

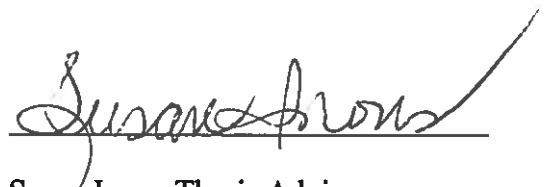
Authoring Landscape:
Ron Rash and the International Conversation of Place

By:
Jacob S. Bell

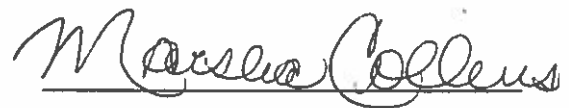
Honors Thesis
Department of English and Comparative Literature
University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill

2018

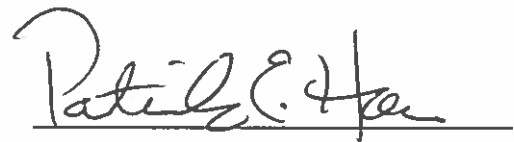
Approved:

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Susan Irons", written over a horizontal line.

Susan Irons, Thesis Advisor

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Marsha Collins", written over a horizontal line.

Marsha Collins, Reader

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Patrick Horn", written over a horizontal line.

Patrick Horn, Reader

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	pg. 3
Chapter I: Introduction.....	pg. 4
Chapter II: Tolstoy, Rash, and the Authorship of Landscape.....	pg. 15
Chapter III: Tolstoy, Rash, and the Translation of Culture.....	pg. 31
Chapter IV: Dostoyevsky, Rash, and the Transcendence of Emotion.....	pg. 49
Chapter V: Conclusions.....	pg. 68
Works Cited.....	pg. 71

Acknowledgements

As I present this completed work, there are many individuals that I must thank for enabling me to develop this project. First and foremost, all my gratitude goes to Susan Irons, my advisor, who led me through the ups and downs of this process for over a year. She consistently challenged me to push farther and farther into my analysis, and while her expectations were high, she always inspired me to live up to them. Our weekly meetings, her comments, and our constant email chains from multiple continents not only culminated in this project, they crafted me into a better student and academic. To Heidi Kim, Ruth Salvaggio, and Minrose Gwin, I also owe my appreciation for their advice on the trajectory of this paper and the theoretical framework of my argument. I sincerely thank Marsha Collins and Patrick Horn for taking the time to read my project and sit on my oral defense committee. Their comments and suggestions strengthened the final version of this thesis innumerably.

Additionally, I owe another debt of gratitude to Sue Rash, of Boiling Springs, NC. Our meetings over coffee offered fresh insights on the dimensions of this project, and while I never recorded our conversations, she nevertheless instrumentally shaped the developments of my work. Finally, I must also extend my deepest thanks to the subject of this paper, Ron Rash, who set down for an interview with me at his home in Clemson, SC. His generosity and willingness to have a conversation with an undergraduate student captivated by his work was priceless in completing this thesis. To all of these individuals and the nameless others who helped me along the way, peace and all good. Without the support of such a dedicated and genuine community, this project would not have been possible.

Chapter I: Introduction

The maxim to be regional is to be national no longer holds true; now, reflecting the interconnectedness of culture and the globalization of the world, to be regional is to be international. Regionalism, the writing of the specific culture and landscape of a place, can be simultaneously unique and relatable. Regionalist authors face a challenge and an opportunity. They face the challenge of capturing the nuances and deeply-rooted idiosyncrasies of their places in the world, yet hold the unique opportunity to use their place as a template to preserve a snapshot of their home and educate others about its importance. William Faulkner reflected that one could never exhaust ways to describe his or her “postage stamp of native soil,” but also moved beyond this definition to investigate how the individual plots of soil could intertwine and create a broader sense of what it means to be human (57). One such intersection of postage stamps exists between two seemingly independent literary traditions, Imperial Russia and southern Appalachia. The connection between these traditions comes in the form of author Ron Rash and the influence on his writing by Lev Tolstoy and Fyodor Dostoyevsky.¹

Ron Rash’s novels and short story collections both draw upon and bring into dialogue the literature of Imperial Russia. Rash uses this link to develop the simultaneously regional and universal values of his work and the simultaneously distinct and relatable values of his people and landscape. By using many of Rash’s novels and some of his short stories, this paper will address that assertion by arguing that Rash uses a strategy employed by Russian authors of the nineteenth century to promote his home on

¹ Alternative English spellings of “Dostoyevsky” include “Dostoevsky” and “Dostoyevskii,” but, in an effort to maintain simplicity and integrity to the original Russian “Достоевский,” this paper will use the spelling “Dostoyevsky.”

the international stage. His characters draw on the unique geographic and cultural features of Appalachia, yet transcend the mold through universal themes and emotions. While Rash has also published a wide array of poetry, this paper will focus mainly on his novels and selected short stories. The influence of the Russian authors on Rash is evident in his style. Rash, understanding the elements that propelled Russian literature from obscurity to a widely-recognized tradition, adapts the themes and strategies of two of Russia's most prominent authors to his reality. In the vein of Lev Tolstoy, Rash views himself as an "author of landscape," writing a tapestry of his people, proving, through his conceptualization of nature, that Appalachia's natural world is distinct, yet transcends through an innate spirituality (Rash Personal Interview).² Much like Tolstoy and his contemporary, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Rash draws upon the unique qualities of his culture; he offers a glimpse into the social issues and defining characteristics of Appalachian culture, exhibiting the importance of its preservation. Finally, with a flare akin to Dostoyevsky, Rash takes the specific physical and cultural elements of Appalachia and demonstrates their humanity, transcending regional boundaries through the shared human experiences of ambition and war. Through the cultural work of his writing, Rash makes the regional international.

Place: A Geographic and Cultural Definition

Central to Rash's writing is the idea of "place." Jon Anderson writes that place is something "locational, sociocultural, and temporal...refers to a straightforward point or position in space, but it is also at once a social concept, drawing attention to the cultural

² The author would like to extend his deepest thanks to Ron Rash for providing a personal interview with the author at his home in Clemson, SC on July 22, 2017. Any designations in the text of "Rash" refer to this interview.

positioning and social relations of the people, processes, and practices involved in co-producing that location” (Anderson). From this definition, several key ideas emerge. First, place is both physical and imagined; it exists concurrently as a geographically defined space and a socially constructed entity. Place has a physical embodiment, a landscape, be that trees, mountains, lakes, a road, a fence, borders, or the absence of all of these characteristics. However, society constructs and interprets place. As Tim Cresswell asserts in *Place: an Introduction*, “‘my’ place is not ‘your’ place—you and I have different places,” defined by biases, world-views, and perspectives (7). Because of the inherent differences in perception between any two individuals, place cannot be singularly understood. And, as perceptions change every day, so too do the signifiers of place. Place, therefore, is malleable—it is inherently changing constantly, never static, always defining and redefining itself. Bearing in mind the diversity that comes in talking about place, this study explores both the physical and social factors that contribute to a particular understanding of place.

By writing about the American South, Rash intrinsically enters into the conversation of place. The study of southern literature has long been the study of the sense of place. Eudora Welty argues in her essay “Place in Fiction” that “it is both natural and sensible that the place where we have our roots should become the setting, the first and primary proving ground, of our fiction,” and asserts that setting is generally the only commonality shared by the literature of the American South (793). While Zachary Vernon writes about the homogenization of the South, this paper maintains that the region remains ubiquitous and, despite rhetoric to the contrary, a historically heterogeneous region (Vernon, “Towards”). Not specifically confined to the borders of

the ex-Confederacy, the South extends beyond state lines. Furthermore, the South manifests in a series of ideological, historical, and ethnic diversities; how, then, can one define it? Place is a unifier in southern literature because location serves as a major, common thread. Casey Clabough views history and “writing as a means of immutable historical preservation,” a process that is “definitively southern,” but this paper argues that history cannot be a reliable narrator of the southern narrative: too much of southern history consists of the systematic suppression of minority voices (Clabough 54). Nor can Jerry Mills’ litmus test of dead mules necessarily set all the parameters of southern, as widespread as the trope may be (4). While it may appear antiquated, the view expressed by Louis Rubin, that southern literature is southern because of “the Southern community itself—as a whole, as an image, as a convergence” of the many Souths is the most truthful: southern literature is southern because of place (63). Rash interacts with this concept in his sense of southern and Appalachian place.

What is Appalachia?

Appalachia is a series of divisions, from geographic definition to pronunciation. Rather than environmental, geographic, or cultural homogeny, Appalachia thrives on the union of disunity. The varied physical terrain, the cultural diversity (from Scot-Irish immigrants, German migrants, to Cherokee and Creek natives), and the socio-economic disparities mark Appalachia as a place with a multiplicity of identities. John Alexander Williams writes that the region concurrently exists as a “real place and a territory of imagination;” popular culture socially constructs Appalachia as a haven of hillbillies and rugged mountaineers, yet also renowned for cultural purity and unsullied individualism (398). Williams, author of *Appalachia: A History*, argues that the region “lives on divided

in our minds because it has to,” as the product of exploitation, ethnic clashing, and poverty (18). To reconcile the proximity of these negative actions to the broader American ideal, Appalachia must remain relegated to “other.”

Two distinct debates highlight the division of Appalachia: differences in borders and syllabic pronunciation. Much debate surrounds the boundaries of Appalachia: should they encompass the extent of the mountains or the famous trail? The Appalachian mountain range spans from Newfoundland in Eastern Canada to deep in American south; the Appalachian Trail runs from Mt. Katahdin in Maine to Springer Mountain in Georgia, yet there are few cultural similarities between these disparate regions. This paper will generally follow the precept of “Official Appalachia,” as defined by Williams in *Appalachia: A History*: a swath of land running from northern Mississippi to southern New York, with a “core” that includes six states—Georgia, North Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia, Tennessee, and Kentucky (13-14).

Rash enters into this discussion by defining his own Appalachia as the world of his childhood, and this paper will concentrate on the areas around his homes, namely western North Carolina and upstate South Carolina, roughly the counties of Oconee, Pickens, Anderson, Greenville, and Spartanburg (Rash Personal Interview).

A prime example of how varied the definition of Appalachia is remains the lack of consensus on how to pronounce the word. Much like the geographic parameters of the region, the pronunciation of “Appalachia” lacks standardization. Two dominant pronunciations differ in terms of the “a” sound in the third syllable of the word: some pronounce the word with a short, *staccato* “a,” and some with a long “ay” sound. Historically, the differences in sounds denoted regional affiliation: the short “a” persisted

in the southern region, the long “ay” in the north, with those who did not pronounce the term “correctly” deemed to be “outsiders, who didn’t know what they were talking about” (Williams 14, Puckett 28). Further pronunciation differences focus on the same third syllable, but center on the hardness of the consonants following the “as”—whether one pronounces it “*Appa-látch-ya*” or “*Appa-lày-shuh*” (Williams 14). The disagreements on both geographic scope and the base pronunciation of the region’s title indicate a larger trope: no singular Appalachia exists; rather, there are many Appalachias socialized by the experiences of its residents.

Rash claims his personal Appalachian setting as integral to his literary identity, as he uses the distinct landscape as the backdrop for all of his novels, poems, and short stories. Vernon interviewed Rash on this subject, concluding that you cannot separate Rash from Appalachia. In fact, Rash maintains that he never considers writing outside this culture, as he feels “so consumed with that landscape that [he] can’t imagine doing it.... It’s almost like it’s genetically imprinted, or [he] want[s] to believe that. [He] just feel[s] like it’s the landscape [he] know[s] best” (Vernon, “Commemorating” 105). In his affiliation with Appalachia, Rash privileges this facet of his identity from the broader genre of southern literature and “self-identifies as an Appalachian writer first and a Southern writer second” (Vernon, “Commemorating” 104-105). To Rash, the South is “perception,” more than the typical geographic area; the South is a “mythological place where people bring their own views, stereotypes,” yet still one of the cultural powerhouses of America, where “despite the sins, and there are many of them,” the people produce “good music, good food, and good writing.” Rash maintains that “there are a number of souths,” as “the world of Faulkner is not the world [he] grew up in; the

smells, the vegetation, the kind of low-level landscape, the place of mansions” is not his South; Appalachia is “a completely different world” (Rash Personal Interview).

His distinction as an Appalachian author presents Rash with a problem. Vernon observed as recently as 2011 that academia does not consider Appalachian literature a viable genre because it does not view Appalachian culture as rich enough, evidenced by a serious lack of academic work on the region (Vernon, “Commemorating” 106). The few academics who do work with southern Appalachian culture conversely view it as representative of America’s “individualism, its self-sufficiency, and self-sacrifice,” but also its “gun-toting violence, its poverty, the exploitation of the environment, its welfare-dependency, its superstition, and its racism” (Drake 217-218, Vernon, “Commemorating” 106, 121-122). This negative perception of culture among critics, paired with the reality that geography physically isolates Appalachia from the broader world, does not point to its literature’s potential as a recognized or respected literary tradition. Rash faces two distinct obstacles as an Appalachian writer: he must contend with established stereotypes of the culture he works in, while simultaneously promoting it as equal to other world literary traditions. He employs strategies similar to Russian writers of the nineteenth century to achieve this end.

The Russian Connection

Rash’s conversation with Russian literature stems from Rash’s belief that he, like all writers, makes art, and in “art, you absorb many voices to find your own” (Rash Personal Interview). In the case of Rash, many of those voices are Russian. Russian literature has long been a part of Rash’s literary journey. Rash’s “parents encouraged reading by their example” and his grandmother, “who didn’t have a lot of money” taught

him that “books were important enough to buy and keep in a prominent place, the front of the house” (Graves and Wilhelm 4). As a teenager, Rash, always a voracious reader because his “mother would take [his] brother and sister and [him] to the library every week,” encountered Dostoyevsky’s *Crime and Punishment*, Turgenev’s *Fathers and Sons*, Chekov’s short stories, and Tolstoy’s *War and Peace* alongside other writers, such as Jack London, Edgar Allan Poe, and Thomas Wolfe (Rash, Graves and Wilhelm 4). In a 2017 interview with the author of this study, Rash acknowledged how the complexity and scope of Russian literature impressed upon him an appreciation for the landscape and psychology of a culture vastly different than his own, an appreciation largely garnered from to Rash’s unique relationship with Dostoyevsky (Rash Personal Interview).

