

Implications of Illness in the Dostoevskian World

Ava Lewandowski

Emory University

7 May 2021

Introduction

All details in Fyodor Dostoevsky's novels are intentional. One of the most important of these is the health condition of his characters, which hints at aspects of their moral and psychological state. Illness and its correlation to guilt, for example, are often highlighted in the novels, especially *Crime and Punishment*, where the mental health of the central character deteriorated as they battled with the psychological effects of a crime. However, all types of health conditions have thematic significance depending on their context and type. Notably, epilepsy carries specific differences in its implications, depending on the character in which it is present. The author's interest in incorporating character health into prominent themes likely originates from his background as a child of a military doctor and his life-long battle with illness.

Dostoevsky, unlike many other writers of his time, incorporated elements of fantastical realism in his works by emphasizing significant character traits through their connection to a supernatural realm through health deviations and their corresponding hallucinations. Many of the illnesses in his novels separated their victims from normal human conditions, not only altering their conscience in a way that isolated them from humanity, but also placing them in the doorway to an extraordinary realm. This 'extraordinary' classification served to further distinguish the divine, or satanic, qualities of the character exhibiting the sickness. When used in Dostoevsky's thematic development, it effectively placed their archetype on a moral ladder that would signify human qualities society should either aspire to obtain, or work to lessen.

With this, it is evident that the implications of illness in Dostoevsky's novels *Notes from the Underground*, *Crime and Punishment*, *The Idiot*, and *Brothers Karamazov* are truly essential to the development of their central themes. The relationship between illnesses and disorders to characters' placements within a Christian world and their spiritual journey effectively translates

Fyodor Dostoevsky's ideas to Russian civilization in his time, and eventually, the world. This also conveys Dostoevsky's critique of rationalism, depiction of moral isolation from Christianity and humanity, and his discussion on forms of personal suffering.

Chapter 1: Epilepsy

Epilepsy is a common neurological disorder, affecting 1% to 3% of the population, and is characterized by a “spontaneous recurrence of unprovoked seizures”.¹ The seizures experienced by epileptic individuals often vary in severity and type, though all are harmful enough to ruin social perceptions of epileptics and interrupt their daily lives. In Dostoevsky's time, 19th century Russia, treatments available today did not exist, nor was epilepsy as understood. As Prince Myshkin was written to do in *The Idiot*, if one had the capabilities to do so, epileptics either had to travel to seek ludicrous treatment for the disorder or deal with these mysterious seizures for the rest of their life. Either way, these individuals stood out from society, and most of the time, not in a pleasant manner. This ostracization from society, if severe enough, often contributed to the development of certain characteristics exhibited in epileptics which Dostoevsky depicts in his works.

A. The ‘Epileptic Genius’: Fyodor Dostoevsky

Dostoevsky's experience with epilepsy throughout his life no doubt provided him with an interesting and knowledgeable perspective of mental illness. In the words of several contemporary accounts, the writer first began to experience epileptic seizures as a student, around the years 1838 and 1843. When walking with his friends, Dostoevsky would sometimes have fits of illness, and after particularly strong ones, experience depression for a couple of days.

¹ Bassel F Shneker, Nathan B Fountain, Epilepsy, *Disease-a-Month*, Volume 49, Issue 7, 2003, Pages 426-478, ISSN 0011-5029, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0011-5029\(03\)00065-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0011-5029(03)00065-8).

Years after these experiences, Dostoevsky would experience sudden and unanticipated psychological states consisting of vivid memories and *déjà vu*, accompanied by either angst or near-ecstatic feelings. Nowadays, medical professionals recognize them as simple partial seizures that eventually become more severe, or grand mal seizures, but in Dostoevsky's time, they instead were named as 'dreamy states' or 'intellectual auras'. Dostoevsky experienced all types of seizures in different circumstances, often triggered by lack of sleep, alcohol, or stress. His daytime seizures, as depicted in *The Idiot*, were preceded by a peaceful or harmonious sensation.

