

**Title:** The Proliferation of Scandal in Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*: New Media and Old-Fashioned Gossip

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My paper examines two models for the dissemination of scandalous information in *The Idiot*— new forms of mass media and the more traditional route of society gossip. In *The Idiot*, a novel saturated through and through with scandal, Prince Myshkin is called by various names, most notably “idiot,” but also “democrat” (as Nancy Ruttenburg explores in her recent book *Dostoevsky's Democracy*) and “thief” in Keller’s article accusing him of wrongdoing in the “Pavlishchev’s son” affair. The very public and scandalous denunciation of Myshkin as a usurper by the young nihilists is justified on the grounds of *glasnost*, the freedom to bring events to the public’s attention. This was the typical stance of many new publications founded in Alexander II’s “Epoch of Great Reforms,” including the satirical weekly *Iskra*, Dostoevsky’s prototype for the rhetoric and tone of Keller’s article. These new publications provided new fora for public discourse, and were addressed to social strata that were previously excluded from participation. How public opinion is formed about Myshkin, both through the press and through gossip, is an important theme explored by Dostoevsky and his narrator in *The Idiot*, and these interpellative processes, that is, the branding of Myshkin as an “idiot” or “democrat” by others, go a long way in explaining why the charismatic prince’s message falls on deaf ears. For example, his act of compassion toward Nastasya Filippovna is popularly interpreted not as an act of Christian love, but as a typical act of a “democrat” or “nihilist,” who ostentatiously prefers a fallen woman in order to make a social statement. In such scenes, where society gossip spreads like wildfire, Dostoevsky is not only commenting on the widening of Petersburg’s *haut monde* in the 1860s, but he also shows the role of naming, rumor, and, most importantly, the dominant narratives of public discourse in shaping scandal’s course.

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