Rash often acknowledges Dostoyevsky’s influence on his vision as a writer. In an interview with the *Financial Times* in 2012, Rash identified *Crime and Punishment* as the single book that changed his life, claiming that “I had always entered the books I read,” but *Crime and Punishment* “was the first book that entered me.” He went on to add that “Dostoyevsky is at the top of the list” of his literary influences and remains “the most important novelist for me” (Rash, Metcalfe). Rash points specifically to *Crime and Punishment* as the book “that made me want to be a writer more than anything else” because its “intensity...did something a book had never done...stunned me” (Rash Personal Interview). Dostoyevsky’s “moral seriousness” and the way he “created characters...just stayed with” Rash, due to “the power there...dealing with intense philosophical ideals...that come out of the stories themselves.” He also notes the psychological complexity of Dostoevsky’s work, an element he sees present in his own writings, as humans “live almost all our lives with masks on” (Rash Personal Interview).

Rash's intellectual attachment and professional development of ideas originating in Russian literature link his body of work to that tradition.

While it may initially seem far-fetched, the idea of a link between Russian and southern writers is not revolutionary; rather, scholars often acknowledge a relationship between the two seemingly disparate groups. Carson McCullers, renowned author of *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, claimed that Russian realism inspired her brand of southern literature, stemming from a childhood fascination with the "great Russians" who "opened the door to an immense and marvelous new world" ("Books" 122, "Russian" 252). Literary critic Maria Bloshteyn notes that southern literature tends to have a friendly disposition towards Dostoyevsky and other Russian writers, like Tolstoy and Turgenev (20). In "Dostoyevsky and the Literature of the American South," Bloshteyn names the appeal of Dostoyevsky's religiosity and his literary focus on the "ultimate questions" of God and human salvation to southern writers, such as Faulkner and Flannery O'Connor, as the Russian author's influence on the southern literary genre (1, 19-20). Rash acknowledges that "Faulkner and O'Connor have been huge influences on" him, transitively linking him to the work of the great Russian literary giants (Rash Personal Interview).

Rash certainly does not emulate or replicate the Russians; rather, he operates under similar pressures and reacts in much the same way: both he and they work and worked to expand the literary tradition of their home by writing indigenously. As Priscilla Meyer writes in *How the Russians Read the French: Lermontov, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy*, "nineteenth-century Russian writers, like many others of the period, were quite consciously creating a new national literature" (3). Russia, much like the German states

and later empire of the same period, viewed French culture and the arts as the summit of refinement. They both idolized and envied the pinnacle of “France.” French had long been the *lingua Franca* of Russian culture, since Peter I introduced it as the language of the court in the late seventeenth century and Catherine II made it fashionable. Due to this socialization, Russians “saw themselves self-consciously through Western European eyes, at once admiring Europe and feeling inferior to it” (Meyer 3-4). The idea of inferiority derived from the fact that the Russian literary language was in its infancy (Lotman). Alexander Pushkin, the father of modern Russian literature credited with turning Russian into a language of letters, only finished writing in the 1830s; Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky wrote in the 1860s-1900s, so they worked in a literary tradition still in its infancy (Gorky).

Rash finds himself in a similar position. Appalachian literature is not a widely spread or recognized literary distinction and tends to be regarded only as a caveat of southern literature. Only since the 1970s has the idea of a distinct, Appalachian literary tradition emerged, yet even this attempt of redefinition met backlash, critics arguing the mere phrase “is a disturbing contradiction in terms” (Parti 29). Authors such as Lee Smith and Charles Frazier strove to define the Appalachian literary tradition, reaffirming that the “distinct and largely homogenous population, with a history and culture distinctly different than that of the rest of the country, including the deep South,” has a place in modern literary discourse. Drawing on the work of Smith and Frazier, Anne Parti argues that the Appalachian “experience shared by a group” gave “rise to a unique body of literature” (29). Critics, however, merely ascribe this phenomenon the title of local color, banishing it to the minor ranks of American or southern literature (Parti 29-30). With

Appalachia faced with critical disavowal, Rash's work enters into the conversation of what makes Appalachia unique and deserving of its own literary distinction, much like the Russian authors of the late Imperial period.

Chapter II of this paper will demonstrate how Rash gives agency to the physical landscape of Appalachia. Much like Tolstoy creates a landscape tied to the collective consciousness of the Russian people in *War and Peace*, arguing for the landscape's innate spirituality, Rash presents his natural settings as god-like and removed from humanity, their sanctity arising through separation. Through spirituality, the landscape comes to exert influence over the actions of characters, giving rise to distinct cultural traits. Next, Chapter III will discuss the methods through which Tolstoy, in *War and Peace*, operates within a distinct cultural framework and how he writes about events and institutions unique to their own plot of soil. Rash mirrors this strategy in his own writing, writing with a distinct Appalachian voice about distinct Appalachian phenomena, from meth culture to hyper-religiosity. Chapter IV will demonstrate how, through a connection to shared human experiences, Rash, in the vein of Dostoyevsky, transcends the innate regionalism of his subjects to become a truly universal author. Be it the redemption cycle, ambition, or war, human experiences link populations the world over and, in the hands of writers like Rash, become a vehicle for the importance of the literary tradition in which he writes. In demonstrating the shared connection between Rash and the Russian authors, this paper will suggest that Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky influence the ways in which Rash chooses to present his world as simultaneously regional and universal.

Chapter II: Tolstoy, Rash, and the Authorship of Landscape

“Да! все пустое, все обман, кроме этого бесконечного неба. Ничего, ничего нет, кроме его” -Lev Tolstoy (*Война и Мир* 300).³

Introduction

An integral part of the idea of place is the physical landscape of the space it designates. In a literary sense, setting exists as a backdrop. The natural landscape can be as simple as the vegetation, rivers, and topography that make up an area; however, for some authors, it takes on a greater quality. Both Ron Rash and Lev Tolstoy see landscape as an active agent in their work: through an innate spirituality, the physical land interacts with and influences the actions of characters. Spirituality is not easily definable or standardized, nor is it inherently religious. Elements of Christian theology certainly appear in the work of Tolstoy, and to a much lesser degree, the work of Rash, but both authors exhibit a different understanding of spirituality from each other. For Tolstoy, the unique geography of the Russian land has a spirituality because it is innately tied to the Russian people. The interconnected, yet esoteric, relationship between Russians and their land is sacred, hence its spirituality. Rash operates under a multifaceted approach, though all still ascribe the same spiritual quality to nature. This approach is to view nature as something omnipotent and incomprehensible to humans; it exists suspended between life and death. Because of its quality of suspension, nature takes on a divine role: in its divinity, it can be both vengeful and healing, both constraining and promoting, like the Old and New Testament Judeo-Christian God. Because both Tolstoy and Rash's

³ “Yes! All is vanity, all falsehood, except that infinite sky. There is nothing, nothing, but that.”

landscapes are so unique to and representative of the regions they write about, they hold sway over the people who live there, defining action through their spirituality.

Rash believes he has an intimate and personal relationship with the natural world, rooted in his childhood and adolescence. Rash's family resided for most of his primary and secondary education in the town of Boiling Springs, in Cleveland County, part of the piedmont region of North Carolina. In an interview, reflecting on his childhood and work, Rash named proximity to the Appalachian Mountains and the surrounding natural world, such as the Broad River, as what afforded him the opportunity to make a home within the landscape (Rash Personal Interview). He fished often, keeping a journal, now housed in the Irvin Department of Rare Books and Special Collections at the University of South Carolina, which documents his excursions and catches (Binette). In Rash's own words, he "grew up close to nature and wanting to be in it" (Personal Interview). Beyond just his home in Cleveland County, Rash spent a great deal of time at his "grandmother's farm near Boone," which is a small, college community "on the Blue Ridge parkway." As a child, Rash "ran wild up there." He recollects a desire to be "out there...in it," a yearning for "the smell, the sound of the stream" (Rash Personal Interview). Spending so many of his formative years outside in nature, Rash remarks that he now has an empathetic understanding "how easy it [nature] can be lost" (Rash Personal Interview).

Nature is important to Rash, and his affiliation bleeds into literary preferences. As a writer connected to other writers, Rash feels "most interested in," and feels the most "kinship to" the South's Faulkner, China's Mo Yan, France's Jean Giono, and Switzerland's Charles-Ferdinand Ramuz. These four geographically disparate authors share a commonality: in the words of Rash, they are "writers of landscape" (Personal

Interview). In the words of Faulkner, these authors “discovered that [their] own little postage stamp[s] of native soil [were] worth writing about and that [they] would never live long enough to exhaust it” (57). These authors write about their particular regions, yet pay special attention to the physical world of their regions. Faulkner, the Nobel laureate of southern literature, created the town of Jefferson, Mississippi from the cast of his native Oxford. Giono’s plays and novels focus on the Provence region of France; Ramuz’ literature centers on the alpine terrain of rural Switzerland and its fortress effect on the residents (Imhoff, “Charles-Ferdinand”). While not as specifically regional as the others, Mo Yan’s metafiction blends point of view and the physical landscape to demonstrate the cultural chaos of revolution and destitution (“Mo Yan”). Though separated by space and time, these authors share a commonality of approach: they meld the physical world into their conception of place, becoming authors of their own individual landscapes.

Rash acknowledges Tolstoy as another such author of landscape. Count Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy was born in Tula province, near Moscow, in 1828 and died in 1910 as one of the most renowned novelists in history. His most famous works include *Anna Karenina*, *The Death of Ivan Illyich*, and *War and Peace*, a novel and philosophical treatise on the Napoleonic invasion of the Russian Empire in 1812. Tolstoy’s influence resonates today in the non-violent movements of Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr.; like Henry David Thoreau, Tolstoy advocated the doctrine of civil disobedience, linking him forever with images of resistance (Gorson). Rash read Tolstoy’s renowned novel, *War and Peace*, in his adolescence. After spending over a month reading it, he dubbed it truly “magnificent;” Rash admits to being “stunned by the canvas he [Tolstoy] wrote on.” The

links between Tolstoy and the landscape of Russia are evident to Rash, who believes that writing a landscape of Russia is “what [Tolstoy] wanted to do,” and “that’s what makes that book so amazing” (Personal Interview). Rash argues that Tolstoy “show[s] you this landscape in as full a way as [he] can” and “take[s] all of that as far as you can take it novelistically.” Rash thinks Tolstoy succeeds in his goal, as “we [the reader] come away...having a sense of that [Russian] landscape and how that landscape affects humans” (Personal Interview). By detailing the Napoleonic invasion and showing both the physical and personal resistance of the Russian land and peoples, Tolstoy ascribes spirituality to the Russian land by demonstrating its ties to its people.

Rash also claims the title of an author of landscape for himself. His tapestry is the Appalachian landscape; he writes of the blending of human and natural affairs. Rash believes that “human destiny and landscape are inextricable” and “that’s a big part of what I try to do in my work...to make landscape a character” (Personal Interview). Rash’s views on landscape expand beyond the physical boundaries of setting—he notes that “in some ways, landscape is destiny,” concluding that “the geography one grows up in has a huge impact psychologically, on how we perceive the world and the possibilities of the world” (Personal Interview). In Rash’s work, this notion manifests prominently in three of his novels, *The Cove*, *Saints at the River*, and *Above the Waterfall*. Rash explores different facets of his view of nature in each novel. In *Saints at the River*, nature exists as a medium between life and death. It is not the otherworld, nor is it the world of the living; rather, it is the in-between. *The Cove* and *Above the Waterfall* show two sides of the same coin in regards to nature, both reflecting conceptions of the Judeo-Christian God; on one hand, *The Cove* presents nature as the vengeful, wrathful God of the Old

Testament, on the other, *Above the Waterfall* depicts the healing New Testament model. Regardless of the model, nature exerts influence over human affairs.

War and Peace: Spirituality and Unity in Nature

Tolstoy's authorship of landscape often accesses the relationship between humans and nature. Rebecca Gould argues that Tolstoy creates a new definition of "sublime" in his Caucasus' writings, demonstrating the awakening of an appreciation of the specific Russian landscape in Tolstoy's characters, such as how "the mountains gradually overtake Olenin's consciousness" in *The Cossacks* (91-3). Gould demonstrates how Tolstoy explores the impact of nature on humanity, but also the impact of humanity on nature, through "juxtaposing images of the physical landscapes of the Caucasus with the destruction wrecked by war" (93). Through his work on the physical landscape of the Caucasus, Tolstoy demonstrates the connection between people and their environment: there exists a symbiotic and mutually-affective relationship between them. Tolstoy's renowned novel, *War and Peace*, further explores this idea and links it to the concept of spirituality.

Tolstoy was an author of spirituality in addition to landscape. Russian literary theory views Tolstoy, like Dostoyevsky, as a spiritual theoretician, though largely in the context of the Russian Orthodox Church, the common faith of both authors (Strutsenko 103-5). Tolstoy's religious spirituality seeped into other realms of his writing, influencing some of his philosophies and practices. Dan Moulin notes that Tolstoy maintained precursory views on a spiritual education for children, believing they were best able to comprehend the Bible and its teachings (351-52). However, Tolstoy's spiritual notions were not solely under the umbrella of Orthodox Christianity: some scholars see a link

between Tolstoy and Eastern philosophies. In her essay, “Л. Толстовство и Даосизм,”⁴ Lu Venya argues that Tolstoy rejects the influences of the western philosophical tradition and embraces some of the ideologies of China and the Far East, namely Taoism, evidenced by the focus on nature in his novels and short stories (88-90). Taoism teaches that true peace comes from an attuned awareness of the competing forces of nature: humans can only truly find purpose if they accept the turbulence of life and commune with the natural world. Tolstoy’s writings abrogate these claims, as he discusses nature’s ability to create an “awareness of the unity with everything that is hidden from us by time” (217). Tolstoy’s spiritual views, be they Judeo-Christian or Taoist, manifest in his philosophies of nature: awareness of the connection to the divine is vital, rather that divine is a deity or the balance of the natural world.

