

From *Empire Falls* to Pawtucket Falls:
a harbinger of salvation.

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“My books are elegiac in the sense that they're odes to a nation that even I sometimes think may not exist anymore except in my memory and my imagination,” Russo replied when asked in an interview about his unconventional depictions of American life.¹ By mixing contemporary themes with traditional regional life, Russo creates interrelated spaces and counter-spaces in his novel *Empire Falls*. While the concepts of space and region have often been equated with geography, contemporary scholarship in the humanities accentuates the importance of looking beyond maps and borders. Wai Chee Dimock stresses the undoing of geographical encapsulations in her scholarship, urging Americanists to identify “alternate geographies [and] alternate histories.”² A new mode of geographical scholarship for identifying such alternate geographies and histories furthermore requires thinking about regions or nations not simply in terms of a territorial geography but rather of a relational geography.³ Janice Radway, in her presidential address to the American Studies Association, emphasised that “territories and geographies need to be reconceived as spatially-situated and intricately intertwined networks of social relationships that tie specific locales to particular histories.”⁴ Understanding places as networks of relation thus implies a re-drawing of the map, including temporal as well as spatial connections. The following article will highlight such connections both within Richard Russo’s novel *Empire Falls* (2001), a novel portraying life in a post-industrial New England mill town, as well as in Lowell, Massachusetts, the birthplace of the American industrial revolution.

Russo’s regional writing joins a body of what I call critical regionalist fiction, popularised by authors such as Annie Proulx or Louise Erdrich, that has emerged in the past thirty years. Their fiction roots global themes in a particular locale, often foregrounding a certain resistance to the universality of globalisation. The term “critical regionalism,” which originated in landscape and architectural studies, was coined by architects Alexander Tzonis

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and Liane Lefaivre as a way of rethinking regionalism in architecture.⁵ In an essay entitled “Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance,” architect Kenneth Frampton popularised the idea by pleading for a high level of critical self-consciousness while valuing the uniqueness of a particular place. “The fundamental strategy of Critical Regionalism,” Frampton asserts, “is to mediate the impact of universal civilization with elements derived *indirectly* from the peculiarities of a particular place,”⁶ addressing at once global concerns and what Frampton terms a “place conscious poetic.”⁷ In *Critical Regionalism: Connecting Politics and Culture in the American Landscape*, Douglas Powell applies this architectural concept to cultural studies as he remaps Appalachia, drawing tangents between local circumstances and larger connections of meaning.⁸ “Critical regionalism,” Powell states, “requires thinking about texts geographically.”⁹ This article will close read the fictional mill town of Empire Falls within the larger framework of transnational capital and globalisation by way of the real-life evolution of the Lowell mills from the largest industrial complex of the United States in the middle of the nineteenth century, through its deindustrialisation in the twentieth century, and finally the subsequent revitalisation after recognising the town’s potential in a global market.

Territorial Geography: A Split Region

New England scholar Kent Ryden uncovers critical regionalist practice in emerging fiction in his article “Region, Place, and Resistance in Northern New England Writing.” Regarding the region’s contemporary authors such as Richard Russo, Ryden argues that:

because its meanings well up from within rather than [being] imposed from without, place offers a potential point of resistance to region [...] This subversive, political use of place runs as a consistent thread through the work of many contemporary northern New England writers.¹⁰

Ryden highlights authors who have emerged in the past 30 years, whose writing is not merely about place but is moreover pursuant of a political agenda of a more inclusive, democratic literature.¹¹ In democratising the region of New England, critical regionalist authors, including Richard Russo or Elizabeth Strout, have shifted the conceptual heart of the traditional New England northward, into Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont, the

imaginative locus of the “real” New England, where the landscape and ethnic makeup of the population match the ideal more closely, as Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island change economically and demographically.¹²

