?

Sophie: Four hours.

Ben: Untie me. We have work to do.

15. PANIC IN THE HOSPITAL AND A LAST NIGHT.

The chorus, faintly (possibly recorded or off-stage) sing the Dinka words we heard at the beginning of the opera which describe people and things being destroyed, perhaps with larger numbers and some additional words. This time the English words are included too.

röör (men)mïth (children)wæɛŋ (cows)nyan bäär (a tall girl)

bust **kee** rou (two hundred) raan pieth (a nice person)

*Sophie enters the ward and holds her hand to protect her from the smell.
Amel sits slumped in a chair.*

Sophie: Amel, go and sleep.

Amel: I'm fine. I'm fine.

We need to empty the buckets.

(Pointing) And she has died.

Sophie: You need to sleep.

Amel picks up the buckets. Ben enters.

Ben: Leave those. Take a rest.

Reluctantly Amel does so, and leaves.

I'll open the doors.

We can't live with this stench.

As he does so, the sound of the chorus increases.

Patient 1: Nurse, nurse, they will shoot us.

Patient 2: They will cut off our arms.

Patient 3: They will not even dig a hole for us.

Gradual panic as the patients begin wailing and moaning.

Ben: (*shouts*) We are flying the Red Cross.

Sophie: We will look after you.

We will look after you.

Ben: (*quietly*) Remove the body.

We will bury her here.

Bring the woman and the baby in.

Sophie and an assistant take the body. The woman and baby are helped in; they sit on the bed where the body has been taken from.

Outside, lights isolate Sophie with the body.

into our thin stew, sharpen their long knives.

Now two lovers will steal time.

This may be their last night,
their last night.

Amel. Amel, I must take a rest.

Amel: Sophie, please don't leave me on –

Sophie: I'm sorry. I need to snatch a rest Amel.

Amel: Where is the doctor?

I need the doctor to look at this patient.

Sophie leaves. She walks straight into Ben's room. Ben is almost naked, partially hidden by the mosquito net.

At three different points during Sophie and Ben's love-making, the chorus (off stage, and gradually louder and closer) sing 'We will make you Dinka drink your blood' in Nuer and English, signalled by the numbers **1**, **2** and **3** in the text.

Sophie: Doctor. Are you still a doctor?

Ben: Yes, yes, yes! But I'm finished.
I'm finished. I can't do any more.

Sophie: You can love me. Please love me.

Ben: I'm not a man. I'm not...a man.

Sophie: This may be our last night.

Ben: (*angry*) Touch me, feel me, stroke me.
Do what you want.
See if there's anything there.

Sophie takes her clothes off and lies beside him, putting her hands under the sheet.

If I could just...unseal myself.
My mind is in such a bleak place.

Hold me close, tight as you can.

Sophie: There...there...sweetheart

Aheri chwora (Acholi: I love you sweetheart)

Aheri malich (I love you so much)

I love you so much.

Ben: It's no use.

1.Sophie puts her head under the sheet.

(Ben:) It's not the right time.
Aileen, my wife, she –

Sophie: Think of me. Think of me!

I may be the last woman you ever have.

This...now. This may be the last time.

You can do it, (repeated in Acholi)

2. Ben sighs. Sophie sits astride him; they make love.

As they make love, Sophie intermittently sings/sighs endearments in Acholi - as above plus Ongee ng'ato mahero moloji (You are everything to me).

Ben: I do love you Sophie.

3. Sophie gets off him and sits on the bed.

Sophie: Say that again.

Ben: I love you Sophie.

Sophie: We may die tomorrow.

Ben: We may die tonight.
It seemed such a long life.

Sophie: Will you die happy?

Pause.

Ben: Give me the beer. It's my last bottle.

He opens the bottle and raises it in the air.

To us.

He passes it to Sophie.

Sophie: To us.

Sophie & Ben: To us.

Explosions, loud gunfire, screams. A visual suggestion of fire.

Sophie drops the bottle, spilling the beer.

'We will make you Dinka drink your blood', and the same phrase in Nuer, are repeatedly distorted within the soundscape.

Sophie: Get up, get dressed. Get up!

Chorus: People are speared and shot,
bound with ragged belts, strangled.

We hear the chants of their magicians.

People are speared and shot,
tied with knotted cords, murdered.

(Chorus:) We hear the songs of Liberation.

Old men, mothers, disabled, sick, young,

speared and shot, dumped in the reeds.

Amel: Oh my tall ebony people,
(interweaving with you are dumped in the reeds
the chorus) and the river runs blood-black.

Amel: You are dumped in the reeds
 and the river runs blood-black.

Oh my tall ebony people
 not even your cattle are spared.

16. THE REBEL COLONEL AND MARKS OF LOVE.

Noises of war continue. The Colonel and rebel soldiers arrive, looking battle weary. The Colonel has an AK-47, the others spears. They stride into the ward. The patients sob.

Colonel: Why are you are still here?
 You disobeyed my orders.

Ben: What choice did I have?

Colonel: Do you have a gun?

Ben: I will not use a gun.

Colonel: Then you will die.
 You will all die.

- Patient 1: Oh Nhialic, Nhialic*, *God, the supremebeing.
 help us now,
 help the Moounyjang.* *This is what the Dinka
 call themselves, 'men of
 'men'(pron. thuongjang).
- Patient 2: My children!
 My husband!
- Colonel: Doctor, you know Manchester?
 Manchester United?
- Ben: What? No, no.
- Colonel: I was a student in Manchester.
- Ben: And now –
 I can't understand how –
- Colonel: This is a dirty war, a filthy war.
 You British are responsible.
 You made borders
 in a land without borders.
 You made a country
 where there was no country.
 We are the blacks of the South.
 The Arabs spit on us.
- (Colonel:) They call us abd, slaves.
 They call us black donkeys.
 They take away our parliament.

They take away our government.
 They steal our young girls,
 put them to work in the sorghum fields.
 At night they work them on their backs.
 These are men who would place
 coals between our legs,
 drop insects in our ears
 and brand us like cattle.
 Now the Nuer thieves
 do their killing work for them,
 their killing work for them.
 their killing work,
 their killing, killing.

He licks his finger and touches his throat (a form of Dinka swearing).

Colonel: I curse the Nuer thieves:
they will die before the next harvest.

Amel: (*Very angry*) Do not listen to this man's rubbish.

This is a war of the elite,
 a glory-trial, a schoolboy scrap,
 a glory-trial, a schoolboy scrap.

(Colonel:) It is about who will be leader,
 who will have the swagger stick,
 the swagger stick, the swagger stick.

We women do not care.

We women do not care.

Amel: Dinka and Nuer should live in peace.
We should kill the white ox,
sit down together, share the meat,
sit down together, share the meat.

Now our patients will die.

You will die, I will die

because men are little boys.

You are a little boy!

The Colonel hits her hard across the face and, as she lies on the ground, kicks her once in the stomach. Sophie goes to her.

Sophie: Amel! Amel!

Colonel: Now you will move these patients.
This hospital will be our gun post.

Ben: We will not move these patients.

Amel: We will stay with our patients.

Sophie: *(crying)* We will stay with our patients
(Sophie:) even if the sky pours fire.

Colonel: I should kill you

but I will not waste my bullets
on a white doctor and his Acholi whore.

Repeated chant of 'We will make you drink your Dinka blood', quite close.

Rebel 1: Colonel, colonel, the Nuer!
*(As if looking out
from the ward* They have many guns.

Rebel 2: We are hard fighters
but we have only spears.

Colonel: I am a Dinka spearman.
I am a master of the fishing spear.
I will make a spell to protect us.

Amel: Your spells will do nothing.
(from the floor) You are not a spiritual man.

The Colonel shoots her.

Oh Abuk, Abuk,* *Goddess of gardening
may I not see my mothe – and women.

Firing increases, glass breaks. The Dinka rebels are at the back of the ward, looking out. Sophie drags Ben across the ward and pushes him against the wall.

Sophie: I killed again. She is the third.
I brought her here.
I said I'd look after her.

Ben: This is it, Sophie. Our time's up.

Sophie: Then I shall mark you,
and whoever finds you
will know you were loved.

She kisses him hard on his bare shoulder.

Ben: I can hear your heart beating.

I will mark you too.

He bites her hard and she cries out.

Sophie, my heart is whole again.

Sophie: Hold me. Hold me close.

Ben: *(quieter)* My heart is whole again.

Now we'll run. And we'll fun fast.

Now! Now!

Colonel James begins firing rapidly. The soldiers shout. The back wall falls in (in slow motion) filling the hospital with dust.

'We will make you Dinka drink your blood' is played very loudly, and repeatedly, like a giant hammer in the ear of the audience, at the same time as the 'blood kenning'. It as if the two pieces of music are fighting each other.

a cruel massacre.

This was not a fight.

It was a massacre,

a cruel massacre.

Deep wounds do not heal.

Deep wounds do not heal.

Sophie slowly emerges, and as she does, looks around.

Sophie: I am still alive.

She puts her fingers to her face.

Sweat?

We hear a faint, broken humming of the music of 'He who would valiant be', which emerges more fully in the space between Sophie's words below.

Blood...

My face is moist with blood.

A sweat of blood.

She hears a boy's voice.

Boy: Lady... lady.

Help me.

Looking round, Sophie sees three half-naked boys tied roughly to a pile of torn bed metal, which looks a bit like a bonfire. Two of them have died. Red ribbons are tied round their heads, like a mask-bandage; we cannot see their eyes, so the boy is a 'singing mouth'.

We hid in a tree
 but the tree fell.
 They brought us here.
 They clubbed us
 with pieces of metal...
 from the beds.
 We hid in a tree.
 They clubbed us.
 They felled us.
 They –

He dies. Sophie carefully unwraps the ribbons from his head, shuts his eyes and strokes his face. She sees Amel, stripped, partially covered by metal.

Sophie: Oh Amel, they stripped you.

They didn't need... to –

Oh Amel, forgive me.

Forgive me.

Two Nuer soldiers, both with machetes, enter slowly.

Nuer 1: Any Dinka here?

Sophie: I am a nurse. I am Acholi.

Nuer 2: We don't want you.

Sophie: Stay away. This was a cholera hospital.

Nuer 1: Where are the others?

Sophie: I am the only one...
cholera...and fighting.

The wall –

Nuer 2: We are looking for Dinka.

The other soldier makes a sudden gesture of drawing his machete across his throat and then they move on. Sophie wanders to the edge of the carnage and discovers Ben's body.

Sophie: Doctor?

Ben?

She pulls him onto the remains of a bed and makes a crude cross out of scrap, tied together with the red ribbon from the boy's head. She thrusts it into the tangle of metal above Ben's head.

As she does this, she half sings, half hums a fragmented version of most of the second verse of 'He who would valiant be':

(Sophie:)

Whoso beset him round with dismal stories

Do but themselves confound – his strength the more
is.

No foes shall stay his might; though he with giants
fight,

He will make good his right –

Ben, did you hear me Ben?

Did you hear me singing to you?

Adwaro kendi. Adwaro kendi

(I want to marry you)

We sing this hymn at weddings,

at weddings, at weddings.

She falls across his body.

Red Angel: character notes (in order of appearance)**Kur, Dur and Dut**

Village Dinka boys with a Christian background serving with the SPLA. They are emblematic; their personalities are not really differentiated. It's more important that they represent child soldiers and all children forced to grow up before their time who get caught up in civil and tribal wars, and who gradually become rootless, displaced and often injured or killed. Although the three boys in the last scene are not Kur, Dur and Dut, they will be played by the same singers. As children suffer at the beginning of this story, they suffer at the end.

