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Intersecting Nervous Disorders in Dostoevsky's *The Insulted and the Injured*

In his early novel *The Insulted and the Injured* Dostoevsky bestows upon the orphan Nelly his epileptic affliction, and upon the partially autobiographical figure of Ivan Petrovich he bestows an unspecified nervous disorder, the symptoms of which resemble those of the author's own nervous condition of the 1840s. Dostoevsky depicts this condition in a passage where Ivan Petrovich, the narrator of the novel, describes his own symptoms of illness: sensations of "mystical horror" and "a most oppressive, agonizing state of dread."¹ This passage is widely accepted² as Dostoevsky's description of his own early nervous condition, characterized by lightheadedness, dizziness, occasional fainting spells and aural hallucinations. From a medical perspective, Dostoevsky's early nervous disorder and his later epilepsy may have been related, yet when the author spoke about his illnesses in his later life, he claimed to have experienced them as distinct disorders and was firm in his conviction that they were unrelated. Generally speaking, Dostoevsky's stated belief that the disorders were not linked has become conventional wisdom in academic

¹ Dostoevsky, Fyodor, *The Insulted and the Injured*, trans. Constance Garnett, New York: Macmillan, [1917], p. 49; hereafter referred to as *Insulted*. In places I have altered Garnett's translation to better reflect the original. For the original see Dostoevskij, F. M., *Polnoe sobranie sochinenij v tridcati tomov*, 30 vols., Leningrad: Nauka, 1973-1990, 3:207-8, hereafter referred to as *Pss*. All translated material will be accompanied by the corresponding citation in the *Pss*.

² See Catteau, Jacques, *Dostoevsky and the Process of Literary Creation*, trans. Audrey Littlewood, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989, p. 122; Frank, Joseph, *The Stir of Liberation: 1860-1865*, Princeton: Princeton UP, 1986, p. 122; Rice, James L., *Dostoevsky and the Healing Art: An Essay in Literary and Medical History*, Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1985, p. 88; Yarmolinsky, Avrahm, *Dostoevsky: His Life and Art*, New York: Criterion, 1957, p. 57.

criticism, and the distinction between his perception of the disorder in his early life and his later life is glossed over.³

An examination of Dostoevsky's letters from the 1850s and early 1860s indicates that he did indeed entertain a link between the two illnesses during this earlier period, when his epilepsy was a relatively new phenomenon and the experience of his earlier nervous disorder had not receded in his memory or become a source of seeming embarrassment for him (in 1873 he called his early disorder "repulsive"; discussed below). Additionally, a close reading of a key passage of *The Insulted and the Injured*—the extension of the "mystic horror" passage—appears to confirm that Dostoevsky perceived the two illnesses to be related. The way Dostoevsky artistically intersects these disorders indicates that he granted a generative link between the two illnesses. This possible generative link is evident in the manner by which the two representatives of Dostoevsky's nervous disorders first encounter each other. Nelly enters the pages of the novel precisely at the moment Ivan Petrovich is in the throes of his illness, and her ghost-like entrance fulfills a hallucinatory premonition generated by Ivan Petrovich's "mystical horror." Through this coincidence, Dostoevsky constructs an intersection of these two nervous disorders, one in which the early nervous disorder actually generates the later one: Ivan Petrovich's hallucination, a symptom associated with Dostoevsky's early nervous disorder, generates the appearance of Nelly, the representative of epilepsy.

The purpose of this article, then, is to examine Dostoevsky's perception of his nervous disorders during this early period of his career, a period starting in 1846 when he first complained of the disorder, spanning his arrest, his imprisonment and exile in Siberia, and extending to the writing of *The Insulted and the Injured*. Dostoevsky wrote this novel soon after he returned to Saint Petersburg from exile, attempting thereby to reestablish his literary reputation. Upon his return, and during the writing of the novel, Dostoevsky confronted his progressively worsening epilepsy and began to accept his illness as genuine and chronic. With this time frame in mind, the article will first review pertinent pieces of Dostoevsky's correspondence, as well as memoirs about him, to establish the presence of Dostoevsky's early nervous disorder and his perception of that disorder, as well as the later manifestation of Dostoevsky's convulsive epilepsy. It will then address the discrepancies between Dostoevsky's later claims that the illnesses were not

³ See, for instance, Catteau p. 107: "Dostoevsky was never to confuse his nervous illness before 1848 with epilepsy, whatever links there might have been between them in reality."

related and material from his earlier years that indicates he believed them to be related. In doing so, it will trace Dostoevsky's path from stubborn resistance to a definitive diagnosis of epilepsy to acceptance of the disorder, culminating in his artistic incorporation of the disease into *The Insulted and the Injured*. Finally, the article will conduct a close reading of the passage in which Ivan Petrovich suffers a bout of his nervous disorder and its intersection with the epileptic Nelly's entrance to demonstrate how Dostoevsky's early perception of the inter-relatedness of the disorders is reflected in his art. By applying more nuance to our understanding of Dostoevsky's perception of both of his illnesses, the article aims to better contextualize the usage of these disorders not only in *The Insulted and the Injured*, his first novel to incorporate an epileptic character after he was struck by the disease, but also by extension, serve as a basis for understanding his usage of illnesses, especially epilepsy, in his later novels.

In the spring of 1846 Dostoevsky suffered a nervous attack that for him marked the beginning of his mysterious nervous disorder. The sensations associated with the attack "of the entire nervous system" terrified Dostoevsky and prompted him to seek medical attention. He related this event to his elder brother Mikhail in the letter of April 26, 1846:

I haven't written to you because up until today I haven't been able to take pen in hand. The reason for that was that I was sick and near death in the full sense of the word. I was ill to the greatest degree with an irritation of the entire nervous system, and the illness headed for my heart, produced a rush of blood and an inflammation in the heart, which was barely restrained by leeches and two blood lettings. In addition, I ruined myself with various decoctions, drops, powders, mixtures and similar such abominations. Now I'm out of danger. But only because I still have the illness, and according to my doctor's statement, since it was prepared over the course of three of [*sic*] four years, curing it will not take a short time. My treatment has to be both physical and psychic—in the 1st place, with a diet and continual physical deprivations that are prescribed for me. In the 2nd, a change of place, abstention from all strong sensations and shocks, a balanced and tranquil life, and, finally, order in everything. In this instance a trip to Revel (but not for sea bathing, since bathing has been deemed harmful for me) for a change of place and style of life has been prescribed for me as a drastic remedy.⁴

Dostoevsky was clearly shaken by this event, and the symptoms associated with this mysterious disorder afflicted him at least until 1849. The disorder was not definitively diagnosed at the time and no firm conclusions have been drawn about it in retrospect. At times, the attack

⁴ Dostoevsky, Fyodor, *Complete Letters*, ed. and trans. David Lowe and Ronald Meyer, 4 vols., Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1988, p. 127; *Pss* vol. 28.1, pp. 121-122. For the sake of convenience and consistency I have utilized Lowe and Meyer for all translations of Dostoevsky's letters; I have not altered the translations except when noted.

referred to in this letter has been mistaken for Dostoevsky's convulsive epilepsy and has been offered as proof that he suffered from convulsive epilepsy at this time and/or from childhood.⁵ The disorder may have been psychological or physiological in source, and may or may not have been connected to his later epilepsy, but in the end, even the most educated guesses are purely speculative. Whatever its origins may have been, Dostoevsky took the nervous attack in all seriousness, believing he was "near death in the full sense of the word."

