



# Visions

by Louis Nowra



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## F i r s t P r o d u c t i o n o f t h e P l a y

*Visions* was first performed at the Paris Theatre, Sydney, on 17 August 1978 with the following cast:

JUANA Jennifer Claire  
VALERA Tim Hughes  
LOPEZ John Gaden  
MADAME LYNCH Kate Fitzpatrick  
MUSICIANS George Sima, Peter Kelly  
AIDE Geoffrey Clendon  
LOPEZ'S FATHER Peter Corbett  
MAID Judy Davis  
CORINA Mary-Lou Stewart  
ADELAIDE Claire Crowther  
AMERICAN AMBASSADOR John Paramor  
DOCTORS, SOLDIERS, PEASANTS, ETC. John Paramor, Peter Corbett, Geoffrey Clendon

Directed by Rex Cramphorn  
Designed by Luciana Arrighi  
Music composed by Sarah de Jong

## P e r f o r m i n g R i g h t s

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## C H A R A C T E R S

JUANA, a peasant girl

VALERA, her cousin

LOPEZ, heir to the Presidency of Paraguay

MADAME LYNCH, his fiancée, a Parisian courtesan

TWO MUSICIANS

AIDE

LOPEZ'S FATHER, President of Paraguay

MAID (MARIE)

CORINA, Lopez's sister

ADELAIDE, Lopez's sister

TWO DOCTORS

TWO POLICEMEN

AMERICAN AMBASSADOR

LEPER

ENEMY SOLDIER

CRIPPLES, OTHER 'UNFORTUNATES', PARTY GUESTS, SOLDIERS

Many parts can be doubled.

*To Rex Cramphorn.*

'He that trusts his eyes exposes his mind to numberless torments and confusions: he shall take clouds for mountains, straight for crooked, one colour for another, or an indisposed medium for a reality.'

*Sueños, Francisco de Quevedo*



## ACT ONE

---

### SCENE ONE

*Darkness. A storm.*

*We gradually become aware of a figure in white lying awkwardly in the mud. She moans.*

VALERA: [*offstage*] Juana! Juana!

*JUANA lifts herself up. Her white dress is covered in mud and blotched with blood. She tries to cry out but can only utter inarticulate sounds.*

Juana! Juana!

*She attempts to cry out again, but the difficulty of keeping herself up is too much and she falls back into the mud.*

Juana! Juana!

*VALERA enters, confused. JUANA doesn't see him although she can hear him.*

Juana! Answer me. Where are you?

*She tries to rise and, with loud guttural sounds, attempts to gain his attention.*

Juana? Is that you? Speak. I can't see you in the dark.

*VALERA spots JUANA as she tries to push herself up again.*

What's happened to you?

*She falls back into the mud and, in his desperation to get to her, VALERA slips and falls. He crawls the short distance to her. Her face is covered in blood and mud.*

What's happened? Why are you wearing these clothes?

*She seems to be delirious.*

Come on.

*With great effort he lifts her, but she falls limply.*

What's the matter? Use your legs.

*Irritated, he lifts her again and carries her off.*

*The storm becomes louder and the scene darkens into blackout.*



## SCENE TWO

---

*A podium.*

*A rather nervous LOPEZ enters to deliver a speech.*

LOPEZ: I will be brief. I have spent three years away from Paraguay studying in Europe. I learnt a lot during that time. Although... [*he forgets, then remembers*] ... although we are a poor country and backward, compared to the Triple Alliance of Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil, we will soon catch up to them. I have many plans and will drag our country into the modern arena... era... even if you complain. The changes will be strange at first, but in the end you will get used to them. It is the only way Paraguay will survive as a nation.

*Silence.*

My father is very ill and, as I am his son, it is thought that I will soon become President and so... and so I would like to present to you the woman who will become my wife. Although she is not Paraguayan, she has already assimilated herself by studying our culture and learning our dialect.

*He turns in the direction from which she will enter and, once certain she is coming to the podium, returns to his speech.*

Madame Lynch comes from Paris. France. She is an extremely intelligent and cultured woman. And she is a symbol of what I want my Presidency to achieve when I become President. We must look to Europe, as have Brazil and Argentina, for knowledge and understanding.

*The beautiful MADAME LYNCH is at his side.*

LYNCH: Thank you, Señor Lopez. I, too, will be brief. One of the reasons I hope I will be of benefit to the people of Paraguay is that I offer a different perspective. You have no playhouses. No music halls. No libraries or magnificent buildings. Señor Lopez and I hope we can interest you in such things. [*Pause.*] I know there are people who are suspicious of me, a European, who will soon marry one of your most illustrious sons, but I hope I will show you how earnest is my wish to assimilate and understand your beautiful country. Perhaps, in a few years time, when people think of South America, they will not think of Brazil or Argentina but of Paraguay. Thank you.