Sister Catherine: a Belgian nurse working with the MSF (Médecins Sans Frontières/Doctors Without Borders)

She is French speaking, Belgian, from a suburb of Brussels. I imagine it as slightly downmarket, new build. Her parents were ambitious for her – her dad a skilled manual worker, perhaps in manufacturing engineering parts. Her mother a sales supervisor at a building supplies warehouse. They are Roman Catholic and she has, from an early age, had a sense of mission, even – during her adolescence – considering becoming a nun. There was a brief time of gentle rebellion in her late teens. She likes to keep her appearance smart, and perhaps wears lipstick. She works for MSF and has been in Sudan for eighteen months; she has accumulated fatigue which she tries not to show. Her slipping into French is mostly caused by this – she is too exhausted to think of the right English words. Prior to her time in the Sudan, she spent time in Paraguay. She is dedicated but not beyond enjoying a joke. She did not travel at all before joining MSF and did her nursing training in Brussels at a large hospital, where she worked before deciding to go abroad. She is in her late twenties (28/29), unmarried. She was in relationship but this has drifted away during her last months in Belgium and first few months in the Sudan.

Sophie: a Sudanese nurse working with MSF

She is Acholi (the Acholi tribe are mostly in northern Uganda but there are about 20,000 in Southern Sudan). She has a Christian background (evangelical Anglican) and, despite what happens to her, she retains some kind of Christian faith throughout the story. She is 23. She lost her parents in a Murahaleen raid on their small town when she was in her teens (14), after a brutal few months in her area, during which she witnessed rapes, violence and many deaths: her mother was killed (she witnessed this) and she's not sure what happened to her father. A teacher managed to help her get out of Southern Sudan and found her somewhere to stay with her own relatives in Kenya where, after some schooling – and doing domestic tasks in their house as a sort of well treated servant - she has trained as a nurse in Nairobi (basic nurse training). This was paid for by an international training/re-settlement programme. She retains an air of innocence (and not just the air – despite everything, she does have a kind of innocence and openness). She is self-reliant and dexterous. She worked as a nurse in a large hospital in Nairobi for a couple of years but wanted to get back to Southern Sudan, which she still feels is her home.

Her brothers and sisters (2 older sisters, 1 younger brother) also dispersed after the raid. She thinks one of her sisters is dead. Her younger brother joined the SPLA and she is not sure whether he is alive or dead, though she thinks he is likely to be dead. Her eldest sister is married and living in difficult circumstances. She is always very smart, keeping her uniform in an amazingly good state in the environment she is working in, and her hair neat. She owns very little. She has a kind of stoicism and, in a slightly desultory way, likes to live in the moment. Somehow, she has retained a bit of faith and finds herself praying sometimes.

Sophie is a very determined person but has doubts about herself, and what she is doing. She does not really understand her own sexuality but knows that it is – somehow – a very strong thing for her. She doesn't really belong anywhere any more. Being Acholi, she was in a minority in Southern Sudan and she hasn't lived with Acholi people since the raid on her town which changed her life forever. She does not make close friends easily, though she gets on with people well enough. Tall and good looking, she looks her age. As well as her mother tongue, she

speaks good English, from her church background and the time in Nairobi, and a smattering of Dinka and Nuer.

She's intelligent and has a particularly good memory, though sometimes she wishes she didn't remember so much.

Isaac: an SPLA (Sudanese People's Liberation Army) soldier

Nuer. About 26. Chief mechanic in his uncle's garage in Juba he joined the SPLA and has, through survival, become a minor officer who thinks he has the ear of some of the commanders. He was married when he lived in Juba but has become used to the camp women serving his needs in the SPLA. He is not, by the standards of the war, a bad man but has become used to giving commands and people doing what he says. He has, to a certain extent, been brutalised by his experiences. He can take guns apart quickly and mend them. A good talker and joke teller, popular in a café, but not someone you would automatically trust. Physically, lean and very strong.

Ben: a doctor working with MSF.

In his early thirties (33), he has been working for MSF for nearly two years, entirely in the Sudan. He trained as a trauma surgeon in London and worked in a large A&E department in a hospital in Peterborough. He has loving, slightly distant parents who are both teachers. Brought up in rural Lincolnshire, he married his sixth form girlfriend, a history teacher, in his mid twenties – though he was never completely sure that he was in love with her, and feels guilty about this. She was killed in a car crash four years ago. They had no children. Her death is part of the reason he is working with the MSF but he is also easily bored and, to some extent, was always a frustrated sensation seeker and has had altruistic thoughts intermittently throughout his life. He was brought up in a large village near Boston and had a fairly isolated childhood. He has a younger brother. He's never been very good at talking to people. Inside, he has a lot of anger about what's happened to him, about the state of the world and he is – generally – a discontented kind of person. He has been a bit of a workaholic but this has become more a habit than a

conscious decision. No faith, and he never has had any – it wasn't part of his upbringing. He is vaguely left wing but with no faith in the political process. His hobby was sailing but he never had much time for it. His wife liked to visit archaeological sites, and he quite enjoyed this too. He has always been a slightly addictive personality and has always drunk fairly heavily. The pethidine addiction is something that has developed over the past fourteen months of his time in the Sudan; he knew addicted doctors during his time in the UK. He probably likes to read long historical novels, which are an escape and to listen to very loud music on his iPod, whether Wagner, Mahler, Metallica or Ian Brown. He was used to having more than enough money when he was in the UK, and drove a very nice car. He still owns a large modern detached on the outskirts of Peterborough, looking out on the Huntingdonshire countryside.

Deng: an SPLA soldier

Dinka, like most of the SPLA. About 19. A lost boy, very depressed. He came from a small village, would have expected to own a modest number of cattle before joining the SPLA at 14. He is slightly brutalised by his experiences but not as much as we might expect. He has been married two years and has one child, a girl.

Amel: a Sudanese nurse working with MSF

Dinka, aged about 20, she trained in a Sudanese teaching hospital in Juba and is a much less experienced nurse than Sophie. She is quietly efficient but has hidden depths, which find an outlet in her sudden outburst to the rebel Colonel. She is impatient with men and their ways, and rather less taken with Ben than Sophie. Behind her surface efficiency and quietness, there is a fierceness and an impatience with men. She has brothers who are serving with the SPLA. Both her parents are alive and still living in the large village she comes from. Her father is a kind of headman, with a small hardware business as well as cattle. Her mother was educated to the equivalent of 'A' level and is seen as a spokesperson for the women of the community. Amel has lived slightly under their shadows but has inherited some of their assurance.

Colonel James: an SPLA commander

He is from the Dinka elite, in his mid-thirties, and was educated in Khartoum (which reinforced his hatred of Arabs) and Manchester, where he studied biology. He is something of a military thug, a skilful operator who is ruthless with his men. A veneer of politeness but he can be rash and foolish. He was a soccer player (mid-field) who thought he was much better than he actually was. He is a bit overweight, with a smart uniform and swagger-stick. He expects people in his life, and under his command, to serve and obey.

Synopsis:1. GOVERNMENT GUERRILLAS ATTACK

Noises of war. Government guerrillas (Muslim) attack a village. Three boys are caught up in the conflict.

Instrumental (overture)

Full chorus (Dinka/English words)

Three boy trebles (Kur, Dur & Dut)

2. SOPHIE'S FIRST NIGHT AT THE HOSPITAL

Sophie, a nurse, arrives and meets Sister Catherine. Death of child soldier (Dut). The soldier-patients lust after Sophie.

Soprano solo (Sophie)

Soprano and mezzo-soprano (Sophie & Catherine)

Two boy trebles (Kur & Dur) & full chorus
(Hospital staff)

Soprano solo (Sophie)

3. HER SECOND NIGHT

Sophie is raped by a soldier-patient (Isaac). She keeps this a secret but is distressed. Isaac is sent back to the war by Sister Catherine.

Soprano solo (Sophie)

Male chorus (soldier patients), **soprano (Sophie)**, **baritone (Isaac)**, **mezzo-soprano (Catherine)** & **two boy trebles (Kur & Dur)**

4. BLOOD AND THE DOCTOR

Sophie is sent to a mobile field hospital: hell, amputations, trauma. She meets Ben, a British doctor.

Soprano solo (Sophie)

Soprano (Sophie) and tenor (Ben) and chorus

Soprano and tenor duet (Ben & Sophie)

5. BEGGING FOR HIS LIFE

An injured Isaac finds himself on the operating table and pleads with Sophie to help save him. Ben agrees, but there is a condition; she must come to his tent later.

Soprano (Sophie), tenor (Ben) and baritone (Isaac)

Soprano solo (Sophie)

6. DOCTOR BEN

Sophie goes to Ben's tent. He rails about the stupidity of the war and its causes. Ben asks Sophie to inject him with pethidine, which he is dependent on; this was what he meant by the 'bargain' at the operating table.

Tenor (Ben) and soprano (Sophie)

Tenor solo (Ben)

Tenor (Ben) and soprano (Sophie)

7. DENG'S REQUEST

Sophie is taken back to the 'main' hospital. She gives sexual relief given to an amputee soldier-patient (Deng)

Soprano (Sophie) and mezzo-soprano (Catherine)

Soprano (Sophie) and tenor (Deng), including short solos for both

8. SOPHIE'S KINDNESS

Sophie takes Deng to a local hotel, washes him and gives herself to him.

**Soprano (Sophie) and mezzo-soprano
(Catherine)**

Soprano (Sophie) and tenor (Deng)

Soprano solo (Sophie)

9. CHILD SOLDIERS/RE-UNION WITH BEN

Kur & Dur are recruited into the SPLA. Sophie is back at the tent hospital with Ben, who tells her that he was married, and his wife died in a car crash. He abandons a hopeless case on the operating table. Kur & Dur, now child soldiers, eat meat and talk about the brave deeds they will do in the war.

Baritone (instructor) & two trebles, full chorus.

Soprano (Sophie) and tenor (Ben)

Tenor solo (Ben)

Two trebles (Kur & Dur) including a duet.

10. BEN' SUFFERING AND SOPHIE'S LOVE

Sophie declares her love to Ben. He intimates that he is impotent and asks her to inject him with pethidine once more.

Soprano (Sophie) and tenor (Ben)

Soprano solo (Sophie)**11. GOVERNMENT ATTACK/DEATH OF THE INNOCENTS**

The cattle camp near the hospital is attacked.

Dur's mother is killed during the attack. He is injured himself and is at the hospital.

Full chorus**Soprano (Sophie) and soprano (Amel)****Soprano solo (Amel); chorus****Treble (Dur) and sopranos (Sophie & Amel), including short treble and soprano solos (Dur & Sophie)****12. BEN'S POSTING AND SOPHIE'S DECISION**

Ben tells Sophie he has to go to Bor, to deal with a cholera outbreak. She asks him to take her with him.

He points out the differences between them but agrees to take her. She then asks him to take Amel as the other nurse and he agrees.

Soprano (Sophie) and tenor (Ben)**Soprano and tenor duet (Sophie and Ben)**

Soprano (Sophie) and tenor (Ben)13. CHOLERA

The cholera outbreak; a school used as a hospital in Bor. A Colonel from the Liberation Army tells Sophie to treat a camp-woman, Leura. Two rebel soldiers come to claim Leura and assault Sophie and Amel. Ben upbraids them. Colonel James orders Ben to close the hospital because the town is being attacked by another (Nuer) faction of the Liberation Army. Ben and the nurses refuse.

Full chorus**Sopranos (Sophie and Amel)****Full chorus****Bass (Colonel James) and soprano (Sophie)****Contralto solo (Leura) and soprano (Sophie)****Soprano duet (Sophie and Amel)****Baritone and bass (rebel soldiers), sopranos (Sophie and Amel), tenor (Ben)****Bass (Colonel James) and tenor (Ben)****Tenor (Ben) and sopranos (Sophie & Amel))**

14: INTIMATIONS OF MASSACRE AND SOPHIE'S
STRUGGLE

The conflict moves closer to the hospital, which is running short of supplies. Sophie snatches time to be with Ben but refuses to inject him. She ties his hands and stays with him through the night, while he goes through withdrawal. Amel refuses to take a patient.

