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The Society for Caribbean Studies Annual Conference Papers

editor Sandra Courtman

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Vol. 11 2010 ISSN 1471-2024

<http://www.caribbeanstudies.org>

Encountering Discovery and the Politics of Sorry In Jamaican Pantomime

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Abstract

The challenge embraced by the Little Theatre Movement of Jamaica (LTM) in nurturing the form of the Jamaican 'National Pantomime' from its inception in 1941, was the use of theatrical space to allow both performers and audience to play with perceptions of truth, both in the past and in the present, so that both historical and current realities could be examined collectively in a fresh light. Since 1969, Barbara Gloudon – the principal scriptwriter for the LTM – has taken an active delight in turning history on its head in reworkings produced to suit the needs of the present.

Time is life: history, memory, survival, forgiveness and justice. Artists within the context of Jamaican national consciousness like to portray the May 5, 1494 encounter between Spaniard and Arawak as a co-incidental discovery of each other's existence. Indeed, as Barbara Gloudon's script for *Hail Columbus* (LTM 1972) illustrated, the relationship between the Spanish and the island people could have been very different had there been a greater measure of mutual respect. *Combolo* (LTM 2003) heralds the Quincentenary of the Taino culture's disastrous encounter with the Spanish conquistadors. Here Gloudon envisages the 3,033rd descendant of Christopher Columbus returning to Jamaica with the very noble motive of saying sorry. The National Pantomime's message is that history can be redeemed through a sense of contrition if this is accompanied by appropriate changes in behaviour.

'Versioning' – the idea of taking authorial credit for creating a successful adaptation of an[other's] earlier artistic creation – is very much part of Jamaican popular culture. The scope that the 'discovery' event provides for imaginative reinterpretation probably explains why it has been repeatedly the subject of Jamaican Pantomimes both within the LTM and without. This time, in December 2003, a rival company Jambiz not only heightened its challenge to the

LTM's traditional ownership of the Jamaican Pantomime form, but also put into question the quality of the LTM's theatrical interpretation by running its version of the Columbus story, *Christopher-Cum-Buck-Us*, in parallel with *Combolo*. The point was being reinforced that the theatrical establishment represented by the LTM Pantomime Company was no longer entitled to a monopoly of the Jamaican Pantomime form as a commercially viable expression of the island's culture.

Writing an early form of travel guide at the beginning of the 1950s, Esther Chapman rather scenically referred to Jamaica as “a romantic island in the earliest-known portion of the New World, the hunting ground of the warriors of the past, the scene of adventures in which the Caribbean and the Spanish Main were overrun by figures from the history books” (Chapman & Thwaites 1952:20). In many ways, Jamaica represents the paradox of a ‘tropical idyll’ whose scenic backdrop of alluring loveliness stands in contrast to the citizens’ experience of man’s inexorable inhumanity to man. For at least five centuries, players in the roles of oppressor and oppressed have fought each other in a variety of guises in a struggle for pre-eminence and control of natural resources. Spanish control lasted 161 years, followed by the dominance of England for 307 years and then 48 years of independent self-government from 1962 to the present in 2010.

The notion of the centrality of the West Indies on both continental and world stage has persisted through the centuries, at least in the minds of those who live there. This is especially true of the island of Jamaica. First of all, it sits at the centre of the Caribbean Basin, as a map in *The Economist* of February 12, 1983 rather pithily portrays (Figure 1). Gloria Escoffery, teacher, painter and poet summed up, for an article in the *Jamaica Journal*, the mixture of micro and macro levels at which this sentiment operates: “Jamaica is its own little world, but it is also part of a gyrating globe, an entity more complex in its movements than the school books tell us” (Escoffery 1986: 51). Another, less well-known, voice from rural Jamaica, Stanley Redwood of Middle Quarters in St Elizabeth, referred to himself during a visit to the United States in 2002 as being from “the subcontinent of Jamaica” (*Gleaner*, January 2, 2003). Recounting his explanation for this in a letter to the Editor of the *Gleaner*, he summed up the main thrust of his argument in these terms: “When you look at the world map you may see Jamaica as a tiny Caribbean island, I concluded, but when I look at world affairs, I see Jamaica as a subcontinent and if we had the resources of a subcontinent, we would be a superpower” (*Gleaner*, January 2, 2003).