War and Peace serves as a large-scale example of Tolstoy’s philosophies of the natural world and its connection to humanity. The novel depicts, at great length, the Napoleonic invasion of Russia in 1812, and Tolstoy uses the historical discussion as a vehicle for his philosophical musings. To Tolstoy, two distinct factors influence the Napoleonic defeat: nature and humans. Tolstoy explains one cause of the French defeat as the French general’s failure to account for the Russian winter: “no one will deny that that cause was, on the one hand, its advance into the heart of Russia late in the season without any preparation for a winter campaign” (*War and Peace* III:10:1). Winter in Russia, in which the landscape becomes nearly inhospitable, and “a lump of snow cannot be melted instantaneously,” and “the greater the heat the more solidified the remaining snow becomes,” made life miserable for Napoleon’s army (III:13:19). They “[camped]

⁴ “Tolstoy’s Philosophic System and Taoism.”

out at night for months in the snow with fifteen degrees of frost, when there were only seven or eight hours of daylight and the rest was night.” The conditions wreck their army as “the influence of discipline cannot be maintained, when men were taken into that region of death...where they were every moment fighting death from hunger and cold, when half the army perished in a single month (III:14:19). The Russian land itself, represented by the Russian winter, accounts for half of Napoleon’s defeat. Yet, also, Napoleon lost the war because of “the character given to the war by the burning of Russian towns and the hatred of the foe this aroused among the Russian people” (*War and Peace* III:10:1). The Russian populace makes up the other half of Napoleon’s defeat. The defeating of Napoleon, which no other European power accomplished, took a symbiotic relationship between humans and nature. The Russian land alone could not beat Napoleon, nor could the Russian people. Only through their unity was the feat possible.

To Tolstoy, this unity manifests in the character of Mikhail Kutuzov. The one-eyed general becomes a microcosm of the union of land and people in resistance to Napoleon. Tolstoy describes him as “the representative of the national war” and “the representative of the Russian people,” which Tolstoy already established as a mixture of landscape and people. Tolstoy so links Kutuzov to the war itself that he asserts “after the enemy had been destroyed and Russia had been liberated and raised to the summit of her glory, there was nothing left to do... Nothing remained for the representative of the national war but to die, and Kutuzov died” (*War and Peace* IV:15:11). This description of Kutuzov yields important revelations on Tolstoy’s idea of the marriage of people to land. Kutuzov becomes the “representative of the national war,” taking on the mantle of

the Russian people and the land, as both were instrumental in the downfall of the French emperor. This passage also alludes to the idea that, since Kutuzov is the melding of the two entities, he assumes a unique sanctity: he is above human concerns. Revolution, balance of power, and the political redrawing of Europe are of no concern to the old general; he has only one purpose: liberate his people and his land. Once this task ends, he has no more purpose and therefore dies. However, this act of death in itself links Kutuzov to another manifestation of sanctity: Jesus of Nazareth in the Orthodox Christian tradition, who is resurrected from death and returned to earth only long enough to fulfill his purpose before re-ascending into heaven. Kutuzov, by virtue of being the union of the Russian land and people, inherits a unique spiritual quality, alluding to the sanctity of the land in its relation to the people.

Saints at the River: The Holiness of the River

In *Saints at the River*, which prominently features the ethical and environmental debate surrounding the retrieval of the body of a drowned child from a protected river, nature represents a dimension of untamable power. Rash writes landscape in the novel, specifically the river, as a character unto itself. The main plot point, the need to retrieve the body in the first place, hinges on the predicate that the river will not give up the body of Ruth Kowalsky and, eventually, Randy Moseley, who dies trying to recover Ruth's remains. Rather than release them, Rash describes how the river holds them in a "pool below Wolf Cliff," on the border of "the realm of faith" (*Saints at the River* 237). The act of holding ascribes agency to the river itself: it acts as an individual character. Rash reiterates the agency of the river in the destruction of the temporary dam placed over it. Though people attempt to exert influence over it, the river controls its own actions and

flow, so it splits the dam against all odds (*Saints at the River* 204-5). The landscape in this novel, the river, maintains an independent agency, resisting the influence of humans and preserving itself.

Nature in *Saints at the River* takes on a spirituality removed from the living world, sacred because it bridges life and death and preserves souls. The river is the manifestation of removed spirituality. The river, and by extension nature, exists suspended between life and death. When Ruth Kowlasky drowns, she does not die, but rather merges: she exists, “now inside that prism...[and] the prism’s colors are voices, voices that swirl around her head like a crown...and she becomes part of the river” (*Saints at the River* 5). As long as her body remains there, she is “part of something pure and good and unchanging, the closest thing to Eden,” as Luke, an environmentalist, names it, a “holy place” (*Saints at the River* 53). The river is holy because it is in-between. It is not quite death, because it holds “not just [Ruth’s] body, but her soul,” akin to a type of purgatory, as Ruth’s body floats in water, not six feet under earth (*Saints at the River* 172-73). However, it isn’t life either, for while Ruth’s soul may exist in “some timeless state,” her body served as food to larvae and crayfish (*Saints at the River* 185). Even though dynamite retrieves the physical bodies of Ruth and Randy from their trap in the depths, it does not matter, “for they are now and forever lost in the river’s vast and generous unremembering,” their souls forever a part of the ephemeral space (*Saints at the River* 237). Rash, through his characterization of the unmarked beauty and serenity of the river and its space removed from life and death, makes it sacred by linking it to the human soul.

The Cove: Nature as the Vengeful God

The Cove, which depicts the effects of the First World War on the community of Mars Hill, explores an idea of landscape as a physical barrier. The title itself, *The Cove*, invokes images of a confined space: a cove is a small valley enclosed by mountains (1-2). The physical confines of this space give rise to a question posed by Rachel Harmon in Rash's novel *Serena*: do the mountains "fold inwards" and "shut out the sun," trapping and confining those who dwell there? Or are they "sheltering," the "mountains...huge hands...cupped around you, protecting and comforting" (*Serena* 196-98)? In *The Cove*, the mountains take on the former, forming a sinister wall between those who dwell there, and the outside world, yet simultaneously taking on the form "God's hands would be" (3-4, *Serena* 198). Rash never publically discusses his religious beliefs, but his allusions and references allude to a familiarity with the Judeo-Christian tradition (Personal Interview).

Rash acknowledges the construction of nature as a cage in *The Cove*. He notes that "Laurel is in this landscape that is holding her," and that actively "she's trying to transcend it," through her imagining of the ship that brought Walter from Germany to America. However, despite her best efforts, "in a sense, her destiny is the landscape" (Rash Personal Interview). The societal constrictions placed on her by association with the cove and the distrust that breeds because of it proves this statement true. To Rash, Laurel's destiny is the landscape "because she never gets out" (Personal Interview). This is physically true because Laurel dies (*The Cove* 241). However, Rash, in his exploration of the spirituality of landscape, complicates the notion of destiny and agency. The landscape of *The Cove* exists, much like the river of *Saints at the River*, in a plane between life and death, exerting influence over the human world through its omnipotence. Unlike *Saints at the River*, nature in *The Cove* is not the untamable

floodplain, but an omnipotent force modeled after the Judeo-Christian God of the Old Testament.

Much like the Old Testament God of Judeo-Christian doctrine, the omnipotent nature of *The Cove* is inaccessible to humans: it influences the actions of Hank and Laurel, yet they cannot escape it. Nature most readily influences Hank, Laurel, and by proxy, Walter, through the power of perception. The evil that the town associates with the cove where Hank and Laurel dwell, which they believe manifests in Laurel's birthmark, colors all interactions between the siblings and the town. Parents threaten to withdraw their children from school if Laurel and Hank attend, people spit and throw eggs at them, and men threaten both the siblings and Slidell for bringing them into town (*The Cove* 1, 26-27). This treatment of Hank and Laurel links directly back to the landscape; the siblings cannot escape their association with the landscape even though they cannot understand it.

One piece of Judeo-Christian tradition dictates that its God is beyond human understanding. Jewish tradition maintains God is incomprehensible, humans see only his effects. Rash mirrors this idea when describing nature in *The Cove*—the reader sees only the effects of the omnipotent cove, not understanding why it has such effects. Rash continues his exploration of the cove as akin to the Judeo-Christian God throughout the novel. In the Old Testament Judeo-Christian tradition, the only thing that could appease God was the devotion of the Jewish people, generally represented by an animal sacrifice. This idea of sacrificial atonement also holds true in *The Cove*. Hank fights in France during the First World War, sacrificing a hand to save a comrade; upon his return, the people of Mars Hill are more apt to accept him than Laurel, “they’d forget all about the

cove and that witchy sister of his” (*The Cove* 26, 69). In terms of omnipotence, reach, and sacrifice, Rash relates the cove to the Old Testament, Judeo-Christian God.

From a Christian perspective, the only way to escape the judgment of the omnipotent, vengeful God of the Old Testament is through belief in the divinity of Jesus of Nazareth. Rash’s portrayal of nature as the omnipotent God is not without its own Christ-figure: Laurel. The story of Laurel mimics that of Jesus quite remarkably. Though born into the Mars Hill community, Laurel’s neighbors shun her, as the Jews shunned Jesus, and her death scene is ripe with allusions to the crucifixion: she stands with her back to a tree, a physical representation of a crucifix, dies from a gunshot to the left breast, an image eerily reminiscent of the spear to the left side of Jesus, and, most importantly, she gives up her spirit stoically, not “[appearing] to be in pain, her face expressionless” (*The Cove* 240-41). Further, in the same vein as Jesus converting the thieves crucified alongside him, Laurel’s death at the hands of Chauncey “converts” Ansel, Boyce, Wilber, and Jack: they refuse to follow the directives of Chauncey, instead exercising free will and abandoning their pursuit of Walter (*The Cove* 242-43). Christian doctrine maintains that humans derive salvation and redemption, essentially new life, through the willing sacrifice of Jesus—a precept that holds true in *The Cove*, as Walter receives a new life through the willing sacrifice of Laurel: escape from the cove to Maryland and ultimately New York (254-55). For Laurel, escape from the judgement of the cove, the omnipotent God, comes through her own Christ-like sacrifice. As she dies, Boyce turns on Chauncey, saying “you killed a damn woman,” making no distinction between Laurel and any other woman; the acceptance of her humanity, which Mars Hill denies Laurel throughout her life, settles on her in death (*The Cove* 241). The landscape

of the cove exercises influence over Hank, Laurel, and Walter in the manner of an Old Testament God, but Laurel's Christ-like sacrifice ends its power over her and Walter, bringing a bittersweet redemption.

Above the Waterfall: Nature as the Merciful God

In *Above the Waterfall*, Rash presents a view of landscape that embraces life. The landscape of Appalachia fits into the idea of "nature" in this novel, with the physical world embracing the living in the form of wildlife. *Above the Waterfall* depicts the poisoning of a river in a small community through the eyes of the local lawman, Les, and a forest ranger, Becky. In the novel, Rash raises questions of loyalty, justice, and the ability of humans to cope, against the backdrop of the North Carolinian mountains. Nature in *The Cove*, represented by the physical cove where Laurel and Hank live, is a dark place associated with death. In *Above the Waterfall*, quite the opposite is true. The novel demonstrates that nature is life, while the human world remains associated with death.

Through the connotations of suffering, mass murder, and terrorism, death surrounds all representations of human civilization in the novel. Rash presents various spaces of human civilization: hospitals, schools, homes, and government centers, each bearing the connotation of death. Hospitals often represent healing and care, yet Les remarks that "there are certain odors in hospitals that all the disinfectant in the world can't hide...blood and pus...a bedsheet smelled with urine...the smell of suffering." Les's hospital experiences all conjure death: the death of his parents, visits to the mortuary as sheriff, and the aftermath of his ex-wife Sarah's attempted suicide (*Above the Waterfall* 142-43). Rash associates schools, another human space that connotes safety

and progress, with the allusion of death: Becky constantly relives the death of her elementary school teacher at the hands of a mass shooter, every scene involving a school adding more details to the graphic scene (*Above the Waterfall* 166). Homes, the physical manifestation of family, are broken in this novel; the meth culture of western North Carolina tears apart the families, from grieving parents to the supposed microwaving of babies (*Above the Waterfall* 78-81, 89). Finally, government buildings, the incarnation of the state and representative of human society and control, also remain linked to death through Becky's boyfriend's bomb attack on a businessman to ignite an eco-revolution (*Above the Waterfall* 10).

Nature, in contrast to human spaces, represents life and renewal. Becky spends the majority of the novel grappling with the trauma of witnessing a school shooting, which left her mute for years (*Above the Waterfall* 149-51). Throughout the storyline, Becky copes by plugging herself into the natural world, camping out away from civilization, writing poetry about the things she observes, and escaping out to her grandparents' farm, where she would sit as "the morning sun gilds the barn's tin" and "the warmth softly enfolds [her]," the only place she truly felt "safe, inside the silence of bright wings" (*Above the Waterfall* 151). In Becky's story, nature becomes an escape from the world's evil, personified through death and depression. As it is an escape from death, nature is life. Life exists in nature through the absence of evil. In the novel, one expression of the evil of the human world, which Rash represents through the vehicle of Sarah's depression, is nothing more than "damp shadows" on rocks, an outline drawn out on the face of nature for only a moment before fading (*Above the Waterfall* 242). In fact, Rash associates death with the natural world only once in his novel: when CJ, a

disgruntled resort worker, poisons the river with gasoline, killing the local trout population (*Above the Waterfall* 113-116). However, this interaction between death and nature does not defy the association between life and nature throughout the rest of the novel because it is entirely man-made. Death only affects the natural world when humans introduce it.