Full chorus

Sopranos (Sophie & Amel) and tenor (Ben)

Full chorus

Soprano (Sophie) and tenor (Ben)

Soprano solo (Sophie)

**Contralto (woman), sopranos (Sophie & Amel)
and tenor (Ben)**

15 PANIC IN THE HOSPITAL AND A LAST NIGHT

Amel and Sophie struggle to deal with the patients. Sophie buries a body. Selfishly, Sophie snatches time to be with Ben, leaving Amel on her own. Sophie makes love to Ben and he admits that he loves her. The Nuer rebels get ever closer to the hospital.

Full chorus

Sopranos (Sophie & Amel) and tenor (Ben)

Soprano solo (Sophie)

Full chorus, soprano (Sophie) and tenor (Ben)

Full chorus

Soprano solo (Amel)

16. THE REBEL COLONEL AND MARKS OF LOVE

Retreating, a Dinka Liberation Army Colonel and soldiers arrive at the hospital, surprised that it is still operating. The Colonel treats Ben to a diatribe describing the causes of the war and the tribal Nuer/Dinka split in the SPLA. Amel angrily reacts, disagreeing with him. The Colonel hits her. Once more, Sophie and Ben refuse to move the patients. Amel insults the Colonel and he kills her. Sophie and Ben kiss each other, making marks – recognising that this may be the last time they see each other alive. The hospital is attacked.

Bass (Colonel), tenor (Ben) and tenor & baritone (patients)

Bass solo (Colonel)

Soprano solo (Amel)

Chorus; bass (Colonel), tenor (Ben) and soprano (Sophie), baritone & bass (rebel soldiers) and soprano (Amel)

Soprano (Sophie) and tenor (Ben)

Full chorus (possibly recorded)

17. AFTER THE CLUBS AND SPEARS

After the attack: the hospital is in ruins and only Sophie appears to be alive. She hears a boy's voice and sees three boys bound and tied to the metal wreckage. They have been shot. Two have died, and the third soon follows them. Nuer soldiers arrive looking for Dinka. Finding none alive, they move on. Sophie finds Ben's body .

Full chorus

Soprano (Sophie) and treble (boy)

Treble solo (boy)

Soprano solo (Sophie)

Tenor & baritone (Nuer soldiers) and soprano (Sophie)

Soprano solo (Sophie)

Towards a contemporary libretto: the composition of sound, word and line in scene 2 of *Red Angel: a tragic opera set in the Southern Sudan in 1991- 92*, adapted from Yasuzo Masumura's 1966 film of the same name.

Or, **A riposte for Armando: how to write 'serious words for a serious opera'.**

'The theatre must give us everything that is in crime, love, war or madness, if it wants to recover its necessity.'

Antonin Artaud, 'The Theatre and its Double'.¹

Red Angel began with an encounter with a black Christian refugee from Southern Sudan, and the need to understand more about the world he had escaped to find some personal connection with what seemed an alien world of experience. Alien yet familiar because we have so many images of Africa in our heads and hearts from the media: starving children, pits of bodies, boy soldiers, weeping mothers, drought; an endless list of suffering, still our uncharted 'heart of darkness'. We know, intellectually, that this unmoveable myth of Africa is incorrect and untenable, but we also know that it remains a true part of the picture. This myth becomes a background noise of epic, a violently exciting media image story which drags on without specific characters. Consciously and subconsciously, we possess a connotative world of sound in our heads: cries, screams, whimpers, the whirr of helicopter blades, ceiling fans, hooting traffic, chants, the stamping of feet, the roar of lions, gunfire. In some important way, we sense these sounds, especially the chanting, weeping and stamping, are more physical than ours, closer to the centre of things, closer to the dust. Charles Darwin, in *Descent of Man*, wrote 'Our cries of pain, fear, surprise, anger, together with the appropriate actions, are more expressive than any words'.²

¹ Artaud, A., *The Theatre and its Double*, trans Mary Caroline Richards, New York: Grove Press, 1958, p. 85

²Darwin, C., *Descent of Man*, Chapter 3.

The sounds and story of 'Red Angel' are not a myth. They are an imaginative katabasis based on documented fact, a descent into the screaming underworld which the refugee I met had fled from. Underworlds, crime, love, war and madness are the stuff of tragic opera. *Red Angel* attempts to create a living human drama, with two main characters, one from Africa and one from Europe, who become one more pair of heroes and lovers in yet another series of episodes from the long history of war. Placing this story of great suffering and passion in the world of opera recognises that its expression demands a form which pushes music, sound, movement and image to their technical and emotional limits in order to explore the extremes of human experience; a form which might be said to possess a mythic size equal to the real world of the Sudanese war of 1991 to 1992; a form which can place explosions, cries, screams and words before a live audience. But a form where the 'reality' of TV is defamiliarised; that aesthetic distance of form the which allows the audience to approach the subject matter as if for the first time.

The job of the librettist is therefore not just to write the words, but to delineate a score of emotion, action, sound and image which the composer uses to inspire and structure the music. This collaboration is primarily, as Strauss forcefully stated, about 'Action and character! No ideas! No poetry! Theatre!'³ This idea that the librettist is not a poet seems pervasive in writings about libretto. What this means is that the world of sound is the total operatic experience, not a spoken text. The art of poetry demands the poem contain its own music, while in opera the libretto may be said to be the premise on which the music is built. But the librettist must use all the techniques that the poet possesses – rhyme, sound echoes, line length, rhythm and metre – to service what can, as the poet and musician Don Paterson notes, seem 'almost a negative discipline, in that there are so

³ Quoted by Harvey, C., in *Words and Actions*, an essay in *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth Century Opera*, ed Cook, M., Cambridge: CUP, 2005, p. 59. It is a translation of the poet's words to Joseph Gregor: 'Handlung und Rollen! Keine Gedanken! Keine Dichtung! Theater!'

many effects it must *avoid...*'⁴The librettist might be said to be a poet who does not write as a poet.

The librettist is a poet who realises that in sung language, like poetry, 'every word is listening to every other word' (Ted Hughes).⁵ Or, even better, every sound is listening to every other sound. The libretto is only linear in its narrative; the soundscape created for the composer is a series of overlapping circles of varying size and importance, each subtly mirroring, echoing and transforming the rhythms and sounds of precursors. This librettist starts from the premise that sound carries a phonetic meaning equal to the importance of the semantic meaning of words, and the phoneme, or individual unit of sound, is the compositional matter available to fulfil this. The overlapping circles therefore contain not only the semantics of the words and lines, but the sound meanings and connotations of phonemes within words, cries and other non-verbal language, vowel and consonant pattern, rhythm and silence. A libretto is not 'sung talk'. As Artaud wrote, 'Occidental psychology is expressed in dialogue and the obsession with the defined word which says everything ends in the withering of words.'⁶ Allowing phonetic meaning into the libretto, as well as semantic meaning, summons the subconscious energy of the words. So what are the tools and techniques we need to understand in order to create the overlapping circles of the libretto?

The singer John Martyn, at the end of his career, said about his song writing, 'it all becomes vowels, gradually it's just vowels'.⁷ He talks of working at 'the torn edge', not hearing the chords and, in a directly parallel sense, this is

⁴Paterson, D., *The Lyric Principle*, Part 1: The Sense of Sound (London: Poetry Review, Volume 97:2 Summer 2007 - *Ars Poetica*), p. 58

⁵ Quoted by Heaney, S., in *Stepping Stones*, Interviews with Seamus Heaney, by Dennis O'Driscoll, (London: Faber and Faber, 2008).

⁶ Artaud, A., *The Theatre and its Double*, trans Mary Caroline Richards, New York: Grove Press, 1958, p. 118

⁷ In a TV documentary, 20/03/09.

also the job of the librettist, to explore and define the ‘torn edges’ of language where meaning is found in both semantics and sound. The vowel, writes poet and poetic theorist Don Paterson, ‘is the introduction of the human into the material.’⁸ It is the part of the word which, when spoken, holds the core of the emotional content and individualises the speaker. The pronunciation of vowels tells us where we come from. Each dialect and language has its own vowel-energy and singers have to learn new shapes with their mouths to pronounce these, whether the sounds are from Italian, German or Czech, or – as in *Red Angel* – the tribal languages of Dinka, Nuer and Acholi, as well as English, French and Arabic.

Vowel sounds define place as the poet Seamus Heaney beautifully illustrates in his line ‘Anahorish, soft gradient / of consonant, vowel-meadow’⁹ from a poem which takes its title from the first hill on the horizon seen from Heaney’s childhood home.

⁸ Paterson, D., in the author’s notes from a course at Stones Barn, Cumbria, *Sense and sound – advanced poetics* (May 08).

⁹ From Heaney, S., *Anahorish* from *Wintering Out*, London: Faber and Faber, 2002:

My “place of clear water,”
the first hill in the world
where springs washed into
the shiny grass

and darkened cobbles
in the bed of the lane.
Anahorish, soft gradient
of consonant, vowel meadow,

after-image of lamps
swung through the yards
on winter evenings.
With pails and barrows

those mound-dwellers
go waist-deep in mist
to break the light ice
at wells and dunghills.

Anahorish literally means 'place of clear water' and is an anglicized version of the native Irish. As Heaney suggests, the phonetic elements of the word, in particular the four vowels, combine to reflect the rise and fall of the land. The vowels carry this phonetic force of meaning which is clarified by the description of landscape and word in the remainder of the line. And in song, even more than in speech, vowels are longer than consonants. To borrow a metaphor from Heaney, they are the vertebrae holding the skeleton together, rather than the fleshy plasma of the consonants they support.

But consonants have their own phonetic energy, not only onomatopoeic and alliterative, but when they occur as phonesthemes, clusters which are points of sound-sense coincidence. The science of the phonestheme is still controversial but poets and copywriters know them through practice. An example is the sound 'gl-' which occurs in a large number of words relating to light and vision, like 'glitter', 'glisten', 'glint' and 'glow' or 'sn-' in 'snitch', 'snout', 'snicker' and 'snack', words related to the mouth or nose. There are, of course, counterexamples but, as Don Paterson writes, this proves nothing.

In *The Lyric Principle*, he writes that 'language works on a diffuse synaesthetic principle of connotation'.¹⁰ In other words, sounds within words, and the sound of words themselves, set up a series of vibrations in the body and mind of the listener which can invoke the taste, touch, smell, shape, visual appearance, function or any other aspect of the thing invoked. For example, he says, we hear the roundness of 'moon', the hiss of 'sea' and the thinness of 'needle'. Sometimes we can decipher the reasons for the phono-semantic resonance of words containing shared sounds whose link has become fragmented by the passage of time. For example, 'anger', 'anxiety' and 'angst' all go back to a root Sanskrit word for 'strangle'. This gives the repetition of the 'an-' sound a force beyond any glib notification of assonance or alliteration.

¹⁰Paterson, D., *The Lyric Principle*, Part 1: The Sense of Sound (London: Poetry Review, Volume 97: 2 Summer 2007 - *Ars Poetica*), p. 68

Phonesthemes cannot cross from one family of languages to another, so if this characteristic of language exists in the Dinka, Nuer and Acholi used in *Red Angel*, it will not echo English, French or Arabic sound meanings. What the multi-lingual nature of the soundscape of the libretto does is place different worlds side by side, sounding manifestly different through their particular shaping of vowels and giving the composer a much larger range of lengthened vowels than English allows. Southern Sudan is ruled by an Arab government based in Khartoum, who impose the national language of Arabic; it is inhabited largely by two major tribes, the Dinka and the Nuer, who have their own languages, and is the home of smaller tribes, like the Acholi, whose language crosses the border of Sudan and Uganda, and who Sophie, the heroine of *Red Angel*, belongs to. In addition, there is the lingua franca of English for aid workers and the indigenous population, with memories of hymns from missionary churches, and the American English of international TV. Add to this mix the French and Scandinavian languages of aid workers and in a middle-sized town, like Juba in the Southern Sudan, this makes for a complex matrix of vowel and consonant sound, and if the opera is, in poet Charles Olson's words, to be 'equal to the real'¹¹, the language and sounds used must encompass the phonetic world of the market place of Juba.

