

Title: Vicissitudes of Reading of/in *The Idiot*
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In my paper I try to understand how the narrative dynamics of the novel shape and inform its ethics. I argue that *The Idiot* is one of the most radical of Dostoevsky's novelistic experiments inasmuch as it puts into question the integrity of the self created in a process of narrative representation (what Sarah Young calls *the scripting impulse*). Dostoevsky achieves this effect by contrasting the idea of the inherent distance between sign and meaning with Myshkin's initial belief in the possibility of the transcendental signifier.

The protagonist is gradually forced to accept that any form of narrative utterance is bound to cause intense rivalry for the control of its meaning, which ultimately leads to physical violence either against the self (Ippolit and Nastasya Fillipovna) or against others (Rogozhin). Dostoevsky undermines the integrity of narrative self-representations by framing them within non-verbal acts of violence and compassion. Hence, *The Idiot* can be read as a *Bildungsroman*, in which the protagonist, Prince Myshkin, traverses the distance between the novel's *is*—an attempt to secure positive ethical meaning (within an established) narrative—and the novel's *ought*, the silent and nonsensical acts of compassion, which, ultimately, defy signification. In my paper I seek to show that to make sense of *The Idiot* is to participate in an ethically compromised endeavor. Forced to do justice to the text, the reader also has to bear responsibility for the violence inherent in any narrative construction of the self.

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