

## The Discourse of a Historian and Administrator in Yevgeny Feoktistov's *Notes from What Has Been Heard and Seen*

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### Abstract

There is no unambiguous perspective on Russia's cultural and political processes of the second half of the 19th century. Their patterns are largely approached through the lens of the key figures that had a determining influence at a relevant period. Yevgeny Feoktistov was a writer, a journalist, a staff member of the magazines *Sovremennik* and *Otechestvennye Zapiski*, the editor of *Russkaya Rech* and *Journal of the Ministry of National Enlightenment* (1871–1883), later a censor, the privy councillor (since January 1, 1883), the head of the Central Administration for Printing Press for almost 13 years (1883–1896) (Russia's censor-in-chief), a senator (from May 23, 1896 until his death), and part of Russia's administrative elite. He came an impressive way of personal growth that brought him from the ranks of active liberals and *Otechestvennye Zapiski* journalists to the position of Russia's censor-in-chief, who signed the order to close that same magazine twenty years later. His biography is partly captured in Ivan Goncharov's novel *The Same Old Story*. This article investigates the modifications of linguistic peculiarities in Feoktistov's essays and statements and draws his linguistic portrait, which doesn't only explain the patterns of his behavior and everyday style but also sheds light on the shady sides of the events that Russia witnessed in the 1860s–1890s and shapes new optics of the elite circles Feoktistov was part of.

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The ideology and practices of Russian conservatism, in its version that had evolved by the last third of the 19th century, have been a subject of sustainable interest in the humanities over the last ten to fifteen years. Modern research in this field has been quite ample<sup>1</sup>, and it has become a commonplace to use the comprehensive factual materials collected in Yevgeny Feoktistov's memoirs *Behind the Curtains of Politics and Literature*, which has largely been the central source. This commitment is in no small part easily honored by authors due to the availability of Feoktistov's memories republished in 1991 (62 years after the first publication with Julian Oksman's commentaries). However, Feoktistov's vast heritage, which includes publications, studies, letters and diaries, has not yet been systematized completely. It is not about reconsidering his standing or

<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, detailed references in the publications of the 1990s–2010s: Mayorova, Pobedonostsev and Metropolitan Philaret; Mayorova, "K.P. Pobedonostsev v pis'makh; Gusev; Minakov.

historic significance but about deeper research into his personality (the foundation of which was laid by Julian Oksman and Boris Modzalevsky) and the related issues.

Feoktistov's contemporaries produced a lot of negative feedback about him. Such hostility derived from their attitude to the role Feoktistov played while being in charge of censorship in 1883-1896 as the head of the Central Administration for Printing Press. Before he was assigned to this position, Feoktistov had gone a long way, beginning with studies in Moscow University, interest groups and journalistic activity in the 1850s, translations, the first steps in his clerical career, which was rather short though (in Tavricheskaya Chamber of Public Property and in Moscow Governor's Office), and teaching at Aleksadrovsky Cadet Corps. About the same time, Feoktistov was an enthusiastic columnist at *Moskovskije Vedomosti* and, since 1856, *Russian Messenger* (edited by Mikhail Katkov). He produced a number of historical articles for *Russian Messenger* and *Otechestvennye Zapiski*. At the beginning of 1861, Feoktistov began to assist Countess Elizaveta Salias De Tournemire (Evgenia Tur) in managing her magazine *Russkaya Rech* and later became the editor in chief. As he moved to Saint Petersburg in 1862, he served as official for special missions under the Minister of National Education. After editing for *Journal of the Ministry of National Enlightenment* in 1871-1883 and working as head of the Central Administration for Printing Press in 1883-1896, he was appointed a senator in 1896. As a member of the Printing Press Law Committee in the early 1860s, Feoktistov strongly opposed to the Administration's idea to impose penalties on mass media. However, the liberal spirit of his youth had vanished by the time he was put in charge of censorship, so the period of his rule was a challenging one for the history of Russian literature. Meanwhile, the intricate twists and turns of Feoktistov's life and image fit into simple patterns: the period of liberal writing in Moscow was followed by that of officialdom in Saint Petersburg. The latter, according to the logic of interpreters, was marked with treachery and unfaithfulness to the fellows to whom he had been connected while being part of liberal journalism. It should be added that the «fellows» never forgave Feoktistov for the cruelty of administrative excesses that printed word suffered during those years. Indeed, Feoktistov knew the inside behind the scenes of journalism, so his censorship policy was ingeniously cruel, striking precisely and often preventively. As a result, the list of charges against him and the severe «final invoice» raised by his contemporaries were growing ever longer and bigger.