This may include writing simultaneous layers of sound-sense, giving a topographic feel of the place, rather than any documentary accuracy. Language partially emerges from landscape, as Heaney's use of the word 'Anahorish' demonstrated, and the human relationship with animals and plants, so there is something of the wetlands and bush in the phonetics of Dinka cattle-calling songs. The physical vigour of such language is something this librettist seeks to find in English too, a closeness to the sweat of work or sex, the clash of swords and the shedding of blood we find more in the Anglo-Saxon roots of our language than in our Latinate vocabulary. Anglo-Saxon poetry, designed to be accompanied by the lyre, is rhythmic

¹¹ Adapted from Charles Olson's essay title *Equal, that it is, / to the real itself*, in *Selected Writings of Charles Olson*, edited by Creeley, R., New York: New Directions Books, 1966, p. 46

and alliterative, a heightened language continually working towards an interweaving of linked and shared sounds. Poet-singers fought for their jobs in competition; the story-telling slams of the word-choir in the great halls of the chiefs were the operatic arias of their time but the language used was rooted in a harsh life, analogous to the warring hand to hand struggles for survival in contemporary Southern Sudan, though phonetically shaped by the windswept coasts of northern Europe.

This treasure trove of knowledge and intuition, added to the usual tools of a self-aware poet working with metre, rhyme and form, may – at first hearing – seem too complex for consideration in the writing of a libretto. It doesn't help unless we can find a way to reach out, touch it and put it to use. But once we can, it may open up a world of layered phono-semantic possibility equal to the complexity of heroic deeds and sufferings of a tragic opera set in an all too real world. How this librettist has used some of these tools and knowledge, will now be examined by a sound and meaning analysis of scene 2 of *Red Angel*.

A phono-semantic analysis of scene 2 of the libretto of *Red Angel*

2. SOPHIE'S FIRST NIGHT AT THE HOSPITAL

Sophie, a nurse, arrives and meets Sister Catherine. Death of a child soldier (Dut). The soldier-patients lust after Sophie.

Scene 2 begins in half heard conversation and bus noise (Noise should be allowed to enter the world of opera). We hear thank you in Acholi - 'Erokamono' - before a Christian echo of the murderous attackers' cries of 'Allah Akbar' ('God is great') from scene 1 in the Acholi song 'Opak ruoth / Nyasage ber', which similarly means 'God is good, God is great'. Sophie's second verse in English

No moon tonight
 You have not seen darkness
 like our darkness.
 The night is a hiding place,
 a fearful place.

brings us a sound and rhythmic echo of 'The church is a shining place' from scene 1, and echoes Kur's 'Hide. Hide!' These short lines, with two or three stresses, owe something to the simplicity of Plomer's short lines in the libretto of Britten's *Curlew River*. If we look at a good libretto on the page, there is plenty of white space around the words. This is why it helps the aspirant librettist not only to look at the accomplishment of Britten's more successful word collaborators Plomer, Crozier and Myfanwy Piper but to listen to the delicate ear of American poets like Mary Oliver, Gary Snyder and their precursor, William Carlos Williams, the doctor-poet who sometimes wrote on prescription pads. Like Seamus Heaney, we need to go to America – at least in our heads – and come back with a leather hat on our head and a short William Carlos Williamsy line in our ears.

Another language (the fourth so far) is added through the character of the Belgian French speaking hospital Sister. This shows the international nature of NGO staff and, just as importantly, adds another rhythm, almost – I think – like adding a different instrument, with the hyphen used at the end of lines to indicate overlapping sounds. The dying cries of the boy Dut and the whirr of ceiling fans complete the structuring of this section of the soundscape, ready for the music.

An Anglo-Saxon, Middle English (and even the Middle Scots of Dunbar) influence is important partly because of the possibilities offered by the muscularity of the language, often verging on the crude as in the 'gob' and 'bum' of the 'setting up the hospital' chorus. This odd, almost archaic chant is loosely based on the great medieval poem of death found by Britten and

used as the last in the cycle *Songs Sacred and Profane*. There is something in here of children's giggling enjoyment of 'rude' words like 'bum' and 'belly' in rude rhymes like:

Eee by gum
 does your belly touch your bum?
 Do your tits hang low?
 Can you tie them in a bow?

Children immediately respond to Anglo-Saxon derived forms like spells, kennings and riddles, relishing the sounds as well as meaning of the words in a more immediate way than most adults. And children always want to rhyme lines, often to the exclusion of the sense!

This chorus could almost be a puzzle or riddle, if we didn't know the context, with the answer 'a day in a field hospital'

Chorus: Life to death Death to life
 Belly to knife Knife to belly
 Gob to spoon Spoon to gob
 Noon to night Night to noon
 Needle to bum Bum to needle
 Sun to moon Moon to sun
 and yet our work is never done.

Our hands shake, our eyes shut,
 our feet stiffen, our tongues dry.

The time duration of consonants is very short compared to vowels. The more excited we get, the more rhythmic we become, our vowels get longer

and our consonants shorter. Think of how an adult usually says ‘tree’ and then how a child makes the word into a long vowel slide triggered by the gentle explosion of the ‘t’ when he has just learnt to identify the ‘treeness’ of the thing. This understanding informs the sung nature of words like ‘spoon’ and ‘needle’.

A field hospital in the Sudan is full of sighs, tears, shouts, grunts, sobs, cackles and scrapes; they are an intrinsic part of the texture of this scene. The words of this hospital chorus are layered and will – in the music – probably overlap as in a round sung by soprano, contralto, tenor, bass and boy trebles’ voices: long ‘oo’s’ and ‘ee’s’, punctuated by short hisses and splutters and the ‘comfort’ of the ‘m’ and ‘n’ sounds. The rhythm of a hospital ward is an underlying thrum of repetitive activities punctuated by sudden often unexpected interruptions. The hospital soundscape therefore reflects the cries and moans of the patients, the care of the nurses and their helpers, and the crude clangy mess of hospital activities.

The boys’ words following this chorus can be examined for interweaving patterns of sound and sense which continue and develop these considerations. Each differently coloured highlight indicates a separate repetition or sound echo:

Dur: His hands shake.

Kur: His eyes shut.

Dur: His feet stiffen.

Kur: His tongue dries.

Dur: The dead shall rise.

Kur: Welearn! this lie.

Surgeon: Weweretoolate.

Sister: C'est finis. C'est finis.

Chorus: Toolate! Toolate!

Old socketeyes
was at the gate.

Sister: Close hiseyes
and cover hishead.
Takehim from here.
We need the bed.

In the first four lines, two strong stresses are placed together in 'hands shake', 'eyes shut, 'feet stiffen' and 'tongue dries', mostly one syllable nouns and verb placed side by side to create a forceful sound brimming with physical action.

There are six rhymes or repetitions of the long vowel sounds in 'eyes', and eight for 'shake'; the rhyme echo knits these short lines together. Internal vowel echoes in 'learnt' and 'were' and 'feet' and 'need' also provide pattern. Add to this the alliteration of the chorus's three lines beginning 'Too late!' and the repetition of personal pronouns at the beginnings of lines, and we have a rattle bag of techniques cohering these apparently simple announcements, with the overlapping 'circles' of sound suggested in the introduction. And perhaps the t's and d's of Kur and Dur suggest the stuttering rhythm of death before the cluster of these sounds in the chorus's lines. Does the French stand out on its own because it is the death

announcement? And how much of this composition is conscious, how much the result of poem making experience which has risen gently up from the subconscious?

The first song lyric of the opera begins 'As a child I would sit in the sand...' – three stresses per line – again borrowed from Plomer and other librettists – music seems to find it easier to carry this weight. It is loosely anapaestic - - / a rising metre – and is written in anapaestic trimeter with verses of four lines (common in folk song and ballad) and rhyming aabb with full masculine rhymes. This foot can give a lyric a forward moving energy. It is actually found in Edward Lear, the limerick and in Byron's heroic poetry as -

The Assyrian came down like the wolf on the fold

And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold¹²

The use of this form was not conscious, but it may well exist in the subconscious of many writers and reader of poetry. It gives a certain lightness to the content, and perhaps a naivety. It also gets on with things, and gets to the point. It does seem to have led to a humour and almost child-like enjoyment of sound in the lyrics as well as a forward moving energy which reflects the forward moving drive of some physical work and the heroine Sophie's journey. The music actually has quite free timing so that Sophie gradually eases herself into the song as she puts on her nurse's uniform; she almost seems to be trying out the rhythms to begin with, and they are established when she is a little more secure in her own narrative.

The two line chorus has a lengthened first line, literally slowing down the pace and has more of the feel of a lullaby. The composer has given this 'lullaby' a musical dissonance working against the optimism of Sophie's messianic meandering. We don't want the music to illustrate the feel of the

¹² By George Gordon Noel Byron, Lord Byron (1788 – 1824), first published as *The Destruction of Sennacherib*, in *Hebrew Meolodies*, 1815.

words but to find another texture, to suggest other events in the past or future subtly by creating sound echoes that may be picked up later.

Is it too much to suggest that there is a phonestheme in the 'sh-' sound of 'shriek' and 'shack' of verse 3 of the song, mirroring the hospital chorus words 'shake' and 'shut' repeated by Dur and Kur in their word enactment of impending death? The use of this sound suggests something temporary, and quivering. Add to this recipe the powdery 'sand', 'sparkles' and 'sift' of the first verse of the song and we may have a background phono-semantic of things about to disappear.

At the end of the song, the English line 'I need to sleep' is repeated in the very different melody of the Acholi, 'Adwaro nindo' though both have echoing vowel sounds; this final line of 'prose' actually still rhymes, internally, aa bb, with a final trace of the 'o' sound in the Sister's 'I show you'. In retrospect, the intention seems more obvious than it did in the execution, but a poet's ear is listening for these echoes all the time. The sound patterns and repetitions are an intrinsic part of the meaning of the libretto. .

The humorous tone of the Anglo-Saxon words of the hospital chorus is reprised in the end rhymes of 'beware' and 'derrière' in the Sister's advice and the banter of the male chorus who rhyme the Sister's name, 'Katreen' (Catherine) with 'mean'. This lightness will, hopefully, not signal the violence they will soon perpetrate on Sophie. The repetition of 'Bell bum. Bell bum' adds to the childish flavour, since now we seem to be in the territory of a nursery rhyme chant in the school playground.

This rambunctious atmosphere is broken by prosaic lines from Isaac, who tells Sophie that he is a car mechanic from Juba in a matter of fact way. He then uses Nuer, which she will at least partially understand, and he is the only Nuer mother-tongue speaker in the hospital. He might well use vivid gestures which suggest the semantic meaning of the phrases, which are not

translated for the audience. This break in the sound and language texture is brief and we return to sexual teasing in Isaac's final couplet with the rhyme of 'mind' and 'behind'. The swaying motion of 'Okwuto cet pa mane' ('Your buttocks sway like a bell') is running underneath the dialogue, both sung and in physical movement, providing the underlying rhythm for the action of the ward after Sophie's song.

This close analysis of one scene may, at times, seem speculative or pedantic. It is far from an exact science but it is a necessary part of the librettist's task, to borrow from Artaud's words on oriental theatre, to access 'a certain expansive value in words, since the defined sense of a word is not everything, for there is its music, which speaks directly to the unconscious'. This 'music' exists before the composer writes the first note of the score.

