

MEASURE OF THE WORLD
by
Shirley Barrie

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Shirley Barrie
Shirley.barrie@gmail.com
(416) 762-7050

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MEASURE OF THE WORLD

CHARACTERS

FLORENZA A seductive, half native, half Spanish woman in her 20's. Gifted to Godin by the Governor. She's smart and cunning, manipulating both the scientists and the Governor in the attempt to earn the freedom she's been promised.

PIERRE BOUGUER (38) A noted mathematician and astronomer. Persuaded to join the expedition at the last moment, he's ascetic, and exacting, tends to poor health but can barely contain his repressed emotions.

CHARLES DE LA CONDAMINE (35) Explorer and geographer. Less experienced than the others, he's invested in the expedition to earn his place. He's open, adventurous and more than willing to take risks, but facial pockmarks have also scarred him emotionally.

LOUIS GODIN (32) Astronomer and Committeeman. Although the youngest, his charisma and political nose has maneuvered him into the leadership position. He's fiercely ambitious, but not a good collaborator, so feels constantly undermined by his colleagues.

The play was first produced at the Alumnae Theatre, Toronto, in the first Fireworks Festival of New Work, playing in rep from Nov 13 - Dec 1, 2013.

Director:	Molly Thom
Set and Lighting Design:	Ed Rosing
Costume Design:	Bec Brownstone
Sound Design:	Gabrielle D'Angelo
Stage Manager:	Adriana Dmitiri
ASM:	Rhona Bennett

Florenza:	Jessica Zepeda
Pierre Bouguer:	Jason Thomson
Charles de la Condamine:	Michael Vitorovich
Louis Godin:	Paul Cotton

SETTING

PERU, 1736 - 1743

The play is inspired by a French expedition to measure a degree of the earth's arc at the equator near Quito: - part of a great scientific endeavour to determine the exact shape of the world. Apart from the pure science of it, the aim was to prove the scientific superiority of France over England and to spy on Spain, uncovering the secrets she was hiding in her lucrative new world colony.

In the broadest sense, science has not changed much since the 18th century; the lofty goals, the mind-numbing repetitive work, the innovations born of necessity. Scientists are still trying to measure the world, but they now focus on the small as well as the large. Mapping the human genome, the brain, and discovering the secrets of nanotechnology take their place alongside, and sometimes eclipse, expeditions to Mars.

And in the passionate drive for scientific dominance, the rich societies (and corporations) still exploit and misunderstand the poor, politics is a large part of science, and the distance from heart to head remains just as long and difficult to traverse as it ever was.

The longest distance on earth is from the heart to the head.

Paul Theroux, *Blinding Light*

In the studies of antiquity which...hath a certaine resemblance with eternity, there is a sweet food of the minde.

William Camden in the introduction to *Brittania*, the first published topographical survey of the British Isles.

GLOSSARY

Viceroyalty of Peru: Included most of Spanish-ruled South America, governed from Lima

Quito(KEY toe)Audiencia: A local division of the Viceroyalty, administratively responsible to Lima. It included modern day Ecuador, and parts of Northern Peru, Southern Columbia and Northern Brazil

Cuenca (kWHEN kuh):	A city south of Quito
Guyaquil (why a KEEL):	A coastal city, Peru's main port
Lake (Laguna) Cuicocha (La GOONA coo ee CO cha):	A lake high in the Andes
Tapada:	Mistress
Mestiza:	Half native, half Spanish
Toise (twaz):	A French unit of measurement (approx 6 ft)
Cahouchou (yuh COW tchew):	Rubber
Cinchona (sin COE na):	A source of quinine
Chuspa:	Coca bag, hung around the waist
Iscupuru:	Small gourd container for llipta
Llipta:	An alkaline ingredient that helps the coca work

SCENE ONE. A ROOM IN AN ELEGANT QUITO HOUSE IN 1736. PIERRE BOUGUER, SOBERLY DRESSED IN THE FRENCH STYLE, SITS AT A TABLE CARVING A TAPERED STICK. ON THE TABLE IS THE MODEL OF A SHIP WITHOUT A MAIN MAST. FLORENZA ENTERS. SHE'S CLAD IN A DRESS THAT REVEALS HER ANKLES AND WEARS ORNATE GOLD NECKLACES AND EARRINGS. AROUND HER WAIST HANGS AN EMBROIDERED BAG OR CHUSPA. SHE CARRIES A BASKET OF SEWING. BOUGUER LOOKS UP QUESTIONINGLY.