Because of its connection to life and peace, nature takes on a divine role. In contrast to the Old Testament model of the deity of nature presented in *The Cove*, *Above the Waterfall* presents a view of nature much more attuned to a New Testament assessment of the Judeo-Christian God. The New Testament God represents forgiveness, and in this vein, nature in *Above the Waterfall* acts as a healer. It is therapeutic for Becky, who finds solace in it: she constantly remembers the last words of her teacher before she is shot, “promise not to speak children, don’t say a single word. Be completely silent,” and goes off alone into the woods, where she finds renewal among nature, finding “the blessing of that moment” (*Above the Waterfall* 166). For Les, haunted by his inability to support his depressed wife and his telling her to “go ahead” and commit suicide, also finds healing through nature (*Above the Waterfall* 85-6). His healing is by proxy, through Becky. Les’ link to Becky, whom nature heals of her own demons, allows him to finally leave his past behind, shown in his decision to give up bribe money paid to him by a marijuana farmer to aid a friend in need. In *Above the Waterfall*, with human institutions corrupted by death, the landscape and natural world are able to take a “man who encouraged clinically depressed wife to kill herself,” and “a woman, traumatized by school shooting, who later lived with an ecoterrorist bomber” and bring them together, to heal (10, 251-52).

Conclusion

Rash sees himself, like many of the writers influential in his career, as an author of landscape. Tolstoy, in his defining novel, *War and Peace*, writes in the same spirit. For Tolstoy, the Russian land is just as sacred and mystic as its people because of an unbreakable link between them. Russia is Russia because of the Russian people; the Russian people are as they are because of the Russian land. This relationship is sacred because it is of the people, capturing the spirit of the nation, which is unique and unconquerable, even by Napoleon Bonaparte. Rash draws on this idea of the land as sacred and applies it to his native Appalachia. In his exploration of the spirituality of nature, three images emerge: 1) that nature is an ephemeral plane between life and death, personified by the river in *Saints at the River*, 2) that nature is omnipotent and influential, like the Old Testament God of the Judeo-Christian tradition, and 3) that nature can also be the New Testament image of God, benevolent and merciful, offering healing to those willing to stop and listen. Has Rash concretely solidified a stance on the spirituality of nature? The breadth of approaches and the continuation of the exploration in his work suggests not, yet one piece of his exploration permeates both his writing and Tolstoy's: the specific landscape of a geographic place exerts influence over the lives of the people who dwell there, giving rise to unique cultural phenomena.

Chapter III: Tolstoy, Rash, and the Translation of Culture

“Человек сознательно живет для себя, но служит бессознательным орудием для достижения исторических, общечеловеческих целей.” - Lev Tolstoy, (*War and Peace*

IV:1:1).⁵

Introduction

Place is just as much a social concept as a physical one. The previous chapter demonstrated the concept of “authors of landscape” and how they interact with place as a physical landscape, a geography. This chapter, in the same vein, will demonstrate how both Ron Rash and Lev Tolstoy expand the conversation of place to include culture and society. They approach this in a similar manner by definition, yet slightly differently in application. Tolstoy writes about specific cultural expressions in his world and makes them an integral part of his narrative. For example, he takes commonplaces of Russian society, such as *salons* and the institution of Serfdom, and makes them the backdrop of his novel. To further this cultural grounding, Tolstoy chooses a topic of incredible national importance for the Russians as the main setting for *War and Peace*: the Napoleonic invasion of Russia in 1812, which held massive connotations of home and pride for the Russians of his day. Rash’s writing demonstrates some elements of this approach: he writes about specific societal phenomena that affect his region. He extensively explores and writes on the emergence and effects of meth and drug culture on Appalachia, seen in his short stories “Nothing Gold Can Stay” and “The Ascent.” Further, much as Tolstoy weaves elements of Russian society into his novel, Rash

⁵ “Man lives consciously for himself, but is an unconscious instrument in the attainment of the historic, universal, aims of humanity.”

weaves elements of his own society into his work. Rash uses various literary devices and constructions to represent physical realities of communities in their fictional representations. One such example is the community of Cliffside, NC in his short story “The Night the New Jesus Fell to Earth.” In writing their cultures, Rash and Tolstoy expand the conversation of place as a social actor.

War and Peace: A Russian Cultural Moment

In *War and Peace*, published in 1869, Tolstoy explores place as a social entity by writing his culture. Three key features highlight his representation of his culture: the *salon* scene of St. Petersburg, the institution of Serfdom, and the Napoleonic invasion of Russia in 1812. Tolstoy represents the early nineteenth-century *salon* culture of Petersburg by setting the opening of his novel in one such space, taking into account the originality of language that populated the society he writes about. In dealing with the unique Russian experience of Serfdom, Tolstoy takes a much less direct, but no less pervasive approach—he fills his novel with characters that fit this mold, yet are easily forgotten. Finally, Tolstoy taps into a patriotic understanding of the 1812 invasion of Russia, exploring on a grand scale the conflict that shaped so much of the society in which he lived.

Tolstoy describes cultural phenomena of his day, namely, the aristocratic *salon* culture of St. Petersburg. Much like the French equivalents in the Age of Enlightenment, the “Golden Age of Russian Culture,” roughly 1800-1830, saw an outpouring of *salon* culture in St. Petersburg and Moscow as the political power centered at the court of Catherine II (r. 1762-96) devolved during the reign of her son, Paul (r. 1796-1801). Catherine Evtuhov notes that the *salons* became home to “poets musicians and

intellectuals” who “debated questions of literary form, translated the latest of English and German romantic verse, and reflected on problems of Russian history” (6-7, 26).

Recognizing the prevalence of this phenomenon in the turn-of-the-century society he writes about, Tolstoy incorporates it into his 1869 novel. The opening lines of *War and Peace* depict the drawing rooms of Anna Pavlovna, a Petersburg socialite and lady-in-waiting to the Empress Maria Feodorovna, during a *soirée*. The *salons* of Petersburg represent an interesting cultural facet of aristocratic Russian society: the multiplicity of languages. For aristocrats at the dawn of the nineteenth century, it was far more common to learn French, German, or English before native Russian, and often all of them (Evtuhov 26-7). Take for example, the opening lines of *War and Peace* in the original Russian:

“Eh bien, mon prince. Gênes et Lucques ne sont plus que des apanages, des поместья, de la famille Buonaparte. ... je ne vous connais plus, vous n'êtes plus mon ami, vous n'êtes plus мой верный раб, comme vous dites. Ну, здравствуйте, здравствуйте. Je vois que je vous fais peur, садитесь и рассказывайте”(*War and Peace* I:1:1).⁶

Here, the blurring of both French and Russian in a few short sentences demonstrates the multiplicity of languages at the top of Russian society. Tolstoy remains true to the culture by having his dialogues reflect what truly would have been seen and heard at a Petersburg *salon* in 1805.

To continue his description of cultural trends in his Russia, Tolstoy examines the institution of Serfdom. Serfdom, as a concept, may seem quite alien to a western reader.

⁶ “Well, Prince, so Genoa and Lucca are now just family estates of the Buonapartes...I will have nothing more to do with you and you are no longer my friend, no longer my ‘faithful slave,’ as you call yourself! But how do you do? I see I have frightened you—sit down and tell me all the news.”

It is, by definition, “a coercive labor system that arose primarily in Europe in the aftermath of the Roman Empire” in which “agricultural workers...were tied to the land and owed their landlords a variety of duties, in kind, in cash, or in labor duties” (Weeks “Serfdom”). While it faded in Western Europe by the eighteenth century, well into the nineteenth century “Russian social life and economy were based on the institution of serfdom.” In Russia, “serfs worked the land, thereby producing a surplus that allowed Russian landowners to serve the Russian state as officers and administrators... also [making] up the bulk of the Russian army” (Weeks “Emancipation”). As the official end of Serfdom would not come until 1861, the system permeated the society Tolstoy writes about in *War and Peace*. To address the permeation of society by serfs, he has them permeate his novel in the same way—serf characters abound in *War and Peace*, though they are not prominently featured. The valets at doors in the mansions of the Rostovs and the Bolkonskys, the carriage drivers, the soldiers who fight with Prince Andrei at Austerlitz and Borodino, “Old Tikhon, wearing a wig” and “sitting drowsily listening to the snoring of the prince,” are all serfs (*War and Peace* I:1:26). They populate most scenes in the novel, yet never attain a place of prominence among the aristocratic characters. The only time Tolstoy breaks this trend is when the serfs on the Bolkonsky’s estate defy Maria and attempt to force her to stay and protect them from the French. It is in this moment of inverted power, when peasants tied to the land try to hold a landowner on the land, that Maria, for a moment, realizes that “she felt that she could not understand them however much she might think about them” (*War and Peace* III:10:12). By demonstrating the interwoven and disconnected place of serfs in Imperial Russian

aristocratic society, Tolstoy interacts with another culturally specific moment of his place.

The tapestry on which Tolstoy wrote his novel was the Napoleonic Invasion of Russia in 1812, which brings with it pervasive connotations for Russians of his day. In Russian, the term used for the 1812 invasion is “Отечественная война 1812 года” (*Otechestvennaya Voyna 1812 Goda*) which roughly translates as the “Patriotic War of 1812,” though the word “Отечественная” more directly translates as “fatherland’s” war. To the Russian people of Tolstoy’s day, this war truly defined them as Russians; it was a war for the fatherland, a concept that referenced the physical landscape itself, as concepts of nationalism did not emerge until after the Napoleonic Wars (Evtuhov 32-8). For Russians, the invasion marked a cultural shift from pre-modern to modernity—medieval Moscow burned down after Napoleon occupied it, physically destroying the past. Tolstoy describes this episode, writing how “Pierre felt stifled by the smoke which seemed to hang over the whole city” as he wanders through the disaster, noting how “fires were visible on all sides. He did not then realize the significance of the burning of Moscow, and looked at the fires with horror” (*War and Peace* III:12:9). The literal burning of old Russia opened the Empire to a future as a great European power, demonstrated by the Russian presence at the Congress of Vienna in 1815 and subsequent interventions in European affairs (Evtuhov 22-4). The cultural impact on Russia permeated well into Tolstoy’s lifetime—Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky based his *1812 Overture*, which debuted in 1882, on the invasion and when Russia declared war on the German Empire in 1914, *War and Peace* became one of the most read works among the upper classes (Evtuhov 269-

275). By grounding his work in his cultural moment, Tolstoy truly demonstrates his capacity to write the social aspect of place, in addition to its physical landscape.

By writing about specific Russian ideas of *salon* culture and Serfdom, and tapping into the societal connotations of the Patriotic War, Tolstoy writes a novel very clearly grounded in Imperial Russian culture. Considering his earlier work on the importance of the physical Russian landscape, discussed in the second chapter of this paper, and his evident inclusion of specific Russian cultural constructions into his novel, Tolstoy taps into the idea of regionalism. His sense of place is so strong, he can fully weave culture and geography together, solidifying his status as a regional writer of Russia.

Nothing Gold Can Stay and Burning Bright: An Appalachian Cultural Moment

In his short story collections *Nothing Gold Can Stay* and *Burning Bright*, published in 2013 and 2010 respectively, Rash establishes himself as a culturally regional author by writing about several moments unique to his culture. These collections, which span time from “Lincolmites” during the American Civil War, through the Great Depression and right into the present day, present views of Appalachia from a multiplicity of viewpoints, be they children, adults, or elders. Through stories in both collections, Rash approaches one of the most pertinent topics of modern Appalachia: the emergence of a meth and drug culture. Rash speaks and writes often of meth and drug culture: two of his novels, *The World Made Straight* and *Above the Waterfall*, prominently feature characters who are addicts, and in a personal interview he admits that he decided to write about it because, at the time, no one would touch it (Personal Interview). Of his many writings on the subject, two stories, “Nothing Gold Can Stay”

and “The Ascent,” sum up Rash’s exploration of meth and drug culture from within and without—he offers the viewpoints of both users and those they affect.

In writing about meth and drug culture, Rash writes about a cultural phenomenon central to his region. The growth of methamphetamine abuse in Appalachia grew exponentially in the late 1990s and early 2000s. For example, in the state of Tennessee, “there were only two lab seizures in the entire state” in 1996, 20 in 1997, but in 2001, there were “461 seized labs statewide” and “over a thousand in fiscal year 2004” (MacMaster 117-18). Not only did the number of lab seizures in the state skyrocket, these seizures focused in a specific geographic area, the eastern part of the state, which constitutes the Appalachian mountain chain. In 2004, in eastern Tennessee, DEA seizures of labs made up 65% of the methamphetamine lab seizures in the southeastern United States (MacMaster 118). The reasons for this epidemic are widely debated, yet there seems to be no singular cause. As Ryan Brown argues, “crystal meth in Appalachia...is embedded in a complex web of historical tradition, economic change, geographical particularities, institutional conditions, social relationships, and individual life trajectories” (265). Regardless of the origins of the culture, the meth abuse epidemic coincided with Rash’s early years as a writer, weaving its way into his works.

“Nothing Gold Can Stay,” the title story of the collection with the same name, presents drug culture from the perspective of a user. The narrator of the story, who remains unnamed, and therefore, could be anyone, suffers from an oxycodone (OC) addiction (“Nothing Gold Can Stay” 31). Through this narrator, Rash shows us the debilitating effects on both the physical and the moral. Physically, the narrator’s surroundings and body fall apart. The initial setting of the story is in the narrator’s friend

Donnie's trailer, where "the refrigerator...and the TV are the last things in the trailer that can be plugged into a socket," as the "microwave, VCR, air conditioner...have all been pawned" ("Nothing Gold Can Stay" 30). As for the narrator's body, he is constantly aware of his own increasing addiction, noting that he "[hadn't] had anything all day and the craving's working on [him]," and "his eyes are on the tabs" and thoughts of the next hit he can take. He reflects "how there was a time a 10 [Oxycontin 10mg] would have [him] walking on sunshine half a day, but now it just takes the edge off" ("Nothing Gold Can Stay" 31-2). Morally, the dependence on OC eats away at the narrator and Donnie, costing them their innocence. The narrator reminisces throughout the short story about his teenage years fishing with Donnie and doing repair work for Mr. Ponder, a Second World War veteran, before addiction dictated their lives. However, in order to obtain money to purchase more OC, Donnie and the narrator break into Mr. Ponder's house, overstep his dead body, and steal a jar of gold teeth he took from the mouths of dead Japanese soldiers in the Pacific theater ("Nothing Gold Can Stay" 37-40). Despite ending the story wishing to return to his innocence and dreaming of "fish [moving] in the current, alive in that other world," the narrator takes another OC 10 and remains complacent in Donnie's theft—an act which points to his acknowledgement that he can never return to the world before his addiction ("Nothing Gold Can Stay" 42). By showing the depravity of a user in the meth and drug culture, Rash shines a light on the desperation and reality that users suffer daily.