Dostoevsky informs his brother that he did not recover from the illness and that he believes it will take some time to cure since it was some time in coming to fruition. Dostoevsky's expectations on the prognosis turned out to be correct; other letters he wrote to his brother in 1846 indicate that, although the illness abated in intensity, it still affected him. In a letter of May 16, 1846 he writes to his brother of his troubles and his melancholy mood, adding to a list of complaints "And then my illness to boot. The Devil only knows what this is."⁶ The illness returned with force in October as he was working on *The Landlady*. In a letter of

⁵ The academic paper trail concerning the onset of Dostoevsky's epilepsy and whether the disorder of the 1840s was genuine epilepsy is complicated. However, with few exceptions, it is now generally accepted that Dostoevsky's convulsive epilepsy first occurred in Siberia in 1851 and that he suffered from an unspecified nervous disorder starting in the 1840s or perhaps earlier. This is supported by the majority of accounts of Dostoevsky which cover this time period, as well as reports from Dostoevsky himself and his family. See Catteau 102 for a brief summary. James L. Rice is the exception to the general trend. He relies substantially on a letter of Dr. Yanovsky to Maikov from February 17, 1881 to argue his case (see Rice 3-23). In this letter Yanovsky recounts Dostoevsky's reaction to Belinsky's death on May 28, 1848. Dostoevsky stayed the night and suffered a nervous attack. Leonid Grossman also interprets this as an incident of the falling sickness: "At 3 o'clock in the morning Dostoevsky had a strong attack of the falling sickness" (Grossman, Leonid, *Dostoevsky: A Biography*, trans. Mary Mackler, Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1975, p. 52). Joseph Frank, on the other hand, describes this incident as a severe attack of apoplexy: "at three in the morning he suffered and attack of convulsions similar to that of his 'kondrashka'" (Frank, Joseph, *The Seeds of Revolt: 1821-1849*, Princeton: Princeton UP, 1976, p. 181). In my opinion, this one incident is not sufficient evidence to conclude that Dostoevsky suffered from epilepsy with convulsive seizures at this point in time. Andrey Dostoevsky forcefully denies this possibility in a response to Yanovsky's letter (see *F. M. Dostoevskij: Novye materialy i issledovanija*, Literaturnoe nasledstvo, vol. 86, Moscow: Nauka, 1973, p. 550). Andrey claims that convulsive epilepsy began when Dostoevsky was in prison and believes Yanovsky simply erred in his retroactive diagnosis. Frank sees the situation in the same light as Andrey: "Writing after Dostoevsky's death, Yanovsky recognizes such attacks as advance signals of 'epilepsy'; but whether he thought so at the time is not clear—and very doubtful. If he did have any suspicion, it was carefully concealed from his patient" (Frank *Seeds* p. 165). Indeed, Yanovsky's second account carries more authority as it came later in 1885 and was intended as the official public record of his account.

⁶ *Complete* p. 130; *PSS* vol. 28.1, p. 124.

October 17, 1846 to his brother, Dostoevsky indicates he plans to go abroad for treatment: "I'm not going for a good time but to take a cure. Petersburg is hell for me. It's depressing, so depressing to live here! And my health is noticeably worse"; but his health is not simply "worse," it is positively alarming: "I'm now almost in panicky terror over my health. My palpitations are terrible, as during the 1st period of my illness."⁷ Presumably by "first period" Dostoevsky is referring to the severe attack he relates in the April letter.

Soon after this terrifying episode Dostoevsky consulted Dr. Stepan Yanovsky for treatment of a local infection⁸ upon the recommendation of his friend Valerian Maikov. The local infection took several months to cure and treatment lasted from the end of May 1846 to the middle of July; Yanovsky claims that Dostoevsky visited him every day during this period of treatment.⁹ Although Dostoevsky first approached Yanovsky about his local infection, the doctor became Dostoevsky's treating physician for his nervous condition and their visits continued practically daily until Dostoevsky's arrest in 1849. The doctor noticed signs of the writer's disorder even in his initial examination of the patient:

After a careful examination and auscultation his lungs turned out to be completely healthy, but his heart-beat was not completely regular and his pulse was uneven and noticeably compressed [*szatyj*], as occurs among women and people with a nervous temperament.¹⁰

In his diagnosis, Yanovsky connects the circulatory and nervous systems, just as Dostoevsky had done in his description of the nervous attack, but instead of diagnosing a physical malady, Yanovsky offers a psychological one—a "nervous temperament." Yanovsky indicates that Dostoevsky complained of other nervous and physical symptoms during the years he was in his care. He relates that the patient "often complained of a peculiar faintness of the head [*golovnye durnoty*], placing them under the general

⁷ *Complete* p. 135-136; *Pss* vol. 28.1, pp. 127-128.

⁸ "Unfortunately, Yanovsky does not tell us what the specific complaint was for which he treated Dostoevsky; he refers only to a 'local ailment' which took several months to cure. (Such discretion leads one to suspect that the ailment might have been venereal)" (Frank *Seeds* p. 165). The infection may also have been hemorrhoidal in nature. Although Yanovsky makes no mention of them, Catteau claims the doctor treated Dostoevsky for "haemorrhoids" (Catteau p. 100). Dostoevsky does indicate he suffers from hemorrhoids in letters to his brother Mikhail of July 18, 1849 and August 27, 1849.

⁹ Dolinin, A. S., ed., *F. M. Dostoevskij v vospominanijax sovremennikov*, 2 vols., Moskva: Xudožestvennaja literatura, 1964, vol. 1, p. 156. Translations are mine.

¹⁰ Dolinin, A. S. vol. 1, p. 155.

definition of apoplexy [*kondraška*]. [. . .] I always assumed it was some kind of nervous disorder."¹¹

Yanovsky relates a typical "consultation" with Dostoevsky: the young author would complain that he "slept alright, but there were hallucinations, and a faintness in my head." Yanovsky would then examine the patient, and "not finding anything in particular, I say to him in reassurance, that everything is fine, and the hallucinations are from nerves." Dostoevsky would then respond, "Well, of course, nerves; that means there will be no apoplexy [*kondraška*]? That's great! As long as there's no apoplexy, we'll deal with the rest."¹²

Yanovsky's account was written in 1885, some years after the author's death, and he recognizes a "nervous disorder" in Dostoevsky's complaints in retrospect, but it is unclear whether he was of that opinion while he was treating Dostoevsky. Despite Dostoevsky's complaints of lightheadedness and hallucinations, Yanovsky evidently did not find any organic cause to the illness; he prescribes no medications as did the doctors who treated Dostoevsky for his first nervous attack and there is a complete lack of physical treatment. Instead, the doctor simply reassures Dostoevsky that his symptoms are the result of nerves, and this apparently was sufficient to calm the "nervous type." Insofar as the regimen of treatment was geared more toward the psychological than the physiological, this may indicate that Yanovsky was of the opinion that the illness was either a result of Dostoevsky's self-professed hypochondria or something akin to high-strung nerves and thus, appropriately enough, the doctor attempted to effect a psychological cure, acting in many ways like a modern therapist, offering reassurance to the perhaps hypochondriac and understandably apprehensive patient.

Although Yanovsky's treatment of reassurance, conversation and companionship tends to indicate that the doctor believed the disorder had a psychological source, he did not doubt the reality and veracity of Dostoevsky's symptoms; on the contrary, he avers that he witnessed them in the strongest of forms. He indicates that at times the symptom of lightheadedness was so strong that Dostoevsky fainted. To document this point, he relates an incident when he encountered Dostoevsky by chance on the street in St. Petersburg. Dostoevsky, being supported by a police officer, had evidently fainted; Yanovsky assisted in accompanying him home. Looking back at that incident and the disease in general, he connects the fainting spells to Dostoevsky's later epilepsy, claiming that

¹¹ Dolinin, A. S. vol. 1, p. 158.

¹² Dolinin, A. S. vol. 1, p. 156-57.

the nervous disorder "subsequently became a pure form of the falling sickness."¹³ Yanovsky's diagnosis may lead one to believe that Dostoevsky suffered from epilepsy at this period in his life, but Yanovsky clearly states he considered the nervous disorder to be a precursor to epilepsy, not epilepsy itself; the disorder only later became a "pure form of the falling sickness." In his account he does not indicate that Dostoevsky suffered any convulsive epileptic episodes during these early years in Saint Petersburg. Dostoevsky "sometimes stayed the night" at Yanovsky's,¹⁴ and given the close, frequent contact the two had at this time, Yanovsky certainly would have noticed and recorded any convulsive seizures. Dostoevsky's mature epilepsy often struck him at night, and surely the attentive doctor would have been aroused by the eerie and disturbing sounds of an convulsive epileptic seizure had they occurred during one of Dostoevsky's overnight stays.