Not surprisingly, then, the LTM Pantomime also reflects the centrality of Jamaica's self-perceived presence in the arena of global activity as seen, for example, in the exchange between Captain John Rackham and his First Mate, Mary Read, in *The Pirate Princess* (1980) Act I, Scene 2:

Mary Read: Where are we off to this time?

Rackham: Jamaica.

Mary Read: Jamaica? Where's that?

Rackham: Off the coast of Miami (*laughter from the audience*)

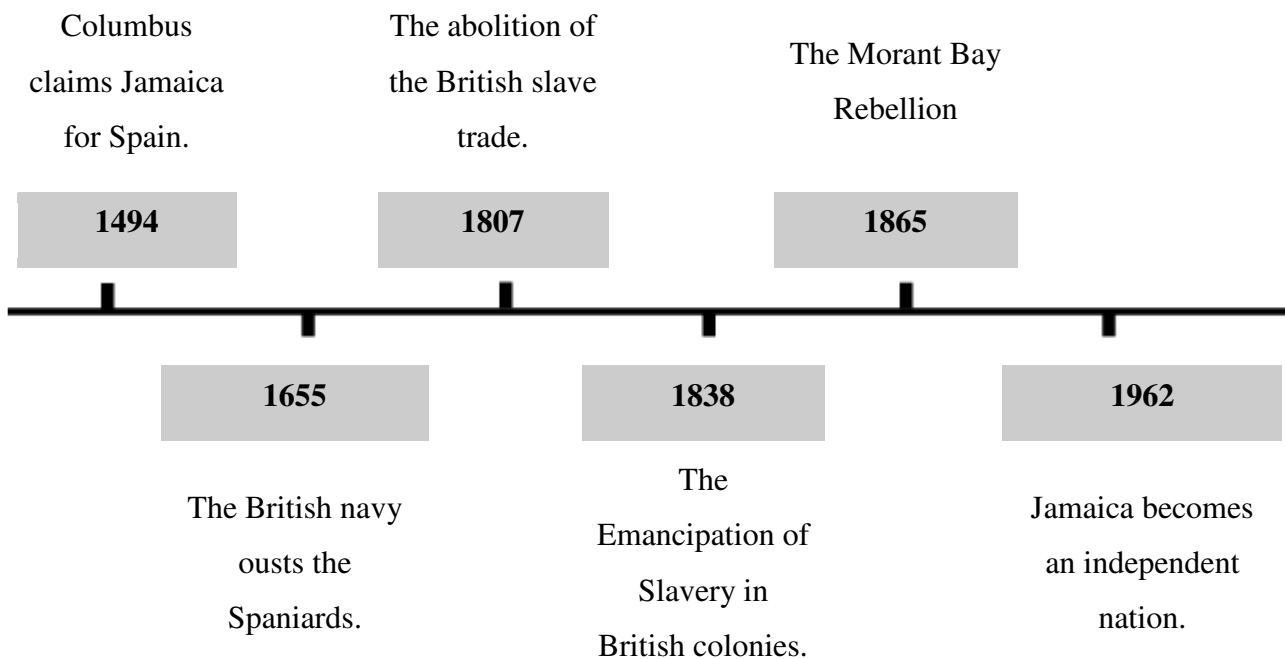
Mary Read: What's Miami?

Rackham: It's a suburb of Jamaica! (*laughter*)

An element of this small Caribbean island's ability to punch above its weight is also reflected in the impact that its presence has made on 21st century British culture. A television advertisement for Walkers Crisps makes the point as mainland Britain is tugged across the Atlantic to the coast of Jamaica so that the footballer Gary Lineker, the epitome of good sportsmanship now turned prankster, can enjoy properly sunbaked crisps. No matter how trivial the example, the intriguing element for the West Indian mind, of this marketing ploy is that role reversal in which 'the centre' finds itself being hauled, literally, to 'the periphery'.

Artists within the context of Jamaican national consciousness like to think of the May 5, 1494 meeting of Spaniard and Arawak as a mutual and simultaneous discovery of each other's existence. D. J. R Walker remarks on the very good fortune of Christopher Columbus in making landfall where "he had sailed into the near centre of the New World with its northern and southern continents lying unknown to him either side of his bows" (Walker 1992: 52). In Act I, Scene 4 of *Hail Columbus* (LTM 1972) Columbus explains to his fellow dons: "Gentlemen, what you must understand is that an explorer hasn't got to know where he's going. When he gets there, he decides where he is. Right?" (Glouidon 1972:13) and thereby consolidates this island's interpretation of the idea of 'discovery' as an expression of 'versioning'.

