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DOSTOVESKY AND O'CONNOR: AN EXAMINATION OF HOW 19TH CENTURY RUSSIAN LITERATURE INFLUENCED AMERICAN SOUTHERN LITERATURE IN THE 20TH CENTURY

Niall P. Sullivan
Providence College, nsulliv4@friars.providence.edu

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Niall Sullivan
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When examining writers who are considered religious writers, a stereotype associated with these writers are that they are creating merely to espouse dogma. Contrastingly, there are also writers who consider themselves atheists, and all of their works are seen as promoting their lack of belief. Fyodor Dostoevsky, a nineteenth century, progressive Russian writer, is often read in the context of the various aspects of religion in his works. Immediately when examining works written by Dostoevsky, it is apparent that he is a writer heavily influenced by his Orthodox beliefs. While he is considered a religious writer in many respects, his use of religion in his works is anything but simple and obvious. At the heart of his novel *Crime and Punishment* is the question of whether or not the protagonist, Raskolnikov, truly confesses to his murder by the end of the novel, and whether or not he is on the path to repentance. The epilogue alone has led to much discussion, and the Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams perceives the ending as extremely satisfying not only on an artistic level, but also on a theological level. Williams also argues that this epilogue demonstrates a deeper use of religion than we might initially believe when first examining Dostoevsky's writing in the context of religion.

Emerging in the mid-twentieth century was another religious writer, from Southern United States: Flannery O'Connor. Similar to Fyodor Dostoevsky, her use of religion in her writing has been the question of secular and religious scholarship. There are some authors who attempt to downplay her writing as the affects of her given circumstances, and not as being shaped by her catholic beliefs.. The manner in which Flannery O'Connor, and Fyodor Dostoevsky integrate their own religious

beliefs and perspectives on religion through the use of the two different characters found in their respective works proves that their purpose in writing was much more than merely attempting to espouse dogma. Instead, both writers wanted to depict scenarios that would force the reader to re-examine previously held conceptions on religion, and to point out some flaws in these previously held religious beliefs. By presenting scenarios in which religion has become construed, Dostoevsky and O'Connor forged a new type of realism present in their works, leaving a powerful effect on the reader of both works. Throughout the process of examining Fyodor Dostoevsky's works and the circumstances surrounding his work, and comparing them toFlannery O'Connor's works and the circumstances that shaped her work, it is obvious to see how heavily influenced Flannery O'Connor and other Southern American writers such as Truman Capote were by Fyodor Dostoevsky, especially when examining their treatment of religion in their respective works.

Rowan Williams, the Archbishop of Canterbury, offers his perspective on the ending of the novel, and the purpose it serves. Williams is not quick to write off the ending Fyodor Dostoevsky wrote as leading to a failure of any kind artistically on Fyodor Dostoevsky's behalf. Instead, he finds the ending as serving a specific purpose that all types of fiction, regardless of what the level of religion in the work is, must carry out. In Rowan William's work, *Dostoevsky: Language, Faith and Fiction,* he states that the ending has to "project something beyond that ending or otherwise signal a level of incompletion, even in the most minimal and formal mode,

indicating an as yet untold story."[1] Williams identifies the world constructed by Dostoevsky as one in which a central question governs the work: what do human being owe each other, and is purposely left painfully open.[2] He then characterizes the novels as needing to invite us to imagine extremes of different painful, uncomfortable feelings such as failure, suffering, and desolation.[3] By this wonderful summation on Rowan Williams' part of the emotional impact Dostoevsky's novels leave on the reader, it is more than apparent that Fyodor Dostoevsky's approach as a religious writer is far from one merely espousing dogma.