Dostoevsky was only formally diagnosed with epilepsy after being taken to Siberia (which, notably, was also after his experience of a mock execution), and likely used this diagnosis to be reprieved from his imprisonment. For years after, the author experienced recurring severe seizures, and it was during this period in which he authored some of the major novels of his lifetime. The death of his son, attributed to epilepsy, may have had a significant impact on the writing of *Brothers Karamazov*, in which Pavel Fyodorovich Smerdyakov also experienced the tragic effects of epilepsy.²

These experiences, whether it be the relationship between mental states to epileptic fits, or the emotionally traumatic event of his son's death, all contributed to Dostoevsky's genius in the portrayal of mental illnesses like epilepsy in his novels and their implications in the context of society and religious belief.

B. A Christian Perspective

² I. Iniesta, Epilepsy in the process of artistic creation of Dostoevsky, *Neurología (English Edition)*, Volume 29, Issue 6, 2014, pg 371-378, ISSN 2173-5808, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nrleng.2011.05.007>.

Due to the lack of medical knowledge in the past, society often explained mental and physical disorders using religious sources. Epilepsy was no exception to this, and those with the disorder were often alienated from others due to their condition. This aided in the stigmatization of epilepsy and the development of characteristics that would further enable epileptics to be considered outliers of society (as can be seen with Dostoevsky and his epileptic characters).

“In the Middle Ages, the accepted view which prevailed in social consciousness was that patients with epilepsy were possessed by Satan and other impure spirits. One common method of treatment of epileptic seizures was to submit the patient to cruel exorcisms.”³

In the Old Testament, diseases were commonly thought to be punishments for an individual or society’s sins. This was also true of epilepsy. Saul, the king of Israel, exhibited epileptic-like behaviors of undressing, falling to the ground, and laying in one place all night, which were most likely preceded by a seizure. It was known that Saul committed vile acts and was disobedient to God, and his seizures were likely to be punishments for this.

Similarly, in the New Testament epilepsy was attributed to negative characteristics. An instance in the Gospel where Jesus cured a man possessed by demons, who was coincidentally a patient with epilepsy, is prominent in explaining the Catholic perspective of the disorder. Particularly in the Middle Ages, epileptics were believed to be possessed by demons, and even subjected to cruel and elaborate exorcisms to treat this disease (which sometimes led to their death).

In the Orthodox Church, from which Dostoevsky had the most influence from due to his Russian heritage, epilepsy was believed to be a “somatic or spiritual structural deficiency which

³ Owczarek, K, and J Jędrzejczak. “Christianity and epilepsy.” *Neurologia i neurochirurgia polska* vol. 47,3 (2013): 271-7. doi:10.5114/ninp.2013.35485

interferes with complete development and leads to inhibitions at work and study”, as well as a natural consequence of sin, similarly to other religions. The Orthodox Church also believed spirits or demons inhabited individuals with epilepsy and sought to lead the possessed individual to death. Some even thought that the demon responsible for this was Satan, who would enter the body of the epileptic during a fit, and then come out of their body, leading to a normal ‘in-between’ phase. This fact becomes significant in the character Smerdyakov, who has had several spiritual associations with Satan.⁴³

C. Significance in Dostoevsky’s Novels

Dostoevsky effectively depicted epilepsy and conveyed it as a metaphor to advance his plot. In his novels, epileptic characters such as Prince Myshkin in *The Idiot* and Smerdyakov in *Brothers Karamazov* tend to exhibit extraordinary characteristics or abilities. However, these traits can have both positive and negative implications (sometimes at the same time), are associated with both saintly and devilish characters, and are evidently “part of a multifactorial, cosmological, anthropological and metaphysical context.”⁵

In *The Idiot*, Prince Myshkin spent a significant portion of his life in Switzerland for treatment of his epilepsy before returning to Russia, which is the time that this novel focuses on. He is often depicted as a fool due to both the detrimental effects of epileptic fits on his education and state of being and his naivety when it comes to interacting with society. In the case of Prince Myshkin, suffering from epilepsy, or the falling sickness, also meant he was “touched by God, as [a] holy fool”, aligning with the ancient view of epileptics. This appeared at the same time as the popular notion of epileptics being possessed by the devil, and in the case of Dostoevsky’s

4

⁵ Dietrich von Engelhardt, "Epilepsie zwischen Phänomen und Symbol im Werk Dosto-jewskis, " *Dostoevsky Studies* 7, (2003): 41-80, here 59-60.