Jamaica's Long Road to Freedom – 6 important dates



As the Mordecais describe: “When English soldiers arrived in the island in 1655, the Taino presence had ceased to be distinct, and survived only in the mingled blood of the living and the adopted cultural practices of the dead” (Mordecai & Mordecai 2001: 7-8). Since the defeat of the Spanish introduced nearly two centuries of African slavery under British rule, it would not be unreasonable to expect this blood-soaked island to find expression in the voice of tragedy possibly like that of the great Shakespeare himself or even the Andalusian playwright Federico García Lorca, executed without trial in 1936 at the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War.

However during the course of centuries, the yarn of the Jamaican story has been woven in such a way that fibres of ruthless expedience have been counteracted by religious fervour and rugged resistance, shaping in the process the character of a multiracial and multiethnic island people known for their music, laughter, food and hospitality. Accordingly, a dependable respite from the violence continues to be the joy and mercurial release of a quick smile, ready wit, verbal irony and good humour. ““Laughter,” wrote Karl Barthe, “is the closest thing to the grace of God”” (Lowrie-Chin, August 4, 2003). Jean Lowrie-Chin, columnist for the *Jamaica Observer*, reflected on the enduring quality of courageous humour in Jamaican society as she reminded her readers of Louise Bennett’s public humiliation as Queenie in the classic LTM Pantomime

of 1963, 1966 and 1973. “How can one ever forget that wonderful Pantomime, *Queenie's Daughter*, when Miss Lou as Queenie emerged from the dressing room in an elaborate girdle and platform shoes?” laughs Jean Lowrie-Chin with empathetic admiration. Thirty years after she had sat in that audience, the journalist could still remember the agonising humiliation of transformation which proved to be so necessary for Queenie the market-vendor to achieve full self-realisation: “And then her moment of glory, when she took the stage for her daughter's wedding looking every inch a queen.” (Lowrie-Chin, August 4, 2003).

Jamaican history – past, present or future – has become an intrinsic characteristic of the Little Theatre Movement's National Pantomime – a musical comedy in which the collaborators juggle fact and fiction for narrative interest. The scriptwriter Barbara Gloudon, in particular, takes an active delight in turning history on its head in reworkings written to suit the needs of the present. Gloudon's provocative interest in episodes of the past is more to do with their use as metaphors for delivering a message about positive perceptions of self to a receptive public, which has paid to go away feeling encouraged at best and entertained at least. In this sense, the ‘historical’ account provides a kind of collective aura of potential truth, which counteracts the essential elements of fun and laughter and which lends weight to the moral message of the production.

There have been dedicated historians involved in this enterprise, like the scriptwriters Gloria Lannaman and Ted Dwyer, and in such years the LTM Pantomime has been an educational tool, drawing important episodes from the past to the attention of a relatively uninformed general public. *Dickance for Fippance* (Lannaman 1974), *Mansong* (Dwyer 1980) and *Bruckins* (Tipling & Dwyer 1988) are examples of LTM Pantomimes, which not only explore aspects of the theme of freedom but also stay true to the documented historical narrative through the medium of performance.

For the most part, however, historical event in Jamaican Pantomime works merely as the framework for a problem solving – and at its best action-packed – story and often there is little pretence at historical accuracy. As in the cinema, there are times when stories from the past merely give flavour to rewritten accounts in the present – *Morgan's Dream of Old Port Royal* (Henry & Greta Fowler 1965) and *The Pirate Princess* (Gloudon 1981), *Hail Columbus* (Gloudon 1972) and *Combolo* (Gloudon 2003), *The Witch* (Gloudon 1975) and *Miss Annie* (Gloudon 2002). Fearing that *Combolo*, the 2003 update of Barbara Gloudon's *Hail Columbus* (1972), would never be able to live up to the original, the critic Michael Edwards warned the

LTM, “If you’re going to rewrite history, then you ought to make sure it’s sufficiently exciting so as to preclude the issue of accuracy” (Edwards, January 1, 2004). The idea of Pantomime as history is, therefore, merely an extension of the art of storytelling in which deviations from the truth are permissible as long as the overall effect works. When the new Boxing Day offering reverts to a reworked version of a previously successful LTM Pantomime, levels of expectation rise even higher to combat the danger of being disappointed by ‘sameness’.

