

Prophet and Persona: Lermontov's Use of the Prophetic Image

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This paper is an attempt to understand the image of the poet-prophet developed by Mikhail Lermontov over the course of his poetic career. Any such attempt must first contend with the difficult problem of determining the limits of the prophetic. The “prophetic mode”, as Ian Balfour calls it, can encompass a vast range of rhetorical styles linked together only by their “claims of divine inspiration [...] obscure figuration and an unpredictable temporality.”¹ While a number of Lermontov's poems are, overtly or at least arguably, written in the prophetic mode, this paper will focus on the poet-prophet as a persona in Lermontov's poetry and how he employs this image as part of his Romantic project of cultivating the individual. It will be my contention that Lermontov uses the poet-prophet persona to explore a complex relationship with the crowd that challenges the limits of internal expression. However, determining the attributes which define the image of the poet-prophet is no easier than describing the prophetic mode, and our first task will be to understand the poetic tradition from which Lermontov inherits the image of the poet-prophet.

The poet-prophet, as a robustly defined image, emerges in Russian poetry only in the early nineteenth century, in the poetic project of the Decembrists. However, while the romantic image of the poet-prophet cultivated by Byron (and derived from an equally complicated history of the prophetic mode in English poetry) greatly influenced these poets, they had also inherited from their own tradition a view of poetic speech, dating from the early eighteenth century, as

¹ Balfour, Ian. *The Rhetoric of Romantic Prophecy*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002, p. 1.

intrinsically related to the prophetic utterance. Iurii Lotman has argued that as poetry took the place of sacred texts in Russia it retained the authority of sacred word. “Truthfulness was perceived not as an optional trait of artistic language, but as an inalienable quality of poetry: anything untrue was not poetry.”² Perhaps even more important for the development of the prophetic mode in Russian poetry were the similarities between psalms and odes noted by Trediakovskii in his “Discourse on the Ode in General.”³ Recently, James von Geldern has observed this link as a correspondence between the “performative frames” underlying each genre. Similarities between the psalms and ceremonial odes, he argues, can be in part explained by mutual correspondence to a “ceremonial frame,” which organizes “hierarchical distinctions between speaker, audience, and subject.”⁴

No doubt these similarities account for the intense interest in the psalms among poets of the 18th century, a number of which, including Derzhavin, Lomonosov, and Trediakovskii, translated the Psalms or used psalmodic motifs frequently in their poetry. It may be that, in studying the psalms, these poets were attempting to find an appropriate lyric subject by which to address power. It stands to reason that the identity of any one element of the stratified triad organized by the ceremonial frame should delimit or prescribe possible identities for those inhabiting the other two roles. Moreover, such a relationship of prescription would be particularly strong between subject and speaker. Thus the long history, rooted in the medieval writings of Metropolitan Illarion, of relating Russian history and the mission of Rus to the writings of the biblical prophets and of legitimating Russian rule through recourse to the sacred,

² Lotman "Ocherki po istorii russkoi kul'tury" 89. Tran. from Ram, Harsha. *The Imperial Sublime: A Russian Poetics of Empire*. Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2003.

³ Davidson, Pamela. "Between Derzhavin and Pushkin: The Development of the Image of the Poet as Prophet in the Verse of Zhukovsky, Glinka, and Kiukhelbeker." P. 182-214. In *Poetics, Self, Place: Essays in Honor of Anna Lisa Crone*. Ed. Boudreau, Nicole, et.al. Indiana: Slavica Publishers, 2007.

⁴ Geldern, James von. "The Ode as a Performative Genre." *Slavic Review* 4 (winter 1991): 934.

might help explain the origins of the poet-prophet topos in Russia. If the ode structured the relationship of poet to ruler in parallel to the hierarchy maintained between God and the poet in the psalms, then a divinely appointed ruler demanded to be addressed by no less than a divinely appointed poet. By structuring their own identity according to biblical topos, Russian rule gave all to more reason to poet to adopt for themselves the role of King David, prophet and poet of the psalms.

