role of art and spirituality in Pasternak's life is the object of Mikhail Polivanov's essay. Elena Pasternak presents biographical comments on the images of women in Doctor Zhivago. And Ulrich Steltner points to the ideological significance of Pasternak's poem "The Nobel Prize" as "non-art" when it is placed next to his earlier poem "February." The liveliest among these contributions is Hans-Bernd Harder's short essay, "Pasternak oder Majakovskij? Wege der russischen Literatur," in which he links Pasternak to the German and French tradition of Enlightenment, and points out that Pasternak, unlike Maiakovskii, never broke with this tradition but rather developed it creatively.

In all, as is often the case with conference proceedings, the collection represents a rather heterogeneous mixture of topics and approaches and thus has little internal coherence. It does, however, complement Pasternak scholarship with detail and a number of valuable new insights. While some articles are unsatisfactory because of their predominantly descriptive character, and the absence of scholarly references from others is annoying, the volume as a whole is worth consulting for the Pasternak specialist although he or she - depending on the specific inquiry - may well find interesting and valuable only a few of the contributions the volume contains.

Larissa Rudova


Bella Akhmadulina first achieved fame as one of the "New Wave" poets from Moscow during the years known as the Thaw - a period when, following the death of Stalin in 1953, post-revolutionary Russian literature enjoyed a brief respite from the programmatic constraints of Socialist Realism. The poetry of the New Wave was not read so much as it was declaimed and sung to capacity crowds in concert halls and stadiums across the Soviet Union. Akhmadulina and other such poets as Evgenii Evtushenko (to whom she was briefly married), Bulat Okudzhava, and Andrei Voznesenskii satisfied a yearning among verse-loving audiences of the time for "bold new voices untainted by the lies of the past." More recently, as Ketchian notes in the book's introduction, it was Akhmadulina's role as a contributor to Metropol, the 1979 literary almanac featuring the prose of largely dissident writers, that precipitated a virtual ban on her works until 1983. Since then she has published four collections of verse, nearly half of her entire oeuvre.

What distinguishes Akhmadulina is an intense appreciation for and exploration of the creative process, a topic that absorbs the poet to an increasingly large measure in her ten collections of verse. While Ketchian incorporates readings of poems from many of these volumes in her monograph, she dedicates the greater part of it to the lyrics found in The Secret. New Poems (Taina. Novye stikhi, 1983). Indeed, in six of the nine chapters that make up The Poetic Craft of Bella Akhmadulina (apart from its introduction and conclusion) Ketchian weaves her way through an exhaustive analysis of the key ideas, tropes, figures, and allusions imbedded in The Secret. The modus operandi of Ketchian's approach is the close reading, a method that displays Akhmadulina's poems to their best effect in some instances, but can work against them in others.
The technique of close textual analysis serves Ketchian well in chapters 2 and 3, entitled, respectively, "The Poetry of the Early Years" and "The Key to the Secret." In "The Poetry of the Early Years" Ketchian discloses how Akhmadulina’s “creative powers need certain preconditions to function – summer fluidity and development, as well as color and autumn rain with chills, to gather and to assimilate impressions and emotions." Akhmadulina's requisites for lyric production include a snowbound house, solitude, a white notebook, night, a candle, and a singing cricket, as well as the right mood or frame of mind. In the third chapter, "The Key to the Secret," in which Ketchian discusses "I know the secret of wondrous blooming," the lyric that inaugurates The Secret, she shows how Akhmadulina uses the image of a blossoming flower to depict the making of a lyric, disclosing the link between the poet's application of various terms to signify the same flower and the Mandel'shtamian comparison of the creative act to the process of a bee drawing nectar from a blossom: "The flowers in nature with their sweet nectar mingle with the written poetic line: 'where the word is or where the floret is.' The names, i.e., the words of the flowers, contain nectar to which the verse, like a bee, can apply itself." Ketchian concludes in these two early chapters of The Poetic Craft that a deep understanding of nature lies at the heart of Akhmadulina's metapoetic lyricism – specifically, how the seasons play a critical role in providing the poet with inspiration, and how Akhmadulina recognizes the influence of previous poets (such as Tsvetaeva, Mandel'shtam, Pasternak, and Pushkin) in her reworking of the traditional parallels between poet and bee, honey and poetry (as Ketchian orders the pairs).

The method of reading closely and unhurriedly befits many of the verses in The Secret, because Akhmadulina is herself thematizing the progression and development of poetry, the hows and whys that enter into a poet's creative output. A close, deliberate analysis digs through a text, mining it for meaning line by line or stanza by stanza. Close textual readings do not make points or support theses, as in an argument-driven analysis, so much as they reveal or suggest, often with a comprehensive, largely indiscriminate regard to detail. Such is the problem at times with The Poetic Craft of Bella Akhmadulina. Ketchian’s close analysis falls short when she elects to focus on a single image – such as the moon – and examine it from myriad angles, giving the reader the technical details of its literary function, but failing to show why the image or idea holds a central place in Akhmadulina's verse. Almost incessantly she steeps her explication of Akhmadulina in symbolism, representation, and parallelism – how the moon or day or space stands for something metapoetic – but refrains from moving beyond such linkages in a way that would help the reader see why indeed Akhmadulina writes almost exclusively about the act of writing. What do metapoetic themes accomplish for Akhmadulina that other topics do not? Does her position as a woman writing about poetry, a thematic tradition that extends down from Akhmatova and Tsvetaeva (whom Ketchian mentions often), play into her intense, almost obsessive, focus on the subject of writing lyric? Admittedly, these kinds of questions concern the poet's role more than the place of the persona or speaker in the lyrics under scrutiny, but as poetry about itself, metapoetic verse by definition implies a contemplation of the self – the poet's self. In producing poems about poetry, Akhmadulina implicitly explores the relation of the self to the text and the creative act, and Ketchian should as well in her interpretation of the poet.

Despite the foregoing reservations, The Poetic Craft of Bella Akhmadulina capably introduces Anglophone readers to the work of one of Russia's more interesting poets. As the only