While the literary culture of eighteenth century America emerged largely from Connecticut, by the mid-nineteenth century this focus had shifted to Massachusetts, whose residents included Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Louisa May Alcott. It was not until the middle of the twentieth century, however, that the northern three states of the region shifted into literary focus: Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine – representing the “previously underrepresented in American life.”¹³ By shifting the region northward which was once moored in the economically as well as climatically lush southern three states, contemporary authors present a hitherto marginalised landscape, climate, and cast of characters. Ernest Hebert’s *Darby* series depicts a fictional New Hampshire town’s transition from rural poverty to suburbia, Cathie Pelletier’s *Mattagash* illustrates Maine’s borderland issues on the threshold to Canada, and Richard Russo’s *Empire Falls* is set in a declining mill town in rural Maine. This literary surge to northern New England has been critically well received, as can be seen in exemplary texts such as Elizabeth Strout’s *Olive Kitteridge* (Pulitzer Prize 2009) or Richard Russo’s *Empire Falls* (Pulitzer Prize 2002), these novels being set in coastal and rural Maine respectively.

Located in northern New England, these novels engage in the discourse of a split region. Russo broaches the issue of a northern and a southern identity of the region of New England in his latest novel, *That Old Cape Magic* (2009), by contrasting rough northern New England life to that of its lush southern three states:

Coastal Maine, by contrast, seemed not just real but battered by reality. Where Cape Cod somehow managed to give the impression that July lasted all year, Maine reminded you, even in lush late spring, of its long, harsh winters, of snow drifts that rotted baseboards and splintered latticework, of relentless winds that howled in the eaves and scoured the paint, leaving gutters rusted white with salt. Even the people looked scoured.¹⁴

Russo contrasts Maine and Massachusetts through images of summer and winter. He depicts coastal Maine not simply as a reality in contrast to a perhaps romanticised picture of summer but rather as a bashed, beaten, and broken reality. Massachusetts, while only separated from

Maine by twenty miles of the New Hampshire coast and still occupying the same climate zone, is portrayed as a different world, one in which the season of summer abides. Far from painting a black and white image when contrasting the rural north with the economically strong south, the relationship between mid-Maine and Massachusetts is portrayed as interdependent. In the novel *Empire Falls*, whenever the town's citizens hope of reanimating the long since shut-down factory, it is always with reference to Massachusetts money: "The hordes of visitors who poured into Maine every summer were commonly referred to as Massholes, and yet when Empire Falls fantasized about deliverance, it invariably had Massachusetts plates."¹⁵ The region's shift northward is accompanied by a dialogue between New England's south and north. While the outlands of northern New England are depicted as harsh living – its people as undereducated and Massachusetts and Connecticut contrasted as climatically as well as economically superior – northern New England's relationship to its southern counterpart remains ambivalent, be it in the form of the saviour or culprit, friend or foe.

From the Maine-land to the Island

Russo's narratives generally treat the issue of the plight of failing small towns in the Northeast and the effects of decline on their inhabitants. While many of his stories are located in upstate New York, he sets fictional Empire Falls, a formerly bustling mill-town, in rural Maine. Russo has been consistently praised for his broad range and sprawling scope of characters as well as his vivid portraits of working class life, and for his "mix of deadpan humor and knowing compassion."¹⁶ Author Annie Proulx underlines his impeccable realism, stating that "if ever time travel is invented, let Richard Russo be first through the machine to bring back a true account. No one writing today catches the detail of life with such accuracy."¹⁷

Empire Falls, the name of the fictional Maine town and the title of the novel, resonates with the narrative's larger theme of dissolution. Russo's account of the working class Roby family and the upper-class Whiting family, which owns most of the town, including the former textile mill, is set along two axes, a temporal and a territorial one. Temporally, *Empire Falls* narrates the present of Miles, Max and Tick Roby and Mrs. Whiting and – interspersed by italicised flashbacks – the past of Mrs. Whiting's late husband C.B. and Miles' deceased mother. The narrative present is additionally disrupted by passages in present tense, of Tick's