In "The Ascent," one of the stories in his 2010 *Burning Bright* collection, Rash demonstrates the effects of meth abuse on non-users, specifically children. Jared, the main character of the short story, is an elementary schooler who witnesses firsthand his

parents' escalating addiction to methamphetamine, as they go from one bag to four, though "there had never been more than one before" ("The Ascent" 83). His parents' addiction dominates his world, as he must live in an environment which constantly reminds him of their state: "the rickety chairs and the sagging couch, the gaps where the TV and microwave had been" ("The Ascent" 76). Despite his childhood wishes of having a great Christmas and catching the eye of girl in his class, Lyndee, Jared, in order to keep his parents from pawning a dilapidated, rusted bike his father bought him, steals a ring and Rolex watch off of two corpses he finds in a crashed airplane. At the story's conclusion, Jared's desperation becomes so great, he locks himself in the ruined airplane during a blizzard ("The Ascent" 86-90). Through the tragic story of Jared, Rash demonstrates the converse side of the Appalachian meth culture: the derogatory effects touch not only the user, but anyone close to them.

In both "Nothing Gold Can Stay" and "The Ascent," Rash explores multiple dimensions of the meth and drug culture that permeates his Appalachia. The emergence of the Appalachian drug culture matched the early years of Rash's publication, making the epidemic his contemporary. Like a regional author, Rash engages the cultural phenomenon on its own terms. Using the narration of both a user and a child with parents who are addicts, Rash approaches the cultural phenomenon from within, allowing his readers to see for themselves the tragedy of the epidemic. He, being one of the first authors to explore this cultural expression through literature, writes from a truly regional perspective, demonstrating not only the positive aspects of his home, but the overtly negative and dangerous ones.

The Night the New Jesus Fell to Earth: Society's Role in Place

Rash's first short story collection, *The Night the New Jesus Fell to Earth*, published in 1994, depicts a series of tales told by Randy, Vincent, and Tracy, three residents of the community of Cliffside, NC. Through the different perspectives of their stories, Rash creates an image of the community that reflects cultural norms and constructions. In this short story collection, Rash demonstrates his mastery of regionalism; he blurs fiction and reality by incorporating real features of the communities he writes about into his fiction. Bearing in mind Rash's disposition to accurately capture and preserve Appalachian culture, this collection stands out as a perfect example of his attempts to draw parallels between reality and prose. The title story of the collection, "The Night the New Jesus Fell to Earth" is a microcosm of this broader theme—Rash represents the dominance of religion, the application of male and female gender roles, and the mentality of small-town life present in the real community of Cliffside through his fictional rendering of the town.

While Rash does not typically demonstrate his personal views of religion in his writings, he does not shy away from demonstrating its impact on the communities he describes. Religion is a dominant force throughout Rash's construction of Cliffside—its presence is omnipotent in the short story. In fact, every action takes place on the grounds or inside the sanctuary of Cliffside Baptist Church. Further, religion frames the narrative. The first lines introduce the reader to two characters: "Cliffside's new Jesus" and "Preacher Thompson," setting the stage for a focus on religion in the coming pages ("The Night the New Jesus Fell to Earth" 29). The next few paragraphs discuss Cliffside Baptist Church history, concerns over the future of the church, and gossip about the former choir

director and his call girl “who wasn’t even a Baptist” (“The Night the New Jesus Fell to Earth” 29-30). References to the church and Christianity abound throughout the early paragraphs of the story, a trend continued with repeated biblical allusions and a recreation of the crucifixion at the end of the story (“The Night the New Jesus Fell to Earth” 29-32, 39-43). Religion acts as a frame for the story, affecting the characters who operate in the story. Religion in Rash’s *Cliffside* creates a sense of confinement; nothing in the plot can be processed without the lens of religion: whenever the narrator, Tracy, faces misfortune, she chalks it up as inevitable, for “as the Bible says, it’s a fallen world” (“The Night the New Jesus Fell to Earth” 37). The prevalence of religion in every aspect of the story gives the reader the sense of its omnipotence; religion is central to the plot and to the life of the community around it.

Rash draws inspiration for his fictional *Cliffside*’s obsession with religion from the real-life community. In the 2010 U.S. Census, Rutherford County, which includes *Cliffside*, NC, boasted 50,560 members of its total population of 67,810 (74.5% of the total population) identifying as an adherent to a religion (“Links and Rankings”). To put it in perspective, there are 216 Christian churches alone in Rutherford County, nearly three churches per square mile (“Church Directory”). In a community where three-quarters of the population adhere to one religion or another, the presence of religion can certainly seem to be everywhere, as it appears in Rash’s version of the community. The majority of “The Night the New Jesus Fell to Earth,” the title story of that collection, takes place within the grounds of *Cliffside Baptist Church*, an actual entity established in 1903 that still exists in the community today (“Our History”). The Southern Baptist Convention, to which *Cliffside Baptist Church* belongs, is the dominant denomination in

the hyper-religious Rutherford County, as reported by the UNC Carolina Population Center in 2014, providing a further example of the religious life that seems to dominate the community (“Religion in North Carolina”).

In addition to a hyper-religiosity, Rash’s construction of a fictionalized Cliffside from the real community depicts distinct gender roles for men and women. He presents these gender constructions through the lens of a woman in the community. Tracy, the narrator, is a female carpenter in Cliffside and struggles to get started in her business “since [she] was a woman, [and] a lot of men didn’t think she could do as good a job” as a man (Rash 34). Eventually, through her hard work and skill, Tracy earns a reputation “as good as any man’s in the county” (“The Night the New Jesus Fell to Earth” 34). Tracy’s story offers insight into the mentality of her community; Tracy achieves a reputation equal to men, but she has to earn it, whereas a man’s credentials would not necessarily be questioned in the same manner. Despite her earning of a solid reputation for good work and mastery of her craft, she is not always viewed as an adequate authority. Men still doubt Tracy’s judgment and contradict her assessments of the sturdiness of the crosses, leaving her wondering “why it is that some men...act like they know more than another human being just because that other human being happens to be a woman” (“The Night the New Jesus Fell to Earth” 35). Tracy has to work hard to gain respect in the community, whereas men seem to have it by virtue of their gender, like the new preacher (“The Night the New Jesus Fell to Earth” 29-32). The experiences of Tracy offer insight into the roles of gender in Rash’s Cliffside; equality of opportunity is not always present. The confinement created by religion in the community is expanded to

female denizens. Tracy's gender confines her in ways that her male counterparts are not—she must prove herself while they do not.

Like religion, strict gender roles are not unique to Rash's fictional account of Cliffside. The gender norms that constrict Tracy in the short story are personal, but a variety of them can be seen in the housing make-up of the Cliffside community.

According to the 2010 US Census, out of 233 households in the community of Cliffside, unmarried females under the age of 65 occupy 37 households; 80% of the total households in the community list men, married and unmarried, as the householder. With women making up 82 of the 163 residents in the labor force and a median non-household female income of \$21,920, twice the Federal Poverty Line, economics alone do not account for the lower number of single females as householders; social factors, like the issues of gender outlined in "The Night the New Jesus Fell to Earth" may account for it ("Cliffside CDP, NC").

In addition to religiosity and divisional gender roles, Rash's Cliffside displays elements of a geographically isolated community, completing the sense of confinement. Rash chooses not to present the geographic isolation itself, but to give the reader a sense of its effects. Cliffside is insular, set apart, and Rash portrays gossip as a means to convey this feature. The Cliffside of "The Night the New Jesus Fell to Earth" is one where everyone knows each other and each other's business, the kind of place where you cannot hide from your demons. Tracy categorizes it as a "small town" where "you're always running into your ex" ("The Night the New Jesus Fell to Earth" 35). Cliffside's physical enclosure expresses itself through gossip, as proximity breeds resentment. Gossip in the short story blatantly targets Tracy. She informs the reader about the fallout from her

divorce to Larry and his campaign against her in the community, claiming things about her “that involved whips and dog collars and Black Sabbath albums” (“The Night the New Jesus Fell to Earth” 37). The rumor itself did not affect Tracy; the fact that her neighbors accepted the rumor did. Tracy “couldn’t get a date for almost two years” and “lost several girlfriends too,” describing how “the rumor caused [her] more heartache” than her actual divorce (Rash 376). Despite her experience, Tracy herself is not immune to the effects of living in a small community: she gossips with the reader early in the piece about Len Denton and his eloping with the non-Baptist singer from Harley’s Lounge (“The Night the New Jesus Fell to Earth” 29-30). This small town mentality, where proximity can lead to tensions, causes “a lot of people [to] want to believe the worst” and adds another layer to the confining mood that marks Rash’s construction of Cliffside (“The Night the New Jesus Fell to Earth” 37). In demonstrating the social functioning of the town of Cliffside, Rash engages the cultural and social aspects of place.

Rash uses the medium of gossip to convey a sense of geographic isolation in his Cliffside, a feature of the actual town implied by its geography and ethnography. Cliffside, NC is not incorporated; the United States Census Bureau officially designates it as a village or CDP. Even by local standards, Cliffside is tiny: the population of the community in 2010 was 611 persons, compared with the 67,810 people overall in Rutherford County, or 98,078 in the neighboring county of Cleveland (“Cliffside CDP”). The relatively small size of the community alludes to this feeling of isolation through lack of diversity, a fact reinforced by the homogeneous make-up of Cliffside: of the 611 people, 553 are white (“Cliffside CDP”). The physical Cliffside community affords a

geographic component to this; it is literally set apart from the world. Cliffside, NC sits entirely on the side of a hill, reached only by branching off the winding US-221 ALT route. Small lanes of cracked pavement lead down to scenic outcrops, usually the site of a church, that overlook the ruins of an abandoned cotton mill, simply called “the Old Mill.” The town itself only boasts three buildings: a United States Post Office, a Sheriff’s office, and the old Cliffside Baptist Church. The confinement and constriction felt by Tracy in Rash’s short story stems directly from the small town environment, a similarity reinforced by the actual Cliffside’s size, demographics, and geography.

Through the short story “The Night the New Jesus Fell to Earth,” Rash proves himself a master of translation. He takes the cultural elements that make up a particular community—in this case, Cliffside, NC—and transfers them into his prose. Taking into account the importance of religion, the gendered view of society, and the impact of small-town life on the real community, Rash demonstrates these features in his fictional representation of the town. A combination of ever-present religiosity, the strictness of the system of accepted roles for two genders, and the banishing isolation stemming from a small town mentality evoke a sense of constriction and confinement in Rash’s Cliffside. The community projects these constructions onto Tracy, predating her emergence as a respected carpenter, the power dynamic surrounding the construction of the crosses, and her eventual realization of the absurdity of the system, represented by Larry’s farcical fall from his cross (“The Night the New Jesus Fell to Earth” 41-3). Rash, in modeling a fictional community after its real counterpart, provides an excellent blueprint of his method for writing regionally—a copy of reality in many dimensions.

Conclusion

The writing of both Tolstoy and Rash demonstrates the idea that place is more than just the physical, geographic landscape; it is a socially constructed space defined and redefined by culture. The actions and plots of their short stories and novels are intricately connected to specific cultural phenomena of their place, be it southern Appalachia or Imperial Russia. Though they may seem worlds apart, these places share an importance in the minds of their authors. While they diverge in writing style, Tolstoy and Rash both take a snapshot of the cultural moment they write about and translate it into their work.

Tolstoy's snapshot exhibits the social and cultural realities of the Napoleonic period. In *War and Peace*, Tolstoy carefully grounds his work in the cultural connotations of early-nineteenth century Russia. He expertly captures the phenomenon of *salon* culture in St. Petersburg by opening his novel in one such scene and returning to it throughout the narrative. Understanding the culture of the social elite he wrote about, Tolstoy weaves both French and Russian into his novel to reflect the dual-linguistic make-up of the elites. In an attempt to truly demonstrate an understanding of cultural moment, Tolstoy chooses to reflect on the social institution of serfdom and the impact of one of the greatest social upheavals in Russian history: the Patriotic War. By demonstrating the cultural forces at work in the moment he writes about, Tolstoy connects the social and cultural aspects of place into his geographic landscape, providing readers with a holistic view of his place.

Rash's snapshot, like that of Tolstoy, pays close attention to the social phenomena of the place about which he writes. Rash uses two different approaches to translate these phenomena into his stories. First, he, like Tolstoy, writes about both cultural phenomena

unique to the cultural moment he describes, such as the emergence of meth culture in Appalachia. Much like Tolstoy describes *salon* culture and serfdom, Rash describes the impact of meth addiction on his particular place. An exploration that stretches twenty years (1994-2013) and seems to be continuing, this cultural case features most notably in “Nothing Gold Can Stay” and “The Ascent” from his *Nothing Gold Can Stay* and *Burning Bright* collections. Second, as demonstrated in “The Night the New Jesus Fell to Earth,” Rash creates fictional communities modeled directly after real ones, incorporating facets of real life in that community literarily through various vehicles. Tolstoy uses the impact of the Patriotic War and the duality of languages to communicate his real communities into fictional ones. Rash uses religion, gender roles, and the constraints of small-town life to achieve the same end. In this way, Rash molds a social and cultural dimension to his landscape.

The combination of writing both landscape and culture gives rise to the concept of regionalism—a tying of a certain author strongly to the place of which he or she writes. Rash maintains that truly regional literature has a way of pulling the reader into the world it creates. He defines “time” as “a type of geography,” and argues that his works, particularly his short story collections *Nothing Gold Can Stay* and *Burning Bright* have a certain effect on people. He believes that the “reader becomes unmoored from time...you go into another world” when you read his work (Rash Personal Interview). Tolstoy and Rash write the culture and landscape of their homes so convincingly, they “unmoor” their readers from their own places and times and transport them into the world of the story or novel. Through this vehicle, the two authors become truly regional authors. In becoming

so strongly regional, Tolstoy and Rash tap into a much larger trend: the transcendence of regional writing on a universal scale.