For people to sing the song of their own story, is a victory in itself. The Jamaican Pantomime’s version of ‘history’ is understood to be that which “resides in the memories of the people [...] told and hence reshaped by the descendants of those who have been misrepresented or under-represented in official historical records” (Bailey 2003:1). As the old storyteller in *Mansong* (LTM 1980) says, “Backra write story fe please demself. Oonu tink say Backra a go write dung de part dat any a we play eena de love story between Miss Rosa and de Captain? Oonu tink say dem woulda write dung de part dat Jack Mansong play eena dat love story?” (Dwyer 1980: Act I, Scene 1). Nonetheless, storytellers who see that the memories are passed on from generation to generation have guarded the historical record. The people’s version of the Morant Bay rising of 1865, eventually written down and published in 1949 by V S Reid in the powerfully evocative ‘novel’ *New Day*, is an example of this historical process.

However, discontinuities in the Caribbean narrative come from a tendency over too many years to disregard the oral account and the fact that so much of the record has been stored in the stories, songs, rhymes, herbal medicine, riddles and proverbs of people often educated only to a limited extent in the western literate tradition. The power of the Jamaican Pantomime narrative – as it was established by the early work of the ever expanding and contracting LTM team – arose from a judicious appreciation of collective memory as a rich and valid historical and cultural archive. A challenge embraced by the National Pantomime is that it should assist the public in the exercise of discovering and experiencing ownership of its collective history.

According to the historical record, when Columbus’ ships crossed the horizon on his second voyage to the Indies, “there, silhouetted against the evening sky on May 4, 1494 arose ‘sheer and darkly green’ Xamayca ‘the fairest island that eyes have beheld’” (Manning-Carley 1963: 18). Traditionally, the association of the term ‘discovery’ with the encounter between Europeans and the peoples of the New World suggests a genesis of valid existence for the island people with the arrival of the Spaniards. Linked with this concept and strongly reinforced

by British colonial experience, is a broader, and very long lasting, notion of privilege associated with exposure to the civilising influence of European philosophy.

The Quincentenary of Columbus's historic first voyage to the Indies in 1492, provided a challenge to this historical perspective as "indigenous and disenfranchised peoples around the world" reflected on a Spanish legacy which not only "exterminated the Indians [...and] decimated the forest covers of the region," but also, as Amina Blackwood Meeks finishes off her list of offences in the present, "collided with Africa till de coco inna my forehead nuh get better yet" (Blackwood Meeks, August 1, 2004). Amina as griot uses the everyday image of a 'coco' – the painful swelling induced by a hard blow to the forehead – to highlight how uncomfortably tangible her personal response to the legacy of Columbus is despite a time lapse of 510 years. Paradoxically, though in decreasing measure, the Caribbean has continued to pay tribute to the "greater civilising influence of Europe" (Hall 1972: 3) ever since. It has taken a long time to shed the colonial tendency to imitate metropolitan practice rather than risk the rebuke of initiating our own; this was what the LTM was potentially/inadvertently trying to do as it reached out to embrace the theatre of everyday life in a Jamaican way.

The acceptability of taking personal credit for chancing upon a successful new version of an original thing is very much part of the island's popular culture. Charles Hyatt, folklorist and erstwhile LTM star, straddled the dividing line between 'discovering' and 'inventing' as he tried to unpack the notion of invention as a rediscovery of the familiar, in the following way: "when you try a ting and try a ting, and get a series of evolution ... and it come right back to the original thing, you tek credit for it becaas is you fine it. Everybody dem fin' out long time" (Maynier Burke 1981:15). A Standard English version of his observation would read something like this: "When you have experimented repeatedly, and as a result of that process you arrive at the point at which you began, then you are entitled to take credit for your invention because you have indeed found it for yourself. Everybody knows this is so." All those who claim to be 'inventors' are therefore really 'discoverers' because all they have done is to encounter for themselves something that has always been there. This rapport between 'discovery' and 'versioning' is a key concept in the development of this paper.

The encounter between the Spaniards and the Arawaks was a mutual discovery of each other's existence. Embedded in this is a latent understanding that Columbus did not encounter a blank social slate and people at some needy stage of pre-cultural development when he chanced upon the island people. Albert Huie, Jamaican artist and set painter for the 1943 LTM Pantomime,

sums up the brink of encounter in a wood engraving entitled “The Discovery,” circa 1950, which seems to suggest that it was the Arawaks who discovered Columbus rather than the other way round. The scope that this episode provides for imaginative reinterpretation probably explains why this ‘discovery’ event has been repeatedly the subject of Jamaican Pantomimes both within the LTM and without.