point-of-view and her teenage frustration with the adult world. In addition to this temporal dissection of past and present, the territorial geography of the story experiences a similarly dualistic split: the town of Empire Falls divides into the property of one wealthy family (including the Whiting estate, the town hall, restaurant, and factory) and the rest of the town. Aside from ownership, the Whiting estate and the other town homes are divided by this natural border of the river, and throughout the novel various attempts to change the course of nature and destiny figure prominently. Contrasting Empire Falls and the river in particular, Martha's Vineyard functions as the geographical ideal, where Miles's mother finds love, to which Miles escapes each summer, and where his daughter recovers from the trauma of a school shooting. These novelistic splits, temporal as well as territorial, underline the foundational dissonance resounding throughout the novel.

The novel unfolds along the intertwined narratives of the Roby and the Whiting families, whose lives frequently intersect – through Miles Roby and Cindy Whiting attending the same class or Miles's mother Grace working for the Whiting textile mill – though it is not until one summer when Miles and Grace spend a week on Martha's Vineyard, where Grace and Charles Beaumont (C. B.) Whiting – who had recently inherited the family estate – begin their affair, that the families' lives become inextricably interwoven and corrupted. Upon the return from the Vineyard, the affair ends, Grace falls fatally ill, and C. B. is removed to Mexico where he later commits suicide. But before he does, Grace will cross, in a religiously motivated effort to right the wrongs she has engendered, the Iron Bridge over the Knox River, the dividing line between working class Empire Falls and the Whiting estate and country club, to confess her folly to Mrs. Whiting. Despite her feigned forgiveness, Mrs. Whiting henceforth avenges the transgression by alienating Grace from her family, and enslaving first her and then her son Miles to the Whiting empire. Aware of Grace's only wish, that Miles attend college and never need to “cross the river” as she has, Mrs. Whiting fetches Miles back to Empire Falls when his mother falls ill, providing a job for him at the local burger joint (owned by the Whitings) so he can work to pay for his mother's treatments. Grace and Francine are both well aware that by quitting college to provide for his mother, Miles will never leave Empire Falls (apart from his annual retreat to the Vineyard with his daughter Tick). Around the ensuing plotline of Miles's power-struggle with Mrs. Whiting, Russo weaves a tapestry of characters and circumstance: of a demented parish priest and his homosexual replacement, of an aged womanizer and his presumably last victim, of a young

bully following in his father's footsteps, and of the neglected teenager who finds his release by dealing death to teachers and schoolmates.

Utopia

In Russo's fictional town of Empire Falls, the mill migrates and with it the inhabitants. One of the few who stays behind is Miles Roby, who flips burgers for Mrs. Whiting at the local grill; all year he saves enough money to visit the Vineyard, his dream location, for only two weeks. A little island, another world, Martha's Vineyard is, for Miles, a place where people are "rich, slender and beautiful," (21) where one falls in love, and where "it was easier to believe in God ... [than] in Empire Falls." (48) In *Empire Falls*, the Vineyard is portrayed as an Eden, isolated from the outside world, an ethereal haven. "Of all the places in the world [Miles] couldn't hope to afford, the Vineyard was his favorite." (28) Its separation not only from rural Maine but even coastal New England by waters stresses the geographical divide between the two places that figure prominently throughout the story and in flashbacks. The main character's love for the island developed through his college friends Peter and Dawn, "who had fallen in love, first with the island then with each other." (63) Once Miles's summer job at the Empire Grill becomes a permanent employment, the Vineyard transforms into a place to visit his dreams for two weeks each summer. His nostalgia stems from his first introduction to the Vineyard, a childhood summer vacation with his mother, who finds solace from yet another of her husband's unannounced absences – in the affections of the heir of the Whiting empire, whom she meets on the island:

By falling in love, she had become an entirely different woman...She became astonishingly beautiful – so beautiful, in fact, that her beauty could not fail to impress even her nine-year-old son, who'd so taken her for granted to that point that he'd never really seen her as a woman, but only as his mother. For a brief span of a few sun-drenched days, she'd been truly happy, perhaps for the first time in her life. (328)