*They wait for applause, but none is forthcoming. LOPEZ starts to clap, gradually the applause grows. Both acknowledge it slightly nervously.*



## ACT ONE

### SCENE THREE

---

*A zoo garden. Animal noises.*

MADAME LYNCH *is sitting at a table by herself. The table is ready for an afternoon tea. Three empty chairs. The MUSICIANS play Paraguayan music softly. LYNCH sips her tea and then motions for silence.*

LYNCH: [*to the MUSICIANS*] You wouldn't know anything from *Tristan and Isolde*, would you?

*The MUSICIANS look at one another and shake their heads.*

Weber?

*Same reaction.*

Bizet?

*Same reaction.*

What about: 'She's Got a Wiggle in the Wrong Places, But It Looks Right'?

*Same reaction.*

It was only a joke. [*Half to herself*] Musicians are the same everywhere.

*She sips her tea. LOPEZ enters, alone.*

Where are they?

LOPEZ: Who?

LYNCH: Your sisters, who do you think? They're an hour late.

LOPEZ: They're not coming.

LYNCH: Are they ill? [*Pause.*] Are they ill?

*Silence.*

They don't want to come?

*He nods and sits.*

This is ridiculous. You will soon be President and your own sisters won't even recognise your choice of wife. Who do they think they are?

LOPEZ: They're suspicious of Europeans.

LYNCH: They think the family will be tainted?

*He nods.*

My God, I'm the one who should worry about being tainted. [*Remembering the MUSICIANS*] There will be no music. You can leave.



*The MUSICIANS do as they're told.*

The only musicians I could find in the whole of Asunción. It's lucky I brought some sheet music with me from Paris. [*Pause.*] What do I have to do to earn your sisters' presence?

LOPEZ: I don't know. [*He stands.*] They're suspicious of new things, that's all.

LYNCH: What about your father?

LOPEZ: The doctors here don't know anything.

LYNCH: Does he hate me?

LOPEZ: It's not a question of hate. They're just suspicious. They'll take their time. They're suspicious of everybody.

LYNCH: Your sisters didn't even send an apology for not coming.

LOPEZ: They lead a very insular life. They think the height of cosmopolitan life is to have a new dress imported from Rio de Janeiro every six months.

LYNCH: When will I meet your father?

LOPEZ: [*shrugging*] When he gets better, I suppose. He's too sick and senile to know who you are at the moment.

LYNCH: Why don't you take over the Presidency if he's that ill?

LOPEZ: I can't do that. The people have gotten used to him leading a hermit life. 'Our recluse El Presidente' they call him. As far as they're concerned, he's still fit to govern. The only thing that would convince them that he's not, is his corpse.

LYNCH: But you're governing now.

LOPEZ: But I'm *not* the President.

*Silence.*

LYNCH: When you're President your sisters will change.

LOPEZ: I'm sure they will.

LYNCH: After you're President for a while, we'll return to Paris. Just a short visit. [*Slight pause.*] I had some famous people visit me. I had a well-known—not a great—salon. I'm the first to recognise that. To have a great salon you have to be old and ugly, but some famous people went out of their way to come and speak to me. Baudelaire and his nigger. They came once. Salons are at the mercy of fashion. One minute you're in, the next minute you're out. [*Pause.*] I can wait for your sisters.

LOPEZ: They'll come round.

*Pause.*

LYNCH: The afternoon tea is spoiled.

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## ACT ONE

LOPEZ: It looks superb.

LYNCH: [*holding a platter of cakes*] Have one.

LOPEZ: No, thanks.

LYNCH: I'd wish you'd eat.

*He shrugs.*

LOPEZ: Once that architect gets here from England I'm going to ask him to turn this into a proper—Taregarten.

LYNCH: Tiergarten.

LOPEZ: [*annoyed*] Tiergarten. [*He walks over to a cage.*] I'll send an expedition up the Amazon. There are some strange animals there, apparently. I heard that there is an animal that never walks, but is as big as a bear and hangs from a tree trunk day in, day out.

LYNCH: Who feeds it?

LOPEZ: [*missing the sarcasm*] There's another one, that when it runs out of food, eats itself. Starts from the tail hoping to get enough nourishment before it kills itself, so it can go in search of its proper food.

LYNCH: Let's hope it doesn't get as far as its legs.

LOPEZ: And there's an animal like an ape, only it's pure white and has eyes that can mesmerise you. According to the natives of the area, it only goes out at night and when it catches your eye you are rooted to the spot and die of hunger.

LYNCH: You believe those stories? They sound like fables.

LOPEZ: I don't know. I once heard of a snake as wide as a man and twenty foot long and thought it was just a story until I saw one captured. It took twenty men to capture it in a struggle.

LYNCH: When was that?

LOPEZ: When I was about nine or ten.

LYNCH: It must have looked huge.

LOPEZ: I had nightmares for months after. While I was standing, staring at the men struggling with it, I accidently tripped. It gobbled me up. I would wake up in my bed crying out.

LYNCH: Thank goodness such animals were never part of my childhood. [*Shivering at the mere thought*] Ugh! Fancy being gobbled up by a snake.

LOPEZ: You eat animals' liver.

LYNCH: Don't look so disgusted. That's *pâté*. Delicious.

