

Title: Unseeing Eyes and Uncomprehending Hearts: Isaiah 6:9–13 and Pushkin’s “Пророк”
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Many critics have examined Pushkin’s poem “Пророк” in the context of the sixth book of Isaiah, focusing on the first eight verses of the biblical passage. Here, the prophet sees the Lord surrounded by seraphim, one of whom burns his tongue with a live coal. This creates a direct parallel to the seraph who replaces the prophet’s tongue in Pushkin’s poem. These critics end their examination at the same point that Pushkin ends his poem: the commissioning of the newly forged prophet.

I have as yet found no studies which examine the influence of the rest of Isaiah 6 on the poem. Here, the Lord tells Isaiah that although the prophet will go to the people, they will not see with their eyes, hear with their ears, nor understand with their hearts. In addition to the aforementioned tongue, these are the very same body parts which the seraph in Pushkin’s poem transforms in the prophet. By replacing the prophet’s eyes, ears, and heart, in addition to his tongue, Pushkin further separates the prophet from the people to whom he is sent. This connection to Isaiah 6:9–13 also hints that Pushkin’s divinely commissioned prophet might not be successful in igniting the hearts of the people.

A reading of “Пророк” which takes the second half of Isaiah 6 into account might not only influence the reading of this poem alone. For example, it can help explain the interactions between the poet and the crowd in Pushkin’s “Поэт и толпа”, provide another subtext for Lermontov’s poem “Пророк” (whose prophet is usually seen to be derived from the biblical prophet Jeremiah), or even provide commentary to Baratynsky’s “Что за звуки? мимоходом”.

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