Yanovsky's relationship with Dostoevsky began in the spring of 1846, soon after the episode which so frightened Dostoevsky, but that incident may not mark the true beginning of the nervous disorder. Persons who knew Dostoevsky during the early period of the writer's life describe him as generally unhealthy and recall indications of his nervous disorder before the attack he reported to his brother. A. E. Riesenkampf and Dostoevsky shared an apartment from September 1843 to some time in 1845.¹⁵ Riesenkampf was a medical student and conducted his practice in the apartment they shared; Dostoevsky was collecting material for *Poor Folk* and took a great interest in Riesenkampf's patients. His interest in the patients and his relationship with the young doctor no doubt exposed him to a wide variety of ailments and medical treatments, current views on diseases, nervous and physiological, and afforded Dostoevsky access to Riesenkampf's medical books. Through this contact with the medical sphere, it is very likely Dostoevsky was developing a layman's understanding of medicine. This is significant because it indicates he understood the initial attack and subsequent disorder to be serious enough to require medical treatment.

Riesenkampf also knew Dostoevsky during his days at the engineering academy and gives a short account of Dostoevsky's early health while he was still a student, roughly the years 1841-1842. He indicates that Dostoevsky was not a model of physical health:

¹³ Dolinin, A. S. vol. 1, p. 160.

¹⁴ Dolinin, A. S. vol. 1, p. 156.

¹⁵ F. M. Dostoevskij: *Novye materialy i issledovanija* p. 549.

Above all he was of a scrofulous constitution, and his voice was hoarse due to a frequent tumefaction of the submandibular and cervical glands; additionally the earthy color of his face indicated a poor [*poročnoe*] condition of the blood (cachexy) and a chronic disease of the bronchial passages. Subsequently the swelling of the glands occurred in other areas, not rarely turning into abscesses, and in Siberia he suffered from deterioration of the bones. He suffered all these ailments stoically and only turned to medical attention in extreme circumstances. His nervous sufferings troubled him much more. More than once he complained to me that at night it seemed to him as if someone was snoring near him; as a result of this he had insomnia and anxiety.¹⁶

Riesenkampf's medical training is evident in the specific medical terms he uses, and the ailments he describes are horrible-sounding. Yet the medical student indicates that physical symptoms were of less concern to Dostoevsky than nervous ones; he confirms Yanovsky's report of nondescript "hallucinations," specifying them as aural hallucinations which occurred at night. Other details of Yanovsky's account are confirmed in Riesenkampf's, including Dostoevsky's use of the word apoplexy (*kondraška*) to refer to the nervous attacks: "All this [financial and other difficulties] disturbed his nerves and effected fits of some sort of depression [*ugnetenie*], making him fear a nervous stroke or, as he called it, apoplexy [*kondraška*]. As a doctor, I long before had noticed his disorder which necessarily required active medical treatment, but I

¹⁶ *F. M. Dostoevskij: Novye materialy i issledovanija* p. 331. I have taken Riesenkampf's account of Dostoevsky as published in 1973 in *Literaturnoe Nasledstvo*. Until that time, the only account of Riesenkampf's memoirs of the author were available in Orest Miller's *Material for a Biography of F. M. Dostoevsky*. Miller only related Riesenkampf's notes in part and not as direct quotations. In Miller's version of Riesenkampf's memoirs, a similar yet dissimilar account of Dostoevsky's health is given (which was reprinted in *F. M. Dostoevskij v vospominanijax sovremennikov*, whence I have quoted it): "His face was a sort of earthy color, he was constantly tortured by a dry cough, especially aggravated in the mornings; his voice was distinguished by a substantial hoarseness; along with these symptoms of disease was a swelling [*opuxol'*] of the submandibular gland. He stubbornly hid all this from everyone" (Dolinin, A. S. vol. 1. p. 113). Miller's account is similar in its medical detail, but the phrase "stubbornly hid" is not a direct translation. Riesenkampf's writes that Dostoevsky suffers his ailments "stoically" and only seeks medical attention in extreme circumstances; in the same account he also indicates that "Fyodor Mikhailovich loved to hide not only his physical misfortunes, but his straitened financial circumstances as well" (*F. M. Dostoevskij: Novye materialy i issledovanija* p. 331). Both sources then confirm that Dostoevsky hid his physical condition, a characteristic that has been used to argue that Dostoevsky may have been suffering from convulsive seizures at this point in time and hiding them from everyone. However, this argument does not carry weight: "None of the people who knew Dostoevsky in the Academy, and who left memoirs, refer to any such attack [of epilepsy]. All were writing after Dostoevsky's death, when the mention of his epilepsy would not have been embarrassing and when its existence had long been public knowledge. Also, it should be noted that Dostoevsky was then living in common quarters with a hundred other classmates, and was constantly under supervision and surveillance: an epileptic attack would have been very hard to conceal" (Frank *Seeds* p. 88-89).

ascribed all this to his disorderly way of life, his insomnia and his poor diet"; he also relates Dostoevsky's "morbid irritability and his fear of falling into a lethargic sleep,"¹⁷ which was confirmed by Dostoevsky's brother Andrei. Whereas Yanovsky's accounts give a picture of Dostoevsky's health after the pivotal event of the spring of 1846, Riesenkampf indicates that symptoms of the nervous disorder had been present in the author even during his years at the academy.

Another account of Dostoevsky during his days at the Engineering Academy is given by D. V. Grigorovich. His report confirms that Dostoevsky suffered from a nervous disorder in those days and that he suffered from fainting spells. Grigorovich was a fellow student at the engineering academy and he and Dostoevsky shared an apartment for a short time during the years of 1844-45. Grigorovich held Dostoevsky's erudition in tremendous esteem¹⁸ and credits him with sparking his interest in literature. Grigorovich's description of Dostoevsky gives the general impression that he was prone to nervous episodes and that his intense work and reading damaged his health. He describes Dostoevsky as a unhealthy bookworm, noting the "sickly paleness of his face"¹⁹ and relating that he would read even during recesses.²⁰ When Dostoevsky was faced with the prospect of having to repeat a course he failed, Grigorovich relates that the future author fell ill and stayed in the infirmary for some time.²¹ He also relates the incident of a "fit" which required him to carry Dostoevsky and revive him; he explains it as a result of Dostoevsky's nervous personality and overwork:

The intense work and stubborn sedentary life acted extremely harmfully on his health; they aggravated his illness [*bolezni*], which had revealed itself several times even in his youth, during his stay at the academy. Once, walking with him past Troitsky pereulok, we encountered a funeral procession. Dostoevsky quickly turned away and wanted to go back, but before we could take several steps away, he had a fit [*pripadok*] so strong that I had to carry him to the nearest shop with the help of passers by; only with difficulty were we able to revive him. After such attacks usually came a depressive [*ugnetennoe*] state of the spirit [*dukha*] lasting two or three days.²²

Grigorovich appears to have witnessed the same sort of fainting fit witnessed by Yanovsky, the experience Dostoevsky referred to as *kondraška*. According to Grigorovich's account it was not an uncommon

¹⁷ F. M. Dostoevskij: *Novye materialy i issledovanija* p. 331.

¹⁸ Dolinin, A. S. vol. 1, p. 127.

¹⁹ Dolinin, A. S. vol. 1, p. 126.

²⁰ Dolinin, A. S. vol. 1, p. 127.

²¹ Dolinin, A. S. vol. 1, p. 129.

²² Dolinin, A. S. vol. 1, p. 131-32.

occurrence for him to have such a "fit." Joseph Frank agrees with this conclusion, but distinguishes those incidents of simple lightheadedness from those in which Dostoevsky lost consciousness:

This is the only reference made by an eyewitness to Dostoevsky's health as a cadet; and since Grigorovich speaks of the collapse as an 'aggravation' of earlier symptoms, we may surmise that these were perhaps attacks of faintness or dizziness—not momentary loss of consciousness as in this case.²³

Grigorovich also makes an intriguing comment: after his later epileptic fits Dostoevsky suffered from post-ictal symptoms which included an oppressive spiritual state, resembling to a great degree the state Grigorovich describes. If Dostoevsky experienced the same symptom after his non-convulsive fits of nerves and fainting fits during the 1840s, this is a good indication that the two illnesses were indeed related. Nevertheless, judging from these accounts, neither Dostoevsky nor the two medical men who knew him at this point in time entertained the notion that his nervous disorder was related to or was a precursor to genuine convulsive epilepsy.

