

Title: Madame du Barry, Великая грешница : A Libertine Subtext in *The Idiot*
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A courtesan who rose beyond her initial station, Mme du Barry had an early history much like Nastasia Filippovna's: apparently violated as a young girl, she was circulated for men's pleasure before being selected to renew the sexual energies of the aging, newly widowed Louis XV. As Olga Meerson has recently discussed, Lebedev's story about Mme du Barry's execution hints at Nastasia Filippovna's likely fate, already linked to that of the condemned man described by Myshkin in Part I. My paper will examine Lebedev's story and its setting closely to uncover a rebellious, skeptical argument. The libertine accents in his narrative suggest that one of Lebedev's sources may be a spurious memoir circulated clandestinely before the French revolution to besmirch the king's and court's reputations. The publisher's preface to *Mémoires de madame la comtesse du Barri*, Vol. 1 (Paris, 1829, xxxv-xxxvi) indeed contains the story of her execution and last words (PSS 9:439). As I will show, Lebedev's insinuations reinforce the novel's essential theme of contested resurrection. It would be dangerous to read his story with too-innocent eyes—yet also dangerous *not* to respond with sympathetic anguish.

Darnton, Robert M. *The Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1995.
Meerson, Olga. "Intertext as Exoskeleton: the Case of Mme. du Barry and 'La dame aux camélias' in *The Idiot*." *Dostoevskii i mirovaia kul'tura* 23 (2007): 85-106.