For Peter and Dawn, C.B. and Grace, and eventually Tick, the Vineyard initiates love. Visiting the Vineyard with her father years later, Tick finds companionship there with Donny, also a divorce child, with whom Tick shares intimate conversations about her frustration with her

parents. “Their mutual understanding, even though it was an understanding of grief, had at first been thrilling, then quietly reassuring.” (77) After their shy but intimate summer relation, they return to Maine and Indiana respectively, their relationship persisting through letter writing.

After a climactic school shooting in Empire Falls, the island serves as a place for recovery and healing. In this traumatic incident, John Voss, the new kid at school, brings a weapon to Tick’s art class, shoots and kills the teacher and several classmates. As he turns the gun on Tick’s friend Candace, Tick instinctively attacks from the side, inflicting a deep wound to John’s head with an Exacto knife, whereupon John turns the gun on Tick and would have shot her had the principle not stepped between them, saving Tick’s life at the cost of his own. (457) Miles immediately retrieves his daughter, immobile and muted from the shock of the violent trauma to which she had been subjected:

Back on the highway, it occurred to Miles that they were headed to Martha’s Vineyard, to Peter and Dawn’s summer house. Being able to replace the word “away” with “Martha’s Vineyard” buoyed his spirits irrationally, and so did the notion that the two of them would be hiding out on an island, as if anyone who pursued them would have to swim there. (463)

Between Miles and his daughter Tick, the Vineyard revives intimacy and confidentiality. “The shooting, [Miles] understood, had rendered his daughter’s world dangerous, and it was his belief that only the repetition of bad things *not* happening would restore her former relationship to it.” (458) It is thus the fatal incident of the school shooting of Empire Falls that performs the Vineyard as a place for healing – unlike Empire Falls – a place where bad things don’t happen. Although the Vineyard itself does not change, it has the power to transform those who visit.

Dystopia

Like the Atlantic that separates Maine from the Vineyard, the Empire Falls’ River Knox functions as a natural geographical border between the Whiting clan and the country club on the one side and the working class town on the other. (164) Figuring prominently throughout the story, the Vineyard and the river reflect opposing ideals. The river gains significance when

Grace Roby, plagued by her sin of infidelity, confesses to Father Tom, who then sends her on a path of penitence across the Iron Bridge. Disclosing her affair with C.B. to Mrs. Whiting requires Grace to traverse the space of the river, a scene largely reminiscent of a rite of initiation and adaptation of a new role in the community. The crossing becomes a ritual through which Grace steps into a new life, marked by her initiation into the Whiting clan and paralleled by the onset of her fatal sickness:

He'd heard the phrase "crossing the river" so often during high school that it no longer truly registered. "Why do you think I cross that river every day?" she often asked him when they argued [...] That way she asked such questions, her eyes wild, her voice shrill [...] She spoke, it seemed to Miles, as if there were no bridge, as if she daily forded the Knox River's strong current at the risk of being swept over the falls and dashed upon the rocks.
(394-5)

While the Vineyard fosters health and love, the river has the power to end both. The crossing of the river to offer penitence leads Grace Roby across the Iron Bridge, used synonymously with the river throughout the novel, as characters refer to sides of the river as the Whitings' side or respectively the town's side of the Iron Bridge. Despite choosing the setting of a New England town, Russo tellingly decides against an idyllic wooden covered bridge, underlining instead the bridge's industrial and functional aspects.