characters, his epileptics seem to be one or the other. With Myshkin, it is evident that he is characterized as the holy version of the dual epileptic, and though he contributed to the catastrophe that occurred in *The Idiot*, Myshkin did so unintentionally. He always attempted to act for the benefit of his peers, and it was often the fault of his naivety and excessive faith in the good of humanity that his good-willed actions caused unintended consequences.⁶

Myshkin's chastity also contributes to his religious character, as he explains "because of [his] congenital illness, [he doesn't] have any experience of women at all."⁷ Epilepsy is a manifestation of Prince Myshkin's connection to a divine world and coincidingly, his deviation in nature from ordinary humans. This isolation from the 'sinful' sensuality of human love associates the Prince with a transcendent, divine love exhibited in the other holy characters of Dostoevsky's novels, such as Father Zossima and Alyosha in *Brothers Karamazov*. This is considered the ideal Christian love, and is what Dostoevsky writes in his novels as the epitome of the state of conscience in individuals, where they may love all men in a way that accepts all their flaws and enable redemption for the sinners who seek it. Myshkin's placement among troubled individuals, such as Rogozhin and Nastasya Filippovna, is purposeful in that he acts as a juxtaposition to Man at his root. As an angelic eunuch-like character, he offers guidance to his peers—and consequently, society—in the form of unjudgmental words of guidance that promote the innocent and unconditional love for humanity.⁸

⁶ Johnson, Brian R. "DIAGNOSING PRINCE MYSHKIN." *The Slavic and East European Journal*, vol. 56, no. 3, 2012, pg. 377–393. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/41698559. Accessed 3 May 2021.

⁷ Dostoevsky, Fyodor. *The Idiot*, pg 17. New ed., Penguin Classics, 2004.

⁸ Johnson, 391.

On the opposite side of the spectrum is Smerdyakov, who represents all associations with epilepsy that are considered evil. Smerdyakov is the murderer of his father, the sinful seducer of innocents, and the epitome of atheism and nihilism. From birth, he has exhibited qualities of what the ancients perceived to be an epileptic: a man possessed by the Devil. Smerdyakov's association with Satan started before his birth. Not only was he a product of Fyodor Karamazov's rape of Lizaveta, a mentally disabled girl in town, but also was born the same night that the baby of Fyodor's servants died. The baby had six fingers, which was viewed as a sign of the presence of evil spirits in Russian folklore. It is this that prevents one of the servants, Grigory, from forming the bond with his child, and triggers his perception of Smerdyakov to be associated with evil, as he was a reincarnation of Grigory's 'dragon baby'.

Another significant instance supporting Smerdyakov's association with evil occurred the night of his suicide, which coincidentally was the same time Ivan had his hallucination of the Devil. This connection is intentional in placing the Devil as a representation of Smerdyakov's spirit, as if the two were linked in the same hellish plane of existence. The relationship between them is supported by the ancient perceptions and personal consequences of Smerdyakov's epilepsy. The illness propelled Smerdyakov's atheistic development through his isolation from humanity.⁹ It also played a prominent role in his alibi for Fyodor's murder, and society's underestimation of him that allowed him to continue to act in a typically unacceptable manner. However, it is notable in this occurrence that Smerdyakov occasionally faked an epileptic fit, specifically on nights such as Fyodor's murder. This places responsibility on Smerdyakov due to him consciously acting on his nihilist ideas. In this, he is different from Prince Myshkin, who did

⁹ Cohen, Sharon. "'Balaam's Ass': Smerdyakov as a Paradoxical Redeemer in Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*." *Christianity and Literature*, vol. 64, no. 1, 2014, pp. 43–64. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/26194801. Accessed 4 May 2021.

not fake his disorder, was not evil, and did not purposely contribute to the tragedy in his story. The Devil is innate in Smerdyakov, and his mental disorder had facilitated the methods in which he acted on his true nature.