For Williams, religious beliefs and ideas are presented not as conclusive treatises, but rather, as a means of portraying the beliefs and unbeliefs that exist in the universe. When discussing the last scene presenting what could potentially happen to Rasknolnikov at the conclusion of the novel, he feels that this depiction demonstrates a continuation in Fyodor Dostoevsky's decision to present what exists, rather than proclaiming definitively what should exist. Williams points out that in all of Dostoevsky's works, at one point or another, the reader is presented with characters attempting to reveal or failing to reveal who they are in the guise of various literary devices such as confessions and monologues.[4] He then goes on to characterize Raskolnikov's final confession of his guilt as merely "an outward manifestation of the failed exercise in self-knowledge that makes up the greater part

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[1] Rowan Williams, Dostoevsky: *Language, Faith and Fiction,* Texas: Baylor University Press, 2008,46.
[2] Ibid 1.
[3] Ibid 1.
[4] Ibid 117.

of the book as we are admitting again and again to his obsessed consciousness."[5] While Rowan Williams is not willing to perceive how Rasknolnikov ultimately changes as a profound conversion, he is rejecting the notion of Dostoevsky as a religious writer attempting to profess religious dogma. Instead, Williams perceives this intentional ending not as something to be finished by Fyodor Dostoevsky in later novels, but instead, perceives it as fitting into the structure of the novel, and giving it much more meaning.

Directly speaking to how Rasknolnikov is impacted by external forces, Williams is able to connect Rasknolnikov's fate to how major characters are depicted as responding to external forces in Dostoevsky's works. Part of the reason Fyodor Dostoevsky decides to have most of the characters in the novels outwardly attempt to fix themselves is how visible these characters become when doing so. Before conceptualizing how the major characters become more visible through this process, Rowan Williams makes a distinction between the external and internal as presented in Dostoevsky's novels. According to Williams, the "outside world" is part of the process in which self-affirmation is "uncovered as an unconscious amputation of self from world."[6] Through this perception on how to obtain self-affirmation, he describes those on the path to healing or redemption as "taking the risk of being seen."[7] Based on how Rowan Williams perceives Fyodor Dostoevsky's intentions when writing the epilogue, it makes logical sense that everything occurs in the end of the novel in relation to Rasknolnikov's development as a character throughout

[5] Ibid 117.
[6] Ibid 117.
[7] Ibid 117.

the novel. If we are to assume this theory is true, it makes sense that he only really begins to repent through his interactions with Porfiry and Sonya. It is also logical to assume that his time spent in imprisonment in Siberia can be perceived as a catalyst on his road to redemption, since he is constantly interacting with other people who have experienced the same thing as him.

In an article titled *Why Read Dostoevsky?* written by Janine Langan, the author tries to examine why even students that are assigned to read lengthy Dostoevsky novels enjoy reading his work as much as they do. To begin with, Langan describes the reaction to his death as a grand procession, filled with people from all different walks of life, and even calls the coffin "something they were granted the privilege to carry."[8] Langan uses a quote taken from a newspaper as describing the funeral as "not a burial, but a triumph of life, the resurrection of life."[9] The author then explains how Dostoevsky's approach was far from catering to the elite, but rather, perceived his work as carrying out an old tradition established by Jewish prophets. Janine Langan states that not only did Fyodor Dostoevsky believe that the writer had to be prophetic: he also believed this role would transfer to the reader.[10] This same perspective on writing and why writers decide to do what they do was very much at the heart of what fueled American Southern Writers to decide to write in the twentieth century. Langan feels that the most powerful component of Dostoevsky's writing is the honesty, because as she describes it, "Dostoevsky never

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[8] Janine Langan, "Why Read Dostoevsky?," *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 3, no.1 (2000): 93 Accessed April 10, 2014, http://0-muse.jhu.edu.helin.uri.edu/journals/logos/v003/3.1.langan.pdf

[9] Ibid 93.
[10] Ibid 94.

spoke of what he had not lived himself."[11] An amazing part of part of how Langan is able to describe Dostoevsky is that she is able to balance an idealization of the Russian writer, with an unflinching depiction of some of his flaws. This core tenant of writing became an integral part of Flannery O' Connor's approach to writing, which is known as the New Criticism school of writing.