King David, being a king, also served as the perfect emblem for exalted position gained by the poet through the persona of the prophet. Deriving his power from an alternate hierarchy than that of imperial rule, the poet-prophet, as mouthpiece and recipient of God's divine message, could address the ruler from a more privileged position than that of a mere subject. The way in which the poet-prophet persona began to lay the groundwork for the conflict between poet and ruler, which would define the Decembrists' poetic project, is already evident in the poets of the 18th century. Lomonosov makes explicit reference to God speaking to rulers through a prophet in an ode of 1757.⁵ Zhukovsky completed a translation of L. de Fontan's poem "Bibliia" in 1814, which stressed the role of prophets in shaping Jewish history. Derzhavin's ode "Na vozvrashchenie grafa Zhubova iz Persii" talks about prophesying while at the same time introducing to the image of the poet-prophet the destabilizing locus of the orient, which "functioned as a coded form of political opposition."⁶ Harsha Ram's observations about certain topos embedded in a symbolic topography, involving the martyrdom of the prophet's body, paralysis and the oriental desert, suggest that an even more radical vision of the poet-prophet as dissenter was being cultivated in Derzhavin.⁷ These symbols, as part of the poet-prophet image,

⁵ Ram, 79.

⁶ Ram, 32.

⁷ Ram, 171-2.

will have a long reaching effect on Russian poetry; Ram traces the development of this topography from Derzhavin's "Na vziatie Izmaila" (1790 or 1791) through Kiukhelbeker's "Prorochestvo" to Pushkin's *Kavkazskii plennik* (1822), "Podrazhaniia Koranu" (Imitations of the Koran, 1824) and "Prorok" (1826) and finally to Lermontov's "Son" (The Dream, 1841). These are important observations in that they reveal these topoi as integral to the poet-prophet image in Russia and in that they allow us to consider many poems that deal with this topography, although without explicitly mentioning prophets, as part of the poet-prophet tradition.

In this nascent development of the poet-prophet image, we see the beginnings of the challenge to authority provided by the role of the poet-prophet, which will largely determine the image as it is taken up by the Decembrists. In part, the Decembrists were interested in the use of biblical citations as a way to veil dissent and foil the censors, but the Decembrists also cultivated the image of the poet-prophet as a figure of authority in opposition to the imperial rule.⁸ As Ram has noted in his own treatment of the subject, "the sublime confrontation between ruler and subject remained the context in which the prophetic sublime was to evolve in Russian romantic poetry."⁹

Of the Decembrists, Fedor Glinka and Vilgelm Kiukhelbeker were undoubtedly the most important in developing the image the poet-prophet. Glinka translated the psalms and wrote several poems that outline the prophet's moral imperative to go before the people as a result of his divine election. His frequent rhyming of *prorok* (prophet) with *porok* (vice), in poems such as "Prizvania Isaii" (The Calling of Isaiah, 1822), "Iliia-Bogu" (Elijah to God), "Bog-Illie" (God to Elijah) and "Otvét Prorokov" (Answer of the Prophets), suggests that the role of the prophet, for

⁸ See Orlov's introduction in VI. Orlov, comp., *Dekabristy: Antologiiia v dvukh tomakh*, 2 vol. (Leningrad: Khudozhestvennaia literature, 1975), 1:20.

⁹ Ram, 117.

Glinka, was first and foremost related to his perception of vice.¹⁰ Lermontov will use the same rhyme in his poem “Prorok” (The Prophet, 1841), which also includes themes common to Glinka’s work, such as the crowd’s wilful and violent rejection of the prophet, suggesting Lermontov’s poem is as much directly related to the Decembrist’s vision of the prophet as it is a response to Pushkin’s “Prorok” (The Prophet, 1826).

Even more than Glinka’s, however, Kiukhelbeker’s poetic project sought to map the prophetic tradition onto poetic utterance as a list of his more striking poet-prophet works will demonstrate. “Poety” (The Poets, 1820) overtly attempts to construct a tradition of the writer as prophet, providing a list of poet-prophets whose prophetic powers were demonstrated through their revelation of destinies that were concealed from the crowd. The poem goes on to assert that the writers of “holy Rus” inherited this tradition, suggesting the continuation of the poet-prophet line in Russia. “Prorochestvo” (The Prophecy, 1822), a prophetic message in support of the Greek cause, begins with God’s invective to his prophet-poet, much in keeping with the rhetoric of prophetic election in the Bible. “Proklatie” (The Curse, 1822) describes the holy, frenzied poet-prophet. “Uchast’ poetov” (The Poets’ Fate, 1823) shows poet-prophets suffering in their experiences of madness, exile and isolation. “Zhrebii poeta” (The Poet’s Lot, 1823-24) laments the fate of the poet-prophet who sacrifices himself to become a vessel of God. “David” (1829) addresses prophetic power of language.