Prompted initially by Barbara Gloudon’s LTM script for *Hail Columbus* in 1972, subsequent versions of the encounter story within the Jamaican Pantomime format have been the LTM-rejected but very successful independent production of *Arawak Gold* (Tipling & Dwyer 1991), *Combolo* (Gloudon 2003) an LTM reworking of the 1972 concept, and also in 2003 a rival Columbus Pantomime *Christopher-Cum-Buck-Us* (Jambiz 2003) written by Patrick Brown but with the same ideological spin on notions of ‘discovery’ as its LTM counterpart.

The Arawaks were a soft-spoken people with a language that was, according to Peter Martyr, “rich in vowels and pleasant to the ear” (Walker 1992: 19). David Watts (1990) suggests that the unsurpassable beauty of the land was reflected in the nature of its indigenous inhabitants who were intelligent and without guile. In fact, as D J R Walker proposes, for a first encounter, the Island Arawaks were the best possible ambassadors of the Peoples of the new continent, as they “were in so many ways more refined in thought and habit than any other American Indians then living in that region of the New World despite their primitive lifestyle” (ibid. 111). In fact the ultimate accolade came from Columbus himself who wrote in his *Journal of the First Voyage* that these Island Arawaks were a people without greed, always smiling, who loved their neighbours as themselves, concluding, “I believe there is no better race or better land in the world” (ibid. 34).

The thirst for wealth, which dominated the thinking of the European arrivants, was an immediate threat to both the vulnerable social structure of the indigenous inhabitants as it was to the carefully balanced eco-system of the island environment. Far from the presence of the indigenous Americans achieving legitimacy through recognition within the European norm, everything that they stood for was destroyed by these welcomed guests who found their hosts to be easy prey to their rapacious attitudes. It would be attested within the consciousness of Jamaican folk culture that Columbus was the initiator of European piracy in the Caribbean. Furthermore, by 1540, after only 46 years of exposure to Spanish domination, the first Arawak ‘West Indians’ were virtually extinct.

Yet as *Hail Columbus* (LTM 1972) illustrated in its revisionist version of history, the relationship between the Spanish and the island people could have been very different had there been a greater measure of mutual respect. In the Barbara Gloudon version of the story, Columbus is unsuccessful in finding gold for Queen Isabella, but in the pursuit of it he shares knowledge with the Arawaks and consequently saves the corn crop from the drought and the village from attack by the Carib cannibals. In true pantomime fashion, love conquers all and Mama Cacique, the Arawak Chieftainess, who has the last word declares in Act II, Scene 3, "Is celebration time. Music. Who have foot fe drop, drop it. Who have voice fe raise, raise it. And don't none of you forget who save the day. Oonu hail the man. Hail Columbus..." (Gloudon, *Hail Columbus*, 1972).

In 2003, the rival non-LTM Christmas entertainment, *Christopher-Cum-Buck-Us* (a Jambiz production) at Centre Stage Theatre, also picked up the point made by Columbus. What this Christopher realises through engagement with the islanders is that Europe no longer enjoys a monopoly on the concept of 'civilization':

Columbus' real discovery is that the natives are not so "backward" after all. The natives "shock him out" with their "cellie" phones as his attempts to barter and woo them over with "state-of-the-art technology" such as the first telephone invented by Alexander Graham Bell goes to naught.... Punctuated with obeah, a taste of both cultures, a wide-eyed glimpse of current Jamaican and American politics, a stylised Jamaican "look-a-like" to Osama bin Laden and a dose of the recent "Califronia recall" [sic] thrown in for good measure, the ... hungry belly natives tired of the "fenky fenky" leadership of Chief Running Belly finally succumb to the tastes of Italy and through a rigged election select the foreign Columbus as leader only to find that "the grass is not necessarily greener on the other side." (Unattrib., *Gleaner*, December 21, 2003).

Meanwhile, the official National Pantomime *Combolo* (2003), the LTM version which opened to a full house on the same day as *Christopher-Cum-Buck-Us*, tells the story of the 3,033rd descendant of the original Spanish explorer, who comes back, as the scriptwriter explains, "with a very noble motive. His motive is to find the Arawaks and tell them that he is sorry" (Henry, November 28, 2003).