Appendix: phono-semantic analysis of aspects of scene 1

1. GOVERNMENT GUERRILLAS ATTACK

Noises of war. Government guerrillas (Muslim) attack a village. Three boys are caught up in the conflict.

The first sound is a rumbling, 'like horse's hoofs coming closer', which the composer can layer, through the use of electronic or sampled natural sound, or percussion, or any combination. It is a sound direction which is a suggestion for composition. But it is also a sound texture which can remain throughout much of the scene.

The first words of the opera are a somewhat oratorical paradox, the repetition of 'The day floods with fire', with three strong stresses in a short line and the spreading long vowels of 'day', 'flood' and 'fire'. It is almost a very short Shakespearean chorus, like 'O for a muse of fire' at the beginning of 'Henry V', and it signals the size and importance of events that are about

to unfold. The Dinka list of the people being destroyed, underneath the boys' voices, adds an immediately unfamiliar sound tension to this announcement. The mixture of untranslated tribal language, charged English and atmospheric persistent sounds sets out the stall of the librettist's approach to the material.

The 'dialogue' between the three boys is more extended than most exchanges in the opera. The words overlap in a breathless run through the village and are therefore more 'natural' than most of the language used. Together with their physical movements, this helps to establish their characters quickly: Kur is the leader, Dur is in awe of him and follows whatever he does, and Dut is the weakest, lagging behind. The rapid dialogue is immediately followed by the formal device of a freeze and the very different, measured structuring of the boys' second exchange. 'We race to the church' is like a wind blowing through, with the 's' and 'ch' sounds, reinforced by the sibilance of 'safe place, shining place'.

The steady measure is broken by the attackers' cries, with the harsh nasal quality of the repeated 'Allah-o- Akbar'. A short 'a' is followed by a long 'a' in each word, and this is a phrase that is chanted more often than said. I bring memories of hearing this in the Azaan, the call to prayer, from the mosques of Dhaka and Agadir. The meaning itself is complex; it may mean 'God is Great', 'God is Greater' or 'God is Greatest'. The Sufi Sheikh Hasham says, in essence, 'God is Greater than whatever we think of Him as Great' i.e. greater than all our conceptions of him. Here these words are used as a war cry accompanying the slaughter of children and the rape of women.

We then return to the formality of the boys' exchange, and another freeze, with Kur's 'Safe in the Shadows'. In 'We watch through hating eyes', there is a sustained, harsh inevitability in the long vowel sounds of 'oo', 'a' and 'ey', and a quick fire anger in the spat out 't' of 'hating'. Their almost haiku like sparseness of description is broken by the reiterated, closer 'Allah-o- Akbar'.

The boys reply with their own Christian 'Oh Lord. Oh Lord' before Dut's forceful announcement of 'We shall be soldiers' followed once again by the long vowels of 'hating eyes'. Then we hear the three times repeated pile-drive of their intention to be soldiers, which should have the energy of marching on the spot.

The repeated pattern of the boys' measured narrative interrupted by the attacker's cry of 'Allah-o- Akbar' suggests the structure of call and response found in songs the world over, from Dinka tribes to English Folk. Following the boys' third 'call' of 'We shall be soldiers', the 'response' is their own invocation to Christian belief and a different time in their deliberate 'sampling' of Bunyan's hymn 'He who would valiant be'. The borrowed religious language, archaic but still highly charged with meaning for a believer, gives courage and hope even in the most testing circumstances though the hymn has sometimes been used as much as a chant as an expression of literal meaning, by – for instance – troops going over the top in the First World War towards their meaningless deaths. The boys' singing is interrupted and stopped mid-line by rapid gunfire, at a searing volume to contrast with the ragged sweetness of their voices, a gunfire that echoes noises made at the back of the throat, explosions of spit and lips. The scene ends in the shock of a held silence.

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RED ANGEL NOTEBOOK

3/8/08

After seemingly getting nowhere for days, I've now written the first three scenes. I drafted scene 1, and part of scene 2, for the meeting with Ayanna back in the first week of July but the language seemed too limp and unspecific when I went back to it. Each time I pick up the libretto, I need to re-enter the world of the film, so I'm hoping to sustain a couple of weeks' work on it now. The three trebles are a reflection from Britten's 'St. Nicholas' and other pieces but one of them is lost to death almost immediately – I see this as a kind of breaking the symmetry, or purity of influence. The treble voice is also to suggest the supposed innocence of age, which – in many ways – the 12 year old child soldiers do not have – the treble range provides a kind of irony on what they are experiencing or singing about. I imagine the trebles continuing as patients and soldiers throughout the piece; they are an integral part of the chorus.

I'm trying to avoid most of the direct narrative from Sophie, the nurse at the centre of the story but looking back at 'Curlew River' I see the main characters tell the audience directly where they are going and what they are doing for most of the piece. So maybe I shouldn't be worried about her telling the story sometimes...though I don't want this to be in the past tense because this loses vividness. I'm looking for a rawer language than Plomer's, with splashes of macabre, crude humour. Violence and sex are at the heart of the piece, so I think the rhythm of the language (and sometimes its coarseness) should reflect this in some way.

Which African languages? Sophie is clearly Sudanese Acholi, like Dili, but the SPLA was predominantly Dinka, and the Nuer people are very much part of Southern Sudan too. I've made the rebel soldier Isaac a Nuer, and I think the male 'chorus' voice should be Dinka, since this tribe made up most of the SPLA, when they need to sing in a language other than English. Why do we need this? I think it's more to do with layers of sound, and a topographic feel, rather than any documentary accuracy. It's also the idea of close but clashing meanings meeting in a conflict that is beyond any traditional tribal

conflict or language groupings, where interests of race and natural resources bring people together, in a context beyond their specific tribal identity (though of course the Nuer Dinka rivalries exploded in the inter-tribal Bor massacre). Sounds emerge from landscapes so there must be something of the wetlands and bush in the phonetics of all these languages. I plan to use them sparingly. There are good YouTube resources to hear Sudanese and SPLA songs, but only scraps of translation. I will need to find some speakers of all three languages to speak to and check things over with – and we'll need access to the internet or CD/iPod recordings as we do it.

I'm getting a bit hung up on rhyme and, to a lesser extent, meter. I don't really know how important this is but I think it can give a forward drive to the narration. 'CurlewRiver' seems to have a very loose meter and much longer passages from single characters than I am imagining. When I listen to 'Curlew River', I don't have the feeling that any of the solos are too long – but it is definitely a more static piece than I'm imagining 'Red Angel' will be.

5/8/08

While I was trying to find out about pethidine addiction, the Google search came up with Harold Shipman. He seemed so popular and normal, a member of the Conservative Club and the Rochdale Canal Society, four children including the last one born in the same year as my eldest daughter. Yet there was obviously something wrong with him just below the surface – his addictions must have been a symptom of this. And he ended up killing himself behind the walls of Wakefield prison, which I pass so often on the way to *beam* at the Orangery or Westgate Station car park. Addiction, in doctors, seems not at all unusual: the American young woman from a Christian family seemingly so full of energy, loved by everyone, and dying of an accidental fentanyl overdose in a hospital room. The New Zealand doctor dedicated to serving a poor aboriginal community who couldn't leave the pethidine alone.

In the face of such miserable material, it is hard to be faced with the smiley face that Word adjusts to every time I put (Doctor☺ intending two brackets. But then the doctor often chooses to keep a smiley face for his patients...even if they are dying.

I'm thinking about the length of lines. Plomer seems to favour short, irregular lines (often repeated once), except for the long monologue by the Ferryman which describes the important sad day in remembrance of the 'saint' boy. Looking at the libretto for Eötvös' 'Lady Sarashina', the lines seem long and clumsy – and also in an English that is slightly Edwardian, with long clauses taking us away from the images. There will still be much I have to cut out, even though I'm trying to write sparely. At the moment, I'm very much working with end rhymes, though not necessarily couplets, and internal vowel rhymes – sometimes as many as 11 in a short stanza. There are often two or three weak stresses before a strong stress in Plomer's libretto, as if he's allowing a time space for the stresses to emerge from. In my poetry, I favour a noun and verb driven 'concrete' language but here I need not to be afraid of the weaker stresses and the vaguer and more abstract ways of expressing inconclusive thought with silence-fillers, broken phrases and patterns including more unstressed syllables. A real exception in my writing so far is the 'blood kenning', an overlapping clot of full vowels for the amputation scene. Here I think the effect should very much be about the sound as much as the meaning – the heavy sounds will in some way contribute to the oppressiveness of the scene.

I found the amputation scene really hard. This is one of those places where, unlike the film, I need to find a formal, aesthetic distance from actual portrayal which is not possible – without clumsy, illustrative film images which are bound to be more powerful than any stage picture. I've gone back, I think, to three influences: Horse and Bamboo's 'Needles in A Candle Flame' image of the carefully textured womb being opened by the 'mother' to reveal a sewn foetus, and the long red ribbons which caused so much upset on occasion even though it was a made, 'distant' image from the actual experience; the words 'the hanging of the meat' used by the Sankai Juku Butoh performers for their performance, infinitely slow and white bodied, hanging upside down from the top of buildings and slowly easing themselves to the ground (with a fatality soon after I saw them in Edinburgh); and the red ribbons for blood of Kabuki. I haven't quite worked out how the physicality of this scene works yet but I hope this is on the right track. I think contrasting slow motion action with the repeated 'normal time' chant of the words may be important.

In Iraq, the USA seems to have very high tech means of amputation for their own forces and then they fly the patients directly to military hospitals in Germany. I can't believe, despite the resourcefulness of MSF, that it is the same in a frontline mobile hospital in Sudan. And these hospitals do get cut off so planes can't take the patients back to the larger, base hospitals. The words about feeling lost and forgotten which Sophie and the doctor sing were suggested by a recent account of a Belgian nurse in a 'stranded' MSF hospital in Darfur. Ben the doctor does the amputations in my piece because he can and because the plane might be coming. He trained as a surgeon – it's what he does.

I'm trying to give Sophie silence and spaces when she seeks intimacy. She's 23 so could easily have been married 8 or 9 years in Acholi society. She is in extreme circumstances, in the shadow of death, where she acts in unexpected ways – even for herself. She has been raped but rape is not unusual in the world she's grown up in. Of course, she is traumatised but what can she do except kill herself or get on with her work? She has nowhere to go back to. Nurses have been raped (and murdered) in MSF and other NGO hospitals; Sudanese hospitals have been attacked and continue to be attacked (in Darfur). The rape, in some way, distorts her sexuality but it is not only the rape that has done this – it is also the war and the circumstances she finds herself in. How do we explain her 'inexplicable' actions?

7/8/08

Reading Armando Iannucci in the new Opera North 08/09 programme newspaper, he says he can't imagine how it's possible to write a serious opera without it sounding silly! He was commissioned to write the cosmetic surgery piece for Opera North on the strength of an opera spoof, but talks intelligently about Mozart. Reading about last year's Genesis course, one of the participants said a composer told her rhetoric was more useful than rhyme. She was also advised that a libretto should look quite odd on the page, and that 'it's somewhere between prose and poetry', which is what I'm finding. They also seem to have done exercises designed to prompt surreal scenarios, which I'm trying to get away from.

Anglo-Saxon influence is important for me, because of the muscularity of the language. I was looking at 'Maiden in the Marsh' yesterday which suggested some things for Sophie's song after she's seen off two men. The odd 'setting up the hospital' chant is also based on the great medieval death poem found by Britten and used in 'Sacred and Profane', which I heard in Blythburgh Church earlier in the summer. I then remembered **kennings** and had a go at one based on 'blood' in my search for a ceremonial or chant-like piece to go with my 'hanging of the meat' amputation sequence. My main piece of information on kennings comes from an article in 'The Poetry Book for Primary Schools'. Junior School age children immediately respond to this form, like riddles, and they are closer to an enjoyment of sound than most adult readers. The kenning can also suggest unexpected meanings through working on the form.