Dostoevsky forcefully puts forth the idea that the two disorders were not related in a conversation recounted by Vsevolod Sergeevich Solovyev, the older brother of the philosopher Vladimir Solovyev, who met the writer in early 1873. Writing after Dostoevsky's death, Solovyev recounts how the author spoke about his early nervous disorder and his convulsive epilepsy:

I wanted to find out something reliable about that terrible disease the falling sickness from which, I had heard, Dostoevsky suffered [. . .]. He told me that he had suffered an attack not long ago. "My nerves have been disordered [*rasstroeny*] since my youth," he said. Two years before Siberia, at the time of my various literary troubles and quarrels, I came down with some kind of strange and unbearably painful nervous disease. I cannot relate these repulsive [*otvratitel'nyx*] sensations, but I remember them well; it often seemed to me that I was dying in reality, genuine death came and went. I was also afraid of lethargic sleep. And strangely, as soon as I was arrested, suddenly all this, my repulsive illness, left me. Never afterward did I experience it, not on the road to Siberia, not at the prison. I suddenly became vivacious, strong, fresh, and calm...But during my time in prison I suffered my first fit of falling sickness, and it has not left me since. Everything that happened to me before the first seizure, every trivial event of my life, every face I met, everything that I read or heard, I remember to the tiniest detail. Everything which began after the first seizure I very often forget; sometimes I forget entirely people whom I know well, I forget faces. I forgot everything I wrote after prison; when I finished writing *The Possessed* I had to reread everything from the beginning as I had even lost track of the names of the characters [. . .].²⁴

Here Dostoevsky discusses his illnesses as separate entities, maintaining that he was first struck with epilepsy while in prison and that before his

²³ Frank *Seeds* p.164-65.

²⁴ Dolinin, A. S. vol. 2, p. 191-192.

imprisonment he suffered from "disordered" nerves. He also maintains that the nervous disorder was cured upon his arrest, and that the epilepsy only manifested itself for the first time in prison; in doing so, he demarcates the end of the one illness as occurring roughly half a year prior to the onset of the other. This distances the two disorders chronologically and constructs a gap of time between a possible cause and effect, casting doubt upon a possible connection.

Given the time frame of Dostoevsky's contact with Solovyev, the conversation he recounts could have taken place no earlier than 1873. A thorough examination of biographical sources demonstrates that Dostoevsky's perspective on the interrelatedness of his illnesses in 1873 differed sharply from that which he held some fifteen to twenty years earlier, the period spanning from his arrest to his return to Petersburg and the writing of *The Insulted and The Injured*. Dostoevsky's own correspondence, and memoirs about the author relating to this time period do not indicate that Dostoevsky rigidly understood the illnesses to be unrelated; instead, the materials paint picture of a young man stubbornly resisting the diagnosis of epilepsy, at times directly and indirectly relating it to his early nervous disorder.

Dostoevsky may have unintentionally distorted the history of his illnesses in his account to Solovyev. Dostoevsky readily admits that his memory has been severely affected by his illness and he easily could have forgotten his perspective on his epilepsy during his years in Siberia. He also may have altered his recollection to suit the image of himself he wanted to project now that his reputation had been established as a leading voice in Russian literature. He characterizes his nervous disorder as "repulsive," as if the memory of it were painful and shameful. Perhaps he felt that a nervous disorder which, in Yanovsky's characterization, "occurs among women and people with a nervous temperament"²⁵ was not befitting of his stature and reputation. Whether the distortion was intentional or due to faulty memory, it is crucial not to confuse this later account of his illness with his perception of his epilepsy twenty years earlier.

One discrepancy in Dostoevsky's account to Solovyev is the claim that he was cured of his early nervous disorder "as soon as [he] was arrested"; letters written while he was still in the Peter-Paul fortress contradict this assertion. On July 18, 1849 he wrote to his brother: "My health is good, except for my hemorrhoids and the derangement of my

²⁵ Dolinin, A. S. vol. 1, p. 155.

nerves [*rasstrojstvo nervov*], which is proceeding at a crescendo."²⁶ Again in a letter of August 27, 1849 Dostoevsky's complains of his health:

My hemorrhoids have grown fierce to the highest degree, and I feel a chest pain that I never had before. And in addition, especially towards night, my impressionability becomes greater, at night I have long, hideous dreams and in addition, beginning quite recently, the floor keeps seeming to sway beneath me, and I sit in my room as though in a ship cabin. From all this I conclude that my nerves are in disarray [*nervy moi rasstraivajutsja*].²⁷

Clearly Dostoevsky was still suffering from a nervous disorder while in the Peter-Paul fortress. He refers to a "derangement" of his nerves in both letters, using the same lexical terms he uses in his account of 1873: *nervy* (nerves) and a form of the verb *rasstroit'* (to disorder, disarray). Beginning with the first mention of this nervous disorder to his brother in the letter of April 26, 1846, Dostoevsky consistently refers to this illness as a disturbed condition of the nerves, an "irritation" or "disordering" of them. Also while in prison, Dostoevsky reports suffering from greater "impressionability," nightmares and a spatial hallucination, all of which resemble the symptoms accompanying his early nervous disorder. Dostoevsky does not mention the nervous disorder in the final two letters written while he was in the Peter-Paul fortress, one written in September before his sentence was pronounced and the other right before he was sent to Siberia. Perhaps by that time Dostoevsky indeed was feeling free of the disorder, but it had by no means vanished "as soon as" he was arrested.

Dostoevsky's assertion that convulsive epilepsy first struck him while he was in prison is confirmed by virtually every source corresponding to that period.²⁸ Dostoevsky does not give a precise date for the onset, nor does he indicate a year, but from all indications the first seizure occurred during the early part of his four year prison sentence which began 1850. Referring to a prison medical report which confirms that Dostoevsky suffered from the illness in prison, Joseph Frank writes:

The first genuine attack, so far as can be determined, occurred sometime in 1850, and was characterized seven years later in a medical report as having been marked by shrieks, loss of consciousness, convulsive movements of the face and limbs, foam at the mouth, raucous

²⁶ *Complete* p. 173; *PSS* vol. 28.1, p. 157.

²⁷ *Complete* p. 174; *PSS* vol. 28.1, p. 159.

²⁸ Sofya Korvin-Krukovskaya asserts a different time frame for the onset: "Sofya cites Dostoevsky as asserting that his epilepsy had begun only *after* his release from prison camp, which contradicts all the other evidence at our disposal dating his initial attack to the first year of his arrival there." (Frank, Joseph, *The Miraculous Years: 1865-1871*, Princeton: Princeton UP, 1995, p. 20). Frank cites other inconsistencies in Sofya's accounts of Dostoevsky's life, and explains her version of the onset of Dostoevsky's epilepsy as a confusion of a description of epileptic aura with an actual attack.

breathing, and a feeble, rapid, and irregular pulse. The same report states that a similar attack recurred in 1853; since then, the seizures had continued on the average of once a month.²⁹

In a letter to Andrei Dostoevsky, Riesenkampf confirms that Dostoevsky was first stricken with epilepsy while in prison, but places the onset a year later: "in 1851 [Dostoevsky] was struck for the first time by an fit of epilepsy, which repeatedly occurred monthly thereafter."³⁰ As a condition of his sentence, Dostoevsky served as a private in the army in Semipalatinsk after his release from prison. Baron Vrangl, Dostoevsky's close and influential friend during this time period, maintains that Dostoevsky's epilepsy began in prison and gives a picture of the disease soon after Dostoevsky's release:

I personally was never a witness to [the fits of the falling sickness]. But I know that the fits occurred quite frequently; usually his landlady let me know right away. After a fit he always felt worn out [*razbitym*], sluggish, his thoughts were disconnected and his head did not work. The first signs of the disease, as he maintained, had appeared in Petersburg, but it developed in prison. In Semipalatinsk the fits occurred every three months. He sensed when they were drawing near and said that before the onset some sort of inexpressible feeling of voluptuousness [*sladostrastija*] seized him. It was awful to see the sufferer in these minutes in such a condition; he was pitiful and helpless after each paroxysm!³¹

Vrangl's account indicates that Dostoevsky was not only affected by his epilepsy after an attack, but *before* as well, in the form of an aura. Although Vrangl confirms that epilepsy first appeared while Dostoevsky was in prison, his account differs from Solovyev's on a significant and crucial point. Vrangl claims that Dostoevsky acknowledged a link between the early disorder and his epilepsy, that the "first signs" of epilepsy "had appeared in Petersburg."

Other accounts, including Dostoevsky's own letters, also make this link. In a letter to his brother Mikhail of February 22, 1854, his first extant letter written after prison, Dostoevsky informs him that he has contracted epilepsy, attributing its onset to a disordering of the nerves: "I was often in the hospital. Because of unstrung nerves [*rasstrojstva nervov*] I came down with the falling sickness, but attacks occur rarely,

²⁹ Frank *Years* p. 80.