It should be noted though that the pungent narrative of satirical pamphlets and epigrams had developed around Feoktistov long before, predefining the framework of his image in the literary community for a long time, if not for good. Authors of this permanent satirical 'anti-Feoktistov' record included Nikolay Shcherbina, who viciously listed Feoktistov among other *Russian Messenger* literary small fry in his *The Dream Dictionary of Contemporary Russian Literature* in 1856, Boris Almazov, who would often sting him epigrammatically and «buried *Russkaya rech*» in 1862, openly rejoicing at Feoktistov's downgrade, Nikolai Leskov, who formalized the overall sense of disgust towards Evgenia Tur's assistant and the co-editor of her magazine in his novel *No Way Out*, etc. Every single step that Feoktistov made in his career path in the 1870s was accompanied by literary jeers and catcalls. Aleksey Suvorin and Dmitry Minayev would caustically use rumors about Feoktistov's entourage that compromised his wife. Turgenev, who changed abruptly his tone about the figure he had favored ten years ago, and Saltykov-Shchedrin exercised successfully in producing sardonic labels for Feoktistov. «The new year starts sadly: Gambetta's death, Feoktistov's life», (Academy of Sciences of the Soviet Union 1961-1967) – this is Turgenev's famous response to Saltykov-Shchedrin's

warning (letter of March 6, 1882) about the cabal of Illarion Vorontsov-Dashkov, Mikhail Ostrovsky and Terty Filippov: «And Evgenia Tur, Feoktistover and old madam, is their Aspazija» (Goslitizdat 1933-1939). That is how the satirical and anecdotic myth had grown around Feoktistov. The list of its creators is much longer but the pivotal names have been mentioned here. Of course, such feuilletonism did not describe the reality in a comprehensive way as it served specific plots, trends and literary and political facts; yet, it largely shaped the basic framework for interpretations.

Those who stayed away from «feuilletonization» and offered different perspectives for interpreting Feoktistov's activities included not only and not so much literary figures as people who were engaged in 'business' with him directly or indirectly. Sometimes, when Feoktistov is mentioned in third-party correspondence, mostly unpublished, pen pals forget about hot-button minutiae and business trifles, generalizing some of his features and singling out, in particular, his linguistic sensitivity. For instance, Evgenia Tur, one of Feoktistov's first 'employers', invited him to teach her children after he finished his university studies. This original offer was followed by journalistic collaboration and a long-term relationship, which was not always unshadowed. Nevertheless, Tur retained her trust to Feoktistov almost until the end (it is not improbable that the «model salon hostess, mother and a young tutor of her children» was a compensation for the scandalous unsuccessful love affair she had had in the 1830s with Nikolai Nadezhdin, a university professor and home teacher invited to the Sukhovo-Kobylns' house). In her letters to Prince Nikolay Orlov, head of the diplomatic mission in Paris (Feoktistov met him and the Russian aristocratic clique, including Prince Nikolay Trubetskoy and Count Vladimir Orlov-Davydov, abroad in 1857 in no small part thanks to Evgenia Tur's participation), she would often recall Feoktistov and describe him as an expert in foreign languages. Beware of being misunderstood in her correspondence, she explains that what she means is not just «speaking a foreign language, which is not unusual today, but being able to extract necessary words at a necessary moment and use them in a way to make his interlocutor believe strongly that these words <illegible> are addressed to them for the first time for the sole purpose of pleasant conversation» (Russian State Archive of Literature and Art, fund no 447, series 1, archival unit 12). This statement with a focus on various speech registers that Feoktistov appears to have been conversant in and to have used this skill deliberately to achieve his goals could be treated as an ad-hoc subjective observation of Evgenia Tur if she hadn't reproduced it in both speaking and writing, unfailingly underlining his ability to combine different styles of speech, «switching smoothly from scientific language to an anecdote or a funny parable, thus connecting interlocutors» (Russian State Archive of Literature and Art, fund no 447, series 1, archival unit 11). Curiously, such evaluations are substantiated by other sources, too. Two different people recognized Feoktistov's particular, almost physiological linguistic sensitivity, each in their own way. Alexander Adlerberg, the Minister of the Imperial Court and the Chancellor of Russian Imperial and Tsar Orders, referred to Feoktistov's «pathological philological squeamishness» in his letters to Dmitry Tolstoy, the Minister of National Enlightenment (Feoktistov was the editor of *Journal of the Ministry of National Enlightenment* and the right hand to Tolstoy in 1871–1883): «It seems that he wants to wash his hands thoroughly whenever he deals with an essay or a speech that he finds falling short of his standards» (Pushkin House, fund no 318, series 1, archival unit 37).