The dystopian river brings an end to love and health not only for Grace Roby but also for the Whitings themselves. Framing *Empire Falls*, the narrative begins with a flashback of the deceased C.B. trying to change the course of the river with dynamite to speed up its flow and quell its tendency to "wash up dead animals and all manner of trash" on the Whiting estate, much preferring an alternative location further down river in Fairhaven. (163) C. B.'s attempt at changing nature's flow, disregarding that "the Knox, like most rivers in Maine, was already prone to flooding, especially in the spring, when warm rains melted the northern snowpack too quickly," culminates in the end of the novel with his wife's drowning in the river's raging flood. (13) Unlike the utopian space of the Vineyard, redolent with love, health, and happiness, the force of the river carries destructive powers:

While the water never reached the Whiting hacienda, it did wash the gazebo clean away. Why Francine Whiting was in it at the time, of course, was impossible to know. Perhaps she imagined that so long as she herself commanded this stage, the river would never have the temerity to approach.
(482)

Mrs. Whiting's death at the river's hand underlines nature's ultimate supremacy, ruling not with money and influence but with life. Therefore, when an emergency worker spots the body, he decides the situation too dangerous to attempt a rescue, because, "whoever this woman might have been, she was dead now." In the end, Mrs. Whiting is swept from her side of the river, down its torrents, with no one to rescue her and no one to recover her body. This scene marks not only the end of the narrative but also the termination of the Whiting Empire – considering that Cindy Whiting, the only remaining heir, who never displayed either interest or affection for the family business or heritage, has long since moved away. For the town of Empire Falls the dream of a revitalisation of the Empire Textile seems to have drowned with Francine Whiting. Russo refrains from predicting a potential future for this deindustrialised mill town, leaving it up to the reader to direct his attention outside of the novel to those mill towns of New England that modelled for the fictional narrative.

From Empire Falls to Pawtucket Falls

Empire Falls reflects two critical developments in New England history: the region as the birthplace of US industrialisation in the middle of the nineteenth century and also the beginning of the nation's deindustrialisation in the twentieth century. Russo implies that the perpetual decline in the riverside town results from the citizens' spatial focus on the river as a source of deliverance. It is equally implied, though never realized, in the novel that deliverance from this digression can only be achieved through a dissemination of interests away from the waterfront. One New England city in particular stands as a fitting counterexample to Russo's Empire Falls, because it overcame economic decline by shifting its spatial focus away from the river that had been its engine for nearly a century. Incorporated specifically as a textile manufacturing location, Lowell, Massachusetts, experienced this change from industrialisation to deindustrialisation especially strongly, undergoing a decline from its position as the largest industrial complex in the United States in 1850 to what

Harper's magazine in 1931 termed a "depressed industrial desert."¹⁸ Public historian Cathy Stanton observes, "One of the earliest American places to become industrialized, Lowell was also among the first to experience the shock of deindustrialization."¹⁹ Both fictional Empire Falls and nineteenth century Lowell, home to Empire Textile and Boott Mills respectively, feature populations largely made up of the working class.²⁰ Lowell's mills attracted undereducated factory hands which resulted in heavy immigration from Europe's lower classes, with the result that by 1900 nearly 50 percent of Lowell's residents were foreign-born.²¹ Such a demographic, should industry decline or relocate its facilities, places a town in grave danger of a deep recession. Stanton indicates that by the 1960s, Lowell had "gained a reputation as one of the most down-and-out of New England's depressed mill towns."²²

Both the fictional Empire Falls and the Lowell mills depended on river-powered industry: the Knox River in Empire Falls and the Merrimack in Lowell, with the 32-foot drop of Pawtucket Falls, dammed and redirected into an extensive canal system, offering enough head to power its entire industrial complex. As in the fictional town of Empire Falls, so too in the historical town of Lowell the course of the river was diverted by human hands. In the case of the dynamiting of the Knox River this intercession eventually caused a flood. This poses another parallel to Lowell which, in 1936, already in the depths of an economic depression, was struck by a devastating flood, damaging much of the city and perhaps inspiring the fateful catastrophe in Russo's novel, although the flood in Lowell is not in fact attributed to the industrial growth of the town. Quite to the contrary, the canal system has caused Pawtucket Falls to dry up altogether, flowing only shallowly during periods of heavy rain today.²³

