



Hope vs. obstinacy: A Russian peasant tries vainly to get a passport

# 'Le Passeport' studies mindless bureaucracy

Pierre Bourgeade's one-act play *Le Passeport* is a quaint piece of French bric-a-brac, an odd blend of existentialism, absurdity and character study.

Wednesday night's performance in Playmakers Theatre, given by students in the department of Romance languages, was odd enough. For one thing, the play was performed in its original language, and for another, it was the American premiere of the work, which debuted in Paris only last winter.

*Le Passeport* takes place in Russia around the turn of the century. Nathalia Vissarinovna, a peasant woman, is about to receive a passport permitting her to go to Poland to visit her nephews. She put in the request 25 years before, and since then a strange relationship has developed between her and the customs officer, Fedor Fedorovich.

Nathalia is a simple, warm woman who does not understand Fedor's fanatic allegiance to bureaucracy. The play revolves around their interaction, particularly around Fedor and the coldness that masks his humaneness.

It is very hard to judge a play like *Le Passeport* since it is so typically French. Bourgeade develops his ideas as if they were characters, and while

he certainly is concerned with the human condition, the characters still seem secondary — a part of the *mise-en-scene*.

Judging from the intricacy with which he develops his ideas, however, Bourgeade has written an impressive play.

*Le Passeport* is a contemplation of time. A grandfather clock occupies a central place on the stage. Nathalia must wait five minutes after Fedor arrives before she can see her passport.

Bureaucracy also is a central theme. Fedor considers himself a cog in the gigantic wheel of government, a man devoted to a ridiculously petty system. After finding out that Nathalia has killed her chicken, her last remaining livestock, Fedor realizes he can no longer give her the passport since it was issued to her while she was in category D, those people who own livestock. She must now reapply for category C, those without livestock, and wait four more years.

Once Nathalia finds a louse in the folds of her dress, however, Fedor considers it livestock and grants her the passport.

There is an abundance of humor in

## Steve Carr

### Review

*Le Passeport*, and both Mari O'Brien and Bill Owen infused their interpretations with good comic control.

O'Brien played Nathalia as a mousy, sheepish woman who cannot help herself but must depend on others. Her 15-minute scene at the beginning of the play, where Nathalia walks around the stage waiting for Fedor, was a little too stylized to fit the tone of the play. In the rest of her role, however, she was as sensitive to Nathalia as Bourgeade's writing permitted.

Owen gave a good tragi-comic performance as a man who alternated between automaton and human being. Such touches as tapping a matchbox, acknowledging it as a barnyard, were refreshing. More than once, however, Owen upstaged O'Brien, which upset the balance between the two.

Karine Shoullars' direction was dependable, although O'Brien wandered

around the stage too long in the beginning. Shoullars also did not follow Bourgeade's stage directions at the end of the play, when Nathalia becomes assistant customs officer. The script instructs a spotlight to shine on Nathalia's face while everything else is left in utter darkness, but the lighting simply faded out.

Wednesday's presentation was a very good production of a difficult play. Shoullars in particular is to be commended for bringing both the play and the playwright to this country. Perhaps she will continue to be responsible for such diverse and different programming.

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### Friday

7 p.m. Off Campus IVCF social bowling at Chapel Hill Bible Church.  
9 a.m. Senior Class Marshalls must report during this time to prepare for the Homecoming Parade.  
2:30 p.m. GRE information session to be held Thursday at 7 p.m. in 208 Union.

### Saturday

9:30 p.m. Anglican Student Fellowship Saturday morning breakfast at Chapel of the Cross.

### Sunday

1 p.m. Association on International Students annual festival in Great Hall of the Union. Free admission, open until 6 p.m.  
7 p.m. BISA meeting in the Union.

### Items of Interest

LSAT late registration must be post-marked with extra fees by Thursday. Materials available at Nash Hall.  
GRE information session to be held Thursday at 7 p.m. in 208 Union.

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