Chapter IV: Dostoyevsky, Rash, and the Transcendence of Emotion

“Зато всегда так происходило, что чем более я ненавидел людей в частности, тем пламеннее становилась любовь моя к человечеству вообще.” –Fyodor Dostoyevsky,

Brothers Karamozov.⁷

Introduction

The literary conversation between Ron Rash and Fyodor Dostoyevsky is a conversation of transcendence. Their writings reflect upon a similar question: what is it that truly unites humanity? Their answers to this central question may at first glance appear as different as their geographic locations; however, their strategies coincide in an interesting way: they both tap into an innate belief in shared, human experiences and emotion. Dostoyevsky writes about his landscape, the Imperial Russian capital of St. Petersburg. Many of his most renowned works, including *Poor Folk*, *Crime and Punishment*, *Notes from the Underground*, and *The Idiot*, use the city as a backdrop. The city brings with it a plethora of connotations and social cues that determine both the action and psychology of his characters, characteristics uniquely Russian and uniquely “Petersburgian” that outside observers may not always understand. Yet, for all his geographic and cultural ubiquity, Dostoyevsky’s characters are universally relatable due to their struggles with universal emotions, such as guilt and redemption, which transcend the cultural connotations of the city. Rash shares in this approach; his landscape of

⁷ “But it has always happened that the more I detest men individually the more ardent becomes my love for humanity.”

Appalachia brings with it a distinct cultural and geographic connotation: the mountains create physically isolated communities, which developed a culture unique to the region. Living in the shadows of the mountains defines the actions and psychology of Rash's characters, yet they still transcend his work by invoking universal experiences and emotion: ambition and war.

In an interview with Jesse Graves and Randall Wilhelm after the publication of *Serena*, Rash reiterated a particular respect for Dostoyevsky as one of the primary inspirations for his own work as a novelist and author (Graves and Wilhelm 3). More recently, Rash expanded on his respect for Dostoyevsky by arguing, "if you read his books, with real attentiveness, it takes you into this place that's so deep... you forget you're in his world" that "you feel you're into something serious." Rash also notes that the art of Dostoyevsky's work is that he captivates him "through the characterization, not the language," considering Rash reads in English translation as opposed to the original Russian (Personal Interview). Rash asserts that Dostoyevsky "creates characters that stay with you, moments" that are unforgettable, and that he harnesses a "power in the dealing of philosophical ideas...which come out of the story" through the shared human emotions of "doubt and belief and justice," showing an innate "understanding of human psychology" (Personal Interview). Rash even directly draws on Dostoyevsky in his work; his latest novel includes an epigraph from *The Brothers Karamazov*: "And after that the punishment begins" (*The Risen*).

Much like Dostoyevsky, Rash ascribes to the idea that geography and landscape exert influence over people, but certain human emotions transcend their geographic constraints. For instance, he remembers that "Faulkner has a great line 'people are just a

little bit better than their world allows them to be,” a simple phrase that alludes to the relationship between people and their world: the world *allows* people to be something or behave in a certain way (Rash Personal Interview). His belief in the primacy of landscape in the psychology and actions of people populates his own writings. Through using “regional, historical situations, [and] themes,” Rash arrives at “the questions I [Rash] want to ask...questions that transcend the culture, questions of the human experience” (Personal Interview). As an example, Rash uses one of his recent novels, *The Cove*. While he acknowledges that he writes a character completely defined psychologically by the place she lives in, he also notes that Laurel “transcends through imagination” the constraints put on her by the cove. Through imagining Walter’s ship, Laurel proves that through the shared human emotion of hope, she can rise above the confines of her landscape (Rash Personal Interview).

Rash’s explorations of the relationship between landscape and the people who live in it, as well as the transcendence of human emotions from this condition, are something he speaks often about in published interviews. Rash notes that he holds a respect for authors such as James Joyce and Thomas Hardy because they play with the idea of landscape as something more than just the physical world. Rash says, “what I love so much about Hardy is how landscape is such a daunting presence in his novels, so much so that landscape and the lives played out on that landscape merge, become one. Landscape *is* destiny” (Graves and Wilhelm 4). Rash takes on this mantle in his own writing because he believes that “part of writing is conjuring up the world of the story.” He clarifies this “world of the story” he mentions by saying “there’s a wonderful term the Welsh use, *cynefin*, for a primal, fierce attachment to a part of the landscape.” This

principle guides his writing. Rash clarifies, “When I write a novel, I want that same fierce attachment to the landscape I’m describing” (Graves and Wilhelm 5). Approaching his writing with an acute sense of the landscape and his characters’ relation to it allows Rash to tap into an intimacy with the land. He holds that “if you have that kind of intimacy with the landscape, you can bring the place more intensely into the reader’s mind, which allows the reader to enter the story more fully,” which in turn enables him or her “to understand that place as fully and in as many ways as possible, which includes how the place influences the characters’ sense of reality” (Graves and Wilhelm 5).

Rash links himself to Dostoyevsky through a shared belief in the primacy of collective human experience, despite the specific regional qualities their characters and scenery exhibit. Both authors deal with questions of the internationality and universality of emotion, linked unquestionably to the physical world of their characters. It is the deep connection to a particular place, Rash maintains, that truly makes a landscape and a people universal. For Rash, his belief in the interconnectedness of culture and geography stems from the mantra “one place understood helps us understand all other places better,” as Eudora Welty once said. He believes that “she’s right” (Graves and Wilhelm 5). Rash also contends that “one of the most interesting aspects of literature is how the most intensely ‘regional’ literature is often also the most universal”: be they Hardy, Joyce, Dostoyevsky, or himself. To Rash, “the best regional writers are like farmers drilling for water; if they bore deep and true enough into that particular place, beyond the surface of local color, they tap into universal correspondences...the collective unconscious” (Graves and Wilhelm 5). He believes Dostoyevsky achieves this communion with the collective unconscious through *Crime and Punishment*, the book Rash believes first “entered him,”

showing him the psychological mastery of Dostoyevsky. In the same vein, Rash, with his own writings, taps into this sense of universality at the heart of his definition of regionalism.

Crime and Punishment: The Transcendence of Time, Emotion, and Experience

Through his renowned novel *Crime and Punishment*, Dostoyevsky engages Hegelian thought, Nietzsche's supermen philosophy, and ultimate questions of wrongdoing and redemption. Set mainly against the backdrop of St. Petersburg, the glittering capital of Imperial Russia, his novel brings into conversation the idea of the agency of place, using the city as a microcosm for his ideas. Taking into account both the physical place and the cultural context of his Russia, Dostoyevsky writes an extremely regional work that simultaneously invokes universal emotions of guilt and redemption, grounded in the internal struggle of the title character, Rodion Raskolnikov. Raskolnikov murders a pawnbroker and her sister for their money, only to suffer a hyper-active sense of depravity and guilt, despite his philosophical musings that place him above the law. By showing Raskolnikov's torrid journey towards redemption, which spans several weeks and the length of Russia, from the capital on the Baltic to the wastes of Siberia, Dostoyevsky taps into an essentially human emotion, guilt, making his novel not only a regional wonder, but a universal exploration.

Though spanning the geographic length of Russia, *Crime and Punishment* operates predominantly within a specific geographic and cultural context: the city of St. Petersburg during the period of Great Reforms in Imperial Russia. St. Petersburg, the capital of Russia from its founding by Tsar Peter I in 1703 until Vladimir Lenin relocated the Bolshevik government to Moscow in 1918, is a city of extremes. Located at the head

of the Gulf of Finland and built on top of a reclaimed marshland, the city is divided into four sections by the Neva River and its tributaries; as such, a series of bridges and canals circumnavigate the city (Ioffe). As the city stands on a floodplain, flooding is frequent and summer generally brings heavy precipitation; additionally, St. Petersburg's geographic position produces an effect known as the White Nights in summer, when the sun can be up for nineteen hours or more (Ioffe). Dostoyevsky incorporates these geographic features into his novel: Raskolnikov paces the city for nights at a time, a feature possible because of the series of bridges and the light provided by the White Nights (Dostoyevsky 79). In addition to the geographic features of St. Petersburg, Dostoyevsky also situates his novel with cultural specificity: the period of Great Reforms under Tsar Alexander II, when the autocratic imperial government attempted to reform parts of its system, including emancipation of the Serfs, industrialization, and an overhaul of the judiciary. Dostoyevsky published *Crime and Punishment* in twelve, monthly instalments over the year 1866, the same year that Alexander II established a new, independent court system in Russia as part of his judicial reform agenda (McReynolds 21). Prior to the Judicial Reforms, Russian courts were farcical and the "police enjoyed perhaps less public confidence than did...judges." Dostoyevsky alludes to this inadequate system with his depiction of a police force run on bureaucratic despotism and lacking true conviction, with the exception of the investigator Porfiry (Dostoyevsky 541-2, McReynolds 21). Dostoyevsky's use of both geographic place and cultural phenomena invokes a strict sense of regionalism, which enables him to tap into broader themes of the human experience.

Dostoyevsky recognized the effect on character that a physical environment exerts: *Crime and Punishment* takes the Imperial Russian capital of St. Petersburg and ascribes it agency. Russian critic Vadim Kozhinov believes the creation of this phenomenon occurs in the opening line of the book: “On an exceptionally hot evening early in July a young man came out of the garret in which he lodged in S. Place and walked slowly, as though in hesitation, towards K. bridge” (Dostoyevsky 19, Kozhinov 17). What at first glimpse may seem to be a simple description of weather and geography reveals several central motifs of the rest of the novel: depravity, confinement, and desperation. The “young man,” Raskolnikov, exits his flat in St. Petersburg into an oppressive, stifling environment that contributes to the hemmed-in and trapped feeling that emerges in the character as the novel progresses. Richard Gill, expanding on Kozhinov, further asserts that “the reference to the ‘exceptionally hot evening’...establishes not only the suffocating atmosphere of St. Petersburg in midsummer but also the infernal ambience of the crime itself” (Gill, Kozhinov 18-19). The reference to specific locations, such as “S. Place” and “K. Bridge,” (Stalyarny Place and Kokushkin Bridge) situates the action within the cultural context of St. Petersburg, marked by the winding streets, markets, and canals (Isaeva). This element contributes to Raskolnikov’s growing sense of confinement, fueling his slip towards desperation as he paces the labyrinthine grid of the city (Gill). In a few lines of exposition on the setting, Dostoyevsky gives agency to the very real city of St. Petersburg by creating an atmosphere out of the city’s culture and geography. Raskolnikov’s actions are influenced by the city; the culture and environment of St. Petersburg are so pervasive, Raskolnikov

cannot help but adhere to the constraints of movement and action they place on him (Kozhinov 18-19).

Rash identifies the “early scene where Raskolnikov kills the pawnbroker” as the singular most vivid moment in *Crime and Punishment*, and this scene introduces the holistic human element of Dostoyevsky’s novel: the redemption cycle (Personal Interview). The scene Rash refers to shows the murder of the pawnbroker by Raskolnikov, who kills her with an axe before looting her and her apartment, only to kill her sister Lisaveta when she discovers the pawnbroker’s body (Dostoyevsky 96-99). This scene, though graphic, is emblematic of the schema Dostoyevsky creates: from the moment of his crime, guilt wracks Raskolnikov. Raskolnikov finds that “his hands were still shaking” even after he loots the pockets of the pawnbroker, and “a sort of spasm” paralyzes his body. Upon seeing a red cloth, the urge to clean his hands seizes him, à la Lady Macbeth, and he spends several seconds wiping blood from his hands on a fur coat, horrified “that perhaps all his clothes were covered with blood, that perhaps there were lots of bloodstains, but that he did not see them” (Dostoyevsky 97-8, 109). The guilt, which begins here with the spasms and fear of unseen blood, evolves into “a feverish condition,” in which Raskolnikov is “delirious and half-conscious,” hallucinating in his room and pacing the bridges of St. Petersburg (Dostoyevsky 136). Raskolnikov’s guilt physically affects him, until finally, he confesses to the crime out of love for Sonia, a destitute prostitute. However, even after confession and sentencing, “he was ill for a long time,” still haunted by guilt, until he finally repents before God and finds redemption in religion (Dostoyevsky 542, 551, 557-9). The entire novel tracks Raskolnikov’s curing, his redemption cycle, ultimately ending when he finds his peace.

Dostoyevsky's description of the cycle of guilt and atonement for Raskolnikov taps into a universal human experience, the redemption cycle. Though his novel operates with an acute sense of regionalism, placed in the geographic and cultural context of St. Petersburg, Dostoyevsky manages to tap into the human psychology at the heart of his story. Most people are not murderers, but can identify with Raskolnikov's physical deterioration from guilt and feel the catharsis of his healing when he finally admits his wrongdoing. By tapping into this shared human experience, Dostoyevsky transcends the regional specificity of his setting and culture, making his novel a human novel, rather than solely a Russian one. The location of the story ceases to matter. Raskolnikov could be anyone in the world and hold the same emotions. This distinction adds credibility to Dostoyevsky's assertion that the Russian culture had the capacity to produce the same human experiences as any other culture and landscape, meaning its literary tradition was just as relevant as the French or German: an assertion of equality based on empathy.

***Serena*: The Transcendence of Time**

In perhaps his best known novel, *Serena*, Rash demonstrates the anachronistic, meteoric social, and economic rise of a woman in the heart of southern Appalachia during the Great Depression. Through the course of the novel, Rash depicts the interaction between the natural world and the enigmatic force of will exhibited by his title character, Serena Pemberton. The novel depicts various levels of Appalachian society, from loggers to the Vanderbilt dynasty, and their varied interactions with and debate about the natural world around them. Much like Dostoyevsky, Rash explores the psychological dynamics at work in the rugged terrain—focusing on the singular veracity of his title character. Through her attempts to tame and capitalize on the natural resources

of the North Carolina mountains, *Serena* raises questions of the landscape's agency, the extent of human desire, and the consequences of unchecked exploitation. *Serena* operates at the center of Appalachian regionalism: the plot of the novel centers on the mountainous regions of North Carolina and Tennessee and exhibits multiple unique elements of the Appalachian culture of that time, such as the Scotch-Irish presence, religious fundamentalism, and the clash of classes during the upheaval of the Great Depression. By rooting his characters and novel so firmly in Appalachian landscape, cultural moment, and lore, Rash is able, through the interaction of landscape and people, to demonstrate the universal, human quality of unbridled ambition.