Like Empire Falls, Lowell experienced a massive fall-out in the wake of a relocation of its textile company to the South. Russo writes, "it was common knowledge that Southerners worked for even less than Mainers." (308) Historian Mary Blewett describes similar conditions in Lowell, when, "in ten years between 1926 and 1936, twenty thousand looms fell silent as five of the original textile companies shut down or moved South."²⁴ At this point in the story, Russo highlights the ugly underside of transnational capital and globalisation when the textile mill of Empire Falls is sold to a subsidiary of a multinational company headquartered in Germany, which operates the business so poorly that within three years – despite an overall increase in productivity by nearly 28 percent – the final closure of the mill and shirt factory leads to a relocation:

In less than a month the mill was completely looted of its mortgaged machinery, which was disassembled and placed in trucks destined for Georgia and the Dominican Republic. In fact, it took less time for the mill to be emptied than for its employees to understand the truth of their situation, that Empire Textile had been bought for this very purpose, and their heroic efforts to make the mill profitable had simply swelled the coffers of Hjortsmann International. (343)

Like Lowell, Empire Falls found itself in a vicious cycle, perpetuated by the hope for revitalisation through the same industry that had destroyed it. When Miles Roby enters the Planning and Development Commission office, he passes “a scale model of downtown Empire Falls, so obviously idealized that he didn’t immediately recognize it as the town he’d lived his whole life in.” (59) According to Miles,

the actual town, of course, had never looked quite so prosperous [...] Even more hilarious was the idea that such a nostalgic past should have found a home in the town’s planning and development office. Evidently the commission’s plan was to turn back the clock.” (60)

When in fact time has passed and the mill has remained empty, Miles fears that, “for as long as the mill and factory remained [...] many would continue to believe against all reason that a buyer might be found for one or both, and that consequently Empire Falls would be restored to its old economic viability.” (19-20) With these words, Russo points out the monumental fallacy that has sentenced the mill town to the perpetual recession which persists throughout the novel.

Equally in Lowell, hopes for a revitalisation of the mills sparked when the United States military forces engaged in World War II, generating a domestic boom in the production of military equipment. The mills experienced a short-lived revitalisation by producing military supplies such as parachutes. Immediately following the war, however, the town again struggled with economic crisis as its products became obsolete. When the plants closed anew, long-lasting economic turmoil followed in its wake. However, unlike Empire Falls, Lowell found its renaissance in the 1970’s by redefining itself as a technological and cultural centre.²⁵ By attracting business in the hi-tech sector and investing in the educational and cultural

climate of the city (Lowell now boasts two colleges, a national park, and several cultural festivals) an economic ecosystem more sustainable in twenty-first century America was created.²⁶ Stanton attributes this development to the city's ability to reinvent itself, to position itself "on the leading edge of the cycle of capitalist production, [as it did] with its creation as a planned industrial community in the 1820s." Equally, she continues, "when it turned to a culture-based revitalization approach in the 1970s, it was riding the edge of another wave."²⁷

Incidentally, Lowell was not alone in reviving an industrial wasteland through cultural projects. A similar development can be seen in the Ruhr Basin, the largest urban agglomeration in Germany, which, by the mid-nineteenth century operated 300 coal mines. In the wake of World War II the demand for coal decreased and by the 1970s German coal was no longer economically competitive, leading to a period of decline. After shifting its focus to service industries, technology, and culture, the Ruhr Basin emerged from economic turmoil, has been featured since 2001 as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and was nominated a European Capital of Culture, attracting masses to the coal mines again, but this time as tourists, urban planners, and artists.²⁸

The fictional town of Empire Falls, which incidentally is set decades after the revitalisation of its real-world counterpart, thus stands as a warning to post-industrial New England towns not to search for their salvation by clinging to an unsustainable past. The perpetual decline of Empire Falls results from a disregard for the future as its stakeholders fail to redefine the town by investing in its cultural offerings, attracting service-oriented rather than production-oriented industry, and by diversifying the population through educational and cultural opportunities, such as the Lowell Heritage State Park (later Lowell National Park). Unlike Lowell, Empire Falls ultimately fails to recognise its potential in the framework of global economics.

