

THE TRIAL OF CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS

A Drama by John Curl

A recreation of events that took place
on the island of Haiti (Hispaniola)
in the year 1500.

CHARACTERS

CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS
CAONABO, chief of Haiti
COMMANDER BOBADILLA, Royal Inquisitor
ANACAONA, an Indian woman, spiritual leader
HATUEY, a young Indian man
LIEUTENANT OJEDA, a career officer
FRIAR BUIL, a worldly monk
FRIAR MONTESINOS a young idealist
ESPINOZA, Columbus' cook and valet
SOLDIER

Produced as a staged reading by
The PEN Oakland Writers' Theater
at Live Oak Theatre, Berkeley, CA
September 17 & 18, 2009

Directed by Kim McMillon

CAST

Christopher Columbus.....Paul Abbott
CaonaboTony Rocha
Commander Bobadilla.....Mark G.
Anacaona.....Diana Tenes
Hatuey.....Elaine Pinto
Lieutenant Ojeda.....Randall Wright
Friar Buil.....Montgomery Paulsen
Friar Montesinos.....Pablo Rosales
Espinoza.....Della Smith
Soldier.....Elaine Pinto

PREFACE

The Trial of Columbus is an historical drama, a creative recreation of events that took place in the year 1500 on the Caribbean island of Hispaniola, today shared by the Dominican Republic and Haiti.

The myths surrounding Columbus form a core part of the traditional American origin legend, embedded in the deepest layers of our childhood consciousness, attempting to answer the basic questions of where we came from, how we got here, and by extension who we are. Yet most of these accounts falsify the real history, which is complex, problematic, and scary. American society has for many generations substituted a more pleasant but false history to tell our children, mythological lies that have resulted in generations with deep misunderstandings of the past, and therefore unprepared to shape our common future. My play The Trial of Columbus attempts to look unflinchingly into the heart of the Columbus mythology and perhaps reveal some historical truths.

The play takes place in a dungeon cell, where Columbus has been cast after being deposed from his command as Governor of the island.

Eight years earlier, lost and thinking himself near India, Columbus wrecked his flagship on the rocky coast. The Taino Indians rescued him, treated his crew as honored guests, and built them a village. But Columbus had come not just to “discover” the Indies but to conquer them. He had cut a deal with the King and Queen of Spain, that he would become Governor of all lands he could conquer, and get a tenth of all the gold, silver, pearls, gems, and spices he could gather. Leaving a small colony behind, Columbus sailed back to Spain to deliver the news. Ten months later he returned, at the head of an army and found his colony burned to the ground. The colonists had abused the Tainos until the most powerful chief on the island, Caonabó, came down from his home in the golden mountains of Cibao, and killed them all.

Columbus sent a messenger to Caonabó, offering to make peace. When Caonabó accepted, Columbus had him seized and put in chains. The first Indian massacres followed, and the Tainos were reduced to a conquered people. When Columbus couldn't find enough gold, he enslaved them. At the same time he shut down all attempts to convert them to Christianity, because enslaving Christians was illegal, and sent shiploads of them to Spain to be sold, beginning the transatlantic slave trade. When the Tainos caught a Spaniard now, if reports are to be believed, they sometimes melted gold and poured it down his throat. Meanwhile discontent grew among the colonists and soldiers, who accused Columbus of numerous abuses of his authority. A revolt broke out, and Columbus responded with harsh measures. The king sent an inquisitor, Commander Bobadilla, to investigate. Shocked by the conditions, Bobadilla arrested Columbus and cast him into a dungeon, which is where this play takes place.

Columbus is stunned to find he shares his cell with Caonabó. The two deposed leaders, Columbus and Caonabó, both in chains, struggle with each other as they await their destinies.

In 2009 I was fortunate to be able to stage a production of *The Trial of Columbus* through the PEN Oakland Writers' Theater, directed by Kim McMillon, with a cast of very talented actors led by Paul Abbott, Diana Tenes, and Tony Rocha, and performed at the Live Oak Theater in Berkeley.

Through reading Columbus's letters and the actual log of his first voyage, which really still exists, I got an inside view of his mind and personality, his overblown arrogance and Faustian bluster. He was quite a character. I wanted to recreate this saga, to bring the history to life in order to dispel the mythology, and I found Columbus's nemesis not in Commander Bobadilla, who deposed him, but in Caonabó, the great Taino chieftain.

My first contact with the truth about Columbus took place around 1980, when I was doing some construction work for a homeowner in Oakland. She offered me a box of old magazines. On top of the stack was a beautiful Kuna Indian woman with a gold ring in her nose, the cover of the November, 1975 issue of *National Geographic*. I opened it to a photo of a hawk with a small bell tied to its foot, in an article about Columbus's voyages in the Caribbean. The photo caption read, in part, "His greed awakened, Columbus demanded of each adult an annual tribute: enough gold dust to fill four hawkbells. Pay or perish. Many Indians fled, but the Spaniards tracked them down with dogs. Thousands ended their lives with poison. In 1492 an estimated 300,000 Indians lived on Hispaniola. By 1496 a third of them were dead. Less than a decade later the first black slaves arrived to take over the Indians' oppressive burdens."

Most of the voluminous Columbus literature up until that time presented the history as the heroic saga of a great explorer, while his role in leading the invasion of the Americas, his genocide of the Native people, and his founding of the transatlantic slave trade were all omitted or relegated to footnotes. I came to understand that mainstream culture had replaced the history with prettified lies, while the truth continued to eat at the heart of our society like a cancer.

I wrote an early draft of this play in 1981, and staged a reading of it in San Francisco, directed by Bill Herron, with all the parts played by poets and other friends. Kush, who ran Cloud House (a poetry center), hosted it in a series of plays (the Nature Theater of Oklahoma), in 1981-'82, and he played Caonabó.

I have written other works on the theme of Native resistance to Columbus and his invasion, including my long poem *Columbus in the Bay of Pigs* (1988, 1991), my video *The Columbus Invasion* (1991), and my documentary history *Indigenous Peoples Day* (2017).

John Curl

THE TRIAL OF CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS

ACT I

(Enter FRIAR MONTESINOS, an old man, in a monk's robe.)

FRIAR MONTESINOS

(to audience)

A dungeon, dirty and foul. A shaft of light through a small barred window above. To one side is a figure collapsed against the wall, shackles on his wrists and ankles, on a chain about eight feet long attached to a ring on the floor. It is Christopher Columbus. He is dressed in the rags of what were once fine garments. He lies there unmoving.

(shakes his head)

Columbus, Columbus, Christopher Columbus. Cristóbal Colón in Spanish. Cristoforo Colombo in his mama's Italian. Admiral of the Ocean Sea, baptized for the patron of travelers, Saint Christopher, the Christ Bearer. Today everybody thinks they know who that man was. But how many know that he not only claimed all of America for our King Fernando and Queen Isabella of Spain, but that they, in exchange, appointed him Governor over it, hereditary Governor, to be passed down to his descendants, and that Columbus ruled America like a feudal baron—or at least as much of it as he'd conquered—until he was charged with many serious crimes and, in the year of Our Lord 1500, deposed by Commander Bobadilla. These things really happened, many years ago. Although nobody seems to want to believe them any more. I know, because I was there when I was young, in Santo Domingo, Columbus' capital, on the Caribbean island of Española, called Haiti by the natives. At the time, it was the only European town in all America—only then we didn't call it 'America', but 'The Indies', since we still thought we were in some far frontier of Asia, only a stone's throw from the River Ganges. And what I saw there, I can never forget.

(turns his head)

Ah! Footsteps! Columbus stirs.

(Enter OJEDA, carrying a metal plate with food.)

OJEDA

(to COLUMBUS)

Good evening, Admiral Columbus.

(COLUMBUS just looks at him.)

Hope you're not too sick to eat tonight. I snuck you a little something extra.

COLUMBUS

Is there any word yet about the charges?

OJEDA

Don't you worry none, Admiral.

COLUMBUS

But have they issued the charges?

OJEDA

They're getting it worked out nice and legal.

COLUMBUS

(with emotion)

I've been in this black hole almost a month and nobody's told me yet what I'm accused of!

OJEDA

Now it ain't nearly as bad down here as in some of them other cells.

COLUMBUS

The charges!

OJEDA

Whatever they done or ain't done, they've told me none of it, that's for sure. Here, take your plate, Admiral.

(Tries to hand him the plate, but COLUMBUS does not take it).

COLUMBUS

How can they imprison a man like this and not charge him?

OJEDA

I reckon they can do whatever they choose to, seeing as they're the ones giving the orders and we're the ones taking them, don't you think, Admiral?

COLUMBUS

Why aren't I allowed to face my accusers?

OJEDA

I'll set your plate down right here. Sorry about the mold.

(sets it on the floor)

COLUMBUS

Why doesn't the Inquisitor even interrogate me?

OJEDA

Don't leave it too long or else the rats'll get it.

COLUMBUS

(Shakes his head; to himself)

Just this blankness!

(Voice Over groans.)

Diego! Bartolome! That's their voices! Ojeda, my brothers are being tortured!

OJEDA

Are you hearing voices again, Admiral? Eat your dinner, you'll feel better.

COLUMBUS

Don't you hear them? Ojeda, don't do this to me!

OJEDA

Your brothers are in fine shape, Admiral.

COLUMBUS

Why aren't I allowed to see them or communicate with them?

OJEDA

Rules is rules, you know that better than me, Admiral.

COLUMBUS

(pleading)

I tell you, Ojeda, as soon as the King and Queen hear of these outrages, all will be back as it was. If you'll only take a note to my brothers...

OJEDA

I hope you don't mistake me for a dishonest man, Admiral.

COLUMBUS

I'll be in your infinite debt, I'll remember it always.

OJEDA

(jingles keys)

Tell you what: I can take off your fetters for a brief while, with the excuse that the blood's gone bad in your legs. A brisk walk about the cell would do you a world of good.

COLUMBUS

(hesitates, then pompously)

That I cannot accept. Bobadilla ordered these chains on my ankles in Their Majesties' name, and a person of your rank cannot choose to remove them.

OJEDA

(laughs)

Come now, Admiral, you ain't at Sunday mass, there's nobody here to see.

(Voice Over groans.)

COLUMBUS

There they are again, those moans. Who is being tortured?

OJEDA

It must be the fever, Admiral.

COLUMBUS

Ojeda, tell me!

OJEDA

(listens)

What's that? The rats are scratching
they must sniff your food.

COLUMBUS

(looks at his plate with revulsion)

A month ago I wouldn't have fed this to the swine.

(eats with his hand)

The belly's a whore.

OJEDA

Better eat up.

(begins to leave)

COLUMBUS

Don't go yet!

OJEDA

I'll be back.

(Exits.)

COLUMBUS

Ojeda!

