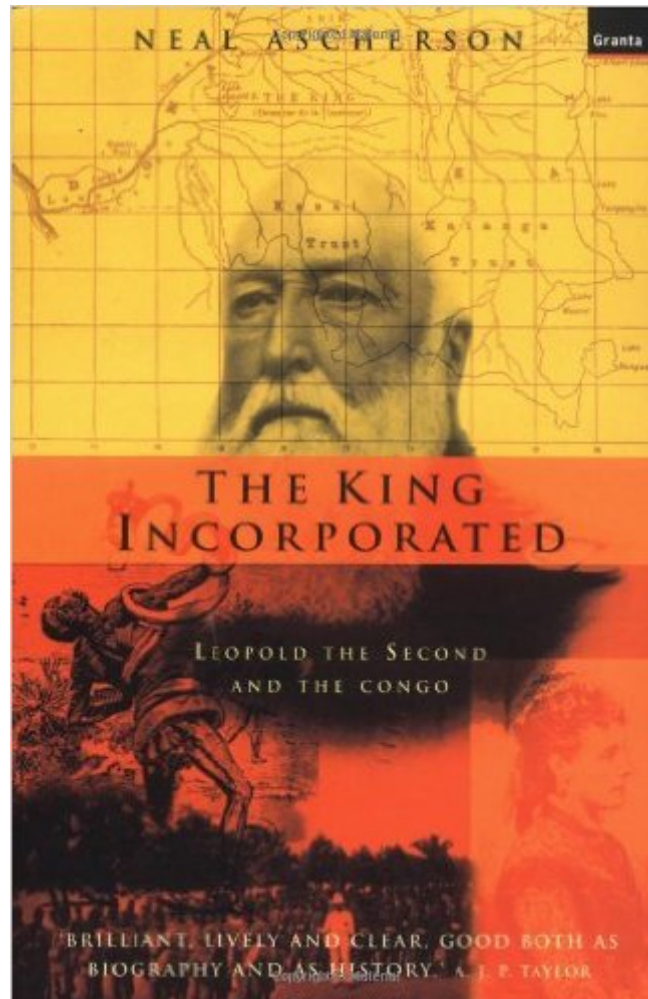


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The King Incorporated: Leopold The Second And The Congo



Synopsis

It is the aim of this text to describe Leopold II without prejudice. The text presents many aspects of his life: as a most ruthless negotiator; as the cold father; and as the sensual ancient riding his tricycle at Vilefranche-sur-Mer to pedal round to the villa of a young mistress.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Or so wrote the Duke of Brabant in 1863, "it's a taste we have got to make her learn." In the period after becoming King Leopold II of Belgium in 1865 he certainly led by example, acquiring and then exploiting the Congo "Free" State for all it was worth. Neal Ascherson's 1963 book "The King Incorporated" narrates just how the King of the Belgians achieved this feat. That story is combined with a good deal of biographical material regarding the King and the Royal Family, the history of Belgium in the period leading up to his death in 1909, and placed within the larger sphere of European history. Leopold himself is a fairly nauseating specimen. He had cold and dictatorial relations with his own children, faced plausible accusations of having been involved in the procurement of pre-pubescent girls, and a relationship with a sixteen year old in the final years of his life. A combination of factors allowed him to procure his colony: his prestigious position as King, a precocious sense of Public Relations well ahead of his time, a vast array of colonial holding companies, a thick veneer of humanitarian verbiage, and the fact that as the King of Belgium he wasn't viewed as a threat by the larger European powers whose Scramble for Africa was then at its height. The weakness in the book, and it no doubt reflects the early stage research was at in 1963, is that only a small part of it deals with Leopold's ruthless exploitation of the Congo Free State. The

only concrete figure that Ascherson is able to hazard regarding the cost in lives is that of the British Consul Roger Casement made in the 1900's, 3 million; modern research suggests nearer 10 million.

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