FLORENZA

M. Godin has sent me to sit with you.

BOUGUER

I do not ...require company.

FLORENZA

He is writing. A very important letter he says, to the bank in Lima, and I am a -

(searching for the word)

BOUGUER

Distraction.

FLORENZA

I do not understand this word.

BOUGUER

No.

FLORENZA

I can go to the kitchen -

BOUGUER

No. No. It's.... If our esteemed leader is taking action ---
(low)
finally...

He gestures for her to sit. She does. She sews, covertly watching him. He goes back to smoothing the stick. He feels it, bends it. It doesn't break. He smiles with satisfaction and places the stick in the position of the mast on the model.

FLORENZA

You have a son, M. Bouguer?

BOUGUER

What? No! Of course not.

FLORENZA

M. Godin has two daughters and a very young boy.

(beat)

Are you making the toy for---

BOUGUER

It's not a toy!

(more in control)

It's a model. To scale. A plan that can be used to construct something much bigger.

FLORENZA

How big?

BOUGUER

It will have a keel length of twenty seven toises.

FLORENZA

I do not understand this "toise."

BOUGUER

Of course you don't.

FLORENZA

But you could explain it. If it is not too difficult.

BOUGUER

It's not difficult at all. A toise...

(he tries another tack)

This ship, if constructed...

(corrects himself)

When constructed - will stretch from this house to... the other side of the square.

FLORENZA

(takes this in)

May I ask - *why* - you want to fill the square with a boat?

BOUGUER

(flustered)

I don't. It's just a... comparison. This

(the model)

is an ocean going vessel. Or rather, this is a model of --

FLORENZA

Is this ..ocean ..as big as Lake Cuicocha?

He looks at her in surprise.

FLORENZA

I was at Lake Cuicocha with --

(She breaks off, flustered.

Starts again.)

I was fortunate to visit there once. Cuicocha means Lake of the Guinea Pigs.

BOUGUER

Really.

FLORENZA

A most prized food.

BOUGUER

I will..uh ..remember that.

FLORENZA

(pleased with herself)

A guinea pig is small, but the lake is large.

(beat)

When your boat is big, perhaps you can sail it there.

BOUGUER

Lake Chicocha is much too small.

FLORENZA

It takes a whole day to sail around it.

BOUGUER

It takes 42 days, even longer, to cross the ocean.

(Florenza is shocked)

The lake is also in a protected crater, so the surface is smooth. The ocean is in constant movement. It rolls. In waves. It heaves. Up. And crashes down...

(he is almost ill at the thought)

causing the body to be wracked with an unrelenting nausea. Forgive me. I have work to...

He returns to the model.

FLORENZA

I could give you something to chew.

BOUGUER

Excuse me?

FLORENZA

To help with the sickness from such motion. We call it coca.

BOUGUER

That's a drug! As I understand.

FLORENZA

It helps us to endure much.

BOUGUER

I don't need such assistance.

FLORENZA

Not even if it allows you to enjoy what you love?

BOUGUER

No. Increasing the stability factor of ships will do that.
Which is what I am *trying*---

FLORENZA

How do you know where you are going?

Bouguer sighs in exasperation.

FLORENZA

When there is only water that.. heaves I think you said.. for
such a long time.

BOUGUER

A skilled astronomer can read his position from the sun and
the stars. Now if you (don't mind)---

FLORENZA

But what if there are clouds?

Bouguer stares at her in amazement.

FLORENZA

Perhaps there are no clouds on the ocean.

BOUGUER

There are indeed clouds. And fog. Not so long ago, two
thousand Englishmen were killed when a fleet of ships,
returning home after a victorious battle, got lost in the fog
and crashed onto rocks. Determining position when the
heavens are obscured has, so far, eluded the greatest
scientists.

He works. She sews. Thinking.

FLORENZA

The Governor of this Audencia has made this dangerous and
uncomfortable journey from Spain.

BOUGUER

I believe so, yes.

FLORENZA

He has done this because it will make him rich.

BOUGUER

You're presuming a great deal about someone you don't know.
The Governor is in the service of his King.

FLORENZA

And he will receive much gold for his service. If I may ask, why have you come to Peru, M. Bouguer?

BOUGUER

I am in the service of my King, and of the Scientific Academy of France.

FLORENZA

Your King will give you gold.

BOUGUER

No.