LOPEZ: No, that's liver.



LYNCH: We'll have some imported. You'll grow to like it.

LOPEZ: I disliked cabbage when I was young. I still dislike it.

*LYNCH sips her tea.*

LYNCH: Is that what you still have nightmares about?

LOPEZ: Uh?

LYNCH: Lately you've been waking up in the middle of the night bathed in sweat.

Don't you remember?

LOPEZ: No.

LYNCH: I ask you what's the matter, and you say it's only a dream.

LOPEZ: I don't remember.

LYNCH: What are they about?

LOPEZ: I'm left on a desert island and the only food I have to eat is a ton of *pâté*.

*They both laugh. An AIDE enters.*

AIDE: Sir?

LOPEZ: Yes.

AIDE: The doctors from Rio de Janeiro have arrived.

LOPEZ: Thank you. Tell them I'm coming straight away.

*The AIDE exits.*

LYNCH: What's that about?

LOPEZ: Rio de Janeiro has better doctors.

*LOPEZ exits. MADAME LYNCH sips her tea. A parrot squawks.*

LYNCH: Oh, shut up.

*She sips tea as the lights fade to blackout.*

## SCENE FOUR

---

*A bedroom.*

LOPEZ'S FATHER, *the President*, lies in bed, dying. His two daughters, CORINA and ADELAIDE, are sitting on either side of him. He waves his hand.

CORINA: Yes? [*Pause.*] Is there anything you want?

*She sits back in her chair after failing to get an answer.*

ADELAIDE: If he dies, it's Lopez and his whore.



## PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTES

1. Just as history plays with us, so I have played with history.
2. Madame Lynch's use of the term *bal masqué* is eccentric and suits her own purpose. It's actually a mixture of *bal costumé* and *bal masqué*, but perhaps her term *bal masqué à la Paraguay* comes closer to combining the two.
3. In Act One, scene seven, the song 'La Mort des Amants' is based on the first eight lines of Baudelaire's poem. In Act Two, scene six, the passage in French, spoken by Madame Lynch, is from Chateaubriand's *Atala*.
4. The glass armonica (often incorrectly called glass harmonica) is a name used in Act Two, scene three, to describe a row of water-tuned crystal glasses played by rubbing a moist finger around the edges to produce an eerie, ethereal sound. It is not the instrument invented by Benjamin Franklin (1761) and played by such people as Anton Mesmer and written for by such composers as Mozart (e.g. his shimmeringly beautiful quintet for armonica, flute, oboe, viola and cello).
5. I would prefer one interval (between Acts One and Two). The original production had two intervals, the first placed between scenes six and seven in Act One and the second between Acts One and Two.

### The Music

Music for plays is an uncomplex and direct music. Stripped of ostentatiousness and unnecessary frills and pared down to its essentials, its aim is to communicate its idea and mood in one listening. I hope the music for *Visions* has this quality as written and when played.

You will need two musicians, one a keyboard and guitar player, the other a drummer. I have intended the music to be played on a portable harmonium, a guitar, a basic drum kit (consisting of a bass drum, side drum, cymbal and a triangle), three or four glasses and any other instruments suitable: for example, tambourine, tin whistle, claves, guiro, et cetera. If a portable harmonium is not available, an electronic organ made to sound and look like a harmonium may be used.

For the guitar part in 'La Mort des Amants' use a single strum for the bars with dotted minims in them. For the bars with three crotchets, finger pick one note and then finger pick the chord twice.

L.N.

For scores of the musical pieces found in the text of *Visions* contact Currency Press.



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## PLAYWRIGHT'S BIOGRAPHY

Louis Nowra was born in Melbourne. His plays include *Page 8* (with David Page), *The Woman with Dog's Eyes*, *The Marvellous Boy*, *The Emperor of Sydney*, *Inner Voices*, *Visions*, *Inside the Island*, *The Precious Woman*, *Sunrise*, *The Golden Age*, *Capricornia*, *Byzantine Flowers*, *The Watchtower*, *Summer of the Aliens*, *Così*, *Radiance*, *The Temple*, *Crow*, *Miss Bosnia*, *The Incorruptible*, *The Jungle* and *The Language of the Gods*. He has translated *The Prince of Homburg*, *Cyrano de Bergerac* and *Lulu* for the stage. He has also written the libretti for *Whitsunday* and *Love Burns*.

For television he has written *Displaced Persons*, *Hunger* and *The Lizard King* and for film *Map of the Human Heart*, *Così*, *Heaven's Burning*, *Radiance*, *K-19: The Widowmaker* and *Black and White*. His radio plays include *Albert Names Edward*, *The Song Room*, *The Widows*, *Sydney* and *The Divine Hammer*.

Other writings include nonfiction works *The Cheated*, *Warne's World* and *Walkabout* (in Currency's Australian Screen Classics series); four novels *The Misery of Beauty*, *Palu*, *Red Nights* and *Abaza*; and two memoirs, *The Twelfth of Never* and *Shooting the Moon*. Nowra has won multiple awards and prizes, and lives in Sydney.