The "rickety old sailing ship" (Henry, November 28, 2003) of this latter day Columbus (whose name has been inverted unintentionally to 'Combolo' by the Jamaicans he meets) is wrecked in a storm off the coast of Jamaica, so he too arrives 'by accident'. Once again, beyond the bare bones of the historical account, the Pantomime makes no apologies for producing its own

version of the Columbus event but each time this is done in order to present a special message to the audience.

Again within a tradition of talking about serious things in jest, the LTM Pantomime engages its audience almost surreptitiously in an unresolved, international, political debate triggered by a United Nations' conference against racism in Durban September 2001, which was stymied by the question of apologising for slavery in the Atlantic system and the associated topic of reparations. According to Gloudon, *Combolo* was “also my discussion on reparation, you know, in terms of the African experience, who pays for what they did to us? Nobody even said, we sorry. So, what I have done is that I have made Columbus come back and the people that he was supposed to oppress, to find them to say he is sorry and make amends and hope they can be friends” (ibid.).

As reported by Michael Williams, it was explained at the press launch for *Combolo* (LTM 2003) “that the LTM National Pantomime had always turned history upside down and to that end presents the Arawaks as being here, alive and well” (Williams, December 20, 2003), albeit suffering from a shortage of men. Gloudon's concept merged three Jamaican civilisations – the Arawaks, the Europeans and 21st century Jamaicans in a “three-tiered approach,” which “called for the use of three different settings, music and costuming” (Unattrib. *Gleaner* November 21, 2003). It needs to be noted that a history of aggression, oppression and bloodshed has characterised all three periods.

In the play, the Spanish visitors arrive in pseudo fifteenth century period costume and meet the locals who are African descendants belonging to a dancehall culture, but the island setting simultaneously reflects a pristine tropical idyll and uses Fern Gully (still a site of outstanding natural beauty in the parish of St Ann just south of the coastal town of Ocho Rios) as the home for the residual Arawaks whose pre-Columbian culture is further reflected in their music.

In this way the playwright was able to present the message – as relevant to contemporary realities as it is to recollections of the past – that history can be redeemed through the act of saying sorry and an accompanying change of behaviour. Within the world of Pantomime, “When the descendant of Christopher Columbus offers an apology to the Queen of the Arawaks for the sad legacy of his ancestor, she reminds him:

Once ago yuh coulda fool wi up
What yuh dish out wi had to sup

But is a new day now
Arawak nah bow
And yuh don't haffe worry
If yuh really sorry.

The politics of sorry takes much more than mere words. According to an old-stager: 'Yuh nuh fi sorry. Yuh nuh fi do it.'" (Gloudon, May 14, 2004). The idea that an apology without restorative action is meaningless, while central to *Combolo* (LTM), actually proves to be part of the social commentary of *Christopher Cum-Buck-Us* (Jambiz) too with its "natives who reflect an interesting bunch of the different faces of Jamaica then and now all things good the productive, industrious, responsible, ambitious, discerning and some things not so good greedy, proliferous, chickeenry, 'bag a mout' with no action" (Unattrib. *Gleaner*, December 21, 2003).

In her newspaper column written shortly after the close of the 2003-2004 Pantomime season, Gloudon the journalist pointed out the similarity between "acts of gross cruelty and disrespect" in the treatment of prisoners-of-war in Iraq and the callous and degrading behaviour of gunmen in Kingston. She then tied these reflections into lyrics written for *Combolo* which talk about the strategy of making a fresh start against a background of conflict: "Sorry ah nuh word a mout/ Sorry haffe come from de heart/ If a new day yuh waan fe start/ You haffe play yuh part" (Gloudon, May 14, 2004). The Pantomime's theme is universal in its application.

The extraordinary event which accompanied the Pantomimes of 2003-2004 was that a latter day Combolo did in fact pay an official visit to Jamaica along lines so evocative of Pantomime that the columnist Amina Blackwood Meeks thought it was a joke: "Headline: Something bout Columbus 20th generation coming to visit Jamaica. I found it hilarious. 'Him mussi hear bout Miss Gloudon play...hahahaha' and with that I turned the page" (Blackwood Meeks, August 1, 2004). By her account, Amina who was skimming through the daily newspapers at the Division of Culture was prompted by "a perceptive Secretary" to look at the article more carefully. When she did she nearly had a "conniption" – not only was the present day Duke of Veragua Cristóbal Colón de Carvajal arriving on July 19, 2004 for a week-long visit to Jamaica, and inauspiciously, at a time of national mourning following the death of Hugh Shearer, a well-loved retired Prime Minister, but it looked like the island inhabitants of today were going to welcome this Aristocrat-In-Perpetuity of the Indies with as much enthusiasm as the Arawaks had done twenty generations previously.