FLORENZA

Your Academy then --

BOUGUER

I'm here to perform a great service for my country.

FLORENZA

You will not be paid?

BOUGUER

There is honour in service.

She looks confused.

BOUGUER

Respect.

She still looks confused.

BOUGUER

Abstract qualities ---

He returns to the mast - preparing to fasten it in position.

FLORENZA

And what will you do here to earn this.. respect?

BOUGUER

(irritated)

If you pester M. Godin with these kinds of questions, it's no wonder he sends you--

FLORENZA

(smiling)

M. Godin and I have little time for talk.

BOUGUER

(shocked)

I think it would be better, after all, if you sat in the kitchen.

FLORENZA

As you wish.

She is gathering up her embroidery and basket as LA CONDAMINE enters. He's dressed like a native in rough woolen pants and a poncho, but they're filthy and ragged. With his facial scars he looks quite ferocious. He carries a simple bag over his shoulder.

LA CONDAMINE

So I've not been misinformed! Here you are!!

Bouguer gasps and rises from his chair as if he's seen a ghost.

LA CONDAMINE

And in the very lap of luxury.

Bouguer lurches forward and hits the table, knocking the model. La Condamine rescues it.

LA CONDAMINE

Careful.

FLORENZA

Put that down!

La Condamine is somewhat surprised, but does as requested.

FLORENZA

How dare you burst in here -- I will have you removed.

She starts off. Bouguer stops her.

BOUGUER

Wait. In spite of ..appearances ..this is the third scientist of our group. My God, man. I thought you were dead!

LA CONDAMINE

I came very close. On more than one occasion. But here I am. In the flesh. The little I have left of it.

FLORENZA

May I ask how you got past the doorman, .. Monsieur?

LA CONDAMINE

I ..didn't use the front entrance.. Senorita.

BOUGUER

Someday these antics of yours will land you in trouble.

LA CONDAMINE

I was being thoughtful!

BOUGUER

Thoughtful!?! Look at you.

LA CONDAMINE

I know. Hardly suitable for the front door of such a fine establishment. I ran out of money, you see, and had to leave my bags with some rather insistent characters in the northern mountains as payment for a guide to Quito.

Florenza leaves.

BOUGUER

You couldn't even negotiate a decent suit of clothes?

LA CONDAMINE

So who *is* that ravishing young creature?

BOUGUER

Oh. Well ..uh... Her name is, uh ..Florenza, I believe.

LA CONDAMINE

And...?

BOUGUER

I am told that Louis was royally entertained on his arrival. He met her at one of the receptions at the Governor's palace.

LA CONDAMINE

You were told?

BOUGUER

I got ill after I left you, Charles. By the time I arrived here in Quito she was... ensconced.

LA CONDAMINE

(playing with the word)

Ensconced.

BOUGUER

Making herself free. Sitting at table. According to Louis it's considered shameful in Quito for a man not to have a "tapada".

LA CONDAMINE

She's very ..well appointed.

BOUGUER

Yes well ..apparently you give them gold to show your wealth and status.

LA CONDAMINE

So where's your mestiza mistress?

BOUGUER

I don't succumb to local customs.

LA CONDAMINE

But you sit with ..Florenza ..in the afternoon?

BOUGUER

It's ..awkward.

LA CONDAMINE

(laughs)

You should have stayed with me, Pierre.

BOUGUER

And ended up skulking around back doors, looking worse than a native?

LA CONDAMINE

The last few weeks, I confess, have been a bit of a challenge. But after you left me, I explored further up the coast, and then---

LOUIS GODIN enters.

GODIN

Charles!

LA CONDAMINE

Louis.

Godin stops as he takes in La Condamine.

GODIN

My God! Florenza was right. You have gone native.

LA CONDAMINE

I seem to be in good company.

Bouguer smiles but raises a hand to cover it. Godin doesn't like the gibe being turned back on him, but swallows it.

GODIN

We were becoming very worried about you, weren't we, Pierre?

BOUGUER

Hmmmm.

GODIN

Were you ill as well?

LA CONDAMINE

Me? No.

GODIN

Then what took you so long? The trail from Guyaquil is well travelled.

LA CONDAMINE

I didn't come that way. Why go all the way back south to travel inland, I thought, when I could just cut through the mountains--- You got my letter.

GODIN

And I replied immediately saying that the Spanish had authorized travel to Quito only via Guyaquil.

LA CONDAMINE

Oh. I ...must have set off before it arrived.

