The final proof that Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaevich was no leader and a man lacking vision as well was his failure to take charge of the émigré movement after the Russian Civil War. When there was widespread support for his heading the movement and people were begging him to take charge, he insisted on a declaration of unanimous support from all the various émigré factions. This was a demand impossible to fulfil, and perhaps made to ensure that he would not have to step into a leadership position. The author does not offer an opinion or analysis of this episode.

Despite its lack of analysis, this book is well worth reading for the picture it gives of the workings of the inner circle of Stavka under the command of the Grand Duke.

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The witching hour and other plays, by Nina Sadur, edited by Nadya L. Peterson, Boston, MA, Academic Studies Press, 2014, 202 pp., $27.00 (pbk), ISBN 978-1-618-11399-3

This new collection of four plays by Nina Sadur is a welcome addition to the fields of both Russian literature and theatre. It includes some of Sadur’s best-known works as well as some lesser-known plays (in translations by the editor and three other translators). The texts are framed by an introduction and afterword that contextualize them.

Play texts are notoriously problematic to translate, as the intended audiences can be quite different. Those looking at plays as literature seek translations that accurately convey the language, style, and meaning of the original. Those looking at plays with an eye to production seek the above but need an added fluency of language that “plays” well on the stage (102).

This collection of translations succeeds more as literature, which is probably as it should be. Sadur’s plays are notoriously problematic to stage and yet have had a marked influence on literature, both fiction and theatrical texts. This collection demonstrates clearly the creative gifts of Sadur and gives very able translations of the works that show her propensity for the fantastic, the grotesque, and carnaval (68). Very little attention is given in the volume to productions of these works.

The book opens with an introduction by Mark Lipovetsky titled “Nina Sadur’s Fantastic Theater”. This essay first contextualizes Sadur’s works within a broad international framework, and then it treats a selection of Sadur’s plays from the point of view of the fantastic. Lipovetsky refers to a number of plays which are not included in this collection, and one wonders to what degree the introduction directly speaks to this collection. Most, but not all, of the plays included are referenced and given dates. The first play in the collection, *Go* (1984), is not referenced in the introduction and its absence there is especially evident as it is the first of the four translations. The introductory essay then closes with a listing of authors influenced by Sadur’s writing.

The plays themselves are generally quite well translated. However, *Go* does have some awkward phrasings that seem to be definite translation issues. As a literary text this is not terribly problematic, but it would pose problems for using the text for an actual production. One of the best, most fluid translations is that of *Pechorin: In Memoriam* (1999), which is translated by Margarit T. Ordukhanyan. This play would provide...
difficulties for an actual production – especially in a culture unfamiliar with the referenced Russian novel – so it is somewhat ironic that the translation is one of the most fluid and performable in the collection. This play could be a wonderful companion piece for students reading the novel. Together, the play and novel could provide students with interesting juxtapositions of time, genre, and approaches that could illuminate both texts.

“Red Paradise”, a one-act play from 1988, is a disturbing play that mixes realia of Soviet life with fantasy and surreal imagery. The play reads as a very interesting commentary on the perestroika period before the collapse of the Soviet Union. The final piece in the collection is the full-length play *The Witching Hour* (1983). One of Sadur’s best-known works, in this translation it conveys the wonder and disquiet that Sadur’s texts instil in their audience – whether as readers or as theatrical audiences. An afterword by Karin Sarsenov gives more biographical background on Sadur and places her in the context of contemporary Russian literature.

Overall, this book is a tremendous addition to the field. Some editing inconsistencies will cause readers to jump back and forth between the texts, the introduction, and the afterword – for example, in order to discover when each text was written. This information could be much more consistently presented. Also, it would be good to know why these particular texts were chosen for this collection. While the plays receive brief attention in the introduction especially, there is no explanation as to why these texts in particular are important for understanding Sadur’s output. That said, the texts are representative and introduce readers to Sadur’s deep interests in the roles of women, family, society, literature, time, and place. In addition, Sadur’s sense of play and terror comes through well in each of the texts.

All in all, this is a very successful collection and a very useful addition to the store of translated dramatic literature of contemporary Russia.

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**The Soviet theater: a documentary history**, edited by Laurence Senelick and Sergei Ostrovsky, New Haven CT and London, Yale University Press, 2014, xxiii + 754 pp., US$125.00 (hbk), ISBN 978-0-300-19476-0

Laurence Senelick and Sergei Ostrovsky have produced an essential, welcome, and much-needed sourcebook for all scholars – young or grizzled – studying Soviet, especially Russian, theatre. In a task that has taken 20 years, Senelick and Ostrovsky have followed an extensive paper trail. Happily, they have chosen to mimic their subject and, like the Soviet government, interpreted the concept of “document” in the widest possible sense; thus, they include not only official records, decrees, and other pronouncements, but also protocols, minutes of meetings, excerpts from memoirs, diaries, letters, reviews (occasionally foreign, as well as Soviet), and criticism, in addition to the occasionally quoted passages from plays and satires. This widely cast net has brought home great riches culled from the libraries and archives of the Russian Federation, the United States, and Israel. History comes alive with a multiplicity of voices and opinions: enthusiastic, admonitory, anxious, fearful, officious, declamatory, satiric. Together, these documents are witnesses to the constantly shifting, volatile, and often dangerous, commingled terrain of art and politics in the Soviet period.