Conclusion

At this point I want to return to the opening of the article with Russo's observation of his books being, "elegiac in the sense that they're odes to a nation that [...] may not exist anymore except in [his] memory and [his] imagination."²⁹ Russo turns to these memoirs and his artistry to construct the fictional town of Empire Falls with its textile mill in operation, school children, and safely employed mill workers, sketching, indeed, a scene from the past. But the picture Russo paints of the past is nuanced, as though he remembered the ode James

Taylor once sang to the “Millworker.”³⁰ Contrasting the bygone, his characters live in a present of divorce, unemployment, and school shootings, that can only be escaped by fleeing to Eden, for which one must not only leave the State of Maine, but additionally traverse the waters separating Martha’s Vineyard from the mainland. Crossing the Vinyard Sound serves as a traversal to a better place, one of love, happiness, and healing. Contrasted with this utopian space is that of the River Knox which flows through Empire Falls and powers the mill, the traversal of which symbolically ends love and health equally.

I also want to recall Dimock’s call for “alternate geographies [and] alternate histories,” redirecting our gaze from Empire Falls, Maine to Lowell, Massachusetts, a non-fictional example of a once bustling mill town which, by the twentieth century, could no longer compete within an increasingly globalised world.³¹ Yearning for the bygone, it is not until Lowell reinvents itself within this transnational framework as a centre for culture and technology that the town re-emerges like a phoenix from its ashes. In the twenty-first century, Lowell’s population need not escape to the Vineyard to find contentment. Salvation now springs from within as the Merrimack River which once attracted factories to Lowell now serves as a space of leisure and recreation.

Ironically, the precept left with us is that indeed, “when Empire Falls fantasize[s] about deliverance, it invariably ha[s] Massachusetts plates,” as we look toward Lowell for a way into the future. (25) How important it is that we leave the insular Empire Falls and connect the story of the fictional deindustrialised textile mill to an alternative narrative which can be witnessed in the seminal *post*-industrial town of Lowell. It stands as a warning to the remaining post-industrial New England towns such as Empire Falls not to search for salvation by clinging to an unsustainable past. Richard Russo’s interpretation of Empire Falls as an elegiac ode to a life of the past, too, neglects the potentials within a global economy that New England’s mill town must adhere to if the elegy should ever be rewritten as a paean.

Endnotes

¹ Alden Mudge, "Richard Russo Renders Timely Portrait of American Life," *Book Page* (May 2001). Accessed on 12 March 2011 at http://www.bookpage.com/0105bp/richard_russo.html.

² Wai Chee Dimock, "Planet and America, Set and Subset," *Shades of the Planet: American Literature as World Literature*, Ed. Wai Chee Dimock and Lawrence Buell (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 5.

³ See, for instance, Sheila Hones and Julia Leyda, "Geographies of American Studies," *American Quarterly*, Vol. 57 (December 2005), 1019-32; and Donald E. Pease "The Extraterritoriality of the Literature of Our Planet," *ESQ*, Vol. 50 (2004), 177-221.

⁴ Janice Radway, "What's in a Name?" Presidential Address to the American Studies Association, 20 November 1998, *American Quarterly*, Vol. 51 (March 1999), 15.

⁵ For a detailed discussion, see Liane Lefaivre and Alexander Tzonis, *Critical Regionalism: Architecture and Identity in a Globalized World* (Munich, Berlin, London, New York: Prestel, 2003); and Liane Lefaivre and Alexander Tzonis, "The Grid and the Pathway. An Introduction to the Work of Dimitris and Susana Antonakakis. With Prolegomena to a History of the Culture of Modern Greek Architecture," *Architecture in Greece*, Vol. 15 (1981) 164-78.