Godin doesn't believe him, and is about to explode.

LA CONDAMINE

And I think you'll appreciate any potential risk when you see what I discovered.

He takes a package wrapped in dark rubber out of his bag and starts to unwrap it.

GODIN

You visited a gold mine?

LA CONDAMINE

Far more useful. You know how fiendishly difficult it is to keep our instruments protected from the elements. Well, my quadrant and telescope, in this wrapping, has been through jungle downpours, it's fallen out of a capsized boat, it's been buried, with me, in an avalanche of snow, and it's remained dry throughout.

He holds up the material.

LA CONDAMINE

It's impervious to water.

GODIN
 No fabric is --

LA CONDAMINE
 Completely watertight.

GODIN
 You're delirious.

BOUGUER
 Where did you get such a thing?

He grabs the fabric and examines it.

LA CONDAMINE
 It's made from the sap of a tree they call the cahouchou.
 When you slash the tree it responds to the wound by producing
 more sap.

BOUGUER
 But sap is --

LA CONDAMINE
 Liquid, yes, but after they mix it with various other saps
 and juices --

GODIN
 What kind?

LA CONDAMINE
 Communication was ..an issue. And secrecy a factor. But
 one of them is ipomoea alba.

GODIN
 Morning glory?

LA CONDAMINE
 The resulting solid is waterproof and flexible. It can be
 stretched and shaped. The natives make all kinds of
 contraptions with it.

He takes a rubber ball out of the bag
 and bounces it to Godin. The two men
 react with shock, but Godin manages to
 catch the ball. He bounces it.
 Bounces it to Bouguer who fumbles
 awkwardly before catching it.

BOUGUER
 What is it?

LA CONDAMINE
 A toy. They play a game --

GODIN

And where did you find this cahouchou?

LA CONDAMINE

I've made maps.

Florenza appears carrying a tray.

GODIN

(furious)

Maps! You made maps!!

Florenza suddenly turns around and disappears.

GODIN

Of somewhere you had no permission to be!?

LA CONDAMINE

Louis, if we only went where the Spanish wanted us to, we'd discover very little.

GODIN

You risk getting us all deported before we've even started our work!

LA CONDAMINE

What do you mean ..before we've started?

GODIN

Where is that blasted girl with the drinks?

LA CONDAMINE

You should have finished measuring the base line by now.

Florenza enters with the drinks tray.

GODIN

Ah. Finally. I think you'll find this brandy is almost on a par with what we have in France, Charles.

Godin pours.

LA CONDAMINE

(to Bouguer)

Is the Governor refusing to let work begin?

BOUGUER

Not as far as I know.

LA CONDAMINE

So what's the holdup, Louis?

GODIN

The local banks are proving ..reluctant to advance us funds.

LA CONDAMINE

But it was agreed ..at intergovernmental levels ..before we left France -

Florenza tries to give La Condamine a drink. He's not paying attention. She's uncertain what to do.

BOUGUER

Apparently they have a saying here. We agree, but we do not comply.

GODIN

Such arrogance is being addressed. But---

She offers the drink to Bouguer. He takes it.

LA CONDAMINE

But we brought enough money for the first phase of work.

GODIN

There were - unexpected transportation and settlement costs.

LA CONDAMINE

Like these palatial surroundings?

GODIN

The house has been generously given to us by the Governor of the Quito Audencia.

Godin indicates to Florenza to leave.

BOUGUER

But he doesn't, I understand, provide the furnishings or the many servants it seems to require. Or the rather fine brandy.

Godin glares at him. Bouguer drinks. As Florenza passes by La Condamine on her way out he grabs the gold necklaces around her neck. She yelps in surprise.

LA CONDAMINE

And these? Are they also classified as settlement costs?

BOUGUER

Charles?

GODIN

Let her go.

GODIN

Now!

La Condamine lets go of the necklaces.

LA CONDAMINE

My apologies, Senorita. The brandy seems to have gone to my head after the journey.

FLORENZA

(not letting him get away with this)

You have not taken any.

LA CONDAMINE

Then perhaps I should.

La Condamine picks up a glass from the tray on the table and drinks it down. Florenza looks at La Condamine speculatively for a moment, and exits.

GODIN

(struggles for composure)

When you've been here for a while, Charles, you'll learn that this society is very - sensitive to protocol. There's a certain position that we have to maintain if we -- (expect to earn the respect of)

LA CONDAMINE

Oh, and here I was thinking we came to measure a degree of the earth's arc.