(COLUMBUS sets the plate down and sobs, but without tears. He straightens, head thrown back, breathing deeply, pathetic, self-pitying.)

CAONABO

(Voice Over, from the shadows.)

A rat approaches your food.

COLUMBUS

(Bolts upright, sobered. As if seeing the rat, he waves one hand at it and with the other hand grabs his plate.)

Back to Hell with you!

(looks around frightened)

Who said that?

(louder)

Who said that?

(A figure on the floor not far away appears from the shadows. It is CAONABO, an aged Indian man, also in chains.)

CAONABO

It is only me.

COLUMBUS

(gasps)

Caonabo! You can't be here, you're dead!

CAONABO

I am not dead, Admiral Lord of the Christians. Your memory wanders.

COLUMBUS

(unsure of himself)

No, it was like yesterday. The storm, the ships. I saw you sink into the waves.

CAONABO

It was not me who sank but the gold.

COLUMBUS

(in pain)

Oh, the gold, the treasure!

CAONABO

On the sea bottom, where it belongs.

COLUMBUS

No! You still don't understand. Our troubles started when the King didn't get that gold.

CAONABO

(angrily)

That was not your King's gold, but my people's!

COLUMBUS

How dare you speak to me like that!

CAONABO

How dare you rape my land! How dare you kill my people!

(moves toward COLUMBUS)

COLUMBUS
(frightened, yells)
Ojeda, Ojeda!

CAONABO
(At the end of his chain, looming over COLUMBUS menacingly.)
No one will help you now, Lord Admiral of the Christians.

COLUMBUS
I always treated you well.

CAONABO
You kept me chained on your porch.

COLUMBUS
I did it for your own good. So you could learn Christian ways.

CAONABO
So every Christian who walked by could spit on me.

COLUMBUS
Not true!

CAONABO
Now you too know the feel of chains.

COLUMBUS
I always tried to help your people.

CAONABO
By making them slaves?

COLUMBUS
By making them Christians! So they can die into Eternal Life.

CAONABO
Your people and mine do not die the same.

COLUMBUS
You are a savage! Get away from me! Ojeda!

(Enter BOBADILLA, a tall, austere Spaniard, in black judge's robes, in his mid-60s, always carrying himself stiffly.)

COLUMBUS

(gasps)

Who are you? Where did you come from? How did you get in?

(BOBADILLA walks to the judge's podium, which appears out of the shadows at extreme stage right.)

Are you an apparition or are you real?

CAONABO

You dream, Lord Admiral of the Christians, no one is here.

(The shadows swallow him up again.)

BOBADILLA

(gavels)

Their Majesties' Court is now in session. All rise and repeat after me

"I swear to testify..."

VOICES OF LIEUTENANT OJEDA,

FRIAR BUIL, AND ESPINOZA

(Voice Over.)

I swear to testify...

BOBADILLA

"...only the truth..."

VOICES

...only the truth...

BOBADILLA

"...by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ..."

VOICES

...by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ...

BOBADILLA

"...and the Holy Crown of Their Most Catholic Majesties Fernando and Isabella."

VOICES

...and the Holy Crown of Their Most Catholic Majesties Fernando and Isabella.

COLUMBUS

You are Bobadilla! My eyes must be going bad from being in this filthy black hole all this time. Welcome to the island, sir! At last I am allowed to speak my case!

BOBADILLA

(gavels)

Extraordinary session, eighth October, year of Our Lord fifteen hundred, city of Santo Domingo, island of Española, Crown Colony of the Indies. Public inquiry into the conduct and actions of Don Christopher Columbus, in his capacity as Governor of the Indies and Viceroy of the King and Queen. Let the accusers step forward.

(Enter Lieutenant OJEDA, FRIAR BUIL, and ESPINOZA.)

COLUMBUS

Friar Buil, have you joined these traitors Ojeda and Espinoza against me?

BOBADILLA

Let us begin with Lieutenant Ojeda. Describe the conditions that led to the first revolt.

OJEDA

There was nothing to eat, and what there was, Columbus was hoarding.

COLUMBUS

Not true!

BOBADILLA

(to COLUMBUS)

Speak when you're spoken to.

OJEDA

Everybody was so sick with the fever there was nobody tending the gardens. The Indians ran away and we didn't have the men to catch them.

ESPINOZA

COLUMBUS wasn't giving out enough food to keep a body alive. Except to himself and his brothers, who ate like kings.

COLUMBUS

Liars, ungrateful liars!

BOBADILLA

(gavels)

This is a court of law! You will not shout out!

OJEDA

He forced everybody, even officers, to work at hard labor, dawn to dusk.

ESPINOZA

Even the well-born.

FRIAR BUIL
Even the clergy.

OJEDA
Even the sick, whom he accused of malingering. Those who refused got the whip.

COLUMBUS
You all just wanted to take it easy and let the Indians work for you.

ESPINOZA
He withheld salaries, claiming insufficient funds.

FRIAR BUIL
Whatever went wrong, he blamed others and punished them.

OJEDA
Every ship he's ever commanded has been near mutiny.

ESPINOZA
He's got a mean streak as wide as the ocean.

OJEDA
He placed his two brothers right up under him, above others much more qualified.

ESPINOZA
Eye-talians!

FRIAR BUIL
They hold the Spanish race in much contempt.

OJEDA
One brother's a fool and the other's a killer.

ESPINOZA
They claim to descend from a Roman consul, but they're really sons of a weaver.

COLUMBUS
That's a lie!

FRIAR BUIL
Some claim they are grandsons of a Jew.

COLUMBUS

Twist the knife, go ahead, twist it again!

FRIAR BUIL

It is well known that his first expedition was financed by Jewish money.

BOBADILLA

I am aware of that.

COLUMBUS

By money confiscated when the King expelled them from Spain!

BOBADILLA

Stop interrupting!

OJEDA

He got to hanging people out of hand...

ESPINOZA

...for small offenses, such as stealing a cup of wheat.

COLUMBUS

I could not help myself, I had to do it, for the greater good.

ESPINOZA

There was hardly a man in the colony who wouldn't have jumped at the first ship back to Spain.

OJEDA

But the Governor wouldn't permit it.

BOBADILLA

Why?

COLUMBUS

Not enough supplies.

OJEDA

He didn't want the king and queen to find out what a disaster things had come to.

ESPINOZA

He'd promised Their Majesties vast riches, but had not gathered enough gold to cover half the expenses.

OJEDA

Or so he claimed.

FRIAR BUIL

So to raise funds he rounded up Indians by the thousands to sell in Europe as slaves.

ESPINOZA

He did this against the wishes of the Crown.

OJEDA

It was risky to sail to the islands of the Caribs to get slaves because they knew how to fight, so he decided to round up the docile Taínos instead.

FRIAR BUIL

To do this properly—and COLUMBUS always liked to do things properly—he had to prevent them from being baptized first, so he could declare them rebel infidels and heretics, and therefore legally enslavable.

COLUMBUS

I will defend my policy as the only one feasible!

BOBADILLA

Any more outbursts and you will be gagged!

FRIAR BUIL

He hampered our missionary work terribly. Many thousands were enslaved without ever being given the choice of conversion.

(Enter FRIAR MONTESINOS, as a young man.)

FRIAR MONTESINOS

Inquisitor, I must speak!

BOBADILLA

State your name.

FRIAR MONTESINOS

Friar Montesinos.

BOBADILLA

I don't see your name on this list.

FRIAR MONTESINOS

I can't hold my peace, I must be heard.

BOBADILLA

Very well, young friar. But you will wait till you are called. Ojeda, speak to the charge that the former Governor also hampered the gathering of gold.

OJEDA

Many wanted to go off and gather gold on their own, but he forbade it, and tried to keep a personal monopoly.

COLUMBUS

A government monopoly.

OJEDA

Most believe he did it to save the riches for himself, or for some other king he's in league with.

COLUMBUS

Preposterous!

OJEDA

Let me remind you that he, an Italian, originally offered his 'plan of discovery' to three other kings, namely those of Portugal...

COLUMBUS

(interrupts)

That man is a scoundrel!

OJEDA

... England and France, and would have gladly sold himself to the highest bidder, had those other monarchs had the foresight to make bids.

COLUMBUS

Commander, my loyalty to the Crown is beyond question! The gathering of gold has been delayed by these satanic rebellions, encouraged by none other than that well-known liar!

(shakes a finger at OJEDA)

It is he who should be on trial, not me!

BOBADILLA

I warned you, Columbus, to hold your peace! Ojeda, gag him!

OJEDA

Yes sir!

COLUMBUS

Please! I won't speak out! Commander!

OJEDA

(Gags him.)

That should do you.

BOBADILLA

Let's get on with it. How did the rebellion break out?

OJEDA

After years of abuse, he pushed the colony past the breaking point. One by one people fled his tyranny and began gathering in the far province of Zharagua. There they tried to live in peace, undisturbed by the Governor's illegal ways. Until he sent the army to destroy them. But they were too many and the army wouldn't fight. He pretended to make peace, then broke the treaty as soon as their backs were turned.

ESPINOZA

Who are you to talk, Ojeda,? You're a traitor to your own cause.

OJEDA

I'm a military man. A man of principles.

ESPINOZA

As long as they're to your advantage. You played both sides.

OJEDA

You were Columbus' spy.

ESPINOZA

You get your jollies cutting off noses.

OJEDA

You murdered your best friend.

ESPINOZA

(to BOBADILLA)

That was self defense, a stupid misunderstanding over a gambling debt! Everybody knows that! He's a professional killer!

BOBADILLA

(gavels)

Enough! You are not here to fight among yourselves. I have here

(holds up paper)

the deposition of findings by the Royal Treasurer.

(reads)

"The Royal books have been kept sloppily and inaccurately. There are easily sufficient funds to pay all salaries due in the Royal Colonial Service, which have been withheld unlawfully and under false pretenses. The most important discrepancy I have discovered involves a strongbox found among his personal effects, which contains approximately a quarter million ducats worth of pearls, gems, and gold nuggets, for which there is no account at all in the Royal books." Now, let's see what the Admiral has to say to that. Ojeda, remove his gag.
(OJEDA unties the gag.)

COLUMBUS

I planned to make a special offering of them to the Queen for her birthday. Inquisitor, I swear it!
(Everyone smiles and laughs.)

BOBADILLA

One last question. Ojeda, you said that when he heard the news of my arrival, he ordered preparations for an attack on the capital, but then changed his mind. Why?

OJEDA

He knew the men wouldn't fight. He didn't have their loyalty. He thought they'd turn on him instead.

COLUMBUS

No, no, no.
(hides face)

BOBADILLA

That is all the testimony we will take today.

COLUMBUS

Let me speak!

OJEDA

(to BOBADILLA)
Are you prepared to pass sentence, Commander?