⁶ Kenneth Frampton, "Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance," *The Anti-Aesthetics. Essays on Postmodern Culture*, Ed. Hal Foster (Seattle: Bay Press, 1983), 21.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁸ Douglas Powell, *Critical Regionalism: Connecting Politics and Culture in the American Landscape* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 20.

⁹ *Ibid.*, xi.

¹⁰ Kent C. Ryden, "Region, Place, and Resistance in Northern New England Writing," *Colby Quarterly*, Vol. 39, No. 1 (March 2003), 112.

¹¹ These northern New England writers include the novelists Ernest Hebert, Carolyn Chute, Richard Russo, Cathie Pelletier, Howard Frank Mosher and the poets Donald Hall, Wesley McNair, and David Budbill.

¹² Joseph A. Conforti, *Imagining New England: Explorations of Regional Identity from the Pilgrims to the Mid-Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press 2001), 263-4.

¹³ Kent Ryden, "New England Literature and Regional Identity," *A Companion to the Regional Literatures of America*, Ed. Charles L. Crow (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2003), 209.

¹⁴ Richard Russo, *That Old Cape Magic* (New York: Knopf, 2009), 165.

¹⁵ Richard Russo, *Empire Falls* (New York: Vintage, 2002), 25. References are hereafter given parenthetically in text.

¹⁶ Janet Witalec, "Russo," *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, Vol. 181 (Farmington Hills, MI: Gale, 2004), 229.

¹⁷ E. Annie Proulx, "What It Takes to Endure the Lost, Stubborn Citizens of Richard Russo's Upstate New York," *Chicago Tribune Books* (30 May 1993), 1.

¹⁸ Paul Marion, "Timeline of Lowell History From 1600s to 2009," *Yankee* (November/December 2009), Accessed on 11 November 2011 at <http://www.yankeemagazine.com/issues/2009-11/features/lowell-timeline/all>.

¹⁹ Cathy Stanton, *The Lowell Experiment. Public History in a Postindustrial City* (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006), 4.

²⁰ It should be noted that Russo's novel *Empire Falls* focuses on one textile mill while Lowell incorporated a mill complex. Boott Mills was one of the leading mills and today the complex is still the most intact.

²¹ Blewett states that "in 1900 75 percent of the city's population was first- or second-generation immigrants, and 42 percent was foreign-born. A decade later, only 20 percent of the more than 100,000 inhabitants were native born Americans of native parents." Compare Mary H. Blewett, *The Last Generation: Work and Life in the Textile Mills of Lowell, Massachusetts, 1910-1960* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1990), 5.

²² Cathy Stanton, *The Lowell Experiment. Public History in a Postindustrial City* (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006), 4.

²³ National Weather Service, "Flood of March 1936," Accessed on 24 October 2011 at <http://www.erh.noaa.gov/nerfc/historical/mar1936.htm>.

²⁴ Blewett, *The Last Generation*, 7.

²⁵ The economic boost occurs when Lang Laboratories moves its headquarters to Lowell in 1976. This marks the beginning of the Massachusetts Miracle – though some sources will frame the MassMiracle several years later, in the 1980s and 1990s.

²⁶ The Lowell National Park (<http://www.nps.gov/lowe/index.htm>) was established in 1978, a few years after the Lowell Heritage State Park. It serves to preserve the city's seminal role in the American Industrial Revolution.

²⁷ Stanton, *The Lowell Experiment*, 4.

²⁸ See www.ruhr2010.de.

²⁹ Alden Mudge, "Richard Russo Renders Timely Portrait of American Life," *Book Page* (May 2001), Accessed on 12 March 2011 at http://www.bookpage.com/0105bp/richard_russo.html.

³⁰ James Taylor premiered the song "Millworker" in 1979 in the Broadway musical *Working*, based on Studs Terkel's bestseller. One year later it was included in Taylor's album *Flag* (1979).

³¹ Wai Chee Dimock, "Planet and America, Set and Subset," 5.

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