GODIN

(ignoring the sarcasm)

I've written to the bank in Lima, just this afternoon, asking them to intercede and I expect --

LA CONDAMINE

Lima!

GODIN

That's where the central bank is located, yes.

LA CONDAMINE

Do you know anything at *all* about this country, Louis? The rainy season will have started by the time we get a reply and from what I've been able to gather that'll make it next to impossible to do anything.

BOUGUER

I always said we should measure on the coast.

LA CONDAMINE

French Guinea would have been even better.

GODIN

It's not at the Equator.

LA CONDAMINE

It's close enough.

BOUGUER

(scornfully)

If you're aiming for the merely passable. The Peruvian coast is --

LA CONDAMINE

At least Guinea is French!

GODIN

Enough! Our government *and* our Scientific Academy went to great lengths to ensure that we could measure right here, in the *centre* of Peru, at the Equator.

BOUGUER

(mutters)

Politics.

LA CONDAMINE

And since we are here, we have to start work now.

GODIN

Even in Quito people won't work for nothing.

LA CONDAMINE

Then I'll sell some of the things from my trunks.

Bouguer looks up in surprise. Godin is flustered but tries to cover.

GODIN

I really can't ask you to --

LA CONDAMINE

You'll pay me back. When you get your money from Lima, or wherever. I came through the market while I was looking for you. They may have gold here in Quito, but, believe me, they've got very little of quality or style to spend it on.

GODIN

We're scientists, Charles. Not traders.

LA CONDAMINE

And to maintain that fine distinction you'd sit here for months while letters creep their way across the Andes?

GODIN

You're a foreigner. Their rules are very strict. You won't be allowed to sell in the market.

LA CONDAMINE

You have elevated connections, Louis. You've already been given great ..advantages from the Governor. Surely you can arrange it.

GODIN

That's you all over ..assuming you can just buy your way into anything without respect for -- (process or position)

LA CONDAMINE

I have respect for this mission. Why else would I offer to save your elegant behind.

GODIN

(ready to explode)

That is totally---!

Bouguer jumps in.

BOUGUER

Charles, there's nothing for you to sell.

Godin glares at Bouguer.

BOUGUER

There's no point trying to hide it.

GODIN

I'm *not*---

LA CONDAMINE

What happened to my trunks?

GODIN

Nothing. They're just ..not here.

La Condamine stares at him in disbelief.

GODIN

Yet. While you were gallivanting away up the coast with Pierre --

BOUGUER

Gallivan...! I was determining the exact latitude of the coast of Peru.

GODIN

Leaving me on my own---

BOUGUER

As agreed with Spain.

GODIN

In Guyaquil, organizing supplies and men.

LA CONDAMINE

That's your job.

GODIN

Yes. It is. And since there were a limited number of burros available, the priority had to be our instruments, not excessive personal effects.

LA CONDAMINE

Product. For eventualities.

GODIN

Because you don't trust me?

LA CONDAMINE

Because nobody can control everything.

GODIN

I've sent for your trunks, Charles. They should be --

La Condamine starts out.

GODIN

Where are you going?

LA CONDAMINE

Out. I find the air in here somewhat fetid.

GODIN

Charles!

La Condamine leaves.

BOUGUER

Oh dear. He can't just walk about looking like -- What if people figure out who -- Aren't you going to go after --?

GODIN

People know who I am, Pierre ..and the Governor has spies everywhere. Don't worry. Charles will come to his senses.

Bouguer is not convinced. Godin is not as confident as he's sounded either.

SCENE TWO THE SAME. THREE WEEKS LATER. THE MODEL IS GONE. LA CONDAMINE IS WEARING A SIMPLE WHITE SHIRT AND THE SAME ROUGH WOOLEN PANTS. HE IS EXPERIMENTING WITH A MEASURING STICK AND THE RUBBER BALL. HE DROPS THE RUBBER BALL FROM VARIOUS HEIGHTS, NOTING IN HIS BOOK WHERE HE DROPPED IT FROM AND THE HEIGHT OF THE BOUNCE. FLORENZA MANOEUVRES A TRUNK INTO THE ROOM, DRAGGING IT TOWARDS CENTRE.

LA CONDAMINE

What are you--? That's too heavy for--

FLORENZA

I am not one of these Quito wives, able to lift nothing heavier than a handkerchief.