³⁰ F. M. Dostoevskij: *Novye materialy i issledovanija* p. 549. Riesenkampf also claims in this letter that Dostoevsky's epilepsy began "as a result of corporal punishment." A source contemporary to Riesenkampf, Baron Vrangl, refutes the claim: "everything appearing about this in print is undoubtedly fiction" (Vrangl', A. E., *Vospominanija o F. M. Dostoevskom v sibirii 1854-56*, S. Peterburg: Suvorin, 1912, p. 14). Frank asserts that "Dostoevsky was never flogged, and the attempt to attribute his epilepsy directly to a nervous shock brought on by such an incident must be rejected" (Frank *Years* p. 80). Frank thoroughly unravels the gossip and debunks the claim; see Frank *Years* pp. 78-81.

³¹ Vrangl' p. 37.

however. I also have rheumatism in my legs. Except for that I feel quite well."³² Although not as directly as Riesenkampf, Dostoevsky does connect his epilepsy to his nervous disorder by using the terminology of "disordered nerves." In his letters while in the Peter-Paul fortress, the disordered nerves had produced symptoms of his nervous disorder; here, they cause his epilepsy.

Throughout the letters of the 1850s Dostoevsky continues to connect, directly and indirectly, his epilepsy with his disordered nerves; he also downplays the severity of his illness. His stubborn resistance to the diagnosis of epilepsy is evident in the letter to his brother cited above, where he emphasizes the rarity of the attacks, concluding that in spite of this he feels "quite well." Another example of Dostoevsky's resistance is found in a letter to his brother of July 30, 1854. Dostoevsky writes: "All in all, prison took a lot out of me and implanted a lot in me. I've already written you about my illness, for instance. Strange fits [*pripadki*], which resemble the falling sickness but at the same time are not the falling sickness. I'll write about it in greater detail sometime."³³ Dostoevsky confirms that his falling sickness began in prison. He never discussed his illness in "greater detail" in subsequent letters; he did, however, embrace the diagnosis of the falling sickness as a means of being excused from military service, and eventually would use it in his entreaties to officialdom (including a letter to Tsar Alexander II) to be given permission to return to Saint Petersburg, claiming that only in the capital could he obtain proper treatment. Even in 1856, as he seeks release from military service, he continues to question the veracity his diagnosis. In a letter to Vrangeli of November 9, 1856 Dostoevsky touches upon his epilepsy, citing it as an example of why he is unfit to serve as an officer. He frames his desire to return to European Russia as a wish to obtain proper treatment: "If I wish to return to Russia, it's solely because I want to embrace my dear ones and consult with knowledgeable doctors and find out what sort of illness I have (epilepsy), what sort of fits, which still repeat themselves and which each time dull my memory and all of my faculties and from which I fear, as a result, I'll go mad."³⁴ In this case, Dostoevsky specifically identifies the disorder as epilepsy but does not

³² *Complete* vol. 1, p. 188; *PSS* vol. 28.1, pp. 170-171. I have changed "epilepsy" to "falling sickness" in the translation. The original is *paducaja*.

³³ *Complete* vol. 1, p. 199; *PSS* vol. 28.1, p. 180. I have replaced "strange attacks that resemble epilepsy and yet aren't, however" in the original translation with "Strange fits, which resemble the falling sickness but at the same time are not the falling sickness."

³⁴ *Complete* vol. 1 p. 271; *PSS* vol. 28.1, p. 243.

point to his disordered nerves as the cause, indicating a possible evolution in the perception of his illness. Yet the movement is small and qualified: Dostoevsky writes he still wished to find out "what sort of illness" he has, indicating that he still had doubts about the veracity of his diagnosis.

His confusion and doubt as to a proper diagnosis may have been in part due to medical advice he received in Siberia. In February 1857 Dostoevsky married Marya Dmitrievna Isayeva; on the journey back to Semipalatinsk after the ceremony Dostoevsky suffered a severe epileptic fit. The fit was during the day (most of his fits occurred at night) and the violent spectacle horrified his new bride. He recounts the attack in the letter to his brother Mikhail of March 9, 1857:

On the journey back (through Barnaul), I stopped over at Barnaul at the home of a certain good acquaintance of mine. There a misfortune befell me: completely unexpectedly I had an attack of epilepsy that scared my wife to death and filled me with grief and despondency. The doctor (learned and sensible) told me, contrary to all the doctors' previous opinions, that I have *genuine falling sickness* and that I should expect that during one of these attacks I will suffocate from a throat spasm and will die precisely from that. I myself asked for the doctor's complete candor, appealing to him with the name of an honest man. In general he advised me to be careful of new moons. (A new moon is now approaching and I'm expecting an attack.) Now realize, my friend, what desperate thoughts drift through my head. But what's the point of talking about it! Still, perhaps, it's not even true that I have genuine falling sickness. When I married I completely believed the doctors who had assured me that they're simply nervous attacks that might pass with a change in my way of life. If I had known for certain that I had genuine falling sickness, I would not have married. For my peace of mind and so that I can consult with *genuine* doctors and *take measures* it's *essential* that I resign as soon as possible and move to Russia, but how am I to do this?³⁵

Dostoevsky here expresses a level of genuine alarm that is not present in other letters mentioning his attacks, a degree of alarm resembling that panicked state when he wrote to his brother Mikhail describing the first attack of his early nervous disorder. Dostoevsky's alarm is understandable: having been assured by doctors that he simply suffered from "nervous attacks" which would be alleviated by a change in lifestyle, he is confronted by a "learned and sensible" doctor who informs him he will surely die "during one of these attacks." Under the influence of the other doctors' optimistic diagnosis, Dostoevsky may have believed that he was suffering from the same nervous disorder he did before prison. In fact, the diagnosis and treatment plan offered by the doctors resembles that of Yanovsky and of the doctors who treated Dostoevsky's initial attack in 1846. In contrast to his later oral account to Solovyev, Dostoevsky's letters of this period do not indicate that he had yet definitively demarcated the two illnesses into separate eras of his life. The lack of distinction in

³⁵ *Complete* p. 305; *PSS* vol. 28.1, p. 275.

part explains his resistance to the diagnosis of epilepsy: as much as his early nervous disorder troubled him, he would not have considered it to be as severe as epilepsy. In the letter cited above Dostoevsky for the first time expresses genuine alarm at the prospect of being an epileptic, but he also held out hope that the condition was not serious, but simply a "nervous attack" akin to those he had suffered before his ordeal in prison and exile. Even when confronted with a diagnosis of "*genuine falling sickness*" by a "learned and sensible" doctor, Dostoevsky still holds out hope that he may not suffer from epilepsy. He desires to consult with "*genuine doctors*" in European Russia and procure treatment, possibly a cure. His alarm may also stem from the belief of the time that epilepsy was hereditary; Dostoevsky's indication that he would not have married if he had known that he suffered from the falling sickness reflects that view.

Accounts from the late 1850s show that his illness continued to grow more severe. Writing to his brother Mikhail on September 13, 1858 he relates a series of attacks which occurred over the span of a month: "My illness [*bolezn'*] isn't abating, but is intensifying. Last month there were four attacks [*pripadka*], which has never happened before—and I did almost no work. After the attacks I am for a while in despair [*unynii*] and depression [*toske*] and completely undone [*razbityj*]."³⁶ Insofar that Dostoevsky does not specify his "illness," which was clearly epilepsy, it appears Dostoevsky was finally accepting the diagnosis as he now simply refers to it as "My illness" and he does not question whether or not it is "genuine" epilepsy. In a letter written later that same year on December 12, Dostoevsky relates that his illness is still in force, taking "time" from him.³⁷ Despite all his hopes, Dostoevsky was not cured of his new affliction upon his return to the capital, and it continued to afflict him during the serialization of *The Insulted and the Injured*: "in April 1861, the editorship of *Time* apologized to its readers for publishing only two chapters of *The Insulted and the Injured* 'because of the author's illness.' This illness, Strakhov tells us, was a terrible epileptic fit which struck Dostoevsky and left him almost entirely unconscious for three days."³⁸

From this biographical material we can also picture the sensations Dostoevsky experienced during and after his epileptic attacks, and we can understand the consequences he feared would eventually arise from them. In a report to his brother, he writes: "My health is the same as before. But in the fall I was nevertheless somewhat ill. The attacks haven't stopped.