Several other of Kiukhelbeker’s works continue in the same line as “Poety,” elevating individual Russian poets, posthumously, to the status of prophets. These poems, including “Derzhavin” (1822), “Smert’ Bairaona” (The Death of Byron, 1824) and “Ten’ Ryleeva” (The Shade of Ryleev, 1827), in which the deceased poets are figured as shade who return to impart their prophetic visions, work to establish death as a rite of passage by which the poet reaches a

¹⁰ The latter three poems were all written after 1825.

more exalted level of prophetic vision. By figuring the poet-prophet as a shade, these poems foreground the temporal problem inherent in prophesy. As Pamela Davidson notes, “his late poem “Tri teni” (Three Shades, 1840), addressed to Gridoedov, Delvig, and Pushkin, marked the completion of this gradual process of transformation of the original sacred union of fellow poet-prophets into a company of shades, suspended outside time, linked only by memories of the past and visions of the future.”¹¹ Oriented toward the future through reference to the past, prophesy is uncomfortably situated in the present.

More immediately, Kiukhelbeker’s poems taken as a whole foreground sacrificial death as an essential element of the poet-prophet image. This martyrdom, linked to Christ’s own, is powerfully symbolized in the “bloody crown” (*krovavyi venets*), which appears in poems such as “Uchast’ poetov” and “Smert’ Bairona.” In taking up this image, Lermontov will emphasize the latent connection between poetic laurels, “the crown of the bard” (*venets pevsta*), and the martyr’s crown, “the crown of thorns” (*venets ternovyi*), suggested in Kiukhelbeker’s use.¹² By tracing Lermontov’s image of the poet-prophet back to Kiukhelbeker, we also find an inherent link between another of Lermontov’s favorite images, that of the poet-warrior, and the poet-prophet. This link is suggested by Kiukhelbeker in “David” (1829) and “Geroi i Pevets” (Hero and Bard, 1829), in which he extols King David for wearing the dual wreath of “warrior” and “poet.” Thus, we find that the dual images of poet-prophet and poet-warrior, developed together in Lermontov, in fact are part of the same image, rooted in the persona of King David.

The final link in the Russian tradition of poet-prophet before it reaches Lermontov is Pushkin. While Pushkin was largely frustrated by Kiukhelbeker’s topos of the prophet and his cultivation of the biblical style, Pushkin himself takes up the theme of the biblical prophet in

¹¹ Davidson, 210.

¹² From, “He smeisia nad moei prorocheskoi toskoiu” (1837)

“Prorok” (The Prophet, 1826), which takes much of its language and imagery from the Book of Isaiah. Ram has argued that the poem, “arguably Pushkin’s most exquisite exercise in the “lofty style,” [...] renders homage to the poetics- if not the politics- of the Decembrist sublime, at a time when the poet’s sympathy for the defeated conspirators would have most certainly overshadowed the literary reservations he had previously entertained.”¹³ Most striking, for our current purposes, is the prophet’s silence in the poem. The poem narrates the encounter between the lyric subject and cherubim, detailing a series of purifying, if horrible, bodily torments, which the lyric subject undergoes, and the resultant visions he receives, also terrible in their dizzying scope. The poem ends with the voice of God naming the lyric subject prophet and providing him with his mission. A look at the source in Isaiah reveals that both the violence of the encounter and the muteness of the prophet have been exaggerated, for Isaiah asks several questions, first of the angels who visit him, and then of God himself.¹⁴ Thus, Pushkin’s poem represents an important development of a topos of silence, in particular as related to the ravaged body of the prophet, highlighting his position as an empty vessel, which will grow in Lermontov’s own development of the theme.

Very early on in his career, Lermontov experimented with the prophetic mode as a method of political critique. The first four lines of his poem “Predskazania” (The Prophecy, 1830) are sufficient to demonstrate the prophetic tone of the poem:

Настанет год, России черный год,
Когда царей корона упадет;
Забудет чернь к ним прежнюю любовь,
И пища многих будет смерть и кровь,¹⁵

¹³ Ram, 164.

¹⁴ Isaiah 6:1-12.

¹⁵ Lermontov, M. Iu. *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v chetyrekh tomakh*. 4 vols. Moscow-Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo Xudozhestvennoi Literatura, 1948. Vol. 1, p. 167.