FRIAR MONTESINOS

(steps forward)
I too must speak!

BOBADILLA

(firmly)
I will retire to my chamber and study the evidence.

COLUMBUS

Inquisitor, don't go!

BOBADILLA
The court...

COLUMBUS
You've got to hear my side!

BOBADILLA
Very well, Columbus, speak your piece, but be brief.

(As COLUMBUS speaks, the rest of the stage darkens. BOBADILLA and the others fade into the shadows. COLUMBUS speaks to the audience, gaining confidence and enthusiasm.)

COLUMBUS
It was a glorious day when we first arrived in the Indies. I was in the very first boat; the banner of Castile and León flapping proudly in the wind!

(He looks around, grabs a flag on a cross that is on the floor nearby. He lifts it and enacts the landing.)

A group of Indians watched us from the shore. They thought we were gods come down from Heaven.

(ANACAONA and HATUEY, a young Indian woman and man, leap out of the shadows, appear awe-struck.)

As we approached, they ran away and hid.

(OJEDA, FRIAR BUIL, and Espinoza line up behind COLUMBUS. ESPINOZA is carrying a small wooden trunk. HATUEY and ANACAONA hide.)

We climbed out of the boat and up the beach.

(They enact this.)

I planted the flag.

(As he does, he slips into his memory.)

In the name of God I take possession of this land for Jesus Christ and the King and Queen of Spain.

(He falls to one knee; the others follow.)

(ANACAONA and HATUEY peek out of their hiding places; COLUMBUS sees them.)

COLUMBUS
(to ESPINOZA, without turning around)
Bring me the box. Hurry up, Espinoza, you idiot. Now open it.

(Espinoza opens it. COLUMBUS reaches in and pulls out a string of little bells. He holds them up and shakes them at ANACAONA and HATUEY. They are startled for an instant, then smile.)

COLUMBUS

Gifts from your Sovereigns, Fernando and Isabella.
(to FRIAR BUIL)
Buil, translate that into Arabic.

FRIAR BUIL
(speaks in pidgin gibberish, since he doesn't really know Arabic and is faking it)

(HATUEY and ANACAONA hesitantly approach. HATUEY takes a bell and shakes it quizzically. He holds it up for ANACAONA to see. Then he lifts a pendant off his neck, and hands it to COLUMBUS.)

COLUMBUS
Gold!
(to HATUEY and ANACAONA)
Bring me all of this stone that you have.
(to BUIL)
Translate. This time try Hebrew.

FRIAR BUIL
(He speaks in pidgin Hebrew, but they make no indication of understanding.)

COLUMBUS
They don't seem to understand.
(to them)
What's the name of this island? Is this Japan? Ja-pan? We're on our way to Chi-na, Ca-thay, to the Emperor Kublai Khan with a message from the King and Queen of Spain.
BUIL
We're not getting through.

COLUMBUS
(holds up gold pendant)
The gold, where did you get it? Where?

HATUEY
Cibao. Bohío Haiti Cibao.

FRIAR BUIL
"Ci-bao" might mean "Japan".

ANACAONA
(turns around and points)
Caona nozay Cibao. Haiti.

FRIAR BUIL

I think they're saying the gold comes from that mountain.

COLUMBUS

(to OJEDA, with enthusiasm)

Then we're there!

OJEDA

That means the mainland's only a jump away.

COLUMBUS

Now, back to the ship. We'll explore more tomorrow. Ojeda, bring those two on board, I want to talk to them some more.

(turns and begins to go)

OJEDA

(grabs HATUEY's arm)

You come with me.

(to ESPINOZA)

Grab the girl.

(Espinoza lunges at her, but she dodges. He chases her offstage, as OJEDA pulls the startled and resisting Hatuey offstage.)

COLUMBUS

(faces in opposite direction, goes to one knee)

Thank you, Mother Mary, for protecting me on my journey thus far; guide me safely on, so I may fulfill my vows.

(stands, and resumes as narrator, speaking to audience)

But that night our flagship drifted onto a reef and broke up. The Indians rescued most of our supplies and, with their help, we began a settlement near the beach, here on the island I named Española and the Indians called Haiti. They called themselves Taínos, which in their language means something like

(smugly)

"the Good People". They gladly gave us all the gold they had for a few trinkets. They loved pieces of mirror and glass beads; but best of all they loved little copper bells, the kind we tie to the feet of trained hawks, and they would trade anything for them.

(jingles a little bell)

Their greatest weapons were spears with fishbones for tips, and they hardly knew how to use them for fighting. Their only enemies were a tribe they called Caribs, who raided occasionally from other far-away islands, looking mainly to steal women. They weren't totally stupid. They even knew navigation, and took to sea in long canoes made from hollowed trees. They made maps of the ocean sea by placing stones of different sizes into a bed of sand, and had all the Indies islands completely mapped. They freely shared that precious knowledge with me. I realized there was no need to push on to the mainland on this first voyage. With only two ships left, I decided to leave a colony here, and return to Spain for reinforcements. I gave the

colonists orders to explore the river banks, and everywhere the sand glitters, mark it on a map. Trade for all the gold you can, bury it under one of the houses. I will be back. And return I did, ten months later, with a great fleet of seventeen ships, twelve hundred men, and my brothers Bartolome and Diego. But when we reached the settlement, we found it burned to the ground, and all the colonists dead.

FRIAR BUIL

(angry)

I can't believe this. They seemed so peaceful.

COLUMBUS

(shaken)

I can barely believe it myself. It couldn't have been those local Indians. They were all friendly and docile. It must have been their enemies the Caribs. Fierce cannibals. Savage butchers. They won't get away with this.

FRIAR BUIL

Give them to me. They'll all burn at the stake.

COLUMBUS

They won't go unpunished.

(to audience)

I don't like that monk. He makes fun of my Italian accent. I really try, but I just can't seem to get rid of it. They all make fun of it.

(Enter OJEDA.)

COLUMBUS

How's the digging coming?

OJEDA

We searched every inch of the fort area, including the well, and dug up the ground beneath every house. No gold.

COLUMBUS

None at all?

OJEDA

None, Admiral.

COLUMBUS

Dig them up again. By the way, now that we're on shore, Ojeda, address me as Governor, not Admiral. Also, I'm making my brothers Bartolome and Diego second and third in command.

OJEDA

With all due respect, sir, you can't do that. The King made me second in command.

COLUMBUS

I'm Viceroy of the Indies, and you will obey. Get used to it, Ojeda. I'm placing my brothers in charge when I launch off to explore the continent. I'm only staying here on this island long enough to stabilize the colony.

OJEDA

(glares at him)

This is not the end of that.

COLUMBUS

Get back to digging.

(Ojeda Exits.)

(to audience)

I kept telling myself to be firm. I couldn't show any signs of weakness. All those Spaniards were just waiting for me to make a false step.

FRIAR BUIL

And what are these new orders? Short food rations and manual labor for the sons of noblemen? For the clergy?

COLUMBUS

This is an emergency, Friar. I thought we'd have food and shelter waiting for us. Now we have to start from scratch.

FRIAR BUIL

Half the men are down with fever. There's no medicine. This has been planned very badly.

(swats the air around his face)

These mosquitoes are driving me crazy!

(Enter OJEDA, pushing Soldier in front of him.)

OJEDA

We caught him stealing wheat.

COLUMBUS

What's your name?

SOLDIER

Why are you starving us?

COLUMBUS

I'm not starving you.

SOLDIER

You're hoarding!

COLUMBUS

(to OJEDA)

Give him the whip.

(OJEDA throws Soldier to the ground and raises a whip.)

FRIAR BUIL

(grasps OJEDA's wrist)

His a noble's son. You can't whip Spanish nobility as if they were commoners!

COLUMBUS

There's no room for playboys in this army.

FRIAR BUIL

Why are you starving our soldiers?

COLUMBUS

I'm responsible for these men, Friar, not you.

FRIAR BUIL

I'm responsible for their souls! As long as there is a mouthful of food, we will not accept short rations. And if another noble's son is whipped, I will put you under interdict and withhold the Holy Sacraments from you and your brothers.

(He wheels and Exits.)

COLUMBUS

(to OJEDA)

Give him twenty lashes.

OJEDA

(to SOLDIER)

I'm going to enjoy this.

(raises the whip again)

COLUMBUS

Not here! In the plaza, where everyone can watch. Then follow the friar, see if he's stirring up trouble.

(Enter HATUEY, furtively.)

OJEDA

There's one now!

(to SOLDIER, who has been cowering)

Catch him!

SOLDIER

Yes, sir!

(He jumps to his feet and grabs HATUEY.)

COLUMBUS

Why are you sneaking around?

HATUEY

My cacique, my chief, has sent me.

OJEDA

He can speak Spanish!

COLUMBUS

(furious)

Where is your cacique?

HATUEY

He says to tell you he tried to save the Christians, but Caonabo came down from the mountains Cibao, and killed them.

OJEDA

Cibao: that's where they said the gold came from.

COLUMBUS

Your cacique was supposed to be guarding these men!

HATUEY

My cacique is peaceful, but Caonabo is very angry.

FRIAR BUIL

I can make this devil talk! Let me torture him!

COLUMBUS

Who is this Caonabo?

HATUEY

My cacique could not stop him.

COLUMBUS

This Caonabo, he's king of the mountain of gold?

HATUEY

He is cacique of Cibao.

COLUMBUS

(to SOLDIER)

Let him go.

(to HATUEY)

Go back to your cacique. Tell him to send five hundred men and three hundred women here every day to work.

OJEDA

We don't want those murderers around our camp.

COLUMBUS

We can control them. We need labor. Also tell him to send food, as much as he can lay his hands on.

(to HATUEY)

Go!

(HATUEY starts to go.)

OJEDA

Don't let him go! He won't be back.

COLUMBUS

Stop!

(HATUEY stops.)

One more thing. Tell your chief to send me all his gold. All of it! All...of...it! Now go.

(SOLDIER shoves HATUEY off stage.)

(to OJEDA)

He'll be back. Or he'll soon learn the consequences.

OJEDA

We have to take the offensive against this Caonabo. We should march up to his village and hang him.

COLUMBUS

Right, we can't get bogged down here in this snake pit. Get the army ready to march.

(The stage darkens around COLUMBUS and lightens around CAONABO, ANACAONA, and HATUEY. CAONABO and ANACAONA are in splendid dress. CAONABO looks much younger than when we saw him in prison, and ANACAONA is more mature than when we saw her at COLUMBUS' first landing.)

CAONABO

Why do you involve yourself with these demons again?

ANACAONA

My father has told me to.

CAONABO

Tell your father to move his village into the mountains, near ours.

ANACAONA

He will not do that.

CAONABO

His people are running toward death.

ANACAONA

The Christians will protect us from our enemies, the Caribs.

