

THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

FREN3007 INTERMEDIATE FRENCH

CLASS TEST ON

Jean Anouilh : *La valse des toréadors*

(3 September 2008, 3 p.m.)

Permitted materials:
a single-volume dictionary and a copy of *La valse des toréadors*

Répondez en français à l'une des questions suivantes

- 1 Cette pièce mène-t-elle à une récompense pour le général Saint-Pé ou à une punition ? Raconte-t-elle une réussite ou une défaite ?
- 2 « Dans *La valse des toréadors*, le dilemme du général Saint-Pé consiste à ce que, ne pouvant se prendre pour l'homme public, il ne veut pas être l'homme privé. »

Discutez

La valse des toréadors : some general remarks on the test

I remind you of two things I said: that I would reward intellectual independence; and that such a test, like an essay, is an exercise in the use of evidence.

Intellectual independence is the ability to think for oneself and to write on a subject with the authority that comes from close familiarity with the evidence. The main body of evidence is the text of the play itself; a minor part of the evidence is what I said about it in class. Without close knowledge of the text, it must be difficult to demonstrate intellectual independence. Many of your scripts showed that their writers were less familiar with the play than with my interpretation of it. Few referred to pages that I had not glanced at in class. Few were concrete in their references to the text. Many did their best to bring into their discussion ideas, such as Jean-Paul Sartre's special use of the expression *mauvaise foi*, which were of little relevance to it. The questions I set were for the most part designed to make you focus on some other aspect of the play. An essay which does little more than tell me what I told you is a wasted opportunity. By 'concrete', I mean speaking about identified parts of the text. It does not suffice to say, for instance, that the General fancies anything in skirts: at the least, such a statement should be supported by mentions of M^{me} Dupont-Fredaine (p. 87-96), *la belle caissière* (p. 75), M^{me} Tardieu (p. 120) and Amélie's reproaches about other women. Most statements about texts are interpretations of evidence; the closer the inspection, the more persuasive the argument.

Many of your scripts would have benefited from a clear definition of terms at the outset. This would have made for sharper and more analytical thinking.

For instance, in the question about *une certaine idée de la masculinité*, the word *certaine* seems to me to require a modicum of clarification. What notion of masculinity does one see in the play? Whose notion is it? Yours or mine? Well, no, it's the General's, isn't it? And how well you define the General's notion of masculinity will depend on how well you have read those parts of the play in which he displays it. Take his speech on p. 75 for example, in which he demonstrates four aspects of his conception of himself as a man: being admired by other men; being irresistible to women; being better than other men at womanizing and other noisy & violent things like swearing; and boasting about it all to other men. Any discussion of the topic of masculinity which doesn't refer to p. 75 is going to have difficulty being concrete or very pertinent. As for whether Anouilh celebrates this quality, one could refer to the fact that it has led the General to his present sterile & sordid life & to self-disgust, to the demolition of his self-image by Amélie in the last part of act IV and to the fact that it's Gaston, who's the opposite of masculine according to that definition, who finds real love & gets the girl.

As for the question about *récompense*, *punition*, *réussite* or *défaite*, did anyone think to define at the outset what the General's aims might be? If one is to judge a man's success or failure, should one not be clear about what he's trying to achieve? If his genuine aim is to leave Amélie, by the end of the play he has failed. But if, more likely, his aim is to avoid the issue and make sure he doesn't have to make a choice, then he succeeds, no? The paradox is that by succeeding in this he must fail in one of his other aims: to leave with Ghislaine (if that can be argued to be one of his aims). His punishment is already clear by the end of act IV and is reinforced by the loss of Ghislaine at the end of act V. But then he gets a reward too: Paméla the boobster and a return to the squalid little life that he found so tolerable before Ghislaine's arrival. On p. 70 he says about this former life: *On était si calmes*, which doesn't make it seem like much of a punishment to have to go back to it.

The question about *fuir sa femme* and fleeing himself, etc. A definition of terms would clarify what the figurative expression 'fleeing himself' might mean. The focus of discussion would be the General's self-awareness and sincerity with himself. Does he want to be clear about his motives? Does he want to follow his heart? Yes, no doubt, but only from time to time. Usually he doesn't want to see himself clearly; so the role of bluster, self-knowledge & self-deception would be ideas to explore. Not to mention his fear of loneliness and his *épouvante de vivre*.

The question about *l'homme public* and *l'homme privé*: again, what idea underlies these two figurative expressions? How can one define them? Ideas to clarify here are image & imposture, authenticity & identity. How do we know the General cannot convince himself he is *l'homme public*? Does he or doesn't he want to be *l'homme privé*? His speech to the Doctor on pp. 76-77 would be worth discussing in this connection. So would those where he speaks with tenderness of, and to, Ghislaine. And the end of act III, where he openly envies Gaston.

Many of you were rather simplistic & cut-and-dried about the General's motives. That is, you did not take sufficient account of the fact that what he says (e.g. *Je vous hais, madame, sacrebleu*) must be read in the light of what he does (e.g. staying rather than leaving), and that if this shows a contradiction, that may tell us something about his honesty with himself, his complicated inner life or his real aims.

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quelques termes, quelques citations, à retenir

1 *le harcèlement sexuel*

2 *le droit du seigneur* (Beaumarchais, *Le mariage de Figaro*, 1785)

3 *avoir le beurre et l'argent du beurre*

4 'To keep good and bad faith distinct costs a lot; it requires a decent sincerity and truthfulness with oneself, it demands a continuous intellectual and moral effort. How can such an effort be expected from men like Darquier?'

Primo Levi : *The Drowned and the Saved*
(*I sommersi e i salvati*, 1986)

5 « *Rappelons-nous qu'un homme n'est jamais qu'une imposture.* »

Jean-Paul Sartre : *Baudelaire* (1947)

6 « *La valse des toréadors ?* Que voilà une bonne pièce ! » (*Le Figaro*, 23 janvier 1952)

à la fois une marionnette et un personnage humain

de vieux trucs de vaudeville

un scénario de Mac [sic] Sennet [sic] ou de Feydeau

tout ce qu'il pouvait constater de désolant et d'absurde dans la condition humaine

rien n'est vraisemblable et, cependant, tout est vrai

des sentiments *vrais*, parfois tragiques, mais rendus inoffensifs et *propres au jeu de l'esprit* par la déformation caricaturale

l'esprit est foncièrement sain, la conclusion éminemment morale (le général est durement puni d'avoir été lâche devant la vie et devant l'amour), et l'on rit, d'un bout à l'autre, même et surtout aux moments où l'on devrait pleurer