

Title: Dostoevsky Rewriting Rousseau: The Egotistical Self-Abasement of Confession in *The Idiot*
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Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* (1869) includes confessions that range from trivial parlor games to the painful final testament of a dying man. In several of these instances, Dostoevsky reworks the "Marion account" from Rousseau's *Confessions* (1782), in which the *philosophe* recounts his own theft of a ribbon and his false accusation of that theft against an innocent maid. In *The Idiot*, which is undoubtedly Dostoevsky's most materialistic work, the ribbon—a trifle—becomes hard currency and two of the novel's less savory characters, Lebedev and Fedyshenko, play the role of the innocent maid and the "confessor." Like the stolen ribbon, the themes of true and false confession and expiation for one's shameful acts wends its way through *The Idiot*, touching the stories of many of the novel's characters.

Rousseau claimed that his feelings of guilt over Marion's dismissal partly prompted him to pen the *Confessions*. If Thomas Barran is correct in asserting that Dostoevsky viewed Rousseau as the "carrier of the European moral sepsis" (xvi), then Dostoevsky must have viewed Rousseau's motives for confession with a critical eye. The confessional moments in *The Idiot* reveal Dostoevsky's cynical view of Rousseau's beliefs about human memory and sincerity and their deleterious effect upon contemporary morality. The impulse to confess only serves to encourage crimes against others rather than to discourage them.

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