CAONABO

They are worse than the Caribs. All they want is power, gold and women. We must push them off the island.

ANACAONA

My father says they are the sky people from Turey, those who came to visit us many generations past, and have come again. They just want gifts of our gold and in exchange they will teach us many things, just like last time, and then they will leave.

CAONABO

The Christians are not the sky people returned. They have nothing to teach us. They will not leave until we drive them to the sea. What do they do with this gold they always want? Do they dance before it? Do they pray to it? What does your cacique say, Hatuey?

HATUEY

He says the Christians have powerful dangerous gods. There are many more of them this time. Even more may come. My cacique says we must do what they demand for now.

CAONABO

And what do you say?

HATUEY

I say we must take to the mountains, set snares for them, and trap them one by one.
(A large church bell rings.)

CAONABO

What is that sound?

ANACAONA

It is a magic box they use to talk with their god.

(The bell rings again.)

(The stage darkens around them and lightens around COLUMBUS.)

COLUMBUS

(to audience)

And so we marched to the mountains to find Caonabo. It was glorious! An army of three hundred crossbowmen, cavalry, arquebusses, hounds, footsoldiers in armor with lances and swords. Accompanying us were five hundred Indians from the village near our camp, sent by their headman, the cacique Gua Canagari, who was always our closest friend and ally. Up from the camp we marched, through the Great Meadow to the foothills of Mount Cibao, stopping at villages along the way, where we collected food and gold. Most villages came out to greet us joyfully, and were glad to give us everything they had. Some others, however, frightened no doubt by rumors, took flight and were empty when we arrived. However, they always left plenty of food behind. At the foot of Mount Cibao we set up a fort. From there I sent a delegation, led by Lieutenant OJEDA, to Caonabo.

(As he speaks, OJEDA and CAONABO enact it.)

In his village high on the mountain they met. Caonabo wore a crown with wings on its sides like a shield and golden eyes as large as silver cups. Following my instructions, Ojeda brought gifts and an offer.

(SCENE: OJEDA, HATUEY and CAONABO in the Indian village.)

OJEDA

(to HATUEY)

Tell him that we come to make peace.

HATUEY

(to CAONABO)

The Christian Guamiquina has sent these men to ask for peace.

CAONABO

I am Guamiquina of this land, not the Christian chief. Tell him he will have peace when he leaves the island.

OJEDA

(to CAONABO)

Governor Columbus sends you these gifts.

(hands him some strings of beads and bells)

CAONABO

(tinkles a string of bells)
He means to insult me with these toys.

HATUEY
(to OJEDA)
Caonabo is not pleased.

OJEDA
Then choose your gift. Governor Columbus will give you anything that is his.

HATUEY
(Speaks in Taíno)

CAONABO
(to OJEDA)
Down in the Christian village there is an object like this
(holds up one of the little bell)
only much bigger, and when it rings the earth and sky tremble. If your headman wants peace,
he must bring me this as a gift.

HATUEY
(to OJEDA)
Caonabo wants the great bell, the one in your temple.

COLUMBUS
(to audience)
Can you imagine? He wanted the church bell! The Indians had never heard anything like it, and
were all awe-struck by its magical sound.

OJEDA
(smiles)
Tell him the bell is his. But he's got to come get it.

HATUEY
(Speaks in Taíno)

CAONABO
(Answers in Taíno, with a laugh.)

OJEDA
What did he say?

HATUEY
He will come, and bring his warriors.

COLUMBUS

(to audience)

So they started down, accompanied by Caonabo's Indian army, to fetch the church bell. At the first river bank, Ojeda held up a set of chains, manacles and shackles to Caonabo, and said, as I told him to...

OJEDA

Governor Columbus is preparing a great feast in your honor.

(Holds up handcuffs, shackles and chains.)

These are ceremonial bracelets of supreme power, only worn by great leaders on horseback. Lord Columbus has sent them for you to wear on this festive occasion and, for the highest honor of all, he has asked me to take you down to the feast riding with me on the back of my magnificent horse.

COLUMBUS

(to audience)

Caonabo was thrilled at the offer of getting to ride a horse, which we had never let an Indian do before. They thought they were some kind of supernatural deer.

(CAONABO takes the chains. OJEDA snaps the handcuffs on his wrists and the shackles on his ankles. CAONABO puts his arms into the air and walks in a small circle triumphantly, for all to see.)

COLUMBUS

(to audience)

Ojeda mounted Caonabo behind him, the chains on his wrists and ankles, then told him they had to tie them both together so he wouldn't fall off. As soon as Ojeda had Caonabo tied up, he galloped off across the stream, followed by the rest of our delegation. The startled Indians were frozen in their tracks. Ojeda hardly stopped until they reached our camp, where Ojeda threw the greatest chief of Haiti at my feet.

(They enact this as he speaks.)

The Indian warriors of course followed, but we met them with cannon, cavalry, and ferocious dogs. The battlefield was littered with dead Indians. Before long the survivors came suing for peace. One of them, to our surprise, was the wife of Caonabo, a woman named Anacaona, a chief in her own right.

(Enter ANACAONA, followed by HATUEY. They kneel before COLUMBUS. COLUMBUS holds up a small bell, tinkles it then turns it upside down so it forms a little bowl.)

From now on every Indian will have to pay a bell full of gold dust every three months, as tribute.

(hands the bell to HATUEY)

Caciques will pay a calabash full.

(holds up a gourd)

HATUEY

That much gold is not possible.

COLUMBUS

When you bring in your gold, you will get a copper coin with a hole in the middle, (holds up a coin) which you will wear on a string around your neck at all times. This will be proof that your payments are up-to-date.

ANACAONA

Our gold has been collected over many generations. You will have it all very quickly, then where will we get more?

COLUMBUS

There's gold in the river banks. Dig it out.

ANACAONA

The rivers are our nation's blood; we must not abuse them.

COLUMBUS

Failure to meet your payments will be strictly punished. First offense, cut off an ear; second offense, slice the nose; third offense, chop off the hands.

HATUEY

My village has always helped you, and been your friend. Must we pay too? Will this be our reward?

COLUMBUS

Everyone must pay.

(HATUEY and ANACAONA walk off. COLUMBUS turns to the audience.)

I had to do it; we needed the gold. We went from village to village, asserting our authority and collecting gold. With Caonabo their hero defeated, the rest were cowed. We collected a huge pile of gold. I decided not to hang Caonabo. I realized that the Indians had great affection for him, and would do anything I asked while he was held hostage. I decided to chain him on the front porch of my residence, overlooking the main plaza, so the Indians could see he was not dead. I planned eventually to send him to the king and queen. He was quite an interesting fellow, actually. Only part Taíno. A half breed. The other part Carib, their enemies. They say his mother was kidnapped by Caribs, escaped and came back with a full belly. It didn't appear to be a handicap to Caonabo, though, or at least it didn't stop him from becoming their king. Of course all heathens are morally loose by our standards. Anyway, I assigned my cook and valet Espinoza,

(Enter Espinoza.)

although he was a fool and never once cooked me an edible meal, I assigned him to teach Caonabo our language, and in no time he was speaking.

(Turns to CAONABO, who is sitting chained by one leg. OJEDA is nearby with his arms folded.)

(SCENE: COLUMBUS' porch)

Tell me, Caonabo, who are your Sovereigns?

CAONABO
(spiritlessly)
King Fernando and Queen Isabella.

COLUMBUS
(To ESPINOZA)
He's learned his lesson well enough.

ESPINOZA
Now, tell the Admiral
who is Jesus Christ?

CAONABO
Jesus Christ gold.

COLUMBUS
Not gold
God. Repeat after me
Jesus Christ is God. God.

CAONABO
God.

COLUMBUS
That's better.
(to Espinoza. Shakes his head.)
These people have memories like sieves.

ESPINOZA
When they choose to.

COLUMBUS
(to CAONABO)
They say that somewhere in your mountains there is a river that runs with gold. Where is this river?

CAONABO
River die. My people die.

COLUMBUS

Don't play dumb with me!
(to ESPINOZA)
What is he talking about?

ESPINOZA

The gathering of tribute, I think, sir.

COLUMBUS

What's the problem?

ESPINOZA

Surely you've heard, sir, that many Indians have died in the rivers collecting gold.

COLUMBUS

These are rumors.

ESPINOZA

I saw it with my own eyes, sir.

COLUMBUS

When was this?

ESPINOZA

When you sent me with your brother Don Diego to visit the villages on the Great Meadow.

COLUMBUS

Oh yes, Don Diego reported some problem, but those stories are much exaggerated. My brother an impressionable mind.

ESPINOZA

The quotas are too high.

COLUMBUS

The quotas are just.

ESPINOZA

They cannot meet them. And the friars are out of hand.

COLUMBUS

What do you mean?

ESPINOZA

(Glances at CAONABO, who appears to be paying no attention. Espinoza draws COLUMBUS away. In a lower voice.)

These are Indians, not Moors or Jews, sir. It is not right for the friars to burn them at the stake.

COLUMBUS

Maybe they should have been hanged, not burned. That is no business of yours, Espinoza. In any event, those Indians broke into the Chapel and desecrated the shrine. The punishment was just.

(louder, to CAONABO)

I don't know where you're hearing this nonsense, Caonabo, but none of your people are dying. And if they are and if they're Christians, they'll go to Heaven.

(to Espinoza)

If you hear any more of these murmurings, I want you to report them to me immediately.

(to audience, continuing narration)

That was a mistake, putting Espinoza and Caonabo together. At the time I thought Espinoza was loyal to me. I should have realized he was unreliable when he kept coming to me with all those complaints from the soldiers and the colonists. But I never dreamed he had sympathies with the Indians.

ESPINOZA

I still think it's not right to burn them at the stake.

COLUMBUS

(slaps ESPINOZA in the face)

Don't talk back to me, moron! Get out of my sight!

(ESPINOZA angrily slinks off.)

(To CAONABO)

None of your people are dying. And if they're Christians, they're in Heaven.

(turns to audience)

In any case, over the next several months, we gathered enough gold to make the king and queen happy five times over. Finally I boarded it on my five best ships. I knew my moment of triumph was near. When the king and queen received their gold, nothing my detractors could say would mean a pin.

(to CAONABO)

Caonabo, I have decided to send you with the fleet to Spain. To meet the King and Queen.

Always call them Your Majesties. And always bow when you see them. Like this.

(He bows.)

Go ahead, practice your bow.

CAONABO

I will not go.

COLUMBUS

Oh, you'll go alright.

CAONABO

The zemis will not let me go. Hurrican will not let me leave the island.

COLUMBUS

Forget your idols—they're nothing. Where I'm sending you you'll see wonders beyond your wildest dreams.

CAONABO

There is nothing there I will see; I will not go.

(Enter OJEDA.)