As in the LTM Pantomime, His Grace the Duke – a direct descendant of Columbus – had come to say sorry and “apologised for the harsh treatment meted out to the Tainos (Arawaks) under the Spanish” (Buddan, August 1, 2004). The twenty-first century Cristóbal Colón was coming to honour his ancestor and be fêted in turn by Jamaican officialdom with “a citation from the Mayor of Kingston, the keys to Spanish Town, boat tour of Buccaneer City Port Royal, wreath laying ceremony at his predecessor's monument in St. Ann, Public Lecture at UTECH and such delights” (Blackwood Meeks, August 1, 2004). The Duke also tried to contextualise his country’s past with the suggestion “that British colonialism did more harm to Jamaica than the Spanish did” (Buddan, August 1, 2004).

In the absence of any Tainos (Arawaks) to hear his apology, the gracious reception afforded to the Duke by his hosts, as they talked together about the merits of heritage tourism, is either a tribute to the inherent, forgiving nature of the Jamaican people, or evidence of their ignorance of the *actual* historical account, or else absolute indifference to the genocide of the past in the light of the promise of financial gain in the present. Amazed at the gratitude and love that the Duke experienced in Jamaica, Amina Blackwood Meeks, herself a teller of stories, could only reflect on the irony of presenting him with the keys to the old capital established by the Spanish: “yu mean to say, we carry the man to Spanish Town and never leave him in the district prison in Marcus Garvey Cell as poetic justice?” (Blackwood Meeks, August 1, 2004).

Amina was not the only person to object. “Why honour Columbus?” asked Garfield N. Morgan of Kingston 10 as soon as he got wind of the latter-day Combolo’s impending visit. Conceding that the explorer’s navigational feat had been a tremendous asset to Europe, Morgan pointed out that within the Caribbean context: “to honour this man, is to dishonour the memory of the great people who were here before us” as “Columbus was basically a forerunner to the other pirates, who would follow his path into the region” (Morgan, July 20, 2004).

Apart from the politics of saying sorry, it would seem that the Duke of Veragua was expressing an attitude about colonialism, which is somewhat characteristic of a wider Spanish perspective. The Mexican philosopher José Vasconcelos had visited Jamaica in 1917 and wrote in his autobiography, “It was a misfortune for Jamaica to fall into British hands, for it if had remained Spanish it would today have been a nation. Under the British it was merely a trading post, a factory, with no style of life of its own” (cited in Coulthard, unpublished radio transcript, 1967). In response to the remarks by Vasconcelos, Gabriel Coulthard notes: “The feeling then, that

British colonialism implanted a narrowly practical and utilitarian outlook, without any spiritual preoccupation, is a widely held attitude in Latin America” (ibid.).

In an interview with the editor of the *Jamaica Journal*, Charles Hyatt (Maynier Burke 1981:15) tells the story of ordering a beer at the bar of a hotel in 1964 and immediately being given a bottle of local brew; the word ‘beer’ in independent Jamaica could only possibly have one meaning: Red Stripe. He saw in the bartender’s assumptions a new attitude, “a certain arrogance which to me was a very healthy thing” because it had to do with the evolution of a new idiom of identity. A sudden departure from old social patterns and values, even if it meant returning ultimately to the original position, involved experimentation so that the ‘norm’ could be tested – the difference being that the behaviour becomes yours by choice.

The Mordecais point out that the Taino response to exposure to European diseases which “decimated those who did not die from sheer cruelty and overwork” was despair: “It is reported that thousands committed suicide by hanging themselves or drinking poisonous cassava juice; parents murdered their children to spare them this inheritance of oppression” (Mordecai & Mordecai 2001:7). In the light of this reaction, there does not seem to be much of a spiritual legacy that could have arisen from the 161-year ‘coco-inducing’ collision between the Taino and Spanish worlds in Jamaica up to 1655; unless, one counts the heightened awareness of the power of ‘hope’ among those Africans who survived the middle passage. If the British had a “practical and utilitarian” approach, it ultimately made the colony a commercially viable entity for the empowered with sugar as king. It could be said that this shift from one oppressive European culture to another signposted a crossover point from cultural oblivion under the Spanish to a form of re-indigenisation strengthened by pragmatic diversity of the gene pool under English rule. As it turned out, the power of the master class would be contested with determined resistance by those who had endured injustice and acquired a history of survival. Emancipation from slavery and the pursuit of national sovereignty delivered an ironic consequence: a quest for self-definition among the urban, post-colonial underclass of Kingston and their creation of Jamaican songs of freedom became inspirational anthems for the poor in the ‘mother country’ England by the end of the 20th century.