11/8/08

I am struggling with Nishi's odd (?) sexuality transferred to Sophie in the film.

There's a thoughtful piece of writing about this, by Jeff Hilson, at www.electricsheepmagazine.co.uk/reviews/2007/05/03/red-angel/

which I've found very useful. Jeff Hilson picks out her reply to Orihira who asks her why she is offering herself to him, and she says 'for no reason'. This is an important character defining line, which I have decided to keep in the adaptation. He says this phrase is 'oddly emblematic' of her character throughout much of the film and says she is like a 'non-character' for the first half of the story. Maybe this is partially the key to it. Sophie, as a displaced Acholi woman who has been living outside her 'natural' society for about 8 years (since adolescence) is maybe always slightly 'not present'. Partly, this distance allows her to operate with her unusual and uncompromised passion. She has witnessed rape, sexual abuse and much violence. She knows she is a sexual person but is not sure what to do with this. So much energy has gone into survival and becoming a nurse, it's something she sees as another of her necessary gifts. I think she's perhaps also picked up different notions of 'love' in Nairobi and when she tells Ben that she loves him, it's almost as if she's trying out the meaning of the word. Will saying this word actually make the experience which she is, in some way, looking for, more real? Love never has quite the same meaning in different cultures; the nuances it borrows from literature and media are untranslatable.

Does 'Red Angel' mean that Sophie (as Nishi does) sees herself as a force of destruction? Jeff Hilson says the film 'at times tries to make us believe this', and I've gone for the same feeling in Sophie's reflections on the rape and her encounter with Deng. Her reaction isn't logical but evangelical Christianity and animism, which are in her Sudanese background, are both concerned with sin/guilt and, in different ways, a kind of belief in 'pay back' for your deeds which have to be atoned for somehow. The full 'love' Sophie wants to give Ben is perhaps a kind of atonement, as is her wish to serve as a nurse to give something back to her people, and in some way, to change things for the better – though I don't think she's always sure that she does this. I see her as tall and handsome, attractive to men and with that dangerously child-like fragility/sexuality which Nishi has, despite her matter of fact assurance with different sexual acts. As Hilson writes, perhaps the 'Red Angel' label will stick whatever she does. He says her choices maybe also a comment by Masumura on the emptiness of choice available in war. Sophie's family have had no opportunity to make any choices; choices are not part of the life and social structure they were entrenched in. She is perhaps the first of her family to make work and 'love' choices and is actually experimenting with this new way of living, not always with success. BUT in her present condition she can make choices which affect things for better or worse, and this is important.

Southern Sudan was male-dominated (and probably still is) in 1991 – 92 but curiously most adult males were absent from their families serving in the SPLA. But maybe they still dominated by their absence. Despite some women serving in the SPLA, it was – as usual – a men's war. Sexual violence against girls and women used as a weapon was a major part of the conflict. In the film, Nishi tells Okabe that she loves him partly because he is like her father. This I want to avoid and see if I can find some sort of tentative individual liberation for her which is less to do with love for a man. The film, as Hilson says, 'constantly denies resolution' and this is something I hope to keep in the adaptation without leaving Sophie on quite the same tracks right until the end.

I found a video on one of the websites

www.youtube.com/watch?v=MZIT_g4FCV0 about the controversial 1992 Bor massacre of 2000 Dinka SPLA and non-military personnel by the Nuer SPLA (under the influence of Khartoum). The Nuer General (still active) has

a PhD in Engineering from the University of Bradford. One (word) image from the video is of three Dinka boys tied to a tree and clubbed to death. The three boys in the 'fires of war' might not be the Kur, Dur and Dut of the beginning, but this could be a reflection of them. It is, of course, also a twisted version of the crucifixion image – three 'crucified' on one tree, rather than three.

I'm having trouble arriving at duets for Sophie and Ben so will work on this in the present scene, where they are still at the tent hospital about to go to Bor. In giving way to her desire to come with him, he is in some way acknowledging, in a stronger sense than before, her importance to him. To make solos for Sophie, and – to a lesser extent – Ben, seems more natural. Perhaps this is because of the strangely alienated 'love' relationship they are involved in, where neither actually 'commits' though Sophie says 'I love you.' It's definitely not Romeo and Juliet or Tristan und Isolde!

13/8/08

In *Descent of Man*, Darwin wrote: 'Our cries of pain, fear, surprise, anger, together with the appropriate actions, are more expressive than any words.' This seems to be part of the ground of the piece and I can't 'write' all the sighs, tears, shouts, grunts, sobs, cackles, scrapes etc. but they seem to be very much part of the texture of the piece for me. I have put suggestions and indications but I see some of the SOUNDS from the written words (e.g. in the 'blood kenning' being sung and/or played too).

Struggling a bit with the last scenes where I don't feel I can stay as close to the original, for a number of reasons. Nishi and Doctor Okaba play out a master and servant game, including the cross-dressing, which comes from the very particular hierarchical world they inhabit. Although Ben is superior to Sophie and can tell her what to do, this is not at all the same relationship. To portray the same encounter would look unnecessarily kinky! MSF Cholera hospitals are also much more organised and better equipped, even the temporary ones, than the hospital in the film. In Sudan in 90 – 92, you would not expect more than 5% of cholera patients to die, if that – even in war zone temporary hospitals. I have had to make extra notes about what

happens in these scenes to make some sense of it for myself and the pace of my writing has slowed down considerably.

I have based all the last scenes around the 1991 Bor massacre, but without documentary accuracy. It is very poorly documented and there is still a lot of controversy, and bitter feelings, about its exact nature. There was a hospital in Bor but there may well not have been any MSF team there at the time. But the opera is a 'fable'* about the conflict in general, and massacre and Dinka/Nuer battles were definitely a part of it. I have probably extended the time of the massacre into two days, when it may have happened in a much shorter time. I need to get the feeling of impending doom and claustrophobia to 'heat up' the relationship between Ben and Sophie.

A look at my Google searches would be revealing and strange: synonyms for struggle, frogs in the Sudan, cholera treatment, Bor massacre, Dinka mourning songs, vultures in the Sudan, MSF Sudanese blogs, howling monkeys etc. I've spent hours worrying about whether they have rowing boats with oars in Southern Sudan and, in the end, decided they probably didn't, so removed a lovely image from Sophie's 'khawaja' song...which probably owed too much to Robert Duncan's 'Structures of Rime' anyway. I do 'sample' pieces to get me going, borrowing a few words or a phrase, like the lovely 'lie warm together at day's beginning' from the Anglo-Saxon poem, 'The Wife's Complaint', translated by Michael Alexander; this is one that has remained in, though not quoted exactly. There's so much about love and heartbreak and hand to hand combat in the Old English literature.

I've been thinking more about Hilson's comment about how the main characters do not seem to be fully developed or 'rounded' in 'Red Angel'. This may be to do with the circumstances. They are called on to play their professional roles nearly all their waking hours. We see only glimpses of their more private selves, and their autobiographies, in their close encounters away from the ward or hospital tent. Sophie is trying to define herself and Ben is, in his personal life, lost – that's why the work takes over. Is Romeo a three dimensional character? Discuss. Sometimes we are shadows of ourselves, and may remain like this for years, or our whole lives. The black/white nature of the relationship is very secondary to 2 displaced people coming together.

Because Sophie is Acholi, she is 'outside' the predominantly Dinka world.

*Perhaps not a fable but a 'parable', like Britten's. Apparently parables exclude the animals and talking nature that fables include, though I think the natural world is always just under the surface of my adaptation. But it is a moral tale about the ridiculousness and cruelty of war, without offering any solutions. Apparently the original meaning of 'fable' is a succinct story that is meant to impart a moral lesson and I hope it is this. 'Fable' also has the connotations of something falsified – I prefer the idea that my story is true to itself and the context in which it is situated, but not the actual truth of events. There will be no pithy maxim or neat summing up at the end. Hopefully, an audience will cry-laugh at human folly, and human bravery, and question the nature of what it means to be 'brave' in such extreme circumstances.

14/8/08

I've almost finished the first draft. In the film, there's so much shooting and fairly large scale battle sequences, often in outside locations. We can't do that in the theatre, and I have a kind of convention that everything is inside, or only just outside the hospital or tent. This means that I have compacted some of the action – though I've expanded other things – and really I've lost no 17 of the film scenes, which is mostly a field battle. However, I'm still looking for an apocalyptic sense of conflict and climax in the last four scenes of the opera.

The Nuer chant, 'We will make you drink your Dinka blood' is used as a quickening pulse of hate, throughout these scenes. I'm imagining some intense rhythmic drumming on skins and wood as part of this texture too – but by this I don't necessarily mean on African drums; it could be electronic or use orchestral percussion in some surprising way... though I do remember the incessant rhythm of the Burundi drummers, with those huge drums on their heads at some point. We could even have the chorus walking around the central performance space playing as well as singing.

Sophie putting on Ben's uniform and pretending to command him will not work in this context; it's specific to the Japanese culture and context.

Another important difference is that both Nishi and Doctor Okaba are serving soldiers, so they are forced to shoot. Okaba actually takes over command when the Captain is killed. I've gone for almost the opposite scenario with Ben refusing to use a gun, because he saves lives rather than takes them. BUT what I've also introduced is a certain ruthless selfishness on the part of Sophie and Ben. They find ways to be together, even when they should probably still be working on the ward. And in the end the threat of death means that they make love as everything is falling apart and, lastly, bite-mark each other in front of their patients as the attack begins.

I've given the rebel Colonel quite a long speech-song, not to explain the whole conflict and its complications, but at least to give the audience some sort of idea of what is going on, and the feelings engendered. It is also a way of him trying, bizarrely, to relate to Ben. Like a number of the rebel commanders, the Colonel has been to university in England. This does not stop them behaving as cruel, dictatorial brutes in some cases. There's a lot of hate in the piece, but I think this is a fair reflection of the stories I've come across.

I've allowed Amel, as a Dinka woman, to speak out suddenly and surprisingly about what she thinks about the Nuer/Dinka conflict. This is seemingly out of character but in extreme circumstances many of us are capable of things we had not imagined. It also allows me to make the point that the hate is not Dinka hating Nuer, but some male Dinka hating some male Nuer, with the situation exacerbated by the Arab government in Khartoum. She pays for her frankness with her life.

It is perhaps worth saying that there is some inspiration from 'The Dream of the Rood' in the last scene, which seemed appropriate given the slaughter of the innocent (3 boys mirroring the crucifixion hill) and Sophie's faith. In slight contrast, in the previous scene (16) I've allowed the Dinka nurse Amel and one of the hospital patients to refer to the Dinka gods at the moment of death. Christianity and animism often sit side by side in Dinka spirituality I suspect.

15/8/08

Having just finished the first draft, I am worrying that it is not 'Japanese' enough. Inevitably, any work begins to take on a momentum of its own and has, we hope, a kind of internal integrity. It is a big story, definitely a full length opera. The ending is very 'Romeo and Juliet' with Sophie falling on Ben's corpse, just as Nishi and Doctor Okaba. In Japanese culture red signifies a hero. Is Sophie a hero? Is Nishi a hero? Certainly not in the conventional sense but perhaps that's the point of calling film and opera 'Red Angel'. I think she is, and the fact that she is should have a frisson of shock. 'Red films', in the Welsh language, are what we call 'blue films' and I quite like that connotation too. Of course, a red light district is a place of prostitutes. In India, red is the bridal colour, the colour of a married woman. In English carols, the red berries on the holly bush signify Christ's blood. Red can also be a colour of foreboding, as the title of this opera is from the beginning. I like all these nuances.

