**CONFESSIONS IN WISCONSIN ON TWITTER**  
PROJECT DESCRIPTION & IDEAS FOR YOUR TEACHING  
Devin M. Garofalo

_Confessions_ in Wisconsin is now on Twitter (@WiscoRousseau)! This year, the Great World Texts in Wisconsin program is tweeting the whole of Rousseau’s autobiography in anticipation of the Annual Student Conference. We hope you – and your students! – will follow along with this serialized version of the text and even tweet your own “confessions” about your encounters with the _Confessions_. Working from a 1783 London translation, the _Confessions_ in Wisconsin Twitter project provokes a variety of questions, whether about form, translation, genre or self.

One of this project’s aims is to introduce our program -- and the text itself -- to a broader audience. It’s primary purpose, however, is to serve as an educational resource upon which participating teachers and students might draw as they engage with Rousseau’s _Confessions_.

**HASHTAGS & NETWORKING**

Keep the following hashtags handy:

- #confessionsinwi
- #gwteducators
- #gwtstudents

*Each of these hashtags serves a different purpose:*

For general tweets about the 2014-2015 Great World Texts in Wisconsin program, use #confessionsinwi. This hashtag is ideal for live tweeting GWT events, such as the Annual Student Conference or educator colloquia, as well as tweeting at a broader audience about your participation in the program.

To communicate with your fellow educators, use #gwteducators. This is a great hashtag for sharing online resources, readings or teaching ideas. Twitter can in this way serve as an online forum or discussion board for teachers to network with one another and crowdsource ideas.

While students from across the program will have the opportunity to engage with one another at the Annual Student Conference, Twitter could serve as a virtual space wherein these conversations might begin even sooner. Students can use #gwtstudents to communicate with one another about the text – to ask questions about, debate and discuss the text in preparation for (or following) classroom discussion about Rousseau’s autobiography.

**IDEAS FOR CLASSROOM DISCUSSION & ASSIGNMENTS**

**READER RESPONSE**

Consider using Twitter (or the 140-character tweet format) as the basis for a reader response assignment. Playing off the recent trend of the Twitter confession, students might tweet their confessions about reading Rousseau’s _Confessions_ in informal, bite-sized chunks. Productive topics for discussion might range from a particular passage of interest to points of confusion that might generate classroom debate.

**FORMS OF CONFESSION**

The GWT Twitter edition of Rousseau’s _Confessions_ is a wonderful way to get your students thinking about form, or the shape and structure of a text. Situating the serialized version in relation to the Oxford edition is an excellent way to jumpstart a discussion about form, and to develop a vocabulary with which to describe and analyze the text’s structure. Consider using the following discussion questions as points of departure:
• How is the form of the Oxford edition similar to the Twitter edition of the text? How are they different from one another?
• How does the pace or rhythm of the Oxford edition compare to the Twitter edition? Does reading the *Confessions* in serial form affect the progression of its narrative? How so?
• How does the conversion of Rousseau’s *Confessions* into tweets change your experience or understanding of the text? Does this conversion ever alter the text’s meaning?
• In what ways does Rousseau’s *Confessions* push back against the form of a tweet? Are there moments when the text refuses to accommodate the tweet or reveals its limitations as a form of (self-)expression?
• What do your answers to the above questions tell us about the form of the *Confessions* and its relationship with the content of the Rousseau’s text?

**TRANSLATING ROUSSEAU**

The Twitter edition of Rousseau’s *Confessions* grants students access to a translation of the text from London circa 1783. You might use the Twitter edition as a productive point of comparison to the Oxford edition in discussions about the topic of translation, the ways that meaning transforms between languages, or—more broadly—the specificity of language. Comparing the Twitter and Oxford editions would be an excellent method through which to engage students in a close reading exercise that demonstrates how the rendering of just a single word might change our interpretation of Rousseau’s narrative. The following questions might be of use:

• Ask students to compare a selected passage from the Oxford edition with its corresponding passage in the Twitter edition.
  o How are the passages similar? Where and how do they differ?
  o Do these differences affect our interpretation of the passage at hand? How?
  o Do these differences reveal anything about the reading audiences of these translations?
  o What do your answers tell us about translation as a process and its impact on the specificity of language? On the portrait(s) of Rousseau we encounter in the *Confessions*?

**ROUSSEAU NOW**

Engaging with the Twitter edition of the *Confessions* encourages students to trace interconnections between Rousseau’s autobiographical project and students’ own acts of self-presentation on social media. In some ways, this text will be foreign to students: its eighteenth-century contexts and social conventions seem light-years away. The Twitter edition, however, reveals one way in which Rousseau’s *Confessions* is profoundly of the moment. Not only is Rousseau socially awkward to the point of conceiving himself a misfit (an experience that will likely be all too familiar to students), but there are also striking parallels between his use of the autobiographical genre and students’ curations of their own selves—and their engagements with the selves of others—via social media. Consider the following questions and ideas as points of departure, both for classroom discussion and assignments:

• What is the relationship between autobiography and self-presentation? What is Rousseau’s aim in writing an autobiography?
• How is the relationship between autobiography and self-presentation similar to and different from the relationship between social media and self-presentation? How does Rousseau’s autobiographical project resonate with the project of presenting the self on social media?
• What might the similarities be between eighteenth-century readers of the *Confessions* and contemporary users of social media? How might they engage with the stories and selves of others in similar or different ways?
• Are there interconnections between Rousseau’s anxiety about the reception of his self and contemporary presentations of self on social media?
• Are social media platforms new iterations of the biographical genre? If so, how is this genre similar to or different from its incarnation in Rousseau’s *Confessions*?