However, “Predskazania” is a rare example both in that it is entirely composed in direct prophetic speech and in its overt political message. For most of his career, and particularly in his later works, Lermontov cultivates the image of the poet-prophet instead, casting it as one aspect of his developing lyric persona.¹⁶ As I have already intimated, Lermontov’s image of the poet-prophet was greatly influenced by those of the Russian poets before him. The late poems “Poet” (The Poet, 1838), “Zhurnal’ist, Chitatel’, i Pisatel’” (Journalist, Reader and Writer, 1840), and “Prorok” (The Prophet, 1841) relate an image of the poet-prophet that is clearly inherited from Glinka and Kiukhelbeker, a poet-prophet who intuits the vice of people and is already bound up with image of the warrior, and also, importantly, of a martyr.

Elements of prophetic rhetoric in the vein of “Predskazania,” are still found in Lermontov’s later poems however. A powerful example can be found in the final lines of “Smert’ Poeta” (The Death of a Poet, 1837). Yet another example can be found in poem of 1839, “Na buinom pirshestve zadumchiv on sidel” (At the raucous feast he sat thoughtful), in which the lyric subject describes a man who sits apart from himself and their friends at a party and whose words “sounded prophetically” (*prorocheski zvuchali*).¹⁷ He foresees an axe that hangs over everyone’s head but that he alone perceives. Stressing the prophet’s separation from the crowd of revelers, in the last line the prophet’s declaration of the uniqueness of his vision ends dramatically with the first person pronoun “ya”, tellingly rhymed with “druz’ia” (friends):

Он говорил: ликуйте, о друзья!
Что вам судьбы дряхлеющего мира?...
Над вашей головой колеблется секира,
Но что ж!... из вас один ее увижу я¹⁸

¹⁶ For a reading of Lermontov’s poet-prophet as a politicized topos, see Ram.

¹⁷ This poem is based off the poem “La prophétie de Casotte” by Jean-Francoise de la Harpe, see *PSS*, vol 1, p. 349.

¹⁸ *PSS*, Vol 1, p. 43.

The poem harks back to Kiukhelbeker's poetic encounters with prophetic shades in that Lermontov here enacts a hierarchy of prophetic vision. The prophet alone is privileged to prophetic vision, but the lyric subject retains for himself a privileged understanding of the world, in which he can recognize the prophet and be receptive to his vision, whereas the crowd remains in unseeing ignorance. The ambiguous phrase "prophetically sounded" coupled with the past tense of the poem potentially complicates this reading however, permitting another interpretation; we might surmise that the prophesied event has occurred before the lyric subject tells the story, and thus that the lyric subject's knowing gaze is in fact a backwards one. It is important that both interpretations are possible; the ambiguity of lyric subject's temporal relationship to the prophetic event is bound up both with the identity of the prophet and with the lyric subject's own identity as quasi-prophetic, but it cannot be determined.

Another striking example of the temporal dimension of prophesy expressed in Lermontov's lyrics is the poem К **** ("Kogda tvoi drug s prorocheskoi toskoieu") (When your friend with prophetic anguish," 1830) and its reworking of 1837 "Ne smeisia nad moei prorocheskoi toskoieu" (Don't laugh at my prophetic anguish). These poems, in which the lyric subject predicts his own death, are temporally divided between a narration of the past in which the poet-prophet "knew" (*znal*) what would come to pass and the prophesy itself, or further prophesying, figured in the future tense and in prophetic rhetoric that recalls the tone of "Predskazania." The disjunction of these temporal frames creates a curious lacuna, which is the present of the poem. The problem is all the more striking in that the prediction of death is about the poet-prophet himself. The prophesy, on the lips of the doomed prophet, seems capable of existing only in an atemporal present, relating past and future from a position outside of time.

That the two poems, given that they both describe a public, and perhaps political, confrontation between poet-prophet and society, take place in the intimate space between lovers suggests that this space is figured as a liminal, in keeping with the liminal temporality of the poem. The figure of soon-to-be dead heart, in which the intimate image of the beloved *was* protected, which concludes К **** ("Kogda tvoi drug s prorocheskoi toskoju") captures both the temporal and spatial estrangement that dominates the poem:

И лишь волна полночная простонет
Над сердцем, где хранился образ твой!¹⁹

Clearly, these are developments that lead the image of the poet-prophet away from the Decembrists model, which was firmly rooted in the public sphere. It is worth noting that the intimate register used in these poems may be inherited directly from Byron who has his poet-prophets in "The Lament of Tasso" (1817) and "The Prophecy of Dante" (1819-20) address their respective beloveds.