Janine Langan sees the anguish Fyodor Dostoevsky experienced as more personal when he is described as having "the panic of a loser, incapable to shed his addictions, unworthy of his own vision and dreams."[12] Langan expands this conceptualization of Dostoevsky even further by characterizing Dostoevsky as "an expert in chaos[13]" due to all of the anguish he experienced throughout his tumultuous life. When learning more about Flannery O'Connor's writing and how her background heavily influenced her writing, there are continuities present in this characterization of Dostoevsky's treatment of the chaos in his works. Janine Langan feels that his books respond to the external and internal challenges he faced throughout his life, as "hymns to the light promising to inform that chaos, to the light that made possible the first creation, and can bring a new creation out of that chaos: The light of *Pravada*, the light of Truth."[14] This concept is described as a vision of the world while remaining in life, as "an ideal of the kingdom pregnant with its own realization, an awareness that the present is already the seed of all we hope for."[15] According to Dostoevsky, he feels that it is only in Russia that you can

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[11] Ibid 94.
[12] Ibid 95.
[13] Ibid 95.
[14] Ibid 95.
[15] Ibid 95.

find the dual meaning present in this concept, and expresses how the pursuit of the ideal fulfillment of the truth has been something he has been desperately searching for. Langan is also fascinated by how Fyodor Dostoevsky was able to tackle sociological problems and psychological problems in all of his works, by demonstrating how Dostoevsky himself struggled with the various problems within his own family due to his various vices such as his gambling addiction.

All discussion of other means by which Dostoevsky was able to get at the heart of what people were thinking at the time he wrote his works inevitably leads to a treatment of the biggest challenge he ever wrote about: the God question. Instead of attempting to merely explain how important faith in God is, he openly acknowledges how far removed from self-evident faith in God is in a world rampant with injustice and pain.[16] According to Janine Langan, Dostoevsky was completely aware of how Russian Orthodoxy was under attack in many respects, but he was also able to understand that in the religious tradition's teaching, the icons existed to be transcended and seen through.[17] Langan feels that it is impossible to perceive Dostoevsky as dogmatic in his writing approach because like Pascal, Dostoevsky points out how atheism is a proof of strength of mind and will, up to a point.[18] Janine Langan is able to perceive Fyodor Dostoevsky's unfaltering honesty, refusal to impair universe where God's presence is far from obvious, shying away from

[16] Ibid 100.
[17] Ibid 101.
[18] Ibid 101.

dogmatic Christian answers, and not seeking these Christian dogmatic answers, as leading him to provide an extremely Christian insight.[19]

Similar to how Rowan Williams perceives the role the external has in the healing process, Langan describes the wound and rift as the space providing us with our freedom, allowing us to transcend ourselves and become "*Pravada*-making animals."[20] Janine Langan perceives the painful process Rasknolnikov undergoes throughout *Crime and Punishment* after committing the murder and trying to seek repentance as demonstrating God's presence in the universe. Langan characterizes suicide as the only thing that can "destroy and obliterate this image from the human heart and face."[21] Janine Langan concludes the article by describing this struggle to turn from God's presence as "the gift Dostoevsky wished to share with us through his book: the eye of the fantastic realist for Pravada, for justice in the making, everywhere humans live and love."[22]

In the mid nineteenth century, an American writer from the South emerged, Flannery O'Connor, whose use of her beliefs as a practicing Catholic in her works have often been examined. Unlike Fyodor Dostoevsky, who had begun to doubt his religious beliefs after been imprisoned and being ridiculed by his inmates for not believing in God, O'Connor held onto her religious beliefs in spit of the obstacles placed in her way throughout her life. In her works and in the few interviews she gave, Flannery O'Connor holds in contempt the concept of religious struggles, which makes her different from Dostoevsky in this sense. She is similar to Dostoevsky

[19] Ibid 102.
[20] Ibid 106.
[21] Ibid 109.
[22] Ibid 109.

however, because of the same use of honesty in her work as an integral part of her storytelling and ability to draw her audience in. In an article written by Eileen Pollack titled *Flannery O'Connor and the New Criticism: A Response to Mark McGurl* taken from the *American Literary History Journal*, Pollack provides a great analysis of Flannery O'Connor's writing style, and how her schooling and formative years as a writer influenced it. The approach that O'Connor was able to learn during her two years spent at the University of Iowa is called New Criticism.