Perhaps I am worried the piece is not sufficiently Japanese because I am reading Plomer's early novel, 'Sado', which is very much about subtle differences between English and Japanese sensibilities. But the people in my 'Red Angel' are not Japanese. If anything, I have been looking at specific Dinka and English characteristics. Ben certainly has some of the tightness combined with emotional fragility we associate with the English Grammar School or Public school background, and parents who were not always there for him, locked up in their own very busy lives. There may be things which I can suggest, or insert, to do with the staging, the distancing (and at the same time a kind of aesthetic intensifying) of blood and sex in the techniques of Japanese theatre. Despite the horror, it should all look 'beautiful' and the falling of the wall at the end could be slow and technically magical, signifying the destruction of the hospital as a scenic 'étude' rather than a realistic crash to earth. The sense of this is partially the director's problem but I can't help thinking as a director given my practical theatre background. In many ways, 'grand opera' is itself (at least historically) a distancing form; the 'poor' have to sit at an excessive distance from the action and, for them, the singers become like puppets in a miniature theatre. I've tried to capture unpretentiousness, naturalness and brokenness in some of the 'dialogue' within the opera, while keeping a heightened poetic style for the chorus and most of Sophie's solos.

I have put John Bunyan's hymn, 'He who would valiant be', into the first and last scenes today. This might be seen as a mirror of the 'Te lucis ante terminum' at the beginning and end of 'CurlewRiver' but if it is, this was subconscious. I was looking for something that would bring the three boys of the early scenes together with the three 'crucified' boys of the last scene. Sophie has been brought up an Anglican too so I thought of this very famous hymn because of its iron echo of 'following the Master' in the remembered context of Colonel James' words 'I am a master fish spearer' and, mainly, because it is a wedding hymn (It was sung at my wedding). It joins Sophie's Anglicanism with that of the boys at the beginning. I've also reinserted the line, 'We are the Lord's soldiers', sung by one of the boys, in the first scene. I was worried this might get them confused with the Ugandan 'Lord's Resistance Army' but this didn't exist in 1991, and I think this idea of mission – however misguided - is important. It also, I hope, quite closely relates to the Japanese notion of duty. Despite Sophie's animist roots, and her strange unashamed sexuality, the thread of Anglican Christianity stays with her till the end.

A word about my way of working. When I'm writing a first draft, I surround myself with my sources – books, music, the film, poems, my notes, my scene plan etc. Having finished the first draft, I put all these away and work with what I have on the page. So after watching every scene of the film about four times, I don't intend to look at it while I re-draft. What I will do is look at some books about Japanese theatre, and the film of Julie Taymor's production of Stravinsky's 'Oedipus Rex'. I will also chase up Dili, my Acholi friend, and find a Dinka speaker – and listen to more Dinka music.

A 'small' job to do this weekend is to give a title to each scene. Some will be obvious and similar to those on the DVD. Some I am not sure about yet.

I think this will help composer, singers and anyone else working on it to get a sense of the overall narrative.

17/8/08

I think there are reasons for a narrative apparently so distant from my experience. (Anyway, as Thomas Browne wrote, 'There is all Africa and her prodigies in us'). Where are the Greek myths or great revolutionary love

stories librettists dramatised in the past? The answer is, of course, that they are still there but we are not part of the same 'given' world that poets and composers were working with in seventeenth century Venice or nineteenth century Austria. Media stories which drag on and on, like the Sudanese war, become a kind of generalised, background war/Africa/suffering 'myth' for us, epics without characters. We remember pictures of great suffering and starvation, and rumours of massacres, but rarely have a picture of individuals caught up in this, except as visual images. 'Red Angel' brings those visual/media images to life and delineates characters that are one more reluctant set of 'heroes' in yet another horrendous episode in the long history of war.

Echoes of Troy, the Battle of Maldon, Vietnam, or even 'Romeo and Juliet' are inescapable. They are part of an ever accumulating family of war-love stories. The underlying 'myth' is heroic love in the face of war, but the nature of this 'heroism' is – so we might think – sullied. But is it? Heroes are usually heroes by accident, and circumstance, rather than plan. Part of Homer's genius is that he shows Odysseus as a flawed man. Sophie (and to a lesser extent Ben) are my flawed heroes.

Choices of language. A writer on the TV series 'Life on Mars' said that one of the joys about writing a series set in the 70s was that he could put in the word 'slag' without worrying about it. Contemporary language might be 'slapper', or even 'ho', and I've changed the word the rebel soldiers use to describe Leura, the Dinka camp-woman in the hospital, a number of times. I finished with 'slag' because of its Anglo-Saxon coarseness. Anyway, the kind of language I'm using, between poetry and prose, is not contemporary; its syntax is partially invented, so I think the chanted or sung sound of a word is the best guide to its suitability.

Religion. Apparently, in the film 'Red Angel', religion is not really important. It's not, I think, mentioned. This is odd, given the centrality of Shinto and Zen within Japanese culture but perhaps more central is a rigid societal code, imposed in every institution, from family to army. Honour, duty and everyone in their place (social and military mores) seem much more important. Maybe being caught up in the Sino-Japanese war, hundreds of miles away from house shrines, temples, monasteries and the paraphernalia

of religion, is part of the reason why religion plays no part in the film? The roots of popular Japanese religion are in animism, as is Dinka traditional belief.

The stories and beliefs of Christianity are more than a motif running through my adaptation; they are a central part of the experience and belief system of most black Southern Sudanese. Writing in his 1931 novel, 'Sado', William Plomer writes about religion in Japan, through the eyes of his English protagonist and his Japanese friend, about eight years before the time in which the film is set:

'(Lucas) would never have dreamt of calling himself a Christian, any more than Sado would have dreamt of calling himself a Buddhist, but somehow each of them stood as a protagonist of those two vast and complex ideologies. There they were, representing respectively West and East, the reformer and the resigned. On one side there was Buddha and on the other Christ – Christ, forever racked and bleeding, bleeding incessantly from a hole in his side, obsessed with a craving to wash away the sins of the world; Christ; missionary-minded, the savage god of masochists, the human god, the god who is eaten, still eaten to the music of motor-bicycles and pneumatic drills; and Buddha, calmer emblem of a sustaining fixity at the core of illusion, a neuter principle, actively inert, a sexless deity, self-existing, ironic, supreme, with a jewelled navel, and seated on a lotus in attitude like a joyful promise of everlasting peace...' (p. 182)

I could certainly argue with the notion of Buddhism as 'ironic' or Buddha as a 'deity' but the description of Christianity seems close to the evangelical Anglicanism Sophie, Amel, Kur, Dur and Dut might have experienced in the Sudan. The 'missionary-minded' attitude is, albeit sometimes bizarrely, an important influence in Sophie's decision making. There is no West and East in the libretto but there is Africa with the stamp of the West on it from distant times encountering modern weapons and modern European doctors and nurses with their love for organisation. Perhaps different understandings of the value of individual human lives are at its heart? Southern Sudan = first tribe, second race.... and religious belief is a back-up, a refuge, even a justification. In the end, the Sudanese wars are about greed for the exploitation of natural resources (principally oil) but this is like a line running in the background, and not what the everyday reality of the wars appears to

be about – which is usually racism/preferment and, less often, tribalism/preferment.

Setting. Metal beds, sheets and mosquito nets in the middle of a bush and wetlands landscape. Something of the same sense of space as in ON's production of Peter Grimes, especially when staged at Salford's Lowry. Metal beds and gurney(s) and very thin cloth/net transform into the three different hospitals (each a variation on the last) and the suggestions of church and village. Essentially, it's the same setting with variations and the metal hospital beds are a transformation object, like the cable drums and bricks of Brook's 'Ubu Roi.' The setting isn't fussy, but should be able to appear monumental, and the destruction of the wall in the last scene but one should be spectacular and beautiful. One thing I hadn't realised at the beginning of work on the piece is that so much of Southern Sudan is wetlands and forest (albeit partially destroyed by the war). So I think there should be a suggestion of the water, and the birdlife in the water and in the sky. I guess the metal of the beds could be used percussively by the chorus. I'm also imagining that the job of rearranging and transforming the space would partly be the job of the cast. Thinking of relevant artists: Scarfe's scratchy ink-drawings; Baselitz; the fat and metal of Beuys (especially when in containers) – and his Red Cross boxes and containers. Drawings done with improvised materials by prisoners of war – like the British in the Second World War Japanese camps. And sculptors' drawings, like Henry Moore's, but without the elegance of his curves. Worked etching plates. Watercolour broken by heavy ink lines, and a just visible network of pencil scratching.

I see very pale colours: blue, ochre, an almost washed away red. The only darker colours are the bright and dark reds of blood, and the patchy steel and rusty metal.

Ah the imprecise way even musicians pass on what they want to producers: Teddy Thompson on his producer, Marius De Vries: 'I could tell him that I wanted something to sound like fairies dancing around a maypole and he'd know what button to push to get that.' My directions about the sound of the 'blood kenning' are similarly precise and vague.

The longer silences aren't in the libretto. Where are they? Which is the longest one? Are there times when one small sound interrupts the silence?

3/1/09

Maxine Hong Kingston on Grace Paley at Vietnam Vets writing workshop:
pp. 344 – 345, 'The Fifth Book of Peace'.

When Grace arrives, people are very eager to read, hands and faces and bodies tensely signalling to go next. I nod to Jean Watson. She reads about working as a nurse in burned-out villages. Some children remained alive.' Women pick up the pieces. Waist, hip in blood. It was our job to fix the wounded. Help them return to battle to kill again. Women follow the soldiers and the war. I was sisters with the Vietnam women selling sex to soldiers... Now working for peace is my obsession....Women transmute war."

This is the first time I've directly made this connection, that in nursing the wounded (many of whom are from her 'side' even if consciously she has no 'side') Sophie may be an accomplice to the war. Where does the humanitarian, altruistic argument sit here? If men are choosing to go back to an unnecessary war, is it the place of the nurses to help them do this? In some way, Jean Watson feels complicit, involved in the blame of the Vietnam war. She has a choice, perhaps unlike the prostitutes, making her 'guiltier'.

This is a thorny area and takes us back to the conscientious objection debate: it is permissible to serve in a medical corps during a war or is absolute non-cooperation the only non-war, pacifist choice? Does Sophie use sex as a kind of healing analogous to her care at the bedside of patients? Or has the rape decentred her sexuality? Are both these contributory factors to the way she is? The use of the word 'transmute' – changing from one form to another, from base metal to gold. This is what Sophie thinks she is doing for Deng, with a disastrous result. She is in love with Ben but is also using sex to try and reach him, to get closer to him, to begin the healing. Jean Watson is talking about a physical transmutation: cripples walk again, dying children live to become adults. There's something

of the shamanistic healer here, but Sophie is not as powerful as her subconscious suggests she is.

5/2/09

Having worked closely on a draft of the score of the whole opera with Ayanna eight days ago and having just typed up our notes and conversation, the most important things that came across were the need to give the chorus more work to do (to deepen the musical and sound texture of the piece, adding layers of meaning) and to allow quite a lot more space (and hence more composed music) for stage action without the words. My feeling is that the piece is slightly too dialogue heavy but Ayanna wants to go for setting all the words, with the minor adjustments and additions we've made.

Thinking about space and stage action brought me back to my reservations about Alasdair Middleton's 'Pinocchio' libretto. I've just been reading it again and it's full of fascinating characters with their own word idiosyncrasies, wit, rhyme, sound echoes and short lines (all those things that help to make a good libretto) but there's very little space between lines for things to happen, and that's what it sometimes felt like in the theatre, a sort of relentlessly fine and witty gibber, a series of acts. I wanted the words to stop, for the action to find quieter moments without words, with much more variation in pace, and the whole piece to be shorter, at least for the audience it was intended for. My feeling was the story just isn't that long, in theatrical time. It was also prone to too much enjoyment of set pieces, which however beautiful or eccentric can drag down the necessary pace of narrative development. I will look at the opera on DVD and examine closer the relationship between words, music and action before talking to Jonathan and Alasdair.