However, the change is specific to Lermontov's poetic project as well. As David Powelstock notes, prophesy with Lermontov increasingly becomes a trope used to describe the poet's revelation of his own subjectivity, and in this way Lermontov draws the poet-prophet into the realm of the intimate.²⁰ However, the temporal and spatial aspects described above are not sufficiently explained by an inward turn alone. Leaving aside this issue of temporality for the moment, let us first attend to another aspect of change in Lermontov's development of the poet-prophet image, the poet-prophet's relationship to the crowd.

¹⁹ PSS, Vol. 1, p. 188.

²⁰ Powelstock, David. *Becoming Mikhail Lermontov: The Ironies of Romantic Individualism in Nicholas I's Russia*. Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2005.

A volatile relationship between prophet and crowd was, of course, already part of the poet-prophet tradition. In Glinka's "Iliia-Bogu", we see the prophet complain to God about the abuses of the crowd:

Мы ждем и не дождемся сроков
Сей бедственной с нечестьем при:
Твоих зарезали пороков,
Твои разбили алтари!!²¹

Likewise, the antinomy of the poet, full of inspiration, set against an empty and unreceptive crowd was a well-developed trope in Romantic poetry by Lermontov's time. However, the conflict between prophet and crowd becomes increasingly dramatized in Lermontov, drawing together both of these developed themes. Moreover, increasingly the psalmodic hierarchy of power that defined the early prophetic image seems to collapse in Lermontov, leaving only the uncomfortable dyad of poet and audience, who seem eager to force the poet into the role of the martyr, and both of which are vying for power. In "Smert' Poeta" (The Death of the Poet, 1837) Lermontov indicts the crowd in the death of the Pushkin, an event which is figured as an exchange of crowns, Pushkin's wreath for a crown of thorns deceptively wound in laurel given to him by the crowd:

И прежний сняв венки- они венец терновый,
Увитый лаврами, надели на него:
Но иглы тайные сурово
Язвили славное чело,²²

Likewise, in "Ne smeisia nad moei prorocheskoi toskoiu" the crowd's fatal abuse of the poet is imagined through the metonymy of a trampled crown that is both that of the bard and the martyr:

Пускай толпа растопчет мой венец:
Венец певца, венец терновый!²³

²¹ Orlov, *Dekabristy: Antologija*, 1: 79-80

²² PSS, vol. 1, p. 17.

The dual-crown, laurel and thorns, suggests, in “Smert’ Poeta,” the deceit of the crowd, but it’s reappearance in “Ne smeisia nad moei prorocheskoi toskoiu”, which was written in the same year and likely in the wake of consequences Lermontov faced for writing “Smert’ Poeta,” complicates the image. Here the dual-crown is a metonym for the poet-prophet and it is not given, but trampled by the crowd. Eikhenbaum suggests that Lermontov compiled his verses affectively, such that the reader might absorb the sense of “bard”, “martyr” and “trampled by crowd” as aspects attached to the lyric subject, without concern for the operative syntax. However, these two levels of meaning, Eikhenbaum suggests, also allow for two levels of engagement with the poem.²⁴ The poem may simply group trademarks of the Romantic individual around the image of the poet-prophet, however if we read more carefully, the unexpected trampling of the martyr’s crown by the crowd suggests that their abuse is about the silencing the lyric subject completely, that is, disfiguring even the image of the martyr which metonymically defines him. If we read the poem in conjunction with “Smert’ Poeta”, in which the dual-crown is given by the crowd, then the problem becomes still more complex.

The most sophisticated exploration of the poet-prophet’s relationship to the crowd can be found in one of Lermontov’s last poems, “Prorok”, which is modeled as a response to Pushkin’s poem of the same name. Ostensibly beginning sometime after Pushkin’s poem breaks off, Lermontov’s “Prorok” imagines the prophet as an outcast from society, reviled for his revelation of the crowd’s vices. Despite the disparities of content, the narrative form of the two poems are strikingly similar. A good portion of Pushkin’s poem describes the violent acts worked on the prophet’s body in the desert by cherubim, which are performed as acts of ritual purification.

²³ PSS, vol. 1, p. 27.