Feoktistov's medically businesslike *modus operandi*, his 'sanitary', purifying interference into his ideological sphere of influence, his surgical working methods, and,

finally, his abidance by «verbal and mental hygiene, which needs so much to be cleaned of all the decay and disturbance that have filled mass media beyond measure» (Pushkin House, fund no 318, series 1, archival unit 43), — these administrative functions of his are described by Iosif Gurko, Evgenia Tur's son-in-law, who was the Governor-General and the Commander of the Warsaw Military District in the 1880s.

As we can see, the non-feuilleton evaluations of Feoktistov highlight new perspectives of his personality and represent one of the possible ways of systematizing what he was doing.

Obviously, even a concise list of Feoktistov's professional activities and twists in his administrative career, which involved moving up a few career ladders and, most importantly, culminated in getting access to governmental sources of information, creating them, and getting close to the top governmental officials, as well as almost 30-year membership in this closed small political club—even the most generalized record of his service and list of essays and official documents he inspired require diverse tools to be scientifically described and analyzed.

His texts can be conventionally grouped into a few categories: historical essays, including those he used in his short-lived teaching career, numerous publications, special insider reviews of mass media he prepared for Alexander III, an extensive collection of epistolary correspondence, diary notes, and memoirs. With all the diversity, a specific regularity can be observed in this vast body of documents: their author is a liaison, an intermediary between different domains—writing, journalism, governmental affairs—as well as different historical periods and languages of different cultures. For example, he took part in at least two large-scale projects in the 1850s–1860s, intermediating between Turgenev and Moscow writers and journalists (Gayntseva). Later on, he took on a totally different role of an unofficial intermediary between the editors of Katkov's *Moskovskije Vedomosti* and the upper administrative echelons of Saint Petersburg at the end of the 1860s. That was actually when he developed a pretty clear understanding of self as «practicing historian—not scientist or literary man—who serves to reveal and reproduce the useful lessons of the past. Such activity, however, requires a convenient form and the right words to be found». (Pushkin House, Feoktistov).<sup>2</sup> Feoktistov called himself a «historian-clerk», jokingly assessing his findings for a historical essay dedicated to Anselm of Canterbury, one of his first research papers produced in his university years (1851) (Feoktistov *Ansel'm Kenterberijskij*). It should be noted that Feoktistov described especially carefully the third and last period of Anselm's life in this early work. Analyzing Anselm's *De concordia praescientiae, praedestinationis et gratiae Dei cum libero arbitrio* ("The Harmony of the Foreknowledge, the Predestination and the Grace of God with Free Choice"), *De voluntate* ("On the Will") and *De voluntate Dei* ("On the Will of God"), Feoktistov highlights first of all Anselm's unique language that allows him to bring into accordance the concepts of the foreknowledge and the predestination of God with human's free will. Anselm's epistolary heritage is one of the sources that Feoktistov investigates with particular assiduousness. Extracts from the bishop's essays and

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<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that this 'mission statement' that opens the book refers the reader to a similar self-description: «I have no literary talent but a strong passion for historical studies (...) I will never make a researcher as I can boast no enthusiasm for painstaking work, or necessary assiduousness, or persistent diligence in studies. Nonetheless, I keep studying history and believe I can do some good in this regard—just as anyone who engages in an earnest business lovingly and selflessly». (from Feoktistov's letter to Turgenev of February 11, 1854 (Gayntseva).

fragments of his biography (Hasse) are included in Feoktistov's *Notes from What Has Been Heard and Seen* alongside with everyday notes.