My Acholi speaking friend Dili Diey from the Southern Sudan is very upset because a refugee friend of his who returned to the Sudan a couple of weeks ago was shot almost immediately on arrival. Dili is still 'in hiding' without 'leave to remain' and without money. This war in Sudan can be divided up into chronological sections, but it's still lingering on and flaring up. In a very real sense, the conflict of 91 – 92 is an under-layer of what's happening there now, almost analogous to the musical textures we've talked

about juxtaposing the words, echoing, commenting and adding extra meaning. The opera might be 'historical' on the surface but its essence is contemporary.

13/7/09

After the 'gargantuan task' of putting the two day opera workshop together (as Kara put it) time for some more reflections.

The beginning of scene 1 definitely needs to be freer. With all the complex rhythms and the Dinka language it somehow loses the vitality and rawness of what we need at the beginning of the opera, with the visual accompaniment of the searing images of war. There is room here for a much richer texture, with the sense of more voices – possibly through electronics – and voices on and/or off stage. We could possibly make use of overtones and harmonics on the strings too? The boys' voices need to soar above everything – what they are saying is actually the main narrative content of the scene. And we need the fragment of the hymn at the end of the scene to root them, and the audience, in their belief system – as well as providing a point of reference for the audience's own context. The hymn melody could also be a part of the texture in the introductory section; it should come as something of a shock after the world we are immediately plunged into, a bit of half familiarity. We need to get away from the English choir, bold full throated pronunciation of the Dinka words and, in the future, to work on imaging the words and finding something closer to the real Dinka, and its slightly nasal, 'closed' sound than we were able to manage while concentrating on melody and rhythm. The singers need to listen to the spoken Dinka repeatedly.

There is room for more complex percussion parts, if the dynamics of the instruments can be balanced in relation to the strings and the voices. I think I'd like there to be possibilities for improvisation here too, almost a sense of call and response between chorus and percussion.

The string quartet, at the moment, sounds quite thin – though this may partly be to do with more confidence in playing the parts. Is there room for

doubling instruments here, amplification or some other way of finding a fuller sound in relation to the strength of the chorus? Of course, a solo instrument like the kora (or even another violin or cello) which rises above the strings and interweaves with the solo voice parts – as originally suggested – would make the texture much richer and provide a bridge between the voice and the existing instrumentation.

The music, as many of the participants pointed out, is rhythmically complex and contains some beautiful, clear melodies. Ayanna perhaps still needs to find more spaces for the voices to exist without much backing – despite everything said above – and find more spaces for instrumental sections between words (See my comment above about 'Pinocchio'). Even more repetition would work and I will work on some small cuts and rearrangements of words that would help too. We can't underestimate the difficulty of words being heard, as was amply demonstrated in Rufus Wainwright's 'Prima Donna' where often the French words were obscured by the sheer volume of the orchestral sound or simply not repeated enough for the audience to get hold of the narrative (even with sub-titles). I'd really like to avoid subtitles since they are a distraction from the stage action and split audience focus in a very literal way. What 'Prima Donna' did demonstrate well was that it's good to give an aria a luxuriance of time, and not to be afraid of this – the audience find the solo voice in an extended passage easier to listen to, and this is when their emotional involvement is intensified. 'Red Angel' is a much 'cooler' opera, both in concept and in the musical composition but we needn't be afraid of those passages of dramatic intensity which solo and duet allow.

I already have a sense that the opera works, and that Ayanna, despite her 'lack of experience' is moving towards an individual operatic language, as much driven by rhythm as melody.

Quite often there are notes for the singers to pitch which are not signalled in other parts; this needs looking at. We used a xylophone to pitch during rehearsals, and between numbers and sections in the recording.

15/7/09

Kara's reflections on hearing the first four scenes of the opera –

On the approach to recitative (or 'récit' as the 'operaphiles' have it): it can be tedious and unnatural; Kara says some of the parts of opera are close to recitative, and possibly too long. There are different modes – information mode, state of mind mode and conversational mode. It is in the conversational mode where it can become too much. There are points where the libretto becomes too conversational and I should look at small cuts. Look at communicating information through other means, like action or the visual.

Language – what exactly am I doing with the three African languages since the audience may not know the difference between them? Is it important that they are distinguished? I said the Acholi and Nuer, each really only spoken by one person, are introduced within the narrative. The Dinka, of which much more use is made, is another matter. My first reply was that I am consciously working with the sound of the language and not looking for a literal understanding. However, the Dinka chorus, especially at the beginning of the piece, would be reinforced by visual images related to the words, though not illustrating them – the chorus is really all about the destruction of a village, and something like excerpts from a shopping list of what it destroyed. It would be possible to project or paint the English translation of the words, like 'a tall girl', but this seems a bit of a crude solution. The singers' pronunciation needs to be much closer to the authentic Dinka to find the tone which emerges from the landscape, and to get Monica Wol's slightly mournful intensity (the recorded Dinka speaker). It's a quieter, more concentrated sound than the 'full English'. That the phonetic is as important, in a different way, to the semantic, is of course a working hypothesis: words, music and sound as a kind of 'verbal music'. How important are the languages for 'identity'? I'm more interested in the sensuous world of the sounds – not understanding literal meanings of foreign languages in performance e.g. Kantor, La Mama's use of Greek and Aztec under Andrei Serban's direction, has never bothered me if there is enough precision and intensity behind the delivery, coupled with an appropriate visual image/action, to get a general, physical sense of the meaning.

Kara mentioned that there are a number of effective moments when something beautiful turns ugly (This is quite conscious). Something may sound quite beautiful but it is a war cry. Though I think there should some raw shouting of 'Allah Akbar' above the many noted atmospheric setting.

We talked about the need to reinstate 'He who would valiant be' in scene 1, both for its important meaning. Kara said she was not aware that Southern Sudan is a Christian context (children learnt their English from hymns) and this is a vital piece of information, as well as linking with what happens to the three boys in the last scene of the opera. The humming could easily be a bridge into this.

Kara liked the way that the action is suggested by the instruments as well as voices, both in a diagetive fashion i.e. marimba = war drums – in some passages. Or the less diagetive: lion's claw scrapes on the violins.

We both agreed there should be more instrumental spaces and that the 'Khwaja' song could lose a verse or two – allowing the song to be the same length but with, again, more space.

22/07/09

Just a write-up of some of my notes from the workshop on the 8th and 9th July:

The way 'Bell Bum, Bell Bum' fades away so softly in scene 2 doesn't feel quite right. It's sounding too beautiful. There should be some rawness and crudity in it too, almost as if the men are laughing at the same times as singing. It should leave a seedy, unpleasant feeling in the auditory and emotional response of the audience.

The balance between the instrumentalists, chorus and treble voices needs thinking about at the end of scene 1. At the moment the treble parts are getting a bit lost.

The Dinka word 'pieth' (raat pieth = nice person) in the chorus is two syllables, not one, so this will need re-scoring.

Sophie's repeated line at the end of the song in scene 10, 'I am a town on fire – rush in' needs some sort of echo in the chorus, reinforcing it, and building the song to more of a climax.

11/08/09: reflections after the transfer viva with Kara, Rachel and Mick Wallis.

Some reflections – rather than quoting and comparing the different critical languages of Barthes, Brecht and Hutcheon, I need to be working towards a more elegant synthesis based on my own understanding – though it's still fine to use quotations! This understanding is to do with the collaborative process and an acute and constant analysis of this. I have been given permission to make this more central – the discussions, the collaboration with the composers (and the differences in this collaboration), the reading, the way 'Curlew River' enters the discussion. The ultimate synthesis of the different language is in the final chapter, 'Towards a Poetics of Libretto'.

From the very useful discussions this morning, it seems that there is a paper to be written on comparing Nishi and Sophie's sexuality and how decisions have been made. What shifts have I made in Nishi's sexuality as she becomes Sophie? Is she without morals and simply acting (existential?) or is she making a conscious decision, at any time, to be a healer. How does her sexuality compare with the choices offered within Dinka and Acholi society? The simple choice seems to be camp follower/laundry woman/cook/whore or married woman within the village. Within the war context this changes and when the men are killed and there is a shortage of firepower; then the women take up arms. But Monica Wol, whom I consulted about the Dinka language, is an articulate Dinka within a Western context, who has travelled from the Sudan to the SPLA safe house in Egypt

(her uncle's) to Canada to London but she is still being married 'in the Sudan' (even if this is virtual) and valued in terms of a number of cattle. Will she live with her husband? Will she return to the Sudan at any point? I could interview her about this. Are there differences in Acholi society in the way women are treated? We also talked about how Dili treats women in England and how I've found it difficult to approach him about this, except as a reprimand. He must have had women available to him (and boys/men) for sex since his early teens and may well have been 'initiated' by older boys and men in the SPLA.

It's important to look at how Ayanna chooses to shape Sophie's songs – lyrical, and melodic, with the 'interruption' of a complex rhythm underneath. What does this rhythm say? We talked about how Aniko brought a quietness to the role and also, to some extent, was physically and emotionally separate from the other performers involved in the workshop. Is this part of working on this role? How does the performer find Sophie's sexuality within herself, or is this not necessary? An extreme example of changed behaviour in war is found in Tim O'Brien's 'The Sweetheart of Song Tra Bong' where a 17 year old college girl travels to Vietnam and comes back from the jungle with the 'Greens' wearing a necklace of tongues before disappearing into the jungle forever, and this all begins with an interested visit to the local village outside the confines of the camp. What is the relationship of the different characters in 'Red Angel' to the context beyond the 'wire' of the MSF compounds? Do contexts completely change our behaviour, or is this defeatist behaviourism? In 'Red Angel' everyone one is displaced thanks to the war, and I have tried to give Sophie one extra step of displacement. In a very real sense, the whole of Southern Sudan is displaced. This is very different to 'Peter Grimes', where Grimes is clearly arraigned against the town and only Ellen occupies the territory between and – very briefly – his apprentices (who are not given much of a platform to express their own opinions). Ben's morphine addiction is also one further step of displacement beyond those around him which he has chosen to make, putting him beyond the 'good guy doctor' role.

Sophie's craziness relates to the fact that the crazy is normal in war and the normal is what has to be made up as Tim O'Brien says:

'Often the crazy stuff is true and the normal stuff isn't, because the normal stuff is necessary to make you believe the truly incredible craziness.' (P. 70, 'How to tell a true war story').

'You can tell a true war story by the way it never seems to end' (P.73)

'...In truth war is also beauty. For all its horror, you can't help but gape at the awful majesty of combat...You hate it, but your eyes do not.' This is why the lighting must be beautiful, whatever Barker says, to reflect the 'unreal beauty' of the situation. Whether this leads to analysis by the audience is very debatable, whatever the strategies. As O'Brien writes:

'A true war story is never moral. It does not instruct, nor encourage virtue, nor suggest proper models of proper human behaviours, nor restrain men from doing the things men have always done. If a story seems moral, do not believe it. If at the end of a war story, you feel uplifted, or if you feel that some small bit of rectitude has been salvaged from the larger waste, then you have been made the victim of a very old and terrible lie. There is no rectitude whatsoever. There is no virtue...' (P. 68).

Can opera be a satisfying and provoking but not an uplifting experience? To aim not to be uplifting is quite a challenge! **Look further at Blau on the audience.

This horror and 'obscenity and evil' (O'Brien) will also be portrayed through projection, through staging, through styles of performance, through the programme, through linked talks/workshops – all may be part of the performance experience.

My particular identity as a visual theatre 'person', concerned with (or at least seeing them) the tableaux first, gives me a different understanding of libretto to most working in this area who tend to come from a literary or 'straight' theatre background. How are the individual characters commenting on the tableaux they find themselves in? It might be useful to do a performance analysis of this scene by scene.

(Lindenberger was suggested as an essential critic, to complement Hutcheon).