The social function of the Jamaican Pantomime can be summarized in two words ‘release’ and ‘recovery’. It is about the release of frustration through laughter and the recovery of hope. When enslaved by the Spaniards, the Arawaks died not only from disease and overwork, but also from despair. The journey through the middle passage created in those who managed to

stay alive an indomitable will to survive and to remember the homeland that had been left behind. There were, however, those who did not make it on that long journey from Africa to the Caribbean. Some went insane while others gave in to terror and despair and, like the Arawaks, lost the will to live. The history of the resolute, doughty ones, who outlasted the crossing and rose above the degradation of slavery, and indentureship, was recorded in the oral culture of the folk. It became a legacy that served as an active force of empowerment in the present of each new day because it was founded on the victory of laughter over anguish, expectancy over despondency, hope over despair.

Creatively spanning many periods in the island's story, the Pantomime's history-derived plot stretches back in time yet always paints a picture that relates directly to the present. It is a reminder of the Jamaican people's extraordinary capacity to forgive and the power for good that such an approach entails in terms of community development. This concept is always encapsulated in the "happy-ever-after" denouement of the story. Pantomime needs to be enervating and redemptive like reggae and religion, reminding the public that hope always triumphs over despair: Anancy tries to reform his antisocial behaviour because he loves and wants to marry the benevolent matriarch and the exploitative foreigner becomes creolised and finds a vested interest in being a contributing part of the community.

Time is life: history, memory, survival, justice. The theatre offers a space for collective reflection. Furthermore, it allows both performers and audience to play with time: 'there once was a time' – history; 'time for a change' – politics; 'time is money' – economics; 'time is longer than rope' – justice; 'tomorrow is another day' – hope; 'no time like the present' – action; 'all's well that ends well' – forgiveness. The outcome is that reality can be examined in a fresh light.

List of LTM Pantomimes cited:

1963, *Queenie's Daughter*. Scriptwriters: Greta Fowler, Louise Bennett, Henry

Fowler, Ranny Williams, Lois Kelly-Barrow, Noel Vaz (compiled by Dennis Scott)

1965, *Morgan's Dream of Old Port Royal*. Scriptwriters: Henry and Greta Fowler

1966, *Queenie's Daughter* (revival). Scriptwriters: 1963 team with additional dialogue by Lloyd Reckord

1972, *Hail Columbus*. Scriptwriter: Barbara Gloudon

1973, *Queenie's Daughter* (revival). **Scriptwriters:** 1963 team

1974, *Dickance for Fippance*. **Scriptwriter:** Gloria Lannaman

1975, *The Witch*. **Scriptwriter:** Barbara Gloudon

1980, *Mansong*. **Scriptwriter:** Ted Dwyer

1981, *The Pirate Princess*. **Scriptwriter:** Barbara Gloudon

1988, *Bruckins*. **Scriptwriters:** Carmen E. Tipling & Ted Dwyer

2002, *Miss Annie*. **Scriptwriter:** Barbara Gloudon

2003, *Combolo*. **Scriptwriter:** Barbara Gloudon

Note on Jambiz:

Jambiz was set up in 1996 and has put on an annual Christmas production from the start. The company is based at Centrestage Theatre in New Kingston and is run by a four-man team: Lenford Salmon, Trevor Nairne, Patrick Brown and Glen Campbell. Jambiz won the 'Best Comedy' category at the 2002 Actor Boy Awards for its sixth annual Christmas production *Cindy-Relisha*. In addition, multiple nominations for design, lighting, acting, original songs, best new Jamaican play, and best production that year, meant that the Jambiz International Productions team could depend on its ability to deliver funny scripts and good acting to a rapidly increasing audience base in Kingston and other major towns in the country. So, in 2003 Jambiz was well placed to challenge the Little Theatre Movement Company in a shared treatment of the same Columbus story. It's version *Christopher Cum-Buck-Us*, opening on the same day as the LTM's *Combolo*, was a 'Jamaican Pantomime' designed for a smaller space but its cheekiness paid off and it was deemed a success by the public and the critics.

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