and the establishment of "living-room theater") on the other. In the 1970s Havel was forced by political circumstances to reinvent himself as a dramatist and to find a new voice. According to Rocamora, he met the challenge most successfully in the political pamphlet The Beggar's Opera and in the semi-autobiographical and self-revealing Vaněk's Cycle.

Part IV discusses the 1980s, at which time Havel’s life in the theater took place mostly in his imagination. He spent four and a half years in prison and subsequently was intensely scrutinized by the authorities. Rocamora does a fine job contextualizing and analyzing Havel’s letters to his first wife Olga, which reveal his deep philosophical mood and strong determination to turn his prison experience into a spiritual journey. The two major plays Havel wrote in the '80s, Largo Devolato and Temptation, bear the stamp of his post-prison vulnerability and intellectual obsession with the Devil, whom he sought in various ways to exorcise. Rocamora notes the continuity of the theme of human identity in Havel’s writing and the struggle for its preservation from the de-personalizing pressure of totalitarian political power.

The fifth and final part of the work stretches chronologically from 1990, when Havel assumed the role of "the reluctant president" of the new republic, to 2003, when his thirteen-year presidency ended. It is not clear from whom Rocamora borrows the term "Havelmania," but it aptly conveys the euphoric spirit of 1990, when most of Havel’s banned plays made their debut in theaters in Prague and throughout the country. The theater was the most natural place to celebrate cultural liberation and to honor the nation’s first democratically elected president. Rocamora points out the paradox of the last decade in Havel’s artistic career: he symbolically returned to the theater as his plays entered the Czech theatrical repertoire, but he physically left the theater as his demanding new role on the national and international political stage left him no time for playwriting.

In the Epilogue, Rocamora focuses on the international dimension of Havel’s theatrical career, describing not only the admiration and solidarity he enjoyed from the international writers’ community over the years, but also the moral support of such fellow playwrights as Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter, Edward Albee, and Tom Stoppard, who were inspired by Havel’s passionate commitment to freedom of thought and expression. Rocamora highlights the unprecedented dedication of three international theaters (The Public Theatre in New York City, The Burgtheater in Vienna, and the Orange Tree Theatre in London) which provided a home for Havel’s plays in the 1970s and 1980s, a time when the theaters in his own country closed their doors to him. In the last chapter, “Curtain Call,” Rocamora provides a textual analysis of Havel’s plays, discussing the recurring theme of endangered human identity, the anti-hero, the poetics of the absurd, and the author’s fascination with linguistic experimentation.

Acts of Courage was conceived as an artistic biography of Václav Havel. Although Rocamora notes in her introduction that his political and theatrical careers are closely intertwined, she succeeds in keeping the spotlight on Havel’s accomplishments as a playwright. The book’s weaknesses lie in its “sanitized” biographical narrative, which avoids discussion of controversy, and in the awe the author feels for her subject. While the temptation to hagiography is understandable, given Havel’s outsized international image, the book’s occasionally panegyric tone impedes the reader from penetrating the complexity of one of the most ambiguous and controversial public figures in recent Czech history. Despite these cavils, Acts of Courage remains a well-researched and informative biography that will be of interest to scholars and students in both Slavic and theater studies.

Svetlana Vassileva-Kargyozova, University of Kansas

The beginning of the twentieth century revived the debate in Russia on whether reality and the real object were preferable to the artistic depiction of the object. Yet the battle was now redefined into a conception of reality that extended beyond the perception of the tangible or real world. Russian writers including Andrei Bely sought to distinguish visibilitas from deisstvitatel'nost'. They proposed that the way to that “true” reality could be found in the artistic portrayal and perception of the artistic work. So, too, did abstract art, whatever that term came to encompass, seek to expand reality, to go beyond the object, to the realization in art of something aesthetically superior to common everyday existence. The results were nothing less than spectacular. A new vision of reality emerged in the works of Kandinsky, El Lissitzky, Malevich, Rodchenko, and others. The schools of modern art represented by Russians, who themselves were in the vanguard and avant-garde of these movements, included Symbolism, Futurism, and Constructivism. All came together for a brief moment in 1922 at the Erste Russische Kunstausstellung in Berlin at the Gallerie van Diemen inUnten den Linden 621 that opened on October 15, 1922. It presented some 500 works by over 150 artists including Bilibin, Chagall, Kandinsky, Kustodiev, Malevich, Benois, Varilev, Zeitlin and Tatlin. Berlin was coincidentally also home at the time to Bely, Mayakovsky, Shklovsky, and other members of the literary elite. The exhibition itself served to heighten the split in artistic positions that would be resolved only with the final victory of Socialist Realism.