²⁴ Eikhenbaum, B., *Melodika: Russkogo liricheskogo stikha*. (Petersburg: Opoiiaz, 1922) Pp. 90-118., also *Stat’i o Lermontove*. Moscow: Izdatel’stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1961

Lermontov's poem, describes the violence that is done to him by the crowd, which drives him into the desert. While the acts of violence in Lermontov's poem may at first seem mundane, the parallel with Pushkin's poem seems to suggest a more important meaning, i.e. that they are part of the set of conditions of the prophet's identity and prepare the vessel of his body to hold the contents of prophesy. Likewise, Pushkin's poem ends with the reported speech of God naming the prophet and delivering his mission. Lermontov's poem ends with the reported speech of an old man in the city, describing the prophet in derogatory terms to a child.

By allowing the crowd the final words, Lermontov's poem upsets the vertical hierarchy of the psalms, and of prophesy, in which power descends through the prophet. In fact, the relationship between crowd and poet in the poem is figured as the relationship between two readers. In the third line of the first stanza, the omniscience of the prophet is described as the ability to perceive the interior of people, an ability described as an act of reading the "pages" in people's eyes:

С тех пор как вечный судия
Мне дал всеведение пророка,
В очах людей читаю я
Страницы злобы и порока

Society also looks at him, although their gaze is superficial, directed at his exterior. The excessive degree to which the body of the prophet is attended to by society is highlighted in the reported speech in the final two stanzas, the speech of "old men to children", where we also find emphasis on the act of seeing in the repeated imperative "look":

«Смотрите: вот пример для вас!
Он горд был, не ужился с нами:
Глупец, хотел уверить нас,
Что бог гласит его устами!

Смотрите ж, дети, на него:
Как он угрюм и худ и бледен!

Смотрите, как он наг и беден,
Как презирают все его!»²⁵

Like the prophet, the gaze of society is shown here as engaged in a type of reading. They take the exterior of the prophet as the site of signs, his thinness, paleness etc., which can relate his worth and place in society to them. By drawing attention to this “example” (*primer*), the old men hope to teach the children how to read these signs as they do.

The violence enacted by the superficial gaze of the crowd, parallel to the physical violence they inflict, can also be read in the progress of the poem’s rhymes. In the first stanza, in which the lyric subject introduces himself as a prophet, both his individuality and mission are highlighted in the masculine rhyming of “*ya*” (I) with “*sudiia*,” (judge). The second stanza, however, which introduces the physical violence of society against the poet, by stoning, also contains rhymed words ending in “*ya*”, however the syllable no longer appears independently but only as the unstressed feminine ending of the rhymed words in lines two and four:

Провозглашать я стал любви
И правды чистые ученья:
В меня все ближние мои
Бросали бешено камня.

The fourth stanza, which describes the prophet alone in the wilderness, independent of society’s gaze, ends all of its lines in a “*ya*” syllable, stressed and unstressed, although the word “*ya*” itself from the first stanza does not return:

Завет предвечного храня,
Мне тварь покорна там земная;
И звезды слушают меня,
Лучами радостно играя.

The reported speech that comprises the final two stanzas introduces a definitive shift in the content of the rhymes. Instead of the prophetic subject’s personal “*ya*”, the third person plural

²⁵ PSS, vol. 1, p. 95.

pronouns “*vas*” and “*nas*”, referring to the crowd, are rhymed. “*Nami*” the plural subject in instrumental case is also one of the rhymed endings:

«Смотрите: вот пример для вас!
Он горд был, не ужился с нами:
Глупец, хотел уверить нас,
Что бог гласит его устами!

In the final stanza the prophetic subject returns as a stressed end rhyme, however, this time he is conditioned by the crowd’s gaze and transformed into “*ego*” and “*nego*”, both third person personal pronouns in the accusative case:

Смотрите ж, дети, на него:
Как он угрюм и худ и бледен!
Смотрите, как он наг и беден,
Как презирают все его!»

It is doubly significant that the pronoun does not appear in the nominative case, as did the first person “*ya*” of the first stanza, but rather appears as the object of the sentence. Violence is done to the prophet throughout the course of the poem through the reduction of the personal “*ya*” to the objective third person, and further through his grammatical reduction from the subject of the sentence to its object. Furthermore, the change in the rhyme scheme in this final stanza to a,b.b.a, from a,b,a,b, creates a disruption in expectation that seems to strand the final “*ego*,” stressing its isolation from society even as it suffers the violence of their gaze.