With this, epilepsy is the prominent reason for Smerdyakov's tragic existence. It managed to isolate him from humanity to the extent that he developed a mentality opposite to his Christian-dominated world. From this physical and mental deviation, and Smerdyakov's consequential spiritual connection to Satan, it is evident Dostoevsky used his illness as a manifestation of the damning qualities of his nihilist ideas. Which, when facilitated into action through their adoption by society, would lead to ruin.

Chapter 2: Mental Sickness

Mental sickness is significant in its relationship to guilt and shame. These feelings are often the result of being plagued by a mentality that prioritizes anti-Christian, nihilist ideas that serve to spiritually and psychologically isolate characters from society. Fyodor Dostoevsky uses illness, specifically the hallucinations that come with it, as a deviation from the normal human condition to emphasize the outlandishness and devastating qualities of the mindset in these characters.

A. Hallucinations of a Different World

Hallucinations, as discussed by Svidrigailov in *Crime and Punishment*, “are shreds and fragments of other worlds, the first beginnings of them.” Mental sickness weakens an individual's mind so that “the normal earthly state of the organism is disturbed”, allowing a tear in the boundary between worlds to open that allows them to interact with extraordinary beings.¹⁰ However, which world a character sees depends on the relationship of their ideas with humanity.

¹⁰ Dostoevsky, Fyodor. *Crime and Punishment*, pg 244. Third ed., W. W. Norton & Company, 1989.

In the cases of Raskolnikov and Svidrigailov in *Crime and Punishment*, and Ivan Karamazov and Father Ferapont in *Brothers Karamazov*, their rational, anti-Christian thoughts align them with a hellish alternate dimension in which beings like the Devil, evil spirits, ghosts, and spiders exist. Where heaven is above the human world, this reality exists in the depths, or the roots, of all that is evil and condemned. The sickness that results in a connection with this landscape which Dostoevsky uses to emphasize the moral and spiritual wrongness in the ideas of these characters.

Shortly after the murder of the pawnbroker and her sister, Raskolnikov first begins to experience the detriments of his illness and contact with another world. Nastasya, his caretaker, speaks to him after Raskolnikov first hallucinates a chief police officer's assistant beating his landlady, telling him that "it's ~~your~~ [his] blood that makes a noise. It's when it hasn't got any outlet, and it begins to get all clotted, and then you begin to get visions..."¹¹ Raskolnikov's 'blood' that is making noise is his inner self, loud with the many developments of his ideas. Following Svidrigailov's theory on apparitions, Raskolnikov's mental sickness, which arose as a manifestation of this inner turmoil between classification as man or superman, has opened a channel to another plane. He sees the beating of his landlady, suggesting his connection to a world dominated by sin and a lack of humanity. This is the same world seen by the other characters experiencing hallucinations.

Svidrigailov's hallucinations were due to his many crimes, including the murder of his wife and the rape of a young girl. Plagued by guilt, Svidrigailov experienced his mental sickness as a form of psychological suffering in the way Raskolnikov had. He had apparitions of his dead wife constantly, which he did realize that, based upon his theory, was due to his sickness.

Svidrigailov is aware of his connection to a world with evil things, and inwardly, that his evil

¹¹ Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 98-99.

character has increasingly been a part of it. As time goes on, Svidrigailov continuously tries to regain a connection to society by committing good deeds or courting Dunya in search of love. He knows that “at the moment of a man’s death he enters fully into that world,” that world being the spiritually evil one.¹² To avoid this, Svidrigailov’s only hope is to find salvation through humanity.

Ivan Karamazov and Father Ferapont’s journeys, though, had more to do with their ideas rather than the guilt associated with actions committed by the previously discussed characters. They both had similar anti-Christian notions that involved rationalizing God’s existence for the sake of justice in humanity and experienced hallucinations of the Devil and his demons in representation of this. For the first, “the devil is a hallucination; Ivan is on the eve of falling ill with cerebral fever, but the devil is also a reality: he says that which Ivan could not have said, relates facts the latter did not know,” including his works on solving the crisis of the suffering of innocents by theocracy.¹³ Dostoevsky uses the Devil as a manifestation of Ivan’s ideas to represent their alignment with the anti-Christ. Though Ivan hopes to ease the existence of humanity through security in a ruling by the church, the reality of a society ruled by theocracy is a false belief in God. By disproving His existence through the rationalization of God’s decisions with man-imposed laws and rule, society consequently allows all things to be permitted. Without a God, there is no supernatural guidance of men to act in good will to live their afterlife in heaven. There will exist no opposing force to anti-Christian ideas and social domination by people who believe in rationalism (and, like Raskolnikov, the advancement of civilization

¹² Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 244.