COLUMBUS

(Unlocks his chain from the wall and hands the end of chain to OJEDA.)

Take him down to the dock.

OJEDA

He's old, Governor. He might not stand the trip across.

COLUMBUS

Do as you're told. Caonabo, may Christ be with you!

OJEDA

Come on.

(He leads him out.)

(Enter Espinoza.)

ESPINOZA

Sir!

COLUMBUS

I told you not to bother me.

ESPINOZA

Please let me sail with the fleet, sir. I can't stand it here, sir. I want to go home to Andalusia, see my family again before I die.

COLUMBUS

(angry)

I need you here! You're going to die here, Espinoza, you better get used to it. Now get out of my sight!

(Exit Espinoza hurriedly)

COLUMBUS

(to the audience)

But as soon as all was loaded a forbidding darkness appeared on the horizon. A sudden wind! Clouds hurtled across the sky. The trees whipped and swayed. It was suddenly dark. All the Indians ran for higher ground. Gales thrashed the sea, whitecaps churning around the fleet. Sheets of rain drenching us. We stood transfixed, watching the ships rise and fall in the swirling waves. The air was so dark and thick we could barely see. Great waves crashed fiercely against the hulls, sailors scattered about in panic. Tremendous whitecaps lashed out of nowhere, a huge surge of water shattered over the ships, smashing one against another. On the deck of the flagship I could see Caonabo, just sitting there calmly in his chains, impassive, as if lost in another world, while bedlam pounded all around him. Suddenly the hull caved in. The waters pulled the great ship down into the maelstrom and it was gone! The flagship was gone! Caonabo was gone! Then another ship! Another! All five ships sucked to the bottom! Everything lost! Everything gone! The gold! My treasure at the bottom of the sea! What are we going to do? We have nothing now, nothing to send back. The king will be furious.

(Enter OJEDA and FRIAR BUIL.)

OJEDA

We have a few ships in drydock. We can gather more gold.

COLUMBUS

We don't have time. I promised the King it would arrive by now. We have to send something immediately.

FRIAR BUIL

There's a different kind of gold we can gather, that will be quick.

COLUMBUS

What are you talking about?

FRIAR BUIL

The rebel Indians. Round them up. They can be sold in the slave market in Seville.

OJEDA

That's not the mission we got from the King.

COLUMBUS

That's not for you to determine.

(OJEDA exits.)

FRIAR BUIL

It's perfectly legal. They're rebels if they refuse to convert.

COLUMBUS

(continuing narration)

I realized Buil was right, and it would be to their benefit. As slaves in Spain they would more quickly become Christians and learn the skills of civilization than if they stayed here. At first Buil and Ojeda were 100 percent for it, they were even the ones who proposed it. Only later when things started turning sour, they both did a self-righteous about face and blamed me. So while the new ships were being fitted, I sent the army to the nearest rebellious village and rounded up about a thousand Indians. I had them put in a stockade near the docks. There I selected out five hundred of the best-looking ones. The rest I was going to let go, but there was such a hue and cry from the colonists, that I had to let each one choose a few Indians for personal servants. Anyway, we boarded about five hundred Indians in that first shipment, and sent them off. It turned out very profitable for everyone involved. That's how we started the slave trade.

CURTAIN

ACT II

(COLUMBUS's study. COLUMBUS at his desk. Enter OJEDA riding piggyback on HATUEY.)

COLUMBUS

Ojeda! What are you doing?

OJEDA

Going for supplies, sir! Do you need anything?

COLUMBUS

Get off that Indian.

OJEDA

Why, sir? He's my Indian. You gave him to me.

COLUMBUS

He's not a horse!

OJEDA

I don't need a horse. I'm not going far.

COLUMBUS

Get off that Indian immediately!

OJEDA

(reluctantly)

Yes, sir.

(Pulls on HATUEY's hair. HATUEY lets him down.)

COLUMBUS

If you injure them, they won't be able to work.

OJEDA

There's plenty of Indians; if one gets injured you can just take another. You've been spending too much time in your study, Governor. All the men are riding their Indians now. They're much better than horses for short distances, and there aren't enough steeds to go around. Anyway the Indians like it. Try it, Governor, it's fun.

COLUMBUS

Really?

OJEDA

(to HATUEY)

Down.

(He pokes HATUEY, and HATUEY squats.)

Climb on.

COLUMBUS

(hesitates)

Oh, alright.

(He climbs onto HATUEY.)

OJEDA

Up.

(HATUEY stands.)

COLUMBUS

(enjoying it)

Walk me around.

OJEDA

Pull on his hair. On the center means go. Pull on the left side he turns left. Right side he goes right. Pull the center again, he stops. It couldn't be simpler.

(HATUEY walks COLUMBUS around the stage, then stops.)

COLUMBUS

Let me down.

(to OJEDA)

What's the command?

OJEDA

Tap the top of his head.
(COLUMBUS does and HATUEY squats and lets his off.)

OJEDA
See, it's easy, pleasant, and good exercise.
(OJEDA climbs back on HATUEY, and they Exit.)

COLUMBUS
(to audience)
The slave trade was quite profitable at first. We sent fleet after fleet to Spain packed to the gills with Indians. Everything looked up. That hypocrite Friar Buil only started complaining when, for reasons of efficiency, we postponed their conversion to Christianity until after they were transported and sold in Spain. The reason for this is because many of them just pretended to be converted in order to not be made slaves. They were really secretly still pagans, and stole off to secret places to pray to their false gods. We caught them at it many times.
(Enter ESPINOZA)

ESPINOZA
Ships just docked. Bad news, sir. Those last batches of Indians, over half died on the trip across, and many of the rest died soon after landing. The price for Indians has collapsed and the price for Africans has soared.
(ESPINOZA exits.)

COLUMBUS
This is serious! Next time we'll have to pack them even tighter in the holds, so we have extras to absorb the losses.

VOICES
(Voice Over.)
Pay up! Pay up!

COLUMBUS
What the devil is that?

ESPINOZA
There's been some murmuring among the men.

COLUMBUS
Murmuring? Of what?

VOICES
(Voice Over.)
We want our pay! We want passage home!

COLUMBUS

Is this a rebellion? How on has this been going on? Damn it, Espinoza, why am I the last to know?

(yells offstage)

Go back to work! That's an order!

VOICE

(Voice Over.)

We've served our time, we want to go home!

COLUMBUS

Every man will get what's coming to him, just be patient.

VOICES

(Voice Over.)

We want it now! We can't wait!

COLUMBUS

All of you, back to your jobs, or you'll get nothing.

VOICES

If you won't let us go home, then we want land! Give us land! And Indians to work it!

COLUMBUS

Ojeda! Ojeda!

(Enter OJEDA)

COLUMBUS

Break up this mob and give them all the lash.

OJEDA

The men won't calm down until they feel they've gotten justice.

COLUMBUS

I decide justice here.

OJEDA

They want somebody to take their complaints to. Appoint somebody as judge.

COLUMBUS

Do you think that will calm them?

OJEDA

Yes.

COLUMBUS

I'll appoint one of my brothers.

OJEDA

That would just incite them even more. It has got to be somebody else.

COLUMBUS

(looks around)

Then I appoint you, Espinoza, Chief Justice of the Indies.

ESPINOZA

Me?

COLUMBUS

You don't really have to do anything. A rebellion may be at hand. Be my eyes and ears. Go around and talk to them, play dumb. If they bring you any dispute to decide, let me know immediately, and I'll tell you what to say.

ESPINOZA

Yes sir.

COLUMBUS

(turns to audience)

That was the worst decision I ever made. Espinoza, who I trusted as a son, who owed so much to me, began betraying me immediately.

(Scene darkens; another part of the stage lights. OJEDA and ESPINOZA.)

OJEDA

Some of us are meeting tonight to discuss the problems.

ESPINOZA

Can you get me off this devilish island? Can you get me passage home?

OJEDA

If there's enough of us, we don't have to leave the island to get what we want.

ESPINOZA

And what do you want?

OJEDA

When Orion's belt rises over the hill, we'll meet by the great rocks on the shore. Join us.

(They exit.)

(Stage lightens around COLUMBUS.)

COLUMBUS

(Looks at a map on the wall, then goes to his desk. He rummages around, pulls out a paper and quill pen and reads.)

“To the King and Queen, concerning my amazing — my astounding — disclosures of my second successful voyage of discovery.”

(Enter ANACAONA. She stands silently until COLUMBUS notices her.)

(COLUMBUS clears his throat and reads on.)

"The philosophers of old have described the world as spherical and I have no doubt that this is the shape of the part known to them. But all my observations and calculations of this newly discovered part of the world, lead me to believe that the earth is not shaped as a sphere, for this part is far more elevated than the rest, both water and land, and reaches its peak far inland, under the equator. I believe that here at the highest spot will be found the Earthly Paradise, as revealed in the Bible, inaccessible to mortal feet but by divine permission..."

(He notices ANACAONA.)

What is it?

ANACAONA

Your dinner is ready, master.

COLUMBUS

(to himself)

It's my soul that hungers, not my gut.

ANACAONA

Master?

COLUMBUS

Bring it in.

(She bows and exits. He paces, goes to wall map, studies it. She returns with food, sets it on a table. He sits, tastes the food and spits it out.)

Espinoza!

(hesitates, then louder)

Espinoza!

ESPINOZA

(Enters.)

Yes sir.

COLUMBUS

This tastes like shit.

ESPINOZA

I made it just the way you like it, sir.

COLUMBUS

It's tasteless and overcooked.

ESPINOZA

Beg your pardon, sir. I'll make you something else. What's your pleasure?

COLUMBUS

I have no pleasure; I don't remember the last time you cooked an edible meal.

ESPINOZA

Sir, you complimented me just last night on how excellent you thought the...

COLUMBUS

Don't tell me what I said. Just have the girl take it away. I'll eat nothing.

ESPINOZA

Your excellency needs to keep up his strength.

COLUMBUS

You have your orders
just follow them.

ESPINOZA

Yes sir.

(to ANACAONA)

Clear the table

(ESPINOZA exits.)

COLUMBUS

Sometimes I think that man's trying to poison me. I bet he spits in my food. He won't get away with that!

(walks to wall map again, muttering to himself)

There's no talking to these Spaniards, they're in a different world. It was hard enough when I only had those pampered sons of Castillian gentlemen to deal with, but now with all this riff-raff! I should never have asked the King to empty the prisons and send me all his jailbirds, I would have done better with no workers at all.

(He notices ANACAONA is still there.)

You.

ANACAONA

Yes master?

COLUMBUS
Your name.

ANACAONA
Anacaona.

COLUMBUS
Who is your chief?

ANACAONA
Guarionesh.

COLUMBUS
Come here.
(She hesitates, then does.)
Stop.
(She does. He walks in a circle around her.)
How did you get assigned to the kitchen?