Pollack states that the two principles of New Criticism that fuels a lot of writing in this style are to "write what you know" and "show, don't tell."[23] This first tenet, write what you know, is something that was essential to Dostoevsky's craft as a writer throughout his work. Instead of shying away from his own flaws as a writer, he decided to include them no matter how painful it would be, because he knew how much better it would make him as a writer and as a real individual. Instead of hiding the fact that he was a gambler, and that this addiction was extremely debilitating to his family, he instead decides to include this vice and even created a short story titled, "The Gambler." Other guiding principles emerge in creating a work in the New Criticism writing style, such as to not explain the importance of what you have already depicted, leaving the reader to draw his or her own conclusions from what is written on the page, and not to moralize about your character's misdeeds.[24] This

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[23] Eileen Polack, "Flannery O'Connor and the New Criticism: A Response to Mark McGurl," *American Literary History* 19, no. 2 (2007): 547, accessed April 10, 2014 http://0-muse.jhu.edu.helin.uri.edu/journals/american_literary_history/v019/19.2pollack.pdf.

[24] Ibid 548.

approach is the very thing that Rowan Williams was able to recognize in Fyodor Dostoevsky's writings, when he notes how Dostoevsky doesn't attempt to answer questions, but rather has his characters attempt to answer pivotal questions in new, exciting ways. Pollack writes that New Criticism establishes a paradigm in which stories have a main character who experience a conflict working itself towards a turning point through the use of one or more dramatic scenes, and the specific conflict used should represent a larger question of human behavior justifying and unifying all the different elements of the story.[25] Similar to Dostoevsky, it is obvious that a driving question that becomes the underlying purpose of the work is something that was the foundation of most of Flannery O'Connor's writing. One analysis of Fyodor Dostoevsky's work *The Idiot*, for example, states that the underlying question of the entire novel asks: was Christ merely a supreme, beautiful figure who couldn't help anyone?

The driving question for O'Connor, according to Pollack, was exactly what would it take to get a sinner to recognize the central mysteries of Christianity.[26] Eileen Pollack also notes that part of the difficulty involved in her decision to focus her writing on Christianity was the fact that artistically, she had to figure out how to write about this theme, for an audience of primarily nonbelievers.[27] A key component of Catholic teachings that allowed her approach to reach fruition was her belief that the divine, what must be told, is apparent in the concrete of the material world, and just how the spirit is made flesh in the Word, just as God

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[25] Ibid 548.
[26] Ibid 549.
[27] Ibid 549.

assumed human form and suffered like human suffer, Flannery O'Connor felt the grand themes of Christianity can be embodied in the physical particulars of a flawed character's extremely human struggles against the devil.[28] Through the third-person perspective utilized by O'Connor in which a narrator exists, there are plenty of opportunities for the characters depicted in her stories to still explore various intended conflicts that are of great interest to her.[29] Eileen Pollack concludes the article not by stating that O'Connor was limited by the New Criticism technique she wrote at Iowa, but rather demonstrates how time spent at Iowa and all that she learned from Caroline Gordon gave her a variety of techniques that were the best suited to her approach as a Southern Catholic writer.