Rash situates *Serena* in the center of Appalachian culture and geography. It takes place geographically in the region that now makes up the Great Smokey Mountains National Park in western North Carolina and eastern Tennessee, with such landmarks as Knoxville, TN, Waynesville, NC, and the Biltmore Estate in Asheville, NC physically grounding it. The novel further places itself in the cultural world of Appalachia in the era of the Great Depression—names like Buchanan, Galloway, Campbell, and Ross evoke the Scots-Irish roots of the region, while the historical proximity to Secretary of the Interior Albright, representing the Franklin Roosevelt government, historically situates the novel. Rash's depiction of the vagrant workers traveling from camp to camp, waiting on someone to be maimed or injured so that a position on the crew would open up, further captures the historical context of the novel (*Serena* 199-200). Through the character of McIntyre, Rash demonstrates the religiosity of the region: the vagabond preacher and his doomsday warnings represent the fervor of religion that characterizes Appalachia (*Serena* 30-3). Rash digs deep into the cultural and regional resonances of his

setting, enabling him to invoke truly universal themes by exploring the interaction between the physical landscape and the characters he creates.

The interaction between the landscape and humans is a central theme of *Serena*. In his other novels, Rash ascribes agency to the landscape and explores its impact on the people who live within it by demonstrating how it traps and heals. In this vein, *Serena* again raises the question of nature's converse role as something that "fold[s] inwards" and "shut[s] out the sun," yet also something "sheltering," as Rachel Harmon imagines the "mountains...huge hands...cupped around you, protecting and comforting" similar to how "God's hands would be" (*Serena* 196-98). However, *Serena* takes the conversation further by having nature exercise agency through its interaction with humans, demonstrating this natural/social relationship through the medium of the loggers. The natural landscape seems to be completely at the will of humans in the novel. It suffers destruction at the hands of Pemberton, Buchanan, Serena, and their logging teams, and preservation efforts led by Cornelia Vanderbilt Cecil, Kephart, and Secretary of the Interior Albright. However, it achieves agency through resistance (*Serena* 135-141). In the novel, this resistance manifests itself in the deaths the landscape inflicts on the logging crews. As the logging work becomes more treacherous with the changing seasons, the land the crews log begins to fight back, killing more and more of the workers in work-related accidents, such as falling logs, rattlesnake bites, and drowning (*Serena* 101, 183-85). These incidents, in turn, lead some of the workers to begin "wearing hand-whittled crosses...and rabbit's foots and lodestones, salt and buckeyes and arrowheads and even half-pound iron horseshoes" to ward off evil (*Serena* 183). True to Rash's form, the landscape influences the cultural reactions of the people who work there.

However, the true influence of the landscape on humans in the novel is its impact on the title character: Serena. The landscape allows Serena's ambition to thrive.

Landscape still holds agency, though through a less direct means than Rash's previous explorations, *Above the Waterfall*, *Saints at the River* and *The Cove*. In these novels, the landscape directly influences the actions of the characters, but in *Serena*, the lack of direct influence contributes to Serena's ability to exploit. The land fuels Serena's lust for wealth and power due to its vastness. Secretary Albright, Cornelia Cecil, and John D. Rockefeller see the land as something beautiful and worth preserving, while Serena sees it as a massive prospect for profit (*Serena* 36-38). Throughout the novel, Serena relentlessly pursues one dream: tapping into the vast wealth of South American jungles and building a logging empire based in Brazil, decimating the North Carolina forests in an attempt to raise funds for this venture. To this end, she allows nothing to stand in her way: she ruthlessly orchestrates the murders of her husband's business partners and associates, the attempt on his one-time lover and illegitimate child, and eventually, Pemberton himself, despite her love for him (*Serena* 359-367). Her cutthroat ambition sees her succeed: Serena leaves "a wasteland of stumps and downed limbs whose limits the frame could not encompass" behind her as she achieves "a long career as a timber baroness in Brazil" (*Serena* 369). The limitless potential of the Appalachian landscape feeds the limitless potential of Serena's ambition. That ambition, enabled by the Appalachian landscape, transcends the confines of the mountains.

Through her drive and ambition, Serena becomes a universal character. Rash himself speaks about how ambition becomes the driving force behind every action Serena takes. In Rash's words, "Serena wants to be the eagle," above the world, fierce, majestic,

and unstoppable. Her insatiable appetite for power makes her transcend her Appalachian setting and become one of “his least regional” characters, becoming instead “the American archetype” demonstrating “the blind innocent (but not so innocent) drive” that pushed Americans Westward. Because Serena is so influenced by the Appalachian landscape and culture, she intrinsically becomes less regional and more universal. Rash believes that, unlike islands with limited geography and resources, the seeming endlessness of America allowed Americans to push and consume more and more of the natural world, a reality that Serena embodies (Personal Interview). To Rash, “she’s overtly American” because “she captures something of the almost madness of America that the world, landscape, nature, the insatiable drive to destroy it, like Ahab” from Herman Melville’s acclaimed novel, *Moby Dick* (Personal Interview). Serena’s ambition, inspired and drawn from Appalachia, allows her to rise above the Appalachian culture she operates in to become something easily recognizable as broadly American.

However, Serena’s ambition does not simply make her relatable to Americans at large, but also to cultures the world over. *Serena*, by Rash’s admission, calls into dialogue Elizabethan English drama by mirroring its “sensibility and, to a degree, the structure” (Graves and Wilhelm 8). This conversation emerges structurally and through characterization. For instance, “there are five sections in the novel that [Rash] sees akin to a five-act play,” while the “timber crew functions as a chorus and also functions like the rustics Marlowe intersperses in his plays for comic relief”: Rash even has Serena and Mrs. Galloway “often speak in loose iambic pentameter” (Graves and Wilhelm 8). In addition to structural similarities, Rash links the novel to the Elizabethan tradition through characterization, specifically Serena’s ambition. He “consciously evoked

Macbeth in the novel,” but sees “the book as more in the tradition of Marlowe’s plays, which are always about the will to power” (Graves and Wilhelm 8). That being said, Rash notes that, like many Shakespearean villains, Serena embraces a “sense of nihilism and destruction” as if she wants “revenge on the world for being born” (Personal Interview). While these clear connections to broader themes of American and British literatures may seem to indicate that *Serena* is not truly Appalachian, Rash’s careful molding of the character of Serena to cultures which influenced the Appalachian culture plug her more deeply into the idea of Appalachia.

Beyond Anglophone literature, Rash views Serena as universal in the sense that there is “something in her that cannot allow for human weakness, beyond good and evil,” asserting that “her tragedy is she becomes Nietzschean” (Personal Interview). In invoking the German Enlightenment philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, Rash asserts the transcendence of Serena’s character to a universal level: she simultaneously invokes Appalachia, America, Elizabethan England, and Germany. Serena’s location in the vast Appalachian landscape enables her to exercise her ambition, which transcends the geographic and cultural boundaries of Appalachia, making her identifiably human through the common emotion of ambition.

The World Made Straight: The Transcendence of Emotion and Experience

Rash continues the theme of universal emotion, contextualized by landscape and extreme regionalism, in his novel *The World Made Straight*. One of Rash’s earlier novels, *The World Made Straight* portrays the story of Travis Shelton, a teenager in Madison County who, after a debilitating injury at the hands of a desperate farmer, leaves home, finding refuge with a drug dealer, Leonard, who prepares him for the GED. The novel

explores very primal issues of good and evil, the cost of survival, and ultimately the sins of the past and their impact on the present. Rash writes in a specifically Appalachian landscape and culture, invoking specific images such as meth culture and the American Civil War to place his novel. Through this frame, he taps into fundamental human experience: the brutality of war. This phenomenon, certainly not unique to Appalachia, yet featured prominently in the novel, transcends the geographic and cultural confines of regionalism. Through the transcendence of cultural moment, Rash links his novel to Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, identifying his novel in the broader schema of humanity.

Rash places his novel in Appalachia geographically and culturally. As he does in *Serena*, Rash uses specific place names to situate this novel's setting: Marshal, NC; Shelton Laurel Valley, near the Shelton Laurel Creek in Madison County, NC; and Western Carolina University (where Rash now holds a teaching appointment), denote the physical place of the novel in one of the valleys in the mountainous region of western North Carolina (*The World Made Straight* 219-20). Culturally, *The World Made Straight* explores two distinct facets of Appalachian life, poverty and drug culture. The depiction of Travis's father's difficult subsistence as a tobacco farmer and Leonard's dilapidated trailer demonstrate the reasons and repercussions of an impoverished life. This relationship manifests in the interesting dichotomy of Leonard's *blasé* attitude towards his family and life and Travis's father's hyper-masculine, domineering personality (*The World Made Straight* 82-3). Further, drug culture permeates the novel: the plot begins with Travis selling marijuana plants to Leonard he steals from the Toomeys and their revenge on him. The character of Dena, a pill-addict who lives with Leonard and, who

Rash implies is sexually assaulted by both of the Toomeys, represents the physical embodiment of the culture. Her life exists from one pill to the next as she loses much of her own agency, and Leonard and Travis must rescue her from situations she encounters pursuing her next hit (*The World Made Straight* 14-17, 32-8, 53, 268-72).

More than any of his other works, Rash invokes *Crime and Punishment* in *The World Made Straight*. Leonard's story arch and lingering guilt mirror that of Raskolnikov in Dostoyevsky's classic. Leonard deals with an overwhelming sense of guilt throughout the novel because of the breakdown of his marriage, his acceptance of false charges of marijuana possession, and the effects of these actions on his daughter. His paternal feelings and growing relationship with Travis stem from his feelings of failure with his daughter. Leonard gave up on his dreams when he gave up on his wife and career. By accepting the false charges of possession in Indiana, he forfeits any chance to teach again and to mend his spousal relations (*The World Made Straight* 109-10). Much like Raskolnikov finally achieves his redemption at the end of Dostoyevsky's novel by paying penance in Siberia, Leonard finally stands up to the Toomeys and sacrifices his life so that Dena and Travis can escape and have a better future. This selfless act on Leonard's part serves as his redemption. He would not fight for his wife, daughter, or job, leaving him guilty throughout the novel, but he will fight for his friends (*The World Made Straight* 282-83). By tying the plot of Leonard's story arc to Raskolnikov, Rash puts his novel directly into conversation with Dostoyevsky's. Leonard and Raskolnikov live times and worlds apart, but they both rise above their cultural moment by sharing a story.

Rash further places his novel historically by entering the conversation on the memory of the American Civil War in the South. This novel specifically brings into

discourse the reconsideration of loyalty based on the events in Madison County during the war through Travis's research and fascination with his ancestors' connection to Shelton Laurel (*The World Made Straight* 75-7). A major plot point that arcs throughout the novel is the massacre at Shelton Laurel, involving ancestors of both Travis and Leonard, which becomes indicative of Rash's belief, expressed across several novels and short stories that the Civil War was just that—a civil war (*The World Made Straight* 199-201). Rash's fascination with the Civil War in Madison County stems from the contradictions of that regions' history: specifically the refutation of the notion that the entire South supported the Confederacy. Rash talks about the fact that many Madison County residents, and in truth, many people who resided in Appalachia, fought for the Union, despite their neighbors' loyalties to Richmond (Personal Interview). He draws attention to the fact that the state of North Carolina voted against secession in a popular referendum, though the state legislature in convention eventually enacted a secessionist resolution (Rash, Downs). The difference of political opinions and sides in the conflict led to a hotbed of atrocities for supporters of both the Union and the rebelling South: massacres, house burnings, and reprisals colored the history of Madison County throughout the war. As Rash attests in *The World Made Straight*, there was not “a worse place to be for either side” than Madison County—“if you lived near Bull Run or Shiloh at least the armies moved on after battles. Here it settled in for four years” (199).

The Shelton Laurel massacre, in which twelve-year-old David Shelton and twelve of his neighbors met death by firing squad at the hands of the 64th NC regiment commanded by Lawrence Allen and James Keith, features prominently in the novel (*The World Made Straight* 86-7, 204-7, Gerard). Through his exploration of the massacre in

this short story, Rash argues that he taps into an idea that runs the world over: the brutality of war. Rash does not hold back in his description of the massacre. He writes how, despite the pleas of the twelve-year-old David, who just witnessed his father and brothers brutally die and still says, “I forgive you all this—I can get well. Let me go home to my mother and sisters,” the soldiers of the 64th still kill him (*The World Made Straight* 87). The crux of this scene, to Rash, is that people often commit the worst atrocities against their neighbors, “people do worse to people they know than to strangers” (*The World Made Straight* 93-4, Rash). This element of the massacre is the universal element, as Rash says, what I really wanted to do with Madison county and with Shelton Laurel.” Rash views the events he describes as “a microcosm of what happened in Nazi Germany, in Cambodia, what’s happening in Somalia right now, what happened in Rwanda”: the brutality of neighbors and war (Personal Interview).

The World Made Straight ultimately proves that Rash’s literature can reach beyond its cultural moment. The representation of the Appalachian drug culture again in *The World Made Straight* harkens back to Rash’s short stories discussed in Chapter III. Here, though, Rash uses it to demonstrate the cultural moment of his novel, a moment his characters and themes transcend through their universality. The identical story arc of Leonard and Raskolnikov further illustrates this point. Their similar identities prove the transcendence of experience from the specifics of geographic location and culture. And finally, through his depiction of the Shelton Laurel massacre, Rash demonstrates how *The World Made Straight* transcends its geographic and cultural boundaries, becoming human by reflecting the brutal reality and destruction of human conflict.