³⁶ *Complete* p. 351; *PSS* vol. 28.1, p. 316.

³⁷ *Complete* p. 354; *PSS* vol. 28.1, p. 318.

³⁸ Catteau p. 109.

They come on every once in a while. I lose heart after them each time and sense that I am losing my memory and faculties. Despondency and a state of psychic abasement are the consequence of my attacks."³⁹ Dostoevsky repeatedly speaks of loss of memory as a result of the attacks, a symptom which apparently never abated as he cites it years later in his account to Solovyev. He also reports that his thoughts and mood were highly disordered after an attack, he felt depressed and oppressed, and that he needed entire days to recover from an attack. He also feared he would lose his mind completely.

Despite the physical and emotional anguish his illness caused him, it also offered him an opportunity to obtain permission to retire from military service and to return to European Russia. "Approximately a year after his marriage [to Isaeva], in mid-January 1858, Dostoevsky applied officially for permission to retire from the Army on grounds of disability and in order to be able to consult competent doctors in St. Petersburg about his epilepsy."⁴⁰ Over a year later he received permission in May of 1859. Dostoevsky then moved to Tver: "He had chosen this place of residence himself when, although granted retirement from the Army for reasons of health, he had been denied the right to live in either of the two cities where he could obtain competent medical treatment,"⁴¹ and in the beginning of 1860, Dostoevsky was back in St. Petersburg. It is against this context that our examination of *The Insulted and the Injured* must be undertaken: Dostoevsky slowly and stubbornly accepting that he was suffering from genuine, incurable epilepsy, an illness he associated at times, at least indirectly, with his earlier nervous disorder, an illness which caused emotional and physical suffering, interfered with his work, degraded his memory, and which, he feared, threatened to rob him of his mind.

The Insulted and the Injured was published serially in the journal *Time*, appearing in volumes one through seven from January to July of 1861. The "principal attraction" of the first number of the new journal "was the first installment of a new novel by Fyodor [Dostoevsky]."⁴² The novel enjoyed tremendous popularity with the reading public and was instrumental in guaranteeing the journal's initial success. Dostoevsky had not completed the novel by the time of the publication of the first

³⁹ *Complete* pp. 275-276; *PSS* vol. 28.1, p. 247.

⁴⁰ *Frank Years* p. 217.

⁴¹ *Frank Years* p. 290.

⁴² Carr, Edward Hallett, *Dostoevsky: A New Biography*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1931, p. 87.

installment and continued writing concurrently with its serial publication. He worked on the novel for over a year, starting in 1860 and not finishing until July of 1861, the very month in which the last installment was to be published. It came out in a separate edition in the fall of that same year with considerable changes in the numbering of parts and chapters as well as stylistic changes.⁴³

The novel, although well-received by the public, was thoroughly dismissed by critics of Dostoevsky's time as being without artistic value. Joseph Frank writes, "From our modern point of view, what is most interesting about *The Insulted and the Injured* is its anticipation of future masterpieces."⁴⁴ Indeed, much of the academic criticism⁴⁵ of the novel has focused on this "anticipation." Of particular interest have been the embryonic themes and characters that Dostoevsky brings to maturity in his later works, such as the psychology of a brutalized child, pleasure in masochism, and depraved sensuality. Of additional interest has been the novel's relationship with European literature, in particular with Sue and Dickens.⁴⁶ One study of the novel addresses these topics as well as a host of others, including the theme of women's emancipation and Dostoevsky's criticism of early capitalism.⁴⁷ In a more recent work, Suzanne Fusso argues that Ivan Petrovich's relationship with the orphan Nelly is an early instance of a potentially sexually abusive relationship in Dostoevsky's works, that there are "secrets" and a "sense of erotic power" in their relationship.⁴⁸

The novel is narrated in the first person through the voice of Ivan Petrovich, a young and ultimately unsuccessful writer; he writes his memoirs as he lies ill, approaching death. The narrative consists of two parallel plots, both revolving around a female character. The primary plot involves Natasha Ikhmeneva and her family while the secondary involves

⁴³ Pss vol. 3, p. 520.

⁴⁴ Frank *Stir* p. 111.

⁴⁵ See Frank *Stir* pp. 110-131; Mochulsky, Konstantin, *Dostoevsky: His Life and Work*, Princeton: Princeton UP, 1967, pp. 198-218; Simmons, Ernest J., *Dostoevski: The Making of a Novelist*, New York: Oxford UP, 1940, pp. 105-119; Payne, Robert, *Dostoevsky: A Human Portrait*, New York, Knopf: 1961, pp. 148-150; Yarmolinsky 160-161.

⁴⁶ On the influence of Sue see Grossman, Leonid, *Dostoevsky: A Biography*, trans. Mary Mackler, Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1975, pp. 248-251. On the influence of Dickens see MacPike, Loralee, *Dostoevsky's Dickens: A Study of Literary Influence*, London: George Prior, 1981, pp. 33-91 and Kataraskij, I., *Dickens v Rossii*, Moscow: Nauka, 1966, pp. 391-400.

⁴⁷ See Nazirov, R. G., "Tragidejnoe načalo v romane F. M. Dostoevskogo 'Unižennye i oskorblennye,'" *Filologičeskie nauki*, 4 (1965), pp. 27-39.

⁴⁸ See Fusso, Susanne, *Discovering Sexuality in Dostoevsky*, Evanston: Northwestern UP, 2006, pp. 17-22.

Nelly, the epileptic orphan. In the primary plot a love triangle develops between Natasha, Alesha and Ivan Petrovich: Ivan Petrovich loves Natasha, but she is in love with Alesha. Without her father's blessing, Natasha leaves her family to live with Alesha out of wedlock, and her father curses her for bringing shame on the family. Meanwhile Alesha's greedy father, Prince Volkovsky, schemes to marry his son off to a wealthy princess, Katya. Gullible and feather-headed, and easily led astray by the sight of another woman, Alesha is eventually won over by Katya and deserts Natasha. At the end of the story, Natasha is reunited with her family through Ivan Petrovich's intervention and Nelly's assistance.⁴⁹ Ivan Petrovich ties the two plots together; the plots intersect late in the novel when the Ikhmenev family adopts poor Nelly.

The plot relevant to our discussion is the secondary plot concerning the relationship between Ivan Petrovich and Nelly, a story line which deals chiefly with the psychological portrait of an abused and poverty-stricken orphan. Before the two characters first encounter each other, Ivan Petrovich by chance witnesses the death of Nelly's grandfather, Jeremiah Smith, and his dog Azorka. Ivan Petrovich takes up lodgings in the recently deceased man's vacated quarters as he, by coincidence, was in need of a new place to live. Soon after Ivan Petrovich has moved in, Nelly comes to the flat expecting to find her grandfather. Not finding him, Nelly flees after a short conversation with Ivan Petrovich, leaving him stunned by her unexpected visit and her poverty-stricken state. Nelly returns to the flat some days later, and Ivan Petrovich, curious about the wretched little girl and concerned for her well-being, secretly follows her home. He discovers she is living with an abusive procuress and witnesses Nelly suffer an epileptic seizure. Ivan Petrovich enlists the help of an old schoolfriend to rescue Nelly from the clutches of Bubnova, the procuress under whose "protection" Nelly is being prepared to live the life of a prostitute. Having nowhere else to take her after rescuing her, Ivan takes her to his own flat and cares for her there.

Although by no means an autobiography, *The Insulted and the Injured* is nevertheless in part a portrait of the author as a young man: "its depiction of the literary career of Ivan Petrovich contains obvious references to Dostoevsky's own life—his initial success as a result of Belinsky's backing, and then his decline in critical favor and popularity—it had the gossipy merit of being a *roman à clef*."⁵⁰ In addition to recounting his early literary successes and failures, Dostoevsky also

⁴⁹ For a more extensive summary of plot and style see Mochulsky 198-207.