In an article taken from *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* titled "Religion, Idolatry, and Catholic Irony: Flannery O'Connor's Modest Literary Vision" written by Robert A. Jackson, he attempts to analyze the influence O'Connor's religious beliefs had on her writing process, and how that influence shapes our understanding of her work. A problem Jackson addresses right off the bat is how much secular scholarship is devoted to Flannery O'Connor's writing. Robert Jackson notes how a 1970 study on Flannery O'Connor titled *The World of Flannery O'Connor* by Josephine Hending downplays the Catholic aspect of O'Connor's life and writing in order to perceive her as "the product of much wider cultural forces, and as the author of a body of work whose concern reaches deeply

[28] Ibid 549.
[29] Ibid 556.

into personal and social worlds with less overtly Catholic significances than suggested by religious critics." [30]

Taking an excerpt from Hendin's work, it is stated by the author that Flannery O'Connor's impulse to write or pray emerged from a cultural context, where she was located geographically, and the fact that she had lupus, which claimed her life at a young age. While it is true that these two different factors influenced her writing, doing so fails to consider Flannery O'Connor religious beliefs in the context of her creative process. O'Connor refutes the idea that she can separate her religious identity from her work, because she felt that "because I am a Catholic I cannot afford to be less than an artist." [31] Similar to Dostoevsky, he knew that as he created, it would be impossible for him to completely distance himself from his Eastern Orthodox religious beliefs, and instead, found new and invigorating ways of incorporating these beliefs into his writing.

According to Robert A. Jackson, the fact that is obvious to see how engrained in the South O'Connor's writing was does not "hinder or narrow its scope," but instead, "the fiction itself amplifies and clarifies the resonance, power, and humanity of the Southern culture from which it emerges." [32] In an essay titled 'The Catholic Novel in the Protestant South" written by Flannery O'Connor, she parallels contemporary literature's function to that of the Bible. O'Connor asserts "for the purposes of

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[30] Robert A. Jackson, "Religious Idolatry and Catholic Irony: Flannery O'Connor's Modest Literary Vision," *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Though and Culture* 5, no. 1 (2002): 18 Accessed April 10, 2014, http://0-muse.jhu.edu.helin.uri.edu/journals/logos/v005/5.1jackson.pdf

[31] Ibid 19.

[32] Ibid 22.

fiction, these guides have to exist in the form of stories which affect our image and judgment of ourselves."[33] Like Fyodor Dostoevsky, Flannery O' Connor found the presence of idolatry in the society she was a part of to be a debilitating problem. According to Jackson, destroying the idols and interrupting idolatrous acts becomes "a kind of grotesque, usually violent testament to the equally efficacious process of grace, God's active agency in the world, that burns away the sin of humanity and creation."[34]

Another thing that Robert A. Jackson finds remarkable about Flannery O'Connor's writing is how much of a product of southern United States it truly is. Jackson characterizes the South as depicted by O'Connor as "marked by isolation, a rural individualism, an intensified concentration on ordinary objects whose materiality often explodes with the violence of grace." [35] Similar to the misfit characters often depicted in O'Connor's stories, she is described as sharing the same communal role of these constructed characters, which is the role of "a dissident, a self-conscious minority figure who sets apart, or carves out her own fictional space, from the prevailing culture."[36] Jackson makes note of the fact that the role O'Connor carves out in her writing is the same function her faith has in all her writings. According to Robert A. Jackson, by addressing the primarily homogenous Protestant South from her own minority religious perspective, "she provides a critique of Southern culture in explicitly spiritual terms that parallels the South's more general regional critique

[33] Ibid 22.
[34] Ibid 24.
[35] Ibid 36.
[36] Ibid 37.

of American culture."[37] Jackson concludes the article by stating that the fact that Flannery O'Connor was able to use a canvas that would seem as a desolate as the South in the United States in the middle of the twentieth century to create works as profound as she did is not constraining by any means, and instead, is a testament to her true skill and craft as a writer.