ANACAONA
They tell me to come and I come.

COLUMBUS
What happened to the girl who was here before?

ANACAONA
I do not know.

COLUMBUS
Come now, tell me what you know.

ANACAONA
Her husband is hurt, I think, and cannot go to gather gold, so she gathers gold in his place.

COLUMBUS
Why do you Indians deny half of what you know? Getting information from you is like pulling teeth.

ANACAONA
(looking down)
I do not know.

COLUMBUS

Are you afraid of me?

(No response from her.)

You don't have to be... if you do your work honestly and faithfully. Have you been baptized?

ANACAONA

Yes master.

COLUMBUS

Then you have nothing at all to fear. Is that clear?

ANACAONA

Yes master.

COLUMBUS

(goes to window, looks out, turns back)

Now, let me see your breasts.

ANACAONA

Master orders us to wear clothes, I thought.

COLUMBUS

Do what you're told. The last girl knew how to obey.

ANACAONA

I do not want to, master.

COLUMBUS

Take off your blouse.

ANACAONA

No.

COLUMBUS

Take off all your clothes. That is an order.

(He starts to reach into her blouse, she resists. Knock at the door. In an annoyed tone.)

Who is it?

(HATUEY enters, carrying a large flask of water on his back.)

COLUMBUS

And what do you want?

HATUEY

I come with water, master.

COLUMBUS

Don't you think I can't see that? Stop.

(HATUEY stops. COLUMBUS walks up to him and counts pennies hanging from a string tied about his neck.)

Eight: very good. Your tribute payments are entirely up to date. Sometimes I think you Indians are ten times more reliable than the average Spaniard in this colony, and a hundred times more trustworthy. Well, go ahead, fill the pitcher, you might as well.

(to ANACAONA, annoyed)

You stay here and clean up. We'll continue our discussion later.

(COLUMBUS exits, leaving them alone.)

ANACAONA

Why did you come?

HATUEY

Speak in the Christian language. If they catch us speaking Taíno here, they'll whip us.

ANACAONA

I can't speak truth in a language of killers and liars. Why did you come?

HATUEY

To help you.

ANACAONA

I don't need your help.

HATUEY

They will kill you.

ANACAONA

I'm going to stick a knife in his face.

(pulls a knife out of her bodice)

HATUEY

Our mothers and fathers are hungry. If you're dead who will feed them?

ANACAONA

(She puts the knife back. Wraps some food from the table in a cloth.)

Take this, put it under your shirt, bring it to them.

HATUEY

(refuses to take it)

If you die today, I will die with you.

ANACAONA

His life is not worth both of ours. I do not need help.

HATUEY

We can both live.

ANACAONA

We're not alive as long as these savages keep us as slaves. If we cannot live as Taínos, according to the Taíno way, we cannot live at all. Each day now is a death. The final one can't be any worse. We should all take cassava poison, as many have done.

HATUEY

If we survive and wait, something will change. We can find a way to kill him and both live. Then we can go to the far side of the island, to Zharagua. Some rebel Christians have begun to gather there, and say they'll protect us.

ANACAONA

They are as bad as the others.

HATUEY

Let's escape to Cuba, then.

ANACAONA

We have to stop them here, on Haiti.

HATUEY

Promise me you'll wait one more day. Just to say goodbye to our grandparents.

ANACAONA

(reluctantly)

Alright. Just one day. But take this food to them.
(hands him the food)

HATUEY

I will.

(takes the food and slips it under his shirt)

ANACAONA

Here comes somebody.

(HATUEY quickly begins filling two pitchers from his jug. ANACAONA begins to sweep the floor.)

COLUMBUS

(Enters.)

Why does it take so long to fill two water jugs...? Well...? Oh, just get out of here.

(HATUEY exits.)

(COLUMBUS goes to his desk.)

Where's that letter I started to the king?

(Shuffles papers. Behind his back, ANACAONA reaches inside her blouse and pulls out the knife.)

(A sudden commotion outside. ANACAONA quickly puts away the knife. COLUMBUS goes to the widow and looks out.)

COLUMBUS

What's going on out there? Bring that man in to me.

(Enter OJEDA pushing Hatuey in front of him, followed by FRIAR BUIL and FRIAR MONTESINOS.

OJEDA throws HATUEY at COLUMBUS' feet.)

OJEDA

He had food beneath his shirt, stolen for sure.

COLUMBUS

So, this is what you're up to as soon as my back is turned! And you!

(to ANACAONA)

You were in on this!

ANACAONA

We are innocent.

FRIAR MONTESINOS

The Lieutenant was about to cut off his hand, sir, without inquest or trial.

OJEDA

That's the penalty for stealing.

FRIAR MONTESINOS

For Christ's sake, it's a matter of a scrap of meat and a few crusts of bread.

COLUMBUS

How are you friars connected with this?

FRIAR BUIL

We were merely passing by. My young brother, hardly wet behind the ears, threw himself between the lieutenant and the Indian.

COLUMBUS

Stealing cannot go unpunished.

FRIAR BUIL

Certainly! It undercuts our conversion program if these people don't think we mean business.

FRIAR MONTESINOS

These people have no idea of what's yours or mine; they give freely of all they have. Their souls can be saved through gentleness.

FRIAR BUIL

The young friar, as you can see, is not yet well versed in Church doctrine.

COLUMBUS

I've no time or inclination to argue doctrine, friars. The law is the law. Nonetheless we must make fine distinctions. Since it is but a matter of some garbage, and since this seems to be his first offense, we will lighten the sentence. Cut off one ear.

FRIAR MONTESINOS

Governor, have mercy.

FRIAR BUIL

Why not both ears? Or at least the nose. We must set examples.

COLUMBUS

I've made my decision. Then send him to the mines. Have the girl whipped: fifteen lashes.

FRIAR BUIL

They should both be burned at the stake!

FRIAR MONTESINOS

Peace!

OJEDA

(pulls out a short sword)
Left ear or right?

COLUMBUS

Don't shed blood on my floor, idiot! Take him outside.
(ANACAONA pulls out her knife. COLUMBUS jumps back, falling over OJEDA. HATUEY scrambles to his feet and he and ANACAONA run out. OJEDA starts after them but trips over BUIL and they both go sprawling.)

COLUMBUS

(yells)
Stop those Indians! Don't let them escape!

(OJEDA, BUIL and MONTESINOS exit running.)
(Enter Espinoza.)

ESPINOZA
Sir! Emergency! Half the colonists are gone!

COLUMBUS
Gone where?

ESPINOZA
I don't know where, but they're gone and they've stolen supplies.

COLUMBUS
This is rebellion! Espinoza, that's why I made you judge, to prevent these kinds of things from happening. I'm holding you responsible. Where's Ojeda? Get me Ojeda!
(Espinoza hurriedly exits.)
(to audience)
We gathered the remnants of the army and followed the rebel colonists inland. They had fled into the mountains and to the other side of the island, where the Indians helped them and hid them. I left my brothers in charge in Santo Domingo, and I proceeded to set up a base camp seventy miles inland, at Fort Concepción. I remained there with half the army to round up rebels in that area while Ojeda continued on to catch those who had fled to the other side of the island in the far place they called Zharagua. What I didn't know at the time but I know now, is that Ojeda was playing both sides. Encouraging the rebels while pretending to attack them. And the Indians didn't just give up, like I thought they would, but retaliated against us in the most diabolical ways, led by a man they called Hatuey. They hid in the forest, set traps for us.

Stage darkens around COLUMBUS and lightens around ANACAONA and HATUEY crouching by a small fire. On a low platform before them are three zemi icons. ANACAONA stands. She is draped in wreathes of red and white flowers, with bracelets of bells, holding a palm frond. A group of women can be heard singing in a high pitched wail, while a group of men use their voices like drones, over drums and shell tambourines. ANACAONA dances, waving the palm frond. HATUEY sprinkles a substance into the flames and a cloud of colored smoke rises. She kneels in front of the zemis. HATUEY sprinkles red powder on the center zemi's head. ANACAONÁ and HATUEY chant. ANACAONA sniffs the smoke and falls over backward. HATUEY places a stone bowl with a handle onto the flames, and tosses gold nuggets one by one into the bowl.

ANACAONA
(rises and looks into the pot)
It is ready.

(HATUEY gets up, goes into the darkness and pulls over a Spanish soldier. He is tied up. The soldier is terrified.)

SOLDIER

What are you going to do?

HATUEY

You Christians want gold. We will give it to you.

SOLDIER

No!

(ANACAONA takes the pot from the fire and sets it down near the soldier. HATUEY takes the soldier's hair in one hand, and with the other he lifts the pot.)

SOLDIER

Let me go! You murdering savages!

(HATUEY pulls his hair back, opening his mouth.)

ANACAONA

Here is your gold.

(Stage darkens.)

SOLDIER

(In the darkness he screams.)

(Stage lightens around COLUMBUS.)

COLUMBUS

(to audience)

It was barbaric. When they caught somebody, they'd pour molten gold down his throat. The worst part was retrieving the precious metal from the corpse. What a disgusting mess! But we had to do it. And then to make matters even worse, large numbers of Indians — thousands — were killing themselves. Mass suicides. Whole villages jumping off cliffs rather than just agreeing to work for us. It was madness!

(Stage darkens around COLUMBUS, and lightens in COLUMBUS's house. Enter BOBADILLA, followed by OJEDA.)

BOBADILLA

So this is the Admiral's house. Quite luxurious compared to those barracks and shacks.

OJEDA

Built by forced labor of many starving Christians. If you could have seen the neglect for months and years on end that their Majesties' works suffered so labor could be directed into extravagances for Columbus and his brothers!

BOBADILLA

All three brothers share this mansion?

OJEDA

Hardly. The two large houses on either side are residences of the younger ones—both built at public expense. This downstairs serves as Columbus' offices, while the upstairs is his private quarters.

BOBADILLA

Who were those seven men hanging on the gallows?

OJEDA

Rebels to Columbus. Patriots to the Crown. There are five more in prison, scheduled to be hanged tomorrow at dawn.

BOBADILLA

Release them. There's a story in Spain that he keeps an Indian chief chained on his porch? I didn't see him when we came in.

OJEDA

Dead, I'm afraid, like so many others.

BOBADILLA

It is distressing to see that the Indians are dying over here too. I thought it was just that they did not take to the Spanish climate.

OJEDA

They are very prone to sickness. They say this never happened before we arrived.

BOBADILLA

It is the will of God.

OJEDA

How many of the thousands that Columbus sent to Spain died?

BOBADILLA

All except the two hundred we brought back with us, and they're half-dead too. There are no more Indians in Spain, and no more will be sent back. The Queen has banned the slave trade.

OJEDA

Banned the slave trade?

