

Title: Epilepsy and “Mystic Horror”: Intersecting Nervous Disorders in Dostoevsky’s *The Insulted and the Injured*

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Dostoevsky constructs two distinct representations of his own nervous disorders in *The Insulted and the Injured*. He bestows upon the orphan Nelly his epileptic affliction; meanwhile Ivan Petrovich, a highly autobiographical figure, suffers from an unspecified nervous disorder. The passage in which Ivan Petrovich describes a sensation of “mystical horror,” “a most oppressive, agonizing state of dread” (Pss 3:207-8) is widely accepted as Dostoevsky’s description of the nervous disorder he complained of in the 1840s (Catteau 122), (Frank 122), (Rice 88), (Yarmolinsky 57). Medically speaking, Dostoevsky’s nervous disorder of the 1840s and his later epilepsy may have been related. Dostoevsky, however, experienced them as distinct disorders and was firm in his conviction that they were unrelated (Catteau 108). Through a close reading of key passages of the text, this paper argues that Dostoevsky artistically contradicts his own assertion that his nervous conditions are not related. Dostoevsky constructs an intricate symbolic connection between the characters representing his early and later nervous disorders beginning with their first encounter. Nelly enters the pages of the novel precisely as Ivan Petrovich experiences the “mystical horror”; her ghost-like entrance into his apartment fulfills a hallucinatory premonition generated by the “mystical horror.” Dostoevsky constructs an intersection of nervous disorders in which the early nervous disorder generates the later one: Ivan Petrovich’s hallucination, a symptom associated with Dostoevsky’s early nervous disorder, generates the appearance of Nelly, the embodiment of Dostoevsky’s epilepsy (Rice 88).

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