¹³ Mochul'skii, K. *Dostoevsky: his life and work*, pg 623, PG3328 M613 1971 Princeton University Press, 1971, c1967.

through overcoming moral boundaries). This, as seen in Raskolnikov's dream at the end of *Crime and Punishment*, leads to the destruction of humanity. The idea of Smerdyakov's association with the Devil is emphasized in this event too, where the lack of morality in his behavior has related him to the anti-Christ through the manifestation of epilepsy. It is people who act on their ideals, like Smerdyakov, that Dostoevsky critiques and warns of through the revolutionary hallucination of Ivan and the dream of Raskolnikov.

Lastly, Father Ferapont in *Brothers Karamazov* also experienced hallucinations and mental sickness, both the result of his anti-Christian ideas. The father describes that he "saw a devil sitting on one man's chest hiding under his cassock... another one peeping out of his pocket with such sharp eyes, he was afraid of me," representing his connection to a world plagued by many tiny demons.¹⁴ As with the others, this tear between worlds in the eyes of Ferapont emphasizes that though he believes in the existence of God, he is rejecting him through acting upon fear of Satan rather than love of God and His creation. This is anti-Christian: living a strict, ritualistic life in hope of seeking spiritual salvation through avoiding the true means of existence consisting of actions through love for other humans.

B. Spiritual Salvation, or the Lack of it

Spiritual salvation is the cure for mental sickness. It has been explicitly experienced by Raskolnikov and avoided in Svidrigailov. As described in *Crime and Punishment*, the cure to spiritual isolation is in one's reconnection to society. Raskolnikov achieved this through influence by a prostitute named Sonya, whose faith in God maintained her spirit and and humanity throughout her unfortunate life. She expressed her idyllic Christian love to Raskolnikov, and ultimately led him, with the help of his dream, to realize the fault in his theory

¹⁴ Dostoyevsky, Fyodor, Susan M. R. Oddo, Constance Garnett, and Ralph E. Matlaw. *The Brothers Karamazov: A Revised Translation, Contexts, Criticism*, pg 150. New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 2011. Print.

and accept his place within a Christian world. With this, Raskolnikov saw the beginnings of his reconnection to society and he began his spiritual redemption with his guide, Sonya.

Svidrigailov, unfortunately, revealed the consequences of a failure to experience this reconnection to humanity. After being rejected by Dunya and failing numerous other attempts to make relationships with people, he realizes his total incapability to exist in this world.

Fundamentally, Svidrigailov cannot relate to society that, unlike him, ‘restricts’ behavior with moral boundaries (though true ‘free will’ is acting in love for God and Man) and “in Dostoevsky's dialectics, the unbridled self-will, the absolute freedom of the strong must end in this ultimate act [suicide]...; self-will dies in the acceptance of life (as with Raskolnikov).”¹⁵ As Svidrigailov accepted the fate that came with his destructive self-will, he entered the alternate world where evil spirits exist and all is morally permissible.

Chapter 3: Physical Illness

A. Minor Conditions and Guilt

Most of Dostoevsky’s characters have faced some type of minor physical illness after a major event. The ill individuals discussed in this section are the Underground Man from *Notes from the Underground* and a few characters from *Brother Karamazov*. All exhibit illness as a form of the deviation from the normal human condition, literally and figuratively. Though, with the characters from *Brothers Karamazov*, this illness is overcome through redeeming acts or qualities serving to reconnect them to society.

*“I am a sick man... I refuse to consult a doctor from spite. That you probably will not understand. Well, I understand it, though.”*¹⁶

¹⁵ Jernakoff, Nadja. “*Crime and Punishment: Svidrigailov – a Character in His Own Right*,” *Transactions of the Association of Russian-Americans*, 44-59. (1981).

¹⁶ Dostoyevsky, Fyodor. *Notes from the Underground*, pg 1. Dover Publications, 1992.