The German role and influence in formulating the discussion was significant. The Russian Symbolists had embraced Wagner and Nietzsche. Russian artists had considerable intellectual ties to Germany. Kandinsky had studied in Munich, and El Lissitzky had studied in Darmstadt. Rudolf Steiner and Anthroposophy had an impact on the works of Kandinsky and Andrei Bely. Zimmermann is well equipped to engage the topic. She identifies Wilhelm Woringer as a key figure in the discussion of what constitutes Realism. She also frequently references the works of her mentor, Ange Hansen-Love, and other German-speaking scholars. Zimmermann sets out to examine the debate between Abstractionism and Realism that engaged all of the artists in Russia, and to organize it into a meaningful whole. She breaks down and then re-assembles the debate into her own collage. Her study is not so much a narrative, as it is a collection of pieces where the result is greater than the parts. With mathematical precision she identifies the major topics: the tension between Realism and Abstractionism; the object and our perception of it; the progression of color and form into the point and the line and words; from the static to the dynamic; from the painting to the poster, and the transformation of art into utilitarian tool. Chapter or Section IV, for example, deals with the “Re-Semiotisierung abstrakter Formen” and is broken down into three further sections: 1) A “Dictionary” and “Grammar” of Abstract Art; 2) The Point and the Line as the Building Blocks of All Art; and 3) The Ideogram as Utopian Universal Language. For each topic she identifies the precursors of the debate, sometimes as far back as Leone Battista Alberti’s Della pittura [On Painting, 1435]. Then she moves confidently through the nineteenth century to arrive at the twentieth. Here she identifies and meticulously organizes the theoretical writings of poets and novelists from Bely to Mayakovsky, artists from Kandinsky to Rodchenko, critics from Elkinenbaum to Shklovsky, the filmmakers Eisenstein and Vertov, the philosophers Berdiaev and Florensky, and a multitude of others who contributed to the movements to make art relevant and vital. This approach highlights the author’s intent to describe the “discourse” in which the lines between the arts disappeared. Creative artists, be they writers, painters, filmmakers, or photographers, not only created, they also described in words their efforts and their convictions. Painters declaimed the superiority of their own point of view as loudly as poets.

This is an encyclopedic work that makes great demands on the reader. Zimmermann is at home with an immense library of writings and possesses a visual memory of scores of works of pictorial art. Her clear organization guides us through the cacophony of competing voices on
complex concepts. She reduces and simplifies, making the reader into a spectator of the progression of art and literature from roughly 1910 to 1930. The sense of the abstract that in Russia was strongly connected to “objectlessness” [bezpredmetnost’] was largely a visual phenomenon.

The fifty-six miniature black-on-white illustrations help us to appreciate Rodchenko’s “Construction no. 126 (Lime),” but they cannot do justice to Kandinsky’s “Black Spot” and we do not see Rodchenko’s “Pure Red Color, Pure Blue Color, Pure Yellow Color.” The reader would be well advised to have electronic access to the dozens of works of art discussed, to match the author’s own visual memory. Nonetheless this is impressive scholarship that carefully traces the major themes that wove their way through modern art as it increasingly moved from painting to posters to the objects themselves.

The circular motion of moving from reality to the reality as portrayed in an object returned to the reapparance of the object itself and to Socialist Realism. In a final chapter Zimmermann sums up how the traditional genres of painting, landscape, still life, and portrait evolved from nineteenth-century Realism through twentieth-century Abstractionism into their new incarnations in Soviet times. This is an engaging, wide-ranging study that demonstrates both breadth and depth of scholarship. Many of the extended quotations in the German text are accompanied by the original Russian in footnotes. The fifty-two-page bibliography is a comprehensive guide to those who wish to explore the topic further. This reader missed an index that could help return to specific authors or works mentioned in the text. Zimmermann has made one of the first major twenty-first-century contributions to our understanding and appreciation of this exceptional page of Russian art and literature in the history of Western culture.

Thomas R. Beyer, Jr., Middlebury College


This book documents Anton Rubinstein’s international career as a virtuoso concert pianist, composer, and educator. Taylor relies on published Russian-language sources to dictate his narrative. Readers familiar with those sources may be underwhelmed by the book, which would have required additional primary source research (especially in St. Petersburg) to fill in chronological gaps. This is not to say that it is unsubstantial. In an effort to comprehend and contextualize Rubinstein’s activities, Taylor has gathered together hundreds of letters, official papers, reviews, and reminiscences. If Rubinstein remains a baffling figure, at least now there is a proper account of his paramount achievement—the establishment of the St. Petersburg Conservatory in 1862.