In Maria Bloshteyn's article taken from the *Southern Literary Journal* titled "Dostoevsky and the Literature of the American South," she examines why American Southern writers such as William Faulkner and Flannery O'Connor have noted the strong influence Fyodor Dostoevsky had on their work. These writers imply that they identified with Dostoevsky not just as American writers, but also as southern writers, and their southern heritage was a key influence on their interest in and analysis of Dostoevsky's novels.[38] Throughout the article, the author notes that despite an obvious influence of Dostoevsky on American Southern writers of the twentieth century, there is not a lot of scholarship examining the connection between the two different writing styles. A source that Bloshteyn finds important to analyze is Temira Pachmuss's essay, "Dostoevsky and America's Southern Women Writers: Parallels and Confluences" that examines how southern writers such as Flannery O'Connor and Carson McCullers were influenced by Dostoevsky. Maria Bloshteyn writes that Dostoevsky's Christian Credo, "that the existential, grotesque world of today… may be saved from its spiritual perdition of the fundamental

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[37] Ibid 38.

[38] Maria R. Bloshteyn, "Dostoevsky and the Literature of the American South," The Southern Literary Journal 37, 1 (2004):1, accessed April 10, 2014 http://0-muse.jhu.edu.helin.uri.edu/journals/southern_literary_journal/v037/37.1bloshteyn.pdf

principle of an all-forgiving and all-embracing love" (126)[39] is what draws American southern writers to Fyodor Dostoevsky.

According to Bloshteyn, Pachmuss also argues that Russian classics are close to southern writers, and even closer than to American writers, because the South "has always been a section apart from the rest of the United States, having interests and a personality distinctly its own," (254)[40] and the factors that make it unique in America brought it closer to nineteenth-century Russia than to former Union states. Another fact that Maria Bloshteyn is able to point out in her analysis as noted by Pachmuss is that "in both old Russia and the South up to the present time, a dominant characteristic was the cheapness of human life (252)."[41] What is also interesting to note is how Dostoevsky was perceived as the most important of the Russian novelists in the South, and as a result, more southern writers took their inspiration from Dostoevsky than from any other Russian author.[42] It is also significant to note that all of Dostoevsky's great novels were written and set in the same period after the serfs' emancipation and the introduction of new forms, which had the ability of depicting a society undergoing a major change.[43] The American South during the twentieth century was also a society caught between crossroads of new, exciting ideas, and pre-existing, older ideas. The society in which Fyodor Dostoevsky was writing about was caught in a debate between the Westernizers and Slavophiles, which is a debate that is still relevant today.

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[39] Ibid 2.
[40] Ibid 3.
[41] Ibid 3.
[42] Ibid 5.
[43] Ibid 6.

Maria Bloshetyn notes that Dostoevsky appealed to southern writers due to his Russia-centric mentality, which is re-affirmed by Dosteovsky's statement that "Russia is the place where Russian writers belong and where they should seek both inspiration and subject matter." [44] According to Bloshetyn, this was a view held by southern writers discussing the influence the South had on their creative process. In Flannery O'Connor's 1962 lecture, "The Regional Writer," she argues that southern fiction thrives because southern writers "apparently feel the need of expatriation less than other writers in this country" (844), and are content to be a part of their own communities and to write about them.[45] A component of Fyodor Dosteovsky's writing style that American southern writers learned from him was "if they required any more convincing, they need not conform to northern or European models or expectations, but could set their own literary norms." [46]

It becomes interesting to note that in the article, Maria Bloshetyn discusses the fact that Flannery O'Connor places a large emphasis on the issue of faith for a southern writer demonstrates the interest she had in Dostoevsky as a writer addressing various questions pertaining to faith. Despite the fact that the Catholic Church did not appear to appreciate Fyodor Dostoevsky's writing, Bloshetyn implies that O'Connor was able to circumvent how the Catholic Church perceived his writing through Catholic commentators of his work.[47] According to Bloshetyn, Flannery O'Connor was able to create a convoluted argument that "reading Anti-Catholic

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[44] Ibid 6.
[45] Ibid 6.
[46] Ibid 7.
[47] Ibid 9.