⁵⁰ Frank *Stir* p. 114.

interjects his illnesses, both his early nervous disorder and his epilepsy, into the novel through the characters of Ivan Petrovich and Nelly. Dostoevsky depicts his early nervous disorder extensively and graphically in a passage very early in the novel, and it is in this passage that his two illnesses intersect. Nelly enters Ivan Petrovich's apartment and the pages of the novel for the first time while he is in the midst of an attack of his nervous disorder. Five days after the death of Smith, Nelly's grandfather, Ivan Petrovich is sitting in his new quarters as dusk descends. His mind is full of images of the dead Smith and his dead dog Azorka and he explains to the reader the illness he refers to as *mystical horror*:

As it got darker my room seemed to grow larger and larger, as though the walls were retreating. I began to fancy that every night I should see Smith at once in every corner. He would sit and stare at me as he had at Adam Ivanitch, in the restaurant, and Azorka would lie at his feet. At that instant I had an adventure which made a great impression upon me.

I must frankly admit, however, that, either owing to the derangement of my nerves [*rasstrojstva li nerv* [sic]], or my new impressions in my new lodgings, or my recent melancholy, I gradually began at dusk to sink into that condition which is so common with me now at night in my illness, and which I call *mystical horror* [*misticeskim užasom*]. It is a most oppressive, agonizing state of dread [*bojazn*] of something which I don't know how to define, something incomprehensible and non-existent in the natural order of things, but which will be realized without fail, perhaps this very minute, as though in mockery of all the conclusions or reason, come to me and stand before me as an undeniable fact, hideous, horrible, and relentless. This dread [*bojazn*] usually becomes more and more acute, in spite of all the protests of reason, so much so that although the mind sometimes is of exceptional clarity at such moments, it loses all power or resistance. It is unheeded, it becomes useless, and this inward division intensifies the fearful anguish of expectation. It seems to me something like the anguish of people who are afraid of the dead. But in my anguish the vagueness of the danger makes my suffering more acute.⁵¹

In this passage Dostoevsky for the first time puts in an artistic text the sensations of his nervous disorder in a direct, unambiguous, and autobiographical manner. Critical literature has often identified this passage as Dostoevsky's description of his pre-Siberian nervous disorder.⁵² Yarmolinsky writes that Dostoevsky may well have been remembering his own sensations when, in *The Insulted and the Injured*, he described the mystic terror of his hero: the dread of an inconceivable and impossible something turning into a horrible, ruthless reality, a dread no less harrowing because the mind is divided between an understanding of its folly and an inability to reject it.⁵³

⁵¹ *Insulted* p. 49; *Pss* vol. 3, pp. 207-8.

⁵² Catteau also identifies this passage as autobiographical, but he attributes the symptoms to Dostoevsky's epilepsy, not his earlier nervous disorder: "Dostoevsky borrowed one of the symptoms from the post-critical state of epilepsy, fully aware of it but without naming it" (Catteau 122). See also Magarshack, David, *Dostoevsky*, London: Secker and Warburg, 1962, pp. 125-126.

⁵³ Yarmolinsky p. 57.

Frank agrees, writing "Such a condition of hallucination and disassociation probably conveys sensations connected with Dostoevsky's own 'nervous illness' in the mid-1840s, which is usually considered the forerunner of his epilepsy."⁵⁴ Beyond the "hallucination and disassociation" depicted in the passage, Dostoevsky's choice of terminology indicates he is referring to his nervous disorder. In his letters before and after prison Dostoevsky consistently uses forms of the terms *rasstroit'* and *nervy*, a disordering of the nerves, to describe his mysterious illness, and he repeats these terms in the passage: "derangement of my nerves [*rasstrojstvo li nerv*]." In the passage, the "derangement" of his nerves is not the disorder itself, but rather it triggers the disorder, just as Dostoevsky had claimed to his brother in his first letter after prison that disordered nerves had given rise to his epilepsy.

Here his disordered nerves give rise to the *mystical horror* [*mističeskij užas*], which Ivan Petrovich identifies as the core sensation of his experience. This pair of terms appears in Dostoevsky's logs of his seizures in his later years. They describe "the psychotic moods of post-ictal epiphenomena recorded by F. M. [Dostoevsky] in his logs of seizures during 1870 and later: 'objectless hypochondrical depression,' 'mystical depression,' 'mystical terror' [*grust'*, *strakh*]."⁵⁵ This usage of the same set of terms to describe different disorders in different time periods would tend to indicate that Dostoevsky understood the two to be related at the time of the writing of *The Insulted and the Injured*. Their use in this novel also reflects the function of this novel as a transitional work, a bridge between the pre- and post-Siberian eras, and a shift in Dostoevsky's use of illness in his works in general. "Once epilepsy was diagnosed, his attitude changed. From 1860 onwards, with increasing serenity, he made it part of his creative material, an involuntary experience he was to use in its essence, its dramatic effects and revelations. *The Insulted and the Injured* shows this transition."⁵⁶ The transition Catteau writes of applies to Dostoevsky's use of his nervous disorder as well as his use of epilepsy. If in *The Landlady* Dostoevsky did indeed use the experience of his nervous disorder to convey the sensations of Ordynov's delirium, he masked this autobiographical source of the disorder from the reader. In *The Insulted and the Injured*, Dostoevsky does not mask these autobiographical elements; instead, he makes them clear to any reader with some knowledge of his early writings, and he

⁵⁴ Frank *Stir* p. 122.

⁵⁵ Rice p. 88.

⁵⁶ Catteau p. 122.

does not hesitate to incorporate his nervous disorder into his work. In successive novels, the artistic potential of the early nervous disorder is eclipsed by the wealth of symbolic potential offered to Dostoevsky by his epilepsy. Furthermore, given the disdain with which he speaks of his early nervous disorder in his account to Solovyev, it only makes sense that he would distance himself from the disorder in his later works as he had developed a negative perception of the disorder. However, incorporating it in a semi-autobiographical work earlier in his career, before he had definitively demarcated the illnesses as unrelated disorders and his disdain for his early nervous disorder had taken hold, comes as no surprise.

Ivan Petrovich's nervous attack is characterized by symptoms similar to those Dostoevsky experienced during his nervous disorder. In particular, Ivan Petrovich's account closely resembles an account of the nervous symptoms Dostoevsky related to his brother in one of the letters written while he was in the Peter-Paul fortress. He writes that his "nerves are in disarray," that his disorder comes upon him "especially towards night," that he suffers from "long, hideous dreams" and a type of spatial hallucination where "the floor keeps seeming to sway beneath me, and I sit in my room as though in a ship cabin" (cited above). Ivan Petrovich's disorder is also "common with [him] now at night." Like Dostoevsky's dreams, Ivan Petrovich experiences a fear of something "hideous, horrible and relentless." As Dostoevsky did in the Peter-Paul fortress, Ivan Petrovich also experiences spatial hallucinations: the "room seemed to grow larger and larger, as though the walls were retreating." In general, hallucinations are a common thread in both Dostoevsky's own disorder and that described by Ivan Petrovich. The writer reportedly suffered from aural hallucinations, and Ivan Petrovich suffers from visual hallucinations which take the form of premonitions. During his attack, Ivan Petrovich begins to believe he would see "Smith at once in every corner." Although he does not see the dead man, he is convinced that he will if he but turn around. In the continuation of the passage (cited below) Ivan Petrovich's premonition becomes more and more vivid and real to him; he believes that what he imagines will inevitably come to pass with "the most absolute conviction." In emphasizing the certainty with which Ivan Petrovich believes what he imagines will come to pass, Dostoevsky turns the premonition of an event into a hallucination of the event. He takes the experience out of the realm of the imagination and into that of a nervous disorder in which the victim cannot distinguish from reality and fantasy.

In addition to describing his premonitions and hallucinations, Ivan Petrovich attempts to capture in words the sensations associated with his *mystic horror*. The central sensation of the event is fear. Ivan Petrovich uses two terms indicating fear to describe the sensation: horror [*užas*], used once and dread [*bojazn*], used twice. He describes the event as an ever deepening cycle of fear, "a most oppressive, agonizing state of terror." He says it is akin to the fear of the dead. The fear of the dead indicates the fear of the unreal intruding upon the real, and his inability to identify the object of his fear, the "indefiniteness" of the fear, only serves to intensify the sensation, making his "suffering even more acute." Ivan Petrovich characterizes his fear not only as a strong and overwhelming emotion, but one with an object he cannot identify. This object is indefinable, incomprehensible, and unnatural, unreasonable. Nevertheless, he fears that this incomprehensible object will manifest itself before him "as an undeniable fact, hideous, horrible, and relentless," and that no amount of rational thought, no "protests of reason" will prevent it from materializing before him.