As do the descriptions of the prophet in the reported speech of the old man, the old man’s pronoun seemingly misreads the prophet, while at the same time granting him an identity in the eyes of the crowd. If the poem succeeds, it is because the prophet is able to undercut the words of society’s misreading with his own voice, thus suggesting an alternate, ironic, meaning. We suspect that the “pages” we read about the prophet are in fact the pages of “evil and vice” that

the prophet tells us he perceives in the eyes of the people in the first stanza of the poem. That is, the success of the poem depends on reader being able to understand the final stanzas of the poem not as a dismissal of the prophet, but as a condemnation of society's deafness to his message, and its violence in reducing him to an object.

Further, if what we read on the page, as the speech of society, are the "pages" that the prophet reads in the eyes of society, then his very prophetic vision concerns his own identity. That is the poem seems to stage the prophet's knowledge primarily as knowledge of the way that society sees him. Or rather, he must see slightly under their words about him, he must somehow insert his subjectivity under their objectifying gaze and convey this to the reader. Ultimately, Ginzburg's observation that Lermontov's "*lichnost*" (individuality) is not only the "subject but also the object" of his works holds true in "Prorok."²⁶ If asserting his subjectivity is in itself his task, then the poet-as-prophet is revealed as occupying the difficult position whereby he must set himself under the gaze of society, but by doing so he is himself in danger of being objectified and silenced. His words are in danger of falling flat. However, by being positioned under this gaze he is also set apart from society and marked as occupying a special role, which allows him his "*lichnost*". His task then is to find a space for his subjectivity, to allow it to emerge as the subversion of other people's voices.

The prophet's attempt to assume a hermeneutically superior position from marginal space of his desert exile, in fact, mimics the relationship of the prophetic message to other texts. As Balfour notes, "if the rhetoric of Judaic prophecy is characteristically paradoxical, it is partly because the prophetic message often runs literally *para doxa*- that is, counter to the dominant belief. Yet if the prophets are marginal figures, their design is to envelop the text from which

²⁶ Ginzburg, Lidia. *O Lirike*. (Leningrad: 1974) P. 159. "В лирике же Лермонтова личность – не только субъект, но и объект произведения, его тема, и она раскрывается в самом движении поэтического сюжета."

they are marginalized.”²⁷ It should be remembered that the stanza depicting the desert was the one in which the “ya” syllable occurred most frequently and the only one in which the prophet speaks, although this speech is figured as a type of silence, heard only by the stars. The prophet is most visible in the reported speech of the old man, but the silent, marginal space of the desert is the space in which the true “ya” exists who perceives through his prophetic gift both the identity of the crowd and his identity before the crowd.

In this, as in Pushkin’s “Prorok”, silence is linked to the violent process of becoming a vessel of God’s will. In Kiukhelbeker’s “Smert’ Bairona”, a series of sacrifices occurs in which first the lyric persona and then Pushkin fall into “poetic paralysis” ultimately allowing Byron’s ghost to appear.²⁸ Silence in Lermontov’s “Prorok” remains a sacrifice linked to the prophetic gift, and the means by which the prophetic message is allowed to speak, but in Lermontov the silence also seems to become a space in which interiority is inscribed. Using the image of the poet-prophet, who can perceive from margins of the poem, and the image of the hostile crowd, Lermontov is able to shift the locus of his “*lichnost*” from under the deadening effect of crowd’s gaze to the “silent” space of the desert, which quietly governs the reading of the entire poem.

The poems “К ****” and “Ne smeisia nad moei prorocheskoi toscoiu,” which we discussed earlier, also deal with the problem of the relationship between the lyric subject, imagined as the poet-prophet, and the crowd dramatized as a silencing violence inflicted upon him, and again we will see that the prophetic allows for a shift to the margins, this time temporally. Let us read the two poems in their entirety:

К ***

Когда твой друг с пророческой тоскою

²⁷ Balfour, p. 2.

²⁸ Ram, 156.

Тебе вверял толпу своих забот,
Не знала ты невинною душою,
Что смерть его позорная зовет,
Что голова, любимая тобою,
С твоей груди на плаху перейдет;

Он был рожден для мирных вдохновений,
Для славы, для надежд; - но меж людей
Он не годился - и враждебный гений
Его душе не наложил цепей;
И не слышал творец его молений,
И он погиб во цвете лучших дней;

И близок час... и жизнь его потонет
В забвенье, без следа, как звук пустой;
Никто слезы прощальной не уронит,
Чтоб смыть упрек, оправданный толпой,
И лишь волна полночная простонет
Над сердцем, где хранился образ твой!²⁹

Не смейся над моей пророческой тоскою;
Я знал: удар судьбы меня не обойдет;
Я знал, что голова, любимая тобою,
С твоей груди на плаху перейдет;
Я говорил тебе: ни счастья, ни славы
Мне в мире не найти; - настанет час кровавый,
И я паду; и хитрая вражда
С улыбкой очернит мой недоцветший гений;

И я погибну без следа
Моих надежд, моих мучений;

Но я без страха жду довременный конец.
Давно пора мне мир увидеть новый;
Пускай толпа растопчет мой венец:

Венец певца, венец терновый!.....