BOBADILLA

Only the trade to Europe, not here in the Indies. Better they remain here. We have plenty of African slaves. We don't need them.

OJEDA

But they'll all die very soon here too, unless we abandon this horrible tribute system. Columbus requires the impossible: a million hands cut off will still not ensure that every Indian can fulfill his monthly quota. In the liberated province—in Zharaguá—emissaries have come to the rebel colonists from half the villages on the island asking for protection from the tribute collectors.

BOBADILLA

But what would you replace this system with?

OJEDA

In Zharagua we give each settler a rancho and assign all the Indians living on it to his care. He puts them to work, usually farming. We could establish that system generally. The Crown would get a cut of the profits.

BOBADILLA

There is hardly profit in farming.

OJEDA

It could also apply to gold mining, which Columbus has kept as his personal monopoly until now, with the result that little gold has been mined and the island's resources are still not fully explored.

BOBADILLA

Gold mining is a royal monopoly. You're not accusing Columbus of keeping more than his ten percent of the take, are you?

OJEDA

He is very... ambitious.

BOBADILLA

I know, even without stealing, the man could have become richer than the Pope. Their Majesties permitted him to keep, over my objections, a tenth — a full tenth — of all gold he collected.

OJEDA

My point is that hundreds of private mines could produce far more revenue for the Crown. And it would be very popular with the colonists.

BOBADILLA

Interesting.

OJEDA

The Crown could issue a mining license to any settler who wishes one. The local Indians in each area could be assigned to each miner as workers. Everyone would profit.

BOBADILLA

And this is the system you suggest we use to settle the Indies...

OJEDA

Call it the system of freedom. Enterprise. It certainly would be a step toward settling this place. Columbus seemed content that this remain an armed camp in a foreign nation.

BOBADILLA

The thing that worries me is that half the men here now have been sentenced here for some crime. That includes your people, Ojeda. Many of them are hardened criminals. I fear what they might do if given free reign.

OJEDA

Could it be any worse than what is now?

BOBADILLA

And I have heard disquieting stories that these Indians cannot stand up to the toil of mining and that many quickly die.

OJEDA

Private mining may be different, as each miner must take care of his workers, while Columbus acted like he had an endless supply. It is true that these people do not have nearly the strength of an African, and I have heard it suggested, as a long range solution, that Africans be introduced here for the hardest labor.

BOBADILLA

An interesting and humane proposal. Alright, I'll support your system. I'll issue the mining licenses, and give the land grants.

(goes to desk)

This is Columbus' desk?

OJEDA

That's right, Commander.

BOBADILLA

(tries to open it)

It's locked. Pry it open.

(OJEDA pries it open with a knife.)

BOBADILLA

(rummages around, pulls out papers)

Listen to this. It is a letter, as yet unfinished, to the King and Queen, concerning his last so-called 'voyage of discovery'.

(Reads.)

"I believe that here at the highest spot will be found the Earthly Paradise, as revealed in the Bible, inaccessible to mortal feet but by divine permission. I believe that the great river I discovered is one of the four said to flow from the fountain springing from the foot of the Biblical Tree of Life, feeding the oceans of the world. In short, I now believe the Earth shaped not as a perfect sphere, but as a pear or a woman's breast, with the Terrestrial Paradise situated here on the nipple."

(They both laugh.)

What fancies this man has!

OJEDA

A mind possessed. This corroborates what I said before, that he's obsessed with bizarre dreams and visions, putting himself far above the rest of humanity.

BOBADILLA

(lifts another paper)

Here in another letter he refers to some vow to the Virgin Mary, that if she would guide him across the ocean to the Indies, within seven years he would raise an army of fifty thousand foot soldiers and fifty thousand horsemen—that's a serious army—to launch a new Crusade and seize the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem from the infidels.

(sets paper down)

OJEDA

He thinks he's chosen by God.

BOBADILLA

Their Majesties should never have agreed to make him hereditary Governor of all lands he conquered.

OJEDA

He wants to crown himself King of Asia.

BOBADILLA

Some of us tried to warn the the King and Queen. Asia is vast, I cautioned them, like an elephant; while Spain is like the tip of the elephant's tail. If Columbus conquers the Indies, I said, he'll be the one riding the head, and Spain will be the one to follow. That's how Julius Caesar came to power in Rome, by first conquering Gaul.

OJEDA

He's very dangerous. As a measure of the man, let me remind you how, even in the triumph of his first voyage, he was not above stealing from a common sailor.

BOBADILLA

I don't think I've heard that story.

OJEDA

Their Majesties had offered a reward of fifty thousand maravedis to the first man who sighted land. A fortune to a poor man, but a trifle to the rich. Well it was a simple seaman named Rodrigo who sighted it and cried, "Land," but when Columbus later got the ear of the Sovereigns, he told them an absurd tale of some mysterious beckoning light that he had seen the night before. So although he never even cried, "Land," he claimed and got the reward, leaving the poor sailor with nothing.

BOBADILLA

(with contempt)

Grasping for crumbs! The man has the integrity of an Englishman!

OJEDA

I tell you his personal greed knows no earthly bounds. They say the poor sailor was so disillusioned we went and joined the Moors.

BOBADILLA

Enough. I want to look at the account books.

OJEDA

Let me warn you, Commander, he always bragged about how clever he was to keep two sets of logs on his first voyage, preventing mutiny by fooling the crew into thinking they'd come less far than they actually had, and I have heard from an impeccable source that Columbus keeps two sets of account books, one to show the Royal Auditor and one with the true figures.

BOBADILLA

Who told you that?

OJEDA

His valet. Unfortunately he's with Columbus out on the Great Meadow.

BOBADILLA

Where does he store the books?

OJEDA

He kept that secret from me.

BOBADILLA

Who would know?

OJEDA

His brothers. With your excellency's pardon, I have already taken the initiative to extract that information from them. The younger one Don Diego is deathly afraid of anything physical, and would betray his mother if you threatened to cut off his nose.

BOBADILLA

I hope you didn't take any excessive measures. I need them in good condition so they can answer to the King.

OJEDA

They're in perfect shape. According to Don Diego, there should be a key on a ring hanging inside the kneespace of Columbus's desk on the right side. It opens a compartment in the window seat.

BOBADILLA

(looks under desk, takes out keys)

Very good. Now let's see what's hidden here.

(Goes to window seat, takes off cloth cover, revealing lid and keyhole. He opens it.)

Ah, a strongbox. Ojeda, help me lift this out.

OJEDA

It is heavy, Excellency.

(They lift the box out; BOBADILLA opens it. They step back as if in awe.)

BOBADILLA

Pearls, jewels, gold! Look at the size of those nuggets!

OJEDA

Do you want me to inventory these contents, Commander?

BOBADILLA

No. I'll have the Royal Treasurer, who came along with me, do it. I think I'm finally ready to send a message off to Columbus, and command him to report. I want your most reliable courier. He's two days ride into the interior, you say?

OJEDA

Yes.

BOBADILLA

Good. That will give me time to have his welcome well prepared. I'm not through questioning you on your role in the revolt. You will report to me on that matter first thing in the morning.

OJEDA

Yes sir. One other thing, sir. Many townspeople have gathered outside, waiting to give testimony.

BOBADILLA

Have them wait in an orderly fashion. I will be holding sessions later in the day.
(Fade to dark.)

(SCENE: Another part of the stage lights up. COLUMBUS alone.)

ESPINOZA

(Enters, running)
Sir, Commander Bobadilla, just stepped off the boat!

COLUMBUS

What?
(shakes him by the neck)
Don't trifle with me!

ESPINOZA

It's true, sir.

COLUMBUS

Bobadilla... Commander Bobadilla... here? What's Bobadilla doing here?

ESPINOZA

The king sent him as the Royal Inquisitor. He placed your brothers under arrest!

COLUMBUS

Under arrest...?
(hesitates as it slowly hits him, then yells.)
There's been a coup! Ojeda!
(to ESPINOZA)
Find Ojeda. Tell him to put every man on ready alert. Tell him to have all our Indians prepare for battle. Now!

ESPINOZA

The Royal Inquisitor sent this.
(hands him a scroll)

COLUMBUS

(reads it, suddenly tense)
My whole being is shuddering: have I lost my nerve? The Royal Inquisitor come to investigate me?
(to audience)

I was well acquainted with Bobadilla back in Spain. King's advisor. Old family. Very proper. Old school. Always gave the king the worst advice. He hated me. Tried to turn the queen against me, even though I always treated him with the greatest respect. He didn't like that I was friends his niece. Inés. Lovely girl. She had these great spiritual pools of eyes, you couldn't stop gazing into them. I was quite taken with her for a while. She was in love with me. I think somebody told Bobadilla I was boning her. OK that was kind of true, but it was still all very innocent. I was not in a position to marry. I had my vision to follow. This was all before my first voyage of discovery. Then while I was gone exploring this side of the world, the king took a liking to her too, which made the queen jealous, so they married her off to a certain fool. Bobadilla didn't like it because he thought the groom was beneath her station. The man had plenty of money, he was a merchant, he just didn't have the right title. Bobadilla took it as an insult to his family, and somehow in his twisted thinking he blamed me for it. Maybe I shouldn't attack him. Too late now. What choice have I? With my own eyes I saw the seals and signatures of the King and Queen on his orders. To oppose them would mean rebellion. Oh God, give me a grasp on myself. This all seems so unreal. Only yesterday I was conqueror of all land this side of the great ocean sea, and today I'm alone and unarmed, about to surrender to a man I know is a tool of my enemies.

ESPINOZA

I'll prepare a bit of lunch, sir.

COLUMBUS

(angrily)

Do not disturb my meditation with foolishness.

ESPINOZA

A meal will give you strength.

COLUMBUS

(to himself)

Lord, why didn't you create man more perfectly in your image?

ESPINOZA

You need to rest, sir.

COLUMBUS

For me there is no rest, and I will not sit until I have looked into the Inquisitor's eyes.

ESPINOZA

I'll spread out a blanket for you, sir.

(He bends and starts to spread a blanket, but COLUMBUS boots him to the ground.)

What did you do that for, sir?

COLUMBUS

Overcoming fleshly weakness is good for the soul. Idiot, speak to me no more of these lowly passions. I must keep my mind on what lies ahead.

ESPINOZA

(looks past COLUMBUS)

Soldiers approaching.

COLUMBUS

Fetch my Sash of Office. I need to fit the role.

(ESPINOZA hesitates.)

Fetch my Sash of Office!

(Espinoza reaches into a sack and pulls out the sash.)

Fasten it around me.

(Espinoza fastens it over COLUMBUS' left shoulder and under his right arm.)

(Enter OJEDA, followed by Soldier.)

OJEDA

Admiral Columbus...

(hesitates and falters)

I have orders for your arrest.