Dostoevsky constructs this scene so that the object of Ivan Petrovich's fear does materialize before him as the physical fulfillment of his premonition. In the first part of the passage Ivan Petrovich describes his illness in a general sense. In the following section he returns to the time frame of the narrative and recounts the evening on which he first encounters Nelly, the "adventure which made a great impression upon" him. This encounter coincides with a specific episode of his nervous disorder:

I remember I was standing with my back to the door and taking my hat from the table, when suddenly at that very instant the thought struck me that when I turned round I should inevitably see Smith: at first he would softly open the door, would stand on the threshold and look round the room, then looking down would come slowly towards me, would stand facing me, fix his lustreless eyes upon me and suddenly laugh in my face, a long, toothless, noiseless chuckle, and his whole body would shake with laughter and go on shaking a long time. The vision of all this suddenly formed an extraordinarily vivid and distinct picture in my mind, and at the same time I was suddenly seized by the fullest, the most absolute conviction that all this would infallibly, inevitably come to pass; that it was already happening, only I hadn't seen it because I was standing with my back to the door, and that just at that very instant perhaps the door was opening. I looked round quickly, and—the door actually was opening, softly, noiselessly, just as I had imagined it a minute before. I cried out. For a long time no one appeared, as though the door had opened of itself. All at once I saw on the threshold a strange being, whose eyes, as far as I could make out in the dark, were scrutinizing me obstinately and intently. A shiver ran over all my limbs. To my intense horror I saw that it was a child, a little girl, and if it had been Smith himself he would not have frightened me perhaps so much as this strange and unexpected appearance of an unknown child in my room at such an hour, and at such a moment.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ *Insulted* p. 50; *PSS* vol. 3, p. 208.

Nelly's entrance into the room, and onto the pages of the novel, is timed in the narrative to serve as the climax of the episode of Ivan Petrovich's nervous attack. Her entrance intersects and intrudes upon Ivan Petrovich's mystic horror, unexpectedly fulfilling his premonition, and she replicates the movements that Ivan Petrovich envisioned Smith would make. She stands in the doorway and enters the room, just as Ivan Petrovich had envisioned Smith would do, and although she does not look around the room, she steps slowly toward Ivan Petrovich, standing and facing him: "Standing in the doorway she gazed at me in a perplexity that was almost stupefaction. At last softly and slowly she advanced two steps into the room and stood before me, still without uttering a word."⁵⁸ For a moment, Ivan Petrovich does not comprehend that Nelly is real; he cries out at her appearance, frightened at the altered embodiment of his fear, and refers to her as an "apparition." Dostoevsky marks the other-worldly nature of Nelly's appearance through the use of the phrase "on the threshold" twice within the passage. The threshold represents the boundary between reality and the dark, psychic world from which spring Ivan Petrovich's "mystical horror." Ivan Petrovich does not understand that Nelly is real until after she has crossed the threshold and uttered the words "Where's grandfather?"; before that moment, Nelly lurks in the shadows and represents the psychic embodiment of Ivan Petrovich's fear.

Nelly is not simply a hallucinated replacement for Smith. Since the premonition is a symptom of Ivan Petrovich's nervous episode, Nelly, the embodiment of his fear and fulfillment of his premonition, is a product of his nervous disorder. James L. Rice writes:

This oppressive fear of something undefinable, a 'fearful agony of anticipation,' finds its embodiment suddenly in a young girl Nelly, who later proves to be a victim of epilepsy and the novel's ultimate victim. She first bodies forth on the narrator's threshold, appearing spectre-like out of his delirium, precisely as Svidrigailov was to materialize from Raskolnikov's dream world. The hallucinatory genesis of Nelly is explicitly rendered as a psychic projection of the narrator's mystic horror, a figment created by his introspective 'bifurcation'—*razdvoenie*.⁵⁹

Rice views the appearance of Nelly as a result of Ivan Petrovich's psychology, an internal "split" in his personality. But her appearance is also a result of the nervous disorder itself, apart from the disorder's psychological underpinnings. Ivan Petrovich's nervous disorder prompts the hallucinatory genesis of Nelly: she is the manifestation of a symptom of the disorder and the embodiment of the mystical horror itself. Nelly's entrance into the novel is both caused by the disorder and constitutes a

⁵⁸ *Insulted* pp.49-50; *PSS* vol. 3, p. 208.

⁵⁹ Rice p. 88.

representation of the object of the fear evoked by the disorder. When Nelly enters the room, the abstract, indescribable object of Ivan Petrovich's "mystical horror" has been made flesh, present and describable. She is the "something incomprehensible and nonexistent in the natural order of things;" she "will be realized without fail, perhaps this very minute as though in mockery of all the conclusions or reason;" she will arrive as an "undeniable fact, hideous, horrible, and relentless." As we know, Nelly, the embodiment of Ivan Petrovich's fear, is epileptic, and as the embodiment of Ivan Petrovich's fear, Nelly also represents Dostoevsky's fear of epilepsy, that form of "genuine epilepsy" which Dostoevsky so stubbornly resisted, but had become so chronic as to become "an undeniable fact, hideous, horrible, and relentless." After Ivan Petrovich moves her into his apartment, her presence will interfere with his ability to write, just as Dostoevsky's epilepsy interfered with his writing in his life. Dostoevsky creates a psychic generative link between these two representatives of his own nervous disorders, an artistic link that should not be viewed as a simple coincidence in the narrative.

At the time of Nelly's entrance, Ivan Petrovich does not know Nelly is epileptic; yet even in this early scene Dostoevsky gives indication that Nelly suffers from the falling sickness. Ivan Petrovich indicates that it is evident that Nelly is very ill and suffers from a grave disease which has left its traces: "She was a girl of twelve or thirteen, short, thin, pale, as if she had just recovered from a brutal illness."⁶⁰ Upon learning of her grandfather's death, Nelly freezes: "For a minute she stood still in the same position, then she suddenly began trembling all over, so violently that it seemed as though she were going to be overcome by some sort of dangerous, nervous fit [*nervičeskij pripadok*]. I tried to support her so that she did not fall."⁶¹ Nelly's standing still resembles a *petit mal* seizure, where the subject loses consciousness and freezes for a moment. Nelly will display the same freezing right before the onset of the first of her seizures depicted in the novel. The sequence of Nelly's reactions also replicates the onset of seizure. First she is transfixed, then she begins to tremble "violently," so violently that Ivan Petrovich must support her. Ivan Petrovich does not name the affliction, but he recognizes the severity of the incident, characterizing it as the start of a "dangerous, nervous fit."

As discussed, in his later years Dostoevsky considered his early nervous disorder to be separate from his epilepsy, claiming to have been cured of the strange disordering of nerves before suffering from

⁶⁰ *Insulted* p.50; *PSS* vol. 3, p. 209.

⁶¹ *Insulted* p.50; *PSS* vol. 3, p. 209.

convulsive epilepsy in Siberia. Yet in the passage examined above, Dostoevsky artistically unites the two conditions through the appearance of Nelly. This artistic link between the two illnesses reflects Dostoevsky's own admission that the two may be related in his own life, as evidenced by his correspondence and memoirs about the author. The artistic use of his illnesses is representative of his acceptance of his epilepsy as "genuine," and it indicates a personal examination and exploration of the ties between the disorders, a revisiting of his fear of the falling sickness and the experience of his early nervous disorder. *The Insulted and the Injured* offers the only overtly identifiable, autobiographical and artistic depiction of his early nervous disorder in his works, and an exploration of the intersection of this disorder with his epilepsy is not repeated in his later works.

The Insulted and the Injured is not the first work in which Dostoevsky represents his epilepsy, nor is it the last. He depicted the falling sickness in his early novella *The Landlady*, and he depicts epileptics again in *The Idiot*, *The Brothers Karamazov*; an epileptic experience even plays a role in *The Possessed*. Being the first work to incorporate epilepsy after being afflicted by the disease, *The Insulted and the Injured* serves as the starting point by which to measure both Dostoevsky's personal perception of the illness and the significance of his use of epilepsy in his art. A better understanding of Dostoevsky's use of the illness in this novel will better inform our understanding of Myshkin's and Smerdyakov's epilepsy, an understanding which is essential if we are to fully appreciate the personal and symbolic significance Dostoevsky cedes to the characters which share with him his *morbus sacer*, epilepsy, the sacred disease.