Пускай! я им не дорожил.³⁰

²⁹ PSS, vol. p. 188.

³⁰ PSS, vol. p. 27.

Subtle but significant changes have occurred in the reworked version of 1837, including the shift from third person to first, which makes the temporal division of the poem between past and future more pronounced. There is also a marked increase in aggression in the 1837 poem, and even the intimate addressee is perceived as the possible source of inimical mockery. What is striking, and strikingly similar in both poems, however, is that the greatest loss is imagined as the loss of all memory of the lyric subject, “without trace”, at the hands of the crowd, leaving his life like an “empty noise.” Thus, we may read these poems as metaphors for the silencing, the silencing of death, that occurs to the reviled poet. Interestingly, though in line with our argument so far, the first poem seems primarily focused on fame, mentioning that the poet-prophet was born for “glory” but concluding that he will die “without trace”, while in the second poem the loss is much more personal. In this poem, the lyric subject prophesizes that he will die “without trace” of his “hopes” and his “sufferings.”

The development suggests that Lermontov was increasingly aware of the difficulty of expressing these aspects of his interiority, which were trampled by the misreading gaze of a hostile crowd. However, Lermontov again uses the prophetic to situate these aspects of the lyric subject in a liminal space of silence. In this case, it is in the temporal disconnect between the past and the prophesized future which places the poem in an atemporal present. That the prophesy, should it come true (and it must come true, or the lyric subject has no “prophetic anguish”), predicts the silence of all trace of the poet-prophet, further situates the poem, audible to us, in a liminal temporal space outside of the temporalities governed by the narrative in the poem. In effect, the poem is an elegy in which the device of prophesy allows the lyric subject to predict the death of his image (either through forgetfulness or hostile misreading) and to thus mourn this

loss in a present that is out of synch with the past and future. As in elegy, the work of mourning creates a decentered space in which the essence of the lost object remains.

In taking up the prophetic image, Lermontov uses many of the elements that were present in the ode and in the Decembrist project to further his cultivation of the Romantic image of the individual. However, the prophetic persona allows Lermontov to investigate the complicated relationship of the lyric subject to the crowd at a time when the crowd becomes the primary other, able of understanding, misreading or ignoring his personality. Developing on the topoi already present in the image of the poet-prophet, Lermontov eventually uses the poet-prophet as a device to create marginal spaces in which interiority could be expressed without being objectified as image.

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The dating of the prophets Jonah, Joel, and Obadiah are more questionable than the other prophets. All three of these have are the subject of fair arguments for much later dates.²⁵⁵ I have shown them here at their earliest suggested dates for convenience. Studying the Figure above can give us a feel for how the various prophets relate to each other chronologically, which we notice is not how they are presented in the canonical order. Hosea uses the image of the prophet's marriage to a prostitute to compare Israel's relationship with God, which continually forgives an unfaithful wife (Israel). The prophets often present their speeches with the words "The Lord says". These words show that the prophets did not promote their own messages, but considered themselves the messengers of God with the authority to speak for God to the people. Some of the Prophetic Books, however, reflect a later historical configuration than when the prophets actually lived. After preaching and writing, his messages seem to have been adapted and corrected by people facing different social and religious situations. writer's biography, derived from his suffering in life (Mikhail Lermontov) and extended to the interpretation of his death (Vladimir Solov'ev). Although these strategies enabled such later writers as Fedor Dostoevskii to assume the role of prophet, the blurring of the moral dimension of the prophetic ideal had long-term consequences for the development of Russian society and culture. This article forms part of a wider project on the development of the image of the writer as prophet in the Russian literary tradition. 1 For an early view of Pushkin's prophetic qualities, based on his use of language, see Gogol', N. V., "Neskol'ko slov o Pushkine" (dated 1832, revised 1834, first published January 1835), in his *Polnoe sobraniesochinenii*, ed. Meshcheriakovetal, N. L., 14 vols.