COLUMBUS

Orders from whom?

OJEDA

From the Royal Inquisitor Governor Bobadilla.

COLUMBUS

(winces)

Bobadilla is not Governor! I am Governor! Bobadilla is an usurper!

(suddenly changes his tone to cajoling)

There is no need for such orders, Ojeda. As you can see I am coming unaccompanied by any force of arms, to speak peacefully with the Inquisitor.

OJEDA

I'm sorry, sir, I have to carry out my orders.

COLUMBUS

Can this be possible, he means to arrest me? What is the charge?

OJEDA

No charges have been formally made, sir, at least not in public.

COLUMBUS

Then this procedure is not legal.

OJEDA

I cannot speak to that, sir. I only have my orders.

COLUMBUS

Would you treat the wearer of the Sash of Office of Viceroy of the King and Queen of Spain, Admiral of the Ocean Sea, Royal Governor of the Indies, as a common criminal?

OJEDA

I'm sorry, sir. I have orders to arrest you and put you in chains.

COLUMBUS

(shocked)

In chains?

OJEDA

In the name of Their Most Catholic Majesties, you are under arrest. Private.
(SOLDIER steps forward. He is carrying handcuffs and fetters.)
You will chain the prisoner. Admiral, put out your wrists, please.

COLUMBUS

Do you prepare me for crucifixion? Well then,
(sticks out his wrists)
drive in the nails.

OJEDA

Private, chain the prisoner.

SOLDIER

(hesitates with fear)

Sir...

OJEDA

Chain the prisoner; that's an order.

SOLDIER

I can't, sir.

OJEDA

What's the matter? Are you afraid of him?

SOLDIER

Yes, sir. I'm sorry, sir. I'm afraid.

OJEDA

Do I have to do it myself?

(He takes the chains from Soldier and turns to COLUMBUS but is suddenly taken with fear himself, and hesitates for a long moment...)

ESPINOZA

(steps forward)

I'm not afraid of him.

(He takes the chains from the stupefied Ojeda.)

COLUMBUS

Espinoza, not you!

ESPINOZA

Glad to do the master a last service... sir!

(He fastens on the chains.)

OJEDA

(to SOLDIER)

Lead the prisoner off.

(to ESPINOZA.)

You will come along for questioning.

ESPINOZA

My pleasure.

(They all exit. Blackout.)

(Enter FRIAR MONTESINOS.)

FRIAR MONTESINOS

(to audience)

We are back in the filthy dungeon where Columbus is held prisoner, chained to the wall. In his morose brooding mind, he stands giving testimony before Commander Bobadilla, while the great chief Caonabo crouches in the shadows.

(MONTESINO exits.)

COLUMBUS

(to BOBADILLA.)

So they threw me in this black hole, Inquisitor, and I've rotted here ever since. Surely you can see this is a travesty of justice! Surely you can see that the King and Queen will be incensed when they hear of this! These accusers are all just jealous malcontents, motivated by only the grossest self-interest. While I swear by the Living God my own inspiration is pure and Christian.

What do you say, Inquisitor? We can negotiate this problem, consider it merely a mistake, and forget it ever happened?

BOBADILLA
Negotiate?

COLUMBUS
Let's just say you were misled by these liars and criminals.

BOBADILLA
(turns to the Accusers, who are nowhere to be seen)
Jury, the accused asks if we can negotiate.

COLUMBUS
Jury? They are the jury?

BOBADILLA
(to the Accusers)
What do you say?

FRIAR BUIL
(steps out of shadows)
Nobody's fooled by his pretenses of piety.
(steps back into shadows)

OJEDA
(steps out of shadows)
Negotiating with a prisoner is improper.
(steps back into shadows)

ESPINOZA
(steps out of shadows)
Unless he's pleading 'guilty'.
(steps back into shadows)

OJEDA
(steps out of shadows)
The last wish of the condemned is always to trade places with the hangman.
(steps back into shadows)

BOBADILLA
So you see, Columbus, this trial is not entirely in my hands. That is all the testimony we will take today.
(gavels)

COLUMBUS

No!

BOBADILLA

Their Majesties' Royal Court is now...

FRIAR MONTESINOS

(steps out of shadows)

You promised I could speak!

BOBADILLA

Friar Montesinos. Very well.

FRIAR MONTESINOS

They're all so ready to accuse Columbus of a hundred crimes, but they say nothing about his central crime. Friar Buil condemns the slave trade but supports forced conversion of Indians. Ojeda condemns the tribute system but wants to replace it with servitude.

OJEDA

(steps out of shadows)

With freedom!

(steps back into shadows)

BOBADILLA

Let him speak.

FRIAR MONTESINOS

Our very presence here is maintained by force. In only eight years we've caused the deaths of tens of thousands of Indians. How many will we kill in the next eight or eighty years? We claim to be here to Christianize, but this is really a war of conquest, an unholy aggressive war for empire.

(All except MONTESINOS, including COLUMBUS laugh.)

BOBADILLA

Friar Buil, what do you say of your brother monk's interpretation of Papal doctrine?

FRIAR BUIL

(steps out of shadows)

He confuses conquest with spreading civilization. He is young. Let us not waste our time further with this. The day has been long.

(steps back into shadows)

BOBADILLA

Yes, I've heard enough and more than enough.

FRIAR MONTESINOS

(angrily, to BOBADILLA)

You don't want to stop this devastation!

BOBADILLA

You've had your chance to speak, Montesinos.

FRIAR MONTESINOS

You support this conquest!

BOBADILLA

(gavels)

You are out of order!

FRIAR MONTESINOS

You don't want to end it! you want to do it more efficiently!

BOBADILLA

(with contempt)

Friar Buil, take this boy away before I'm forced to declare him a rebel.

FRIAR MONTESINOS

I'm going to the King about this, and I'm going to the Pope!

(Exits.)

BOBADILLA

Go, little lamb, run into the lions' den.

OJEDA

(steps out of shadows)

Are we prepared to pass sentence now, Commander?

BOBADILLA

The jury will retire to my chamber to study the evidence. The court is now in recess.

(gavels, rises, and begins to go)

COLUMBUS

Inquisitor, don't go! I have more evidence! I'll answer all the charges one by one, if you'll only listen!

(BOBADILLA exits, followed by the Accusers)

You must understand my side before you pass judgment! Where have you gone? Inquisitor!

(begins to sob)
(CAONABO appears from the shadows.)

CAONABO
Do not cry, Lord Admiral of the Christians. No one is here but me to hear your cries.

COLUMBUS
Caonabo. If no one else, then maybe you can understand. All I have done, I have done not for myself, but in service to the Holy Church.

CAONABO
Tell me no more about your church.

COLUMBUS
You will see when you die, there is only the eternal peace of Christian Heaven or the endless torture of Hell, you'll thank me!

CAONABO
If all dead Christians are in this place called Heaven, my people will gladly go to Hell.

COLUMBUS
But you are Christian too, you were baptized.

CAONABO
I am Taíno.

COLUMBUS
You do not understand. Why is it my curse to always be misunderstood? Well, so be it: I must bear my cross. But I feel suddenly close to you. We were both great chiefs, and now we're both in chains. There's a bond between us.

CAONABO
There is nothing between us. These things are nothing to me. My people do not make chains; my people do not build prisons. These are Christian ways.

COLUMBUS
Caonabo, why do you hate me?

CAONABO
I do not hate you, but, for what you have done, maybe I will kill you.

COLUMBUS
(draws away)
Stay away from me! Ojeda!

(They struggle on the floor, entangling their chains. CAONABO easily overpowers COLUMBUS)

COLUMBUS

(cowering)

Don't kill me.

CAONABO

(Lets him go, with a snicker of contempt.)

I would not shorten your suffering.

COLUMBUS

You've got to listen. I am blameless, blameless. My discovery of the Indies was prophesied many times in the Bible. I have been destined to play a role in these great events. And you can help me! I am going to launch a new Crusade to regain the Holy Sepulchre of Jesus! I have calculated that the fall of Jerusalem and the recapture of the Holy Land from the Infidels will be the signal for the Second Coming!

CAONABO

I do not know this Jerusalem. If it is where you were born, then return there. If not, leave it alone. Return to where you were born; that is your holy land, and you are caretaker of it, just as this is our holy land, and we are caretakers of it. Leave our holy land alone.

(Enter Ojeda)

OJEDA

They've come to take you, Admiral.

COLUMBUS

Then is this the end? Will they hang me with no trial, no chance to clear my name?

OJEDA

Quiet now, Admiral, no need to worry about the rope this morning. They're just taking you to the ship, then it'll be back to Spain; if there's any hanging it won't be till then.

COLUMBUS

Oh God, why have you cast me down like this?

OJEDA

Don't worry, they never hang people like you. Most likely there won't even be a trial. They'll just take away some of your money and titles and let you off. They might even let you play sailor again.

COLUMBUS

They're not going to hang me?

(It slowly dawns on him)

They're not going to hang me!

(Pulls himself up, straightens)

Of course! The King and Queen will take care of me! There won't even be a trial!

(Feeling suddenly strong again.)

Then I am ready to go. Thank you Lord for protecting me in my darkness. My journey is not over yet. I swear by all the saints in Heaven, that I will be back, I will return to power and fulfill my vows, and when I do, to my enemies I will show no mercy! There is a continent to conquer! My sons will yet inherit this land! Caonabo, may Christ save you yet!

(They exit. CAONABO is alone for a few moments. Then Anacaona enters, dressed in a beautiful feathered robe.)

CAONABO

My sister, my friend!

ANACAONA

Do not despair. We have come to set you free.

CAONABO

No one can free me without the key to these chains.

ANACAONA

Stand and you will see. Your chains are nothing, they fall away.

CAONABO

I am too old to stand, too tired.

ANACAONA

Put your sufferings behind you, do not cling to them. The moon changes nightly. Rise.

CAONABO

How can I rise while my people are dying? Our ancestors have deserted us. For the Taíno people there is no place to go, nowhere to hide from these savage Christians who have come to kill us all.

ANACAONA

You are right, old man, and yet you are wrong. We are stronger than they, because in the beginning the spirit who made the world gave this land to the Taínos, and, no matter what, it will always be ours and we will survive.

CAONABO

Then will things return to the way they were before these demons approached our shores?

ANACAONA

Nothing will be the same. But from the earth will spring a new Taíno nation, different beyond our conception, but the same as our ancestors' ancestors, and these will once again prosper in this land.

CAONABO

(triumphantly)

Then we will defeat the invaders!

ANACAONA

They will defeat themselves. But it is not for us to know how or when. Come, rise! We must each play the roles that we can! There is a great dance in preparation.

(She removes her feathered robe.)

Here is your ceremonial robe.

(She wraps it over his shoulders.)

(Blackout.)

CURTAIN.