It may not be a coincidence, therefore, that Feoktistov introduced the textbook based on his lectures for cadets of Aleksandrovsky Cadet Corps with the preamble, "History consists of personal memories" (Znosko-Borovsky), and based his courses on facts mixed up with «fresh, verified» opinions of trusted agents.

History as a never-ending extensive memoir that needs to be arranged and 'administered' from the inside – 'the department of memoirs' – this is Feoktistov's philosophy vividly embodied in his diaries and notes and only partially captured in his collection of memories *Behind the Curtains of Politics and Literature*.

*Notes from What Has Been Heard and Seen* relates equally to the rest of Feoktistov's texts – publications, administrative documents, research papers and memoirs – as a great 'backstage', the main behind-the-scenes, the editing table where fragments of historical essays, memoirs, circular notes and office documents alternate in a specific order and sequence known to the author alone. *Notes from What Has Been Heard and Seen* is sort of a reservation area for languages and plots, the main territory of texts, fragments of which migrate to journals, monographs, diaries, letters as well as headquarters, ministries and departments. For instance, extracts from the monograph *Magnitsky. The Materials for the History of Education in Russia* (journal version published in *Russian Messenger* in 1864, not the autonomous publication of 1865) are glued in on pages with notes on Feoktistov's business trip to Warsaw in 1863. Feoktistov recorded his conversation with the Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolayevich in detail, pointing out the Duke's enlightenment and erudition. As the dialogue turned on Feoktistov's works, the Duke showed his conversance and got down to discussing the publication on Magnitsky. This explains the glued-in insert to some extent. The Duke digressed and switched from one topic to another. In *Notes from What Has Been Heard and Seen*, Feoktistov mentions the «lightness of mind and language» of the Duke caused by the fact that the ample information he disposed of was rather fragmentary and poorly systemized. In addition, this episode is accompanied by clippings from *Moskovskije Vedomosti* of the times when the Duke's initiatives in Poland were strongly criticized. These pieces would later be used in the fourth chapter of *Behind the Curtains of Politics and Literature*.

Another example is the collection of notes, a whole guidebook, from the 1870s' section of *Notes from What Has Been Heard and Seen* that were used in a series of publications in *Russian Messenger* under the pen name V. W.<sup>3</sup> Feoktistov seasons his historical and political Parisian 'sketches' with recalling the details of his everyday life in France, new contacts and acquaintanceship he made in Paris (that was where portrait sketches of Nikolay Orlov, Piotr Albiedyński and Nikolay Trubetskoy were born). There is also a whole collection of historical anecdotes, excerpts from Alexander Jomini's letters, T.I. Greig's short stories, etc.

As we can see, *Notes from What Has Been Heard and Seen* is an album diary, a meta collection, a lab for publications and memoirs. Feoktistov's techniques of «workshop

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<sup>3</sup> Из переписки Прудона ["From Proudhon's Correspondence"]. *Russian Messenger*, 1875, no 5; Политическая жизнь Виктора Гюго ["The Political Life of Victor Hugo"]. *Russian Messenger*, 1875, no 9; Интимная переписка последнего короля польского ["Personal Letters of the Last King of Poland"]. *Russian Messenger*, 1875, no 11; Париж и парижане во время осады ["Paris and Parisians During the Siege"]. *Russian Messenger*, June 1871.

historian» and administrator are especially perceptible in how he selects ‘parallel’ texts, which intensify and comment each other. Linguistic collages are most deeply palpable at the confluence of historical and cultural contexts shedding light on the political collisions that Feoktistov witnessed and engaged in throughout half a century.

The last but not the least thing to mention is that memories in *Notes from What Has Been Heard and Seen* are deprived, just as in diaries, of any personal touch. The author explains this peculiarity of his in one of his earliest notebooks that begins with a quotation from Alexander Pushkin's *Remembrance*:

Then, as with loathing I peruse the years,  
I tremble, and I curse my natal day,  
Wail bitterly, and bitterly shed tears,  
But cannot wash the woeful script away.

It appears that the personal is closed for ever and kind of forced out or replaced by the historical and the national. That is what makes the intricate, diverse event and linguistic texture of *Notes from What Has Been Heard and Seen*, which offers sort of a key to understanding the nature and mechanisms of the polyglotry of the 1870s-1890s, the environment where decisions were made and where national policies found themselves in ‘scattered bundles’ of disintegrated stylistic strategies.

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