LA CONDAMINE

I can see tha -- . Wait a minute. That's my trunk!

FLORENZA

Yes.

LA CONDAMINE

Finally! Get one of the servants to take it to my room.

FLORENZA

That is not wise.

LA CONDAMINE

Excuse me?

FLORENZA

You need my help.

LA CONDAMINE

For what? May I ask.

FLORENZA

To choose what to wear when you meet the Governor. And I cannot do that in your room.

LA CONDAMINE

That's very ..kind of you, ...but there's no need for you to trouble yourself with --

FLORENZA

Forgive me, M. La Condamine, but all of Quito talks of the Frenchman who sneaks into the city and hides away. When M. Godin arrived, a messenger brought word that he was outside the city. He asked for permission to enter. The Governor sent a special escort to greet him. Everyone came out to see the important French visitor pass and the Governor welcomed him in front of the palace wearing his finest clothes. There was a great feast.

LA CONDAMINE
Where he met you.

FLORENZA
Not on that day.

LA CONDAMINE
Louis was well treated.

FLORENZA
He behaved in the proper manner.

LA CONDAMINE
As I will.

FLORENZA
So you can have a similar gift?

LA CONDAMINE
I think not.

FLORENZA
You do not like women?

LA CONDAMINE
They don't like me.

FLORENZA
She does not have to like you.

LA CONDAMINE
(he looks embarrassed)
Please. I'd like to get this trunk--

He moves towards the trunk but Florenza gets between him and it.

FLORENZA
Things do not go smoothly in Quito if the Governor is displeased, Monsieur. And I fear you have offended him by not presenting yourself.

LA CONDAMINE
I think I would've offended him more if I'd appeared at the palace dressed like a mountain peasant.

FLORENZA
M. Godin had to say that you were ill.

LA CONDAMINE
I know. And I've stayed here in the house ..cooped up like one of your Quito wives. But now that my trunks have arrived, I'll send a message right away.

FLORENZA

He may make you wait.

LA CONDAMINE

Then there's no need to choose my coat today.

FLORENZA

But you must be ready with suitable attire.

LA CONDAMINE

(trying to figure out her
persistence)

Has Louis sent you?

FLORENZA

No. He is at a meeting.

LA CONDAMINE

And you want to see what I have in the trunk.

FLORENZA

If I just wanted that, I could easily arrange it.

LA CONDAMINE

(laughs in surprise)

I see.

He decides to humour her.

LA CONDAMINE

Alright.

He opens the trunk. Begins to search
inside.

LA CONDAMINE

What about ..This!

He takes out a very ornate jacket. Her
eyes widen at the sight of it, but she
shakes her head.

LA CONDAMINE

It's not impressive enough?

FLORENZA

You must not shine brighter than the Governor when you have
already offended him.

LA CONDAMINE

Good point.

He drops the coat carelessly on the
floor.

She picks it up, feels it and inspects it carefully as he dives back into the trunk, taking out other fine objects. She is impressed. He comes up with a very plain jacket.

LA CONDAMINE

Is this more to your liking?

FLORENZA

It is not my liking that is important, M. La Condamine. It is too plain. You are not a priest.

He laughs.

FLORENZA

You must show that you have wealth without--

LA CONDAMINE

Without flaunting it.

He digs for another jacket.

FLORENZA

I do not understand the word, but show me the coat.

He puts on a rich, elegant, but refined jacket.

FLORENZA

Yes. That is good.

LA CONDAMINE

Excellent. Because I'm running out of coats in this trunk.

FLORENZA

You have more?

LA CONDAMINE

Aren't they here?

FLORENZA

Only this one.

LA CONDAMINE

Damn! Sorry.

FLORENZA

They will come soon.

LA CONDAMINE

Before the rainy season?

Florenza shrugs. La Condamine begins repacking. She picks up one of the beautiful objects and looks at it carefully before handing it back to him.

FLORENZA

You bring many trunks on this journey while M. Godin has only one.

LA CONDAMINE

Does he?

FLORENZA

Yet he is the leader.

LA CONDAMINE

(laughs)

I may have more trunks, but I don't seem to know when to keep my mouth shut.

FLORENZA

I don't understand.

LA CONDAMINE

We are geographers, Florenza,. We uncover the amazing unity and coherence of the world by describing and mapping what we see. With our measurements here in Quito, we'll reveal the shape of our planet. We know the general shape, of course. It's a circle ..like this.

