

Title: Mantovani's *Akhmatova*: Libretto and Intertexts
Author: Sarah Krive, University of North Carolina-Greensboro

In April 2011 a new opera on the life of Anna Akhmatova premiered at the Opéra National de Paris. Composed by the young French composer Bruno Mantovani, with a libretto by Christophe Ghrissi, the opera, titled *Akhmatova*, highlights three episodes from Akhmatova's life: the Stalinist 1930s, the war years, and the years of her postwar rehabilitation. In a New York Times review of April 5, 2011, "A Tortured Poet's Twisted World," George Loomis laments the fact that the opera evokes the young beautiful Akhmatova only as Modigliani's drawing, and in disservice to the poet's art, offers "a glimpse of poems written during the Terror and war years [only] when she reads excerpts to her friend Lydia Chukovskaya." Loomis concludes his review of the performance by noting that the last scene of the opera is "especially frustrating" in that Akhmatova "simply utters a few cryptic remarks about the sea."

The libretto does in fact make richer use of Akhmatova's poetry than the single scene noted by Loomis. My goal in this paper presentation will not be to laboriously enumerate each instance, however, but rather to use this allusive device to show how the libretto, and the opera as a whole, offers a more complicated and ambiguous view of Akhmatova than previous appropriations, which, as I have discussed elsewhere, typically choose one pole of interpretation, in which Akhmatova is either roundly vilified or held up as a near martyr. By putting the vilification in the mouth of the poet's only son, the libretto forces audience members to reconcile their desire for "pure poetry" with the messy business of living, and reinvigorates use of Akhmatova as an "affective icon" for 21st-century audiences.

sakrive@uncg.edu