Dostoevsky was beneficial for a Catholic writer because it widened one's cultural scope and therefore made one's Catholic writings richer." [48]

Walker Percy, a Catholic southern writer, argues that the reason Dostoevsky resonates with Southerners is because regardless of religious affiliation, he is not "afraid to deal with ultimate questions."[49] An O'Connor scholar notes that Dostoevsky and O'Connor are similar, because "like Dostoevsky, O'Connor believes that her characters need to experience suffering firsthand if they are ever to become authentic in an unjust world." This idea of "writing only about what you know" is really what propelled both of these writers' respective works. Instead of trying to be completely grounded in the abstract and failing to delve into issues uncomfortable for the writers themselves to discuss, both writers decided to tackle these undesirable issues head on. [50] It is also of importance to note that the two writers both suffered from a debilitating illness, and was a major factor behind Fyodor Dostoevsky's perception of the concept of salvation through suffering.[51] In Fyodor Dosteovsky's novel *The Idiot*, the protagonist, Prince Myshkin suffers from epilepsy. In these moments before his seizures, it is when he has profound revelations, and is even more interesting because Dostoevsky himself suffered from epilepsy throughout his life. Maria Bloshteyn concludes the article by stating that the reason southern writers place the most value on Dostoevsky out of all the other Russian writers such as Turgenev and Tolstoy is that according to Bloshteyn, only in Dostoevsky's novels do all crises, regardless of what type they are, fundamentally

[48] Ibid 9.
[49] Ibid 10.
[50] Ibid 15.
[51] Ibid 15.

boil down to a religion crisis "centering on the ultimate question of them all-the existence of God and the implications of his existence or non-existence for ourselves and our souls."[52] Similar to Flannery O'Connor, Fyodor Dostoevsky had a problem just leaving all perceptions of religion exactly as they were, and instead wanted to ask questions about religion nobody else wanted to ask.

After examining how and why both Fyodor Dostoevsky and Flannery O'Connor decided to write, it becomes obvious how influential Dostoevsky's writing was on O'Connor. Despite the fact that Fyodor Dostoevsky tackled religion from an Orthodox perspective, an unbeliever desperately striving to examine why people believe, and Flannery O'Connor was a devoutly Catholic individual, it is still obvious how the two writers felt it crucial to present religious crises in their works: as an attempt to re-affirm their faith. Regardless of the fact that O'Connor and Dostoevsky have two completely different writing styles, the factors that shaped their respective works are extremely similar, especially when examining how passionately both writers felt about the region in which they lived, and how writers of this same lineage had felt compelled to stay in and write about where they were from.

After examining how religion was interwoven into the fabric of O'Connor and Dostoevsky by Robert A. Jackson and Rowan Williams, respectively, it is obvious these two do not embody any religious writer stereotypes as being writers who only espouse dogma, without attempting to arrive at any deep, underlying questions pertaining to religion in their writings. Instead, Flannery O'Connor and Fyodor Dostoevsky both tackle the God question in their works in unconventional ways,

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[52] Ibid 20.

that the lackadaisical reader perceives merely as promoting unbelief. Due to the fact that American southern writers have noted the influence Dostoevsky had on their writing, it is obvious that without this Russian writer, Flannery O'Connor would have never written in the same way, and not with nearly the same amount of power. The existence of God and how he can potentially manifest himself in places that appear to be devoid of any God was a major concern for Dostoevsky, and as a result, became a major concern O'Connor grappled with in her writing. It is amazing that a Russian writer from the nineteenth century was able to have such a powerful influence on the American southern writers who emerged in the twentieth century. As Maria H. Bloshetyn's article "Dostoevsky and the Literature of the American South" points out, there is a remarkable overflowing of themes, ideas, and techniques transcending all cultural boundaries, and is a testament to writing's power to transcend pre-existing boundaries. That is why we still read Fyodor Dostoevsky, and why he is just as relevant today as he was in nineteenth-century Russia. Failing to give ourselves proper time to truly analyze Dostoevsky's works and reach beyond their meaning at the surface level will only hurt us, and we will inevitably miss out on one of the most fulfilling, intellectually stimulating experiences possible in this lifetime.

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