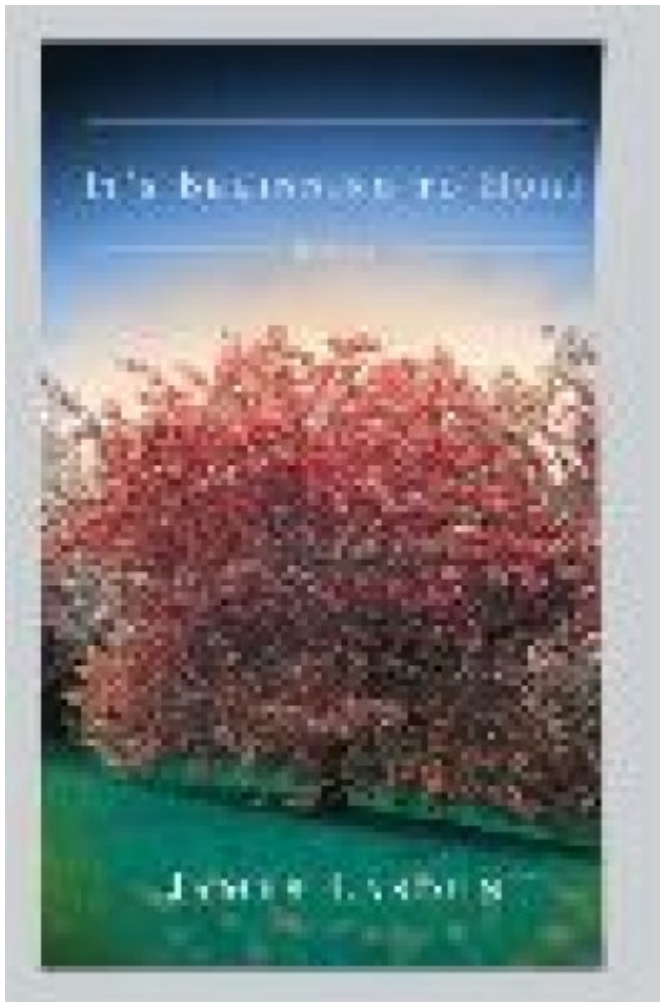


BookMarks

Books in the [September 8, 2009](#) issue

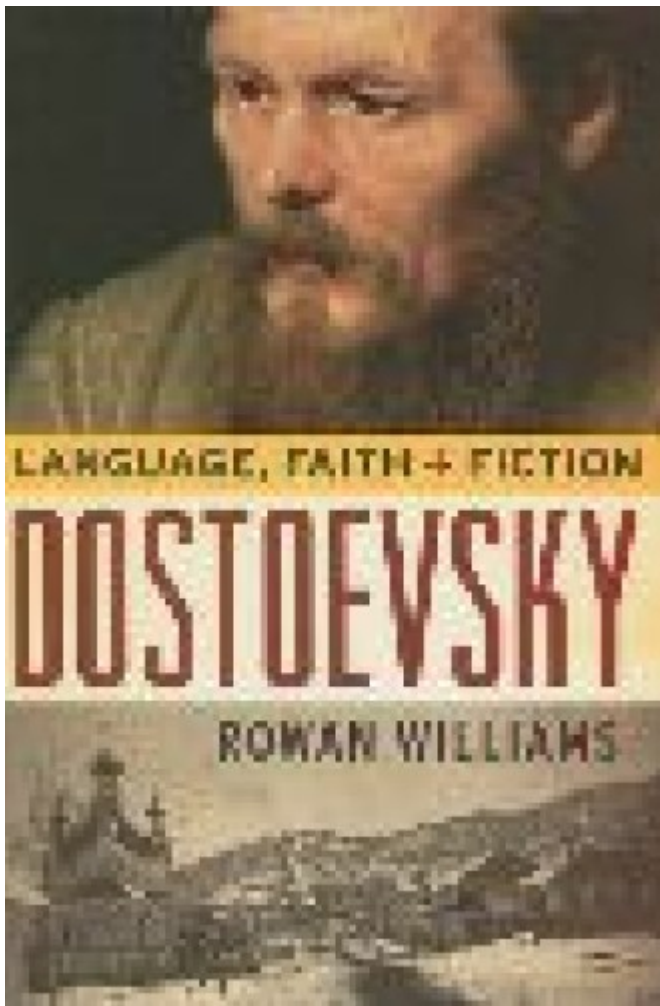
In Review



It's Beginning to Hurt: Stories

James Lasdun

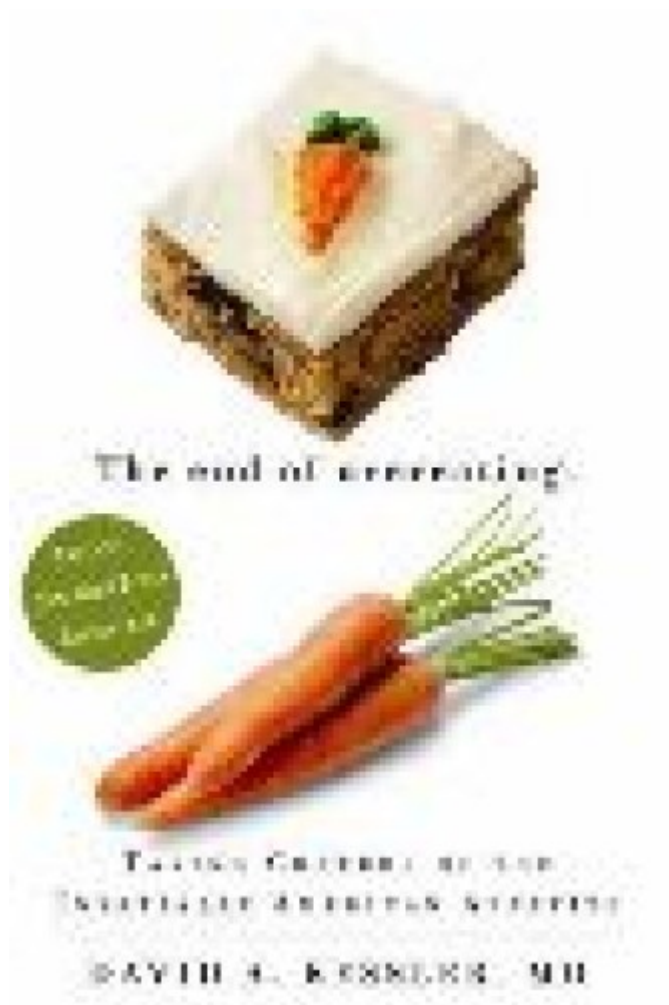
Farrar, Straus & Giroux



Dostoevsky: Language, Faith, and Fiction

Rowan Williams

Baylor University Press



The End of Overeating: Taking Control of the Insatiable American Appetite

David A. Kessler
Rodale

As a short-story writer, James Lasdun trolls the sea of human characters, pulls up a random human being in his net, examines the character with an unflinching, piercing gaze, then writes a scathingly intimate story that takes us deftly and unfailingly to the defining issues in that person's life. When confronted with a moral choice, most of these characters have no faith resource. In "The Incalculable Life Gesture," for example, Richard Timmerman is described as having grown up in a churchgoing household but no longer believing in a god or an afterlife. The landscape of the book is arid, but there are moments when Lasdun expresses a yearning for moral guidance.

Rowan Williams, archbishop of Canterbury, took a two-month sabbatical to write this dense theological treatment of the Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky. The book will be hard sledding for readers unfamiliar with the novels, but it's packed with insights. Part of Dostoevsky's significance as a religious writer, Williams argues, is that he shows people wrestling with the implications of their belief—or unbelief. In Dostoevsky, there are no “unanswerable demonstrations” of religious faith—but also no unanswerable demonstrations of unbelief. The lesson, for Williams, is that “we have to go on speaking/writing about God, allowing the language of faith to encounter fresh trials every day, and also fresh distortions and refusals.”

David Kessler, M.D., describes what's been happening to the American diet over the past several decades, and lays much of the blame for overeating and obesity on the food industry. The industry has learned what it is that humans like and will come back for more of—food larded with inordinate amounts of fat, sugar and salt. Kessler argues that food marketing needs to be monitored and regulated, and he would like to see comprehensive labeling on all packaged foods and calorie counts on all menus in restaurants.