Taylor portrays Rubinstein as exceedingly unpredictable, suffering periods of self-confident hardheadedness and bouts of self-doubting melancholia. He often felt stuck but lived a life in motion; he pursued a sprawling, turbulent schedule of engagements throughout Europe and, for two years, North America. Taylor’s account is enriched by generous quotations from Rubinstein’s letters to family members, which attest to feelings of alienation that stemmed from his merchant-class, Jewish upbringing (his family converted to Catholicism when he was four) and his efforts to make a name for himself as a composer when no such profession existed in Russia. The central biographical events—compositional study with Siegfried Dehn in Berlin in 1845, rejection by Liszt in 1846, being embraced by Grand Duchess Yelena Pavlovna in the 1850s, the development of the Conservatory curriculum, infighting that compelled Rubinstein to twice resign from the institution (in 1867 and 1891), and the historical concerts that he conceived in 1885 as a swansong to the musical common practice—are narrated in exhaustive, at times exhausting, detail.

Amid these events, Taylor offers brief summaries of Rubinstein’s chamber, orchestral, and
theatrical works. Describing the operas was doubtless the greatest challenge, for here Taylo
was confronted with a perplexing array: a historical pageant about the defeat of the Mongol
Golden Horde in 1380; a setting of Thomas Moore’s “Oriental Romance” Lalla Rookh; a hodge-
podge of eroticist and exotist parables covering a third of the globe and a quarter of human
history; several Biblical settings (conceived by Rubinstein as an alternative to Wagner’s music
dramas); a successful throwback to eighteenth-century opera seria (Die Macabéer); an unsuc-
cessful grand opera (Néron); and, at the twilight of his career, half a dozen flops. The motiva-
tions behind the choice of subjects are not addressed by Taylor, nor are Rubinstein’s stylistic
adjustments. The reader is instead offered plot outlines and cast lists—the latter a useful addition
to the historical record, but no substitute for actual engagement with the scores. One Rubinstein
opera maintains a toehold in the repertoire, The Demon, thanks to its emphasis on the psycho-
logical rather than the supernatural. The rich source poem, by Mikhail Lermontov, was kept
from publication by imperial officials; Rubinstein’s opera also faced resistance, but Taylor
leaves the reader unsure of its specific nature or how Rubinstein prevailed. Apparently the com-
poser “had not counted on the objections that would be raised by the religious censor” upon sub-
mission of the opera to the Imperial Directorate in 1871. Yet he learned in late December 1874
“that rehearsals of The Demon had begun at the Mariinsky Theater and that the opera would be
given between 10 and 15 January 1875” (159). The leap from prohibition to production goes
unexplained.

The eventual success of the opera confounded Rubinstein’s antagonists, whose scurrilous,
sometimes anti-Semitic sobriquets continue to color his posthumous reputation. The protracted
quarrels concerning the founding and governance of the St. Petersburg Conservatory made Rub-
instein, a champion of German musical traditions, the target of withering critique from the
Russian nationalist critic Vladimir Stasov and the composers he influenced. Taylor even-hand-
edly narrates the tug-of-war between the factions, leaving the reader with the impression that
Rubinstein was as much a victim of his own intolerances and prejudices as those of others. The
stiffness of his aesthetic posture is manifest in his dealings with Chaikovsky, the first graduate
from the Conservatory to achieve greatness. Rubinstein mocked Chaikovsky’s original ap-
proach to orchestration, specifically the “heretical” combination of instruments found in his
Storm Overture (111); he subsequently discounted Chaikovsky’s First Symphony and Ode to
Joy cantata for their unusual approach to form. Chaikovsky resented the criticism but did not
exact revenge. He was fair-minded when reviewing Rubinstein’s works, as Taylor’s quotations
attest, and even conducted a thrilling performance of Rubinstein’s massive Tower of Babel or-
atorio in 1889, in honor of Rubinstein’s sixtieth birthday.

Rubinstein emerges as something of a chaotic disaster, especially when contrasted with his
brother Nikolai, whose administrative accomplishments were no less impressive—he founded
the Moscow Conservatory in 1866—but whose disposition was gentler, tempered by drink.
Nikolai died in Paris at the age of 45 of liver disease; Anton attended the funeral in Moscow but
showed no emotion, prompting Chaikovsky to observe in horror that “not only is he not crushed
by his brother’s death but is apparently very pleased about it” (178). With respect to Anton’s
death, Taylor is exceedingly brief, omitting even its cause (heart disease). He chooses instead
to emphasize the esteem with which Rubinstein was regarded throughout Europe in the last
years of his life and encourage a reevaluation of his works. Yet the book does little to merit such
a reevaluation: Rubinstein was a much more diverse composer than the stereotypes attest, but
he seems destined to be remembered as a performer. He did not want to escape the shadow of
Beethoven, stubbornly repeating the tried and true over the innovations that his inherent con-
servatism resisted. A letter to his sister Sofiya, quoted by Taylor (235), finds Rubinstein tiring
even of himself. “Today I conduct an opera here, tomorrow it’s a symphony there, and then I
give a charity concert in some other place. . . . That is my life in total. I am bored to death.”

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