Conclusion

Dostoyevsky and Rash share the same conviction: their cultures and landscapes are unique, but accessible through the collective conscious of shared human experience. Dostoyevsky sets *Crime and Punishment* geographically and culturally in St. Petersburg; he engages in the political discourses of his day and uses his landscape as a character to heighten the charged emotions of his characters, demonstrating the interconnectedness of landscape, culture, and human psychology. However, in demonstrating the regional connections between landscape, culture, and their influence on individuals, Dostoyevsky transcends the mold of regionalism. *Crime and Punishment* ultimately plots the guilt and eventual redemption of Raskolnikov, tapping into the shared human experience of guilt culminating in the redemption cycle, making his characters human as opposed to merely Russian; they become relatable to audiences worldwide. All people experience guilt and a cycle of redemption at some point in their lives. Cultural moment may change the individual perception of the emotion or experience, but the baseline remains. Similarly, Rash, through his novels *Serena* and *The World Made Straight*, defies the confines of Appalachia. He, true to form, grounds his works irrevocably in the Appalachian cosmos: his characters exhibit cultural traits exclusive to the region, enabled by a landscape specifically rooted in the mountains of North Carolina. Yet, despite the regionalism, Rash's dealing with subjects such as ambition and the experience of war makes his novels much more than classic examples of local color. His novels take on a globally ubiquitous mantle, making them relatable to any audience, despite ties to a specific place, moment, and culture.

Chapter V: Conclusions

Это могло бы составить тему нового рассказа, - но теперешний рассказ наш

окончен.- Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *Crime and Punishment*.⁸

Ron Rash's work, when analyzed in conjunction with the novels of Lev Tolstoy and Fyodor Dostoyevsky, demonstrates the phenomenon of regionalism as internationalism. Rash engages the writings of the Russian authors by extensively exploring the interaction of landscape and culture, as well as their effects on humanity. This assessment is not to say that Rash specifically mimicked or directly translated Russian literary ideas to his own region; rather, he, with a demonstrated familiarity with their works and situation, brings them into the broader conversation of the relationship among people in various parts of the globe through the conversation of place. Through his similarity in approach to the Russian authors, Rash demonstrates that his Appalachian people are not so different than the Russian people of Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky's day. Ultimately, Rash's literary contribution provides a concrete example of the idea that peoples differ in degree, not kind—there is an innate, shared sense of humanity, no matter what one's place is.

Rash further situates his work in the context of preservation. Believing in the uniqueness of his Appalachia, Rash writes its stories, drawing principally on characters and geography (Personal Interview). Facing the realities of stereotypical portrayals in popular media, in addition to the natural changes associated with globalization and digitization, Rash's work demonstrates the continued importance of his corner of the

⁸ That might be the subject of a new story, but our present story is ended.

world. He accomplishes this, in part, by drawing on the influence of Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky. Much like Rash, the Russian authors faced a rapidly changing world in which most of the cosmopolitan West considered their cultural and geographic region backwards and uncultured. Through their writings, which heavily feature the geography and culture of their world, they appeal to universal human emotions and experiences, showing the diversity and oneness of their postage stamp of soil in connection with the broader story of humanity. Nineteenth-century Russia may differ greatly from Western Europe and the world at large, but Tolstoy and Dostoevsky demonstrated that its people were just as human as people the world over. Rash, in the same vein, demonstrates the regional specificity and relatability of his home. The geography and culture of Appalachia may be unique, but its people are not.

The implications of this assessment extend beyond just the study of Rash. While Rash writes with a white voice in the American South, he provides an avenue to continue the diversification of southern studies. In demonstrating the cultural vibrancy and geographic uniqueness of his region, Rash enters into the conversation of a multiplicity of Souths. The relationship between his writings and those of Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky provides an opportunity to investigate his south through a new lens, that of the Russian authors. By showing a relationship between his Appalachia and Imperial Russia, Rash opens his South to a globalized exploration. In the case of Rash, Tolstoy, and Dostoyevsky, one can look close to home to see abroad, or look far away to see home. Through globalized southern studies, the nuance and depth of Rash's writings take on a broad new meaning, placing him at the forefront of the growing conversation on the place

of the literature of the American South in an interconnected, global world. But that is the beginning of a new story.

Works Cited

- Anderson, Jon. "Place." *Oxford Bibliographies Online*, 14 Sep. 2017,
<http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199874002/obo-9780199874002-0159.xml>.
- Binette, Peggy. "Writer Ron Rash's archive finds new home at UofSC." *University of South Carolina*, 27 April 2017.
http://www.sc.edu/uofsc/posts/2017/04/uofsc_acquires_ron_rash_archive.php#.WcMHutWPKM8
- Bloshteyn, Maria R. "Dostoevsky and the Literature of the American South." *The Southern Literary Journal*, vol. 37, no. 1, 2004, pp. 1-24.
- Brown, Ryan A. "Crystal Methamphetamine Use among American Indian and White Youth in Appalachia: Social Context, Masculinity, and Desistance." *Addiction Research & Theory*, vol. 18, no. 3, 2010, pp. 250-269.
- "Charles-Ferdinand Ramuz." *Contemporary Authors Online*, Gale, 2003. *Literature Resource Center*
go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?p=LitRC&sw=w&u=unc_main&v=2.1&id=GALE%7CH1000080939&it=r&asid=bb091f7f164e429e636c6c453e3158a0. Accessed 20 Sept. 2017.
- "Church Directory A-M" and "Church Directory N-Z." *Rutherford Weekly*.
rutherfordweekly.com/church-directory-a-m-cms-2194. Accessed 21 September 2017.

Clabough, Casey. *Inhabiting Contemporary Southern and Appalachian Literature:*

Region and Place in the Twenty-First Century. University Press of Florida, 2012.

“Cliffside, CDP, North Carolina.” *United States Census Bureau*,

factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/community_facts.xhtml. Accessed 11 October 2017.

Cresswell, Tim. *Place : An Introduction*. Malden, MA, Wiley Blackwell, 2015.

Dostoyevsky, Fyodor. *Crime and Punishment*. Translated by David Magarshack, Crown Publishers, Inc., New York, 1982.

Downs, Gregory P. “The Death Knell of Slavery.” *The New York Times: The Opinion*

Pages, 19 May 2011, opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/05/19/the-death-knell-of-slavery/?mcubz=0. Accessed 29 September 2017.

Drake, Richard B. *A History of Appalachia*. UP Kentucky, Lexington, 2001.

Evtuhov, Catherine, and Richard Stites. *A History of Russia since 1800: Peoples,*

Legends, Events, Forces. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 2004.

Faulkner, William. *The Paris Review Interviews*, vol. II. Picador, New York, 2007.

Gerard, Philip. “Atrocity at Shelton Laurel.” *Our State*, 29 April 2012.

ourstate.com/atrocity-at-shelton-laurel/. Accessed 29 September 2017.

Gill, Richard. “The Bridges of St. Petersburg: A Motif in *Crime and Punishment*.”

Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism. Edited by Jessica Bomarito and Russel Whitaker, vol. 167, Gale, 2006.

Gorky, Maxim. “Pushkin: An Appraisal,” *Pushkin: Homage by Marxist Critics* ed. Irving

D. W. Talmudge, Critics Group, New York, 1937.

- Gorson, Gary Saul. "Leo Tolstoy." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 23 July 2015, www.britannica.com/biography/Leo-Tolstoy. Accessed 20 September 2017.
- Gould, Rebecca. "Topographies of Anticolonialism: The Ecopoetical Sublime in the Caucasus from Tolstoy to Mamakaev." *Comparative Literature Studies*, vol. 50, no. 1, 2013, pp. 87–107.
- Graves, Jesse and Randall Wilhelm. Interview with Ron Rash. *Serena*, by Ron Rash, HarperCollins, 2008, pp. 1-13.
- Ioffe, Grigory, Richard Antony French, Yelena Matveyevna Doroshinskaya, and Mary McAuley. "St. Petersburg, Russia." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1 February 2008, www.britannica.com/place/St-Petersburg-Russia. Accessed 10 October 2017.
- Imhoff, Guy F. "Jean Giono." *Twentieth-Century French Dramatists*, edited by Mary Anne O'Neil, Gale, 2006. Dictionary of Literary Biography Vol. 321. *Literature Resource Center*, go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?p=LitRC&sw=w&u=unc_main&v=2.1&id=GALE%7CH1200012833&it=r&asid=73ca23ed9b95c7891123854930d6f776. Accessed 20 Sept. 2017.
- Isaeva, Ksenia. "A Guide to Fyodor Dostoevsky's St. Petersburg." *Russia Beyond the Headlines*, http://rbth.com/multimedia/2015/07/08/dostoevsky-map_168195. Accessed Nov. 21, 2016.
- Kozhinov, Vadim. "The First Sentence in *Crime and Punishment*, the Word 'Crime,' and Other Matters." *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Crime and Punishment*. Edited by Robert Louis Jackson, Prentice-Hall, 1974, p. 17-19.

- “Links and Rankings.” *U.S. Religion Census 1952 to 2010*,
www.rcms2010.org/compare.php. Accessed 21 September 2017.
- Lotman, Yuri Mikailovich. “K postroeniiu teorii vzaimodeistviia kul’tur.” *Izbrannye stat’i*, vol. 2, no.117.
- . “Russkaia literatura na frantsuzskom iazyke,” *Izbrannye stat’i*, vol. 2, no. 368.
- MacMaster, Samuel A., Kelly Tripp, and Sherri Argo. “Perceptions of HIV Risk Behaviors and Service Needs among Methamphetamine Users in Rural Appalachian Tennessee.” *Journal of Ethnicity in Substance Abuse*, vol. 7, Haworth Press Inc, 2008, pp. 115-130.
- McCullers, Carson. “Russian Realists and Southern Literature.” *The Mortgaged Heart*, edited by Margarita Smith, Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1971. 252–58.
- . “Books I Remember.” *Harper’s Bazaar* 75, 1941. pp. 122-125.
- McReynolds, Louise. *Murder Most Russian: True Crime and Punishment in Late Imperial Russia*. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY, 2013.
- Metcalfe, Anna. “Small Talk: Ron Rash.” *Financial Times*, London, 2012.
www.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/927049109?accountid=14244. Accessed 13 September 2017.
- Meyer, Priscilla. *How the Russians Read the French : Lermontov, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy*. University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 2009.
- Mills, Jerry Leath. “Equine Gothic: The Dead Mule as Generic Signifier in Southern Literature of the Twentieth Century.” *The Southern Literary Journal*, vol. 29, no. 1, 1996, pp. 2–17.

- “Mo Yan.” *Contemporary Authors Online*, Gale, 2015. *Literature Resource Center*, go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?p=LitRC&sw=w&u=unc_main&v=2.1&id=G
ALE%7CH1000146165&it=r&asid=432ed09bf15575e5fb573a3eb17ba489.
Accessed 20 Sept. 2017.
- Moulin, Dan. “Leo Tolstoy the Spiritual Educator.” *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, vol. 13, no. 4, Nov. 2008, pp. 345-353.
- “Our History.” *Cliffside Baptist Church*, www.cliffsidebaptist.org/id2.html. Accessed 21 September 2017.
- Parti, Anne Shelby. “Appalachian Literature.” *Appalachian Heritage*, vol. 13, no. 3, 1985, pp. 29-36.
- Puckett, Anita. “On the Pronunciation of Appalachia.” *Now and Then: Canadian Army Medical Corps*, vol. 15, no. 2, 1915, pp. 25-28.
- Rash, Ron. *Above the Waterfall*. HarperCollins Publishers, New York, 2015.
- . “The Ascent.” *Burning Bright*, HarperCollins Publishers, New York, 2010, pp. 75-90.
- . *The Cove*. HarperCollins Publishers, New York, 2012.
- . “The Night the New Jesus Fell to Earth.” *The Night the New Jesus Fell to Earth and Other Stories from Cliffside, NC*, The Bench Press, Columbia, SC, 1994, pp. 29-43.
- . “Nothing Gold Can Stay.” *Nothing Gold Can Stay*, HarperCollins Publishers, New York, 2013, pp. 27-42.
- . Personal interview. 22 July 2017.
- . *The Risen*. HarperCollins Publishers, New York, 2016.
- . *Saints at the River*. Picador, New York, 2004.

- . *Serena*. HarperCollins Publishers, New York, 2008.
- . *The World Made Straight*. Picador, New York, 2006.
- “Religion in North Carolina.” *UNC Carolina Population Center, Carolina Demographics*, www.demography.cpc.unc.edu/2014/06/02/religion-in-north-carolina-southern-baptists-dominate-catholicism-and-non-denominational-affiliation-rising/. Accessed 21 September 2017.
- Rubin, Louis D., Jr. “From Combray to Ithaca; or, The 'Southernness' of Southern Literature.” *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, 66(1), pp. 47-64.
- Strutsenko, S.V. Ф. М. Достоевский у Л. Н. Толстой о Духовности. *Образование и наука*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2014, pp. 103-115.
- Tolstoy, Lev Nikolaievich. *Война и Мир*. OGI, Moscow, 2002.
- . *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, ed. V. G. Chertkov. Vol. 55, Khudozhestvennaia literatura, Moscow, 1928.
- . *War and Peace*. Translated by Louise and Aylmer Maude, Project Gutenberg, 2009.
<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/2600/2600-0.txt>. Accessed 18 September 2017.
- Venya, L. “Л. Толстовство и Даосизм.” *Образование и наука*, vol. 1, no. 10, 2012, pp. 88-99.
- Vernon, Zackary. “Commemorating Vs. Commodifying: Ron Rash and the Search for an Appalachian Literary Identity.” *Appalachian Journal* 41.1/2, 2013, pp. 104-124.
- . “Toward a Post-Appalachian Sense of Place.” *Journal of American Studies*, 50(3), 2016, pp. 639-658.

Weeks, Theodore R. "Emancipation of Serfs in Russia." *Oxford Encyclopedia of the*

Modern World, Oxford University Press, 2008. *Oxford Reference*,

[www.oxfordreference.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/view/10.1093/acref/97801951763](http://www.oxfordreference.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/view/10.1093/acref/9780195176322.001.0001/acref-9780195176322-e-503)

22.001.0001/acref-9780195176322-e-503. Accessed 12 Oct. 2017.

--. "Serfdom." *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern World*, Oxford University Press,

2008. *Oxford Reference*,

[www.oxfordreference.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/view/10.1093/acref/97801951763](http://www.oxfordreference.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/view/10.1093/acref/9780195176322.001.0001/acref-9780195176322-e-1429)

22.001.0001/acref-9780195176322-e-1429. Accessed 12 October 2017.

Williams, John Alexander. *Appalachia: A History*. UNC Press, Chapel Hill, 2002.

Welty, Eudora. "Place in Fiction." *Welty: Stories, Essays, & Memoir*, The Library of

America, New York, 1998, 781-96.