The Underground Man introduces himself as a sick man, which is how he wants to be perceived. He will not consult a doctor for treatment, and generally does not want to interact with humanity. The difference in *Notes from the Underground* from other Dostoevsky novels is that the main character has not experienced a spiritual transformation and is perfectly content living the rest of his life as an isolated man, deviating from others through physical illness and mentality. The narrator describes his many immoral, anti-humanity intentioned behaviors in the second part of the novel, which increasingly isolated him from the world. It is with this that his illness has manifested and by not seeking treatment or a “cure” from his condition (through accepting a relationship with others, acting for the benefit of himself or other humans, etc), the Underground Man is fully aware and content with placement as a social outcast.

In *Brothers Karamazov*, through the likes of Grushenka, Katarina, and even minor characters such as Madame Khokhlakova, the journey of physical and mental treatment is more explicitly revealed. After the arrest of Dmitri, these individuals face varying levels of guilt for their assistance in it, which Dostoevsky intentionally aligns with the severity of their illness. The most minor was Madame Khokhlakova’s swollen foot, as she had only provided testimony in support of Mitya’s guilt. Due to her frequent visits with Father Zossima, she likely felt guilty “over not doing [her] part to prevent the crime, and for condemning Dmitri to a terrible fate in Siberia.”¹⁷ It is likely that, because her swollen foot is temporary, that the Madame eventually redeemed herself through other good-natured actions. Due to Dostoevsky’s death before the second novel, however, this is only an assumption.

¹⁷ Lambert, Sara, "Illness, Guilt, Conscience, and Responsibility in The Brothers Karamazov". *The First-Year Papers* (2010 - present) (2018). Trinity College Digital Repository, Hartford, CT. <https://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/fypapers/83>

Katarina and Grushenka's fates are included, luckily, in the first novel. Katarina experienced a severe sickness in the period after Dmitri's arrest, in which she provided more significant evidence for his guilt. However, in establishing an end to the era of her lacerating love and a beginning to a transcendental Christian love with Dmitri, Katarina has acted in favor of humanity and as a result, redeemed herself. At the end of the novel, she is seen as healthy, both physically and mentally, though her true fate is still ambiguous in the incomplete novel series. Grushenka acted in an even worse way "because of her major role in the tension between Dmitri and Fyodor, which Smerdyakov uses to frame Mitya... She fails to be a light for Mitya and does not live up to this theory, and therefore feels responsible for his actions," leading to her coma near the end of the novel, which was the worst form of sickness out of the others.¹⁸ However, through her desire to accompany Dmitri in his punishment, Grushenka is likely seeking redemption, the cure for her guilt, through suffering. Dostoevsky describes the journey of these characters to emphasize the ability for men to redeem sinful acts and guilt through repentance, whether it be through the realization of error through punishment, or doing good deeds for the upkeep of faith in God and Christianity. In this way, individuals suffering from their isolation from society find their way to reconnect, as these characters were resolved of their health deviation through methods of redemption.

B. Consumption, the Finale

Dostoevsky integrates consumption into multiple characters of his novels, though the most significant are Ilyusha Snegiryov in *Brothers Karamazov* and Ippolit Terentyev in *The Idiot*. Though all have suffered because of their environment, and other outside influences that have caused them to become the pitiful dying individual written by Dostoevsky, the primary

¹⁸ Lambert, 4.

connection between them is their illness being used as a metaphor. Particularly, as the manifestation of a spiritual journey, where “the mortal part wastes and withers away, so the spirit grows light and sanguine.”¹⁹

Ippolit, for example, though a nihilist for most of the novel, sought meaning in the universe and some connection to Christianity in his end. His beliefs became altered nearer to his death, and he spoke of sowing his seed (something he never had the chance to do, given the near end of his short life) for it to “take root and grow; the one who has received from [him] will give to another...” and that if one is “able to sow a mighty seed, leave a mighty idea to the world as inheritance, then” these good deeds will have the potential to take root in the improvement of humanity, though Ippolit does not finish this statement.²⁰ The adoption of this idyllic Christian idea is a representation of Ippolit’s spiritual salvation, even as his physical body dies.

