Carlota in the Congo

By marriage a Habsburg, I by birth
Am Belgian: Coburg, sister to the late
King Leopold, of whose Congo Free State
“L’etat c’est moi “ was literally true.
That being so, his secreting me here
Was well within his rights. And I have mine.
Nuns, anonymity, court etiquette.
The old madwoman in the Mons chateau
May be the legend but she is not I.
I have a villa where the River sweeps
Out from the heart of darkness toward a sun
That is in Mexico a god. If hands
Are missing here it is the hearts torn out
Juarez inherits, boasting all the while
Of being Indian. Chapultapec
When I was there at least was more Triest
Than Teotihuacan, as my rooms here
Contain one sacrifice alone: myself.
Napoleon the Little, Pio Nono,
U.S. Grant, more blood is on your hands
Than ever any Coburg let. Omit,
Of course, descendants of Victoria.
A little steam-launch brings the fortnight’s mail;
One day a launch will dock for me. My kin,
Where will you bury me? Among the tribes
Upstream who will devour the evidence,
Or in Vienna, where archduchesses
Are so thick on the ground I’d disappear?
No proper Habsburg ever abdicates.
My husband’s brother, centuries along,
Was titled still “King of Jerusalem.”
You ex-and-future cannibals who crew,
Commit me to the water. Floating far,
An old Ophelia too little mad
To get me to a nunnery, or see
A Feathered Serpent in the green python
That hangs aslant above the mile-wide stream,
I see in him the brazen talisman
Of forty years spent in a wilderness,
Who, if I credenced him, would say to me
“Charlotte, beware the Canaan promised you.”