He picks up the ball.

LA CONDAMINE

With Peru down here. And France, Spain and England ..up and over here. But the earth isn't a perfect sphere. Most geographers agree about that. But there's a long-standing dispute about what the exact shape is. My colleagues in the French Academy are convinced that it's shaped like an prolate spher-- well, let's say like a fat man with a tight belt around his middle.

Florenza laughs

LA CONDAMINE

The English, now. They believe that the world is shaped like a slightly squashed orange. A bit flat on the top and bottom. I think the English will be proved right. And I said so. Science should trump nationality. Or so I thought. But doors were suddenly closed to me. Louis was much more politic. He argued that an expedition should be sent here to the equator to discover the scientific truth. Which of course my esteemed senior colleagues assumed to be the theory they preferred.

It took several of my 'trunks' to allow me to come at all. I was hoping that selling goods from the ones stuck somewhere between here and Guayaquil would at least allow us to start work since French money seems to disappear like water into dry earth here. You don't understand a word I'm saying, do you?

FLORENZA

Foreigners are not allowed to sell in the market.

LA CONDAMINE

So Louis tells me.

FLORENZA

But you do have many beautiful things. May I suggest that you take a gift to the Governor.

LA CONDAMINE

(pause)

And are you to select that too?

FLORENZA

It would be best.

La Condamine laughs and gestures her towards the trunk.

SCENE THREE. OUT ON THE PLAIN. TWO MONTHS LATER. IT'S HOT. A LONG BLUE STICK WITH A WIRE TIPPED END RESTS ON A TRIPOD MADE OF STICKS AND CORD AND EXTENDS OFF STAGE PARALLEL TO THE FLOOR. LA CONDAMINE AND GODIN PEER OFF IN ANOTHER DIRECTION TRYING TO SEE THROUGH THE HAZE OF HEAT.

GODIN

What's he doing out there?

LA CONDAMINE

Checking if our measuring trench is level, I expect. I can--

GODIN

No need. It - gives us the chance to have a word.

LA CONDAMINE

There's some problem about the sale of goods?

GODIN

No, no. The Governor's agent pays promptly.

LA CONDAMINE

Minus the hefty commission.

GODIN

There was little time for negotiation if we wanted to start immediately. But I agree with you that care must be taken with the proceeds as we go on.

LA CONDAMINE

Did I say that?

GODIN

Don't be obtuse, Charles. Working like this! Two measurements of the same baseline. It was ..politic in order to get the first phase under way in good weather. You were right about the importance of that. But it can't continue. When we start measuring triangles from this line through mountains that are -- Two routes of measurement through the Andes would be folly.

LA CONDAMINE

So you'd agree to follow Pierre's working methods.

GODIN

(beat)

If our independent measurements of this base line are in accord, my science will be proven to be as sound as his, and some accommodation can surely be --

LA CONDAMINE

We have to expect some variation over a distance of seven miles.

GODIN

Within acceptable parameters and adjustments, of course. Charles, I'd like to know that you're --

Bouguer enters. Stops to mop his brow.
Godin sees him.

GODIN

(with urgency)

-- that you understand the advantages of the three of us working together as we were mandated to.

Bouguer has now reached them.

GODIN

Pierre. Our two teams are about to cross. And at about the halfway point. We seem to be working at a similar pace.

BOUGUER

Is that an example of your scientific rigour?

GODIN

I was making conversation.

BOUGUER

Interrupting our work for frivolity?

GODIN

Of course not. I'm on my way back into the city and --

BOUGUER

But there's hours of daylight left.

GODIN

I'm invited for dinner with the Governor this evening.

LA CONDAMINE

How pleasant.

GODIN

It's a duty. One of the guests is the manager of a gold mine and --

BOUGUER

Ah yes. Your spying.

GODIN

Intelligence. And you shouldn't underestimate it.

BOUGUER

Believe me, I don't.

La Condamine rolls his eyes and waits to see what Godin will do.

GODIN

It's natural, I suppose, that the heat affects some of us more than others. Till tomorrow.

He leaves.

BOUGUER

I am *not* affected by the heat.

LA CONDAMINE

I think we all are. To some extent.

BOUGUER

He leaves the field of scientific endeavour because he's dazzled by gold.

LA CONDAMINE

To be fair, Pierre, France would dearly like to learn how much colonial gold gets sent to Spain.

BOUGUER

Even the Spanish aren't foolish enough to tell Louis that.