Interestingly, Ilyusha, a consumptive boy from *Brothers Karamazov*, has a similar connection to the planting of a seed in the world.

Ilyusha Snegiryov became sick as a manifestation of his traumatic guilt over his belief that he killed a dog. Smerdyakov acted as a seducer to Ilyusha, tempting him to feed a nail to the dog, and in this way condemned Ilyusha to suffer for an act that he was not solely responsible for. Smerdyakov did not have any guilt over this crime, nor did he act in any way to ease the responsibility of Ilyusha for the sin. In the end, to take upon the responsibility of this sin and the sin of all others, Alyosha and the ‘boys’ form a brotherhood to spread Father Zossima’s teachings of love for all men and that humanity must share the suffering of each other, in essence acting in Ilyusha’s name. Ilyusha is the seed that Ippolit and Dostoevsky refer to. As stated in the

¹⁹ C. Dickens. *Nicholas Nickleby*. Penguin Books, London (1986)

²⁰ Dostoevsky, *The Idiot*, 472.

epigraph of *Brothers Karamazov*, the seed, or “corn of wheat” had to have died to bring influence in the form of “fruit” to the world.²¹

Conclusion

Illness is important in the characterization and understanding of the characters in Dostoevsky’s works, and its implications in society. The connection made between health and psychological state further emphasizes religious and moral arguments developed in the novels, including methods of spiritual redemption and the consequences of its refusal. Additionally, the idea of deviation from humanity manifested through illness and hallucinations is innovative in that by aligning modes of morality with alternative worlds, it effectively critiques rational, anti-Christian philosophies.

²¹ Dostoevsky, *Brothers Karamazov*, 2.

Bibliography

Bassel F Shneker, Nathan B Fountain, Epilepsy, *Disease-a-Month*, Volume 49, Issue 7, 2003, ISSN 0011-5029, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0011-5029\(03\)00065-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0011-5029(03)00065-8).

C. Dickens. *Nicholas Nickleby*. Penguin Books, London (1986).

Cohen, Sharon. “‘Balaam's Ass’: Smerdyakov as a Paradoxical Redeemer in Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*.” *Christianity and Literature*, vol. 64, no. 1, 2014. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/26194801. Accessed 4 May 2021.

Dietrich von Engelhardt, "Epilepsie zwischen Phänomen und Symbol im Werk Dostojewskis," *Dostoevsky Studies* 7, (2003): 41-80, here 59-60.

Dostoevsky, Fyodor. *Crime and Punishment*. Third ed., W. W. Norton & Company, 1989.

Dostoyevsky, Fyodor. *Notes from the Underground*. Dover Publications, 1992.

Dostoyevsky, Fyodor, Susan M. R. Oddo, Constance Garnett, and Ralph E. Matlaw. *The Brothers Karamazov: A Revised Translation, Contexts, Criticism*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 2011. Print.

Dostoevsky, Fyodor. *The Idiot*. New ed., Penguin Classics, 2004.

I. Iniesta, Epilepsy in the process of artistic creation of Dostoevsky, *Neurología (English Edition)*, Volume 29, Issue 6, 2014, pg 371-378, ISSN 2173-5808, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nrleng.2011.05.007>.

Jernakoff, Nadja. “*Crime and Punishment: Svidrigailov – a Character in His Own Right*,” *Transactions of the Association of Russian-Americans*. (1981).

Johnson, Brian R. “DIAGNOSING PRINCE MYSHKIN.” *The Slavic and East European Journal*, vol. 56, no. 3, 2012, pg. 377–393. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/41698559. Accessed 3 May 2021.

Lambert, Sara, "Illness, Guilt, Conscience, and Responsibility in The Brothers Karamazov". *The First-Year Papers* (2010 - present) (2018). Trinity College Digital Repository, Hartford, CT. <https://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/fypapers/83>

Mochulsky, K. *Dostoevsky: his life and work*, PG3328 M613 1971 Princeton University Press, 1971, c1967.

Owczarek, K, and J Jędrzejczak. "Christianity and epilepsy." *Neurologia i neurochirurgia polska* vol. 47,3 (2013): 271-7. doi:10.5114/ninp.2013.35485