

The Prize is right

Pulitzer winner on his favorite classics

By MICHAEL GILTZ

Richard Russo is nobody's fool. When he and his wife, Barbara, were looking to buy a new home in Camden, Maine, Russo wasn't impressed by gorgeous views or intricate molding.

"It was a gorgeous house, but the way it was all cut up!" says the 52-year-old author, who was born in Johnstown, N.Y., and grew up in Gloversville.

"There were windows and things jutting out here and jutting out there. They were wonderful architectural features, but you could tell whoever designed this house was not a book person. You simply could not have built or put shelves into that wall space.

"As far as I was concerned, that just killed the deal."

Russo now has two daughters in college; a Pulitzer Prize for his latest novel, "Empire Falls," which just came out in paperback (Vintage, \$14.95); a miniseries in the works with HBO and Paul Newman; and a collection called "The Whore's Child and Other Stories" coming in July (Knopf, \$24).

Now that his novels "Straight Man" and "Nobody's Fool" (made into an acclaimed film starring Newman) have become modern favorites, it's a good time for Russo to talk about some of his favorites — and one classic he won't be reading.

"Great Expectations" by Charles Dickens: "Dickens remains the writer I owe more to than any other author," said Russo. "I was probably asked to

read 'Great Expectations' in high school, but it was really only later, in college, when I picked up 'Great Expectations' again and was old enough to understand what that story was about."

"Eleven Kinds of Loneliness: Short Stories" by Richard Yates: "It's just a miracle. What comes to mind more than anything else with Yates is that incredible sorrow and his willingness to just dwell there with all of these characters who have such reasonable expectations in life ... He just opened a new world of possibility to me."

"A Child's Garden of Verses" by Robert Louis Stevenson: "I had no idea how deeply embedded those illustrations had been in my childhood until I ran across it as an adult. We were buying it for our own daughters or for somebody else's children, and I was just bowled over. I had to sit down, catch my breath and go page to page, rereading every single poem."

"Wuthering Heights" by Emily Bronte: "A really good love story will get me just about every time. 'Wuthering Heights' is a book I really need to reread again because it's

been about a decade since I've read it — the Brontes in general, but certainly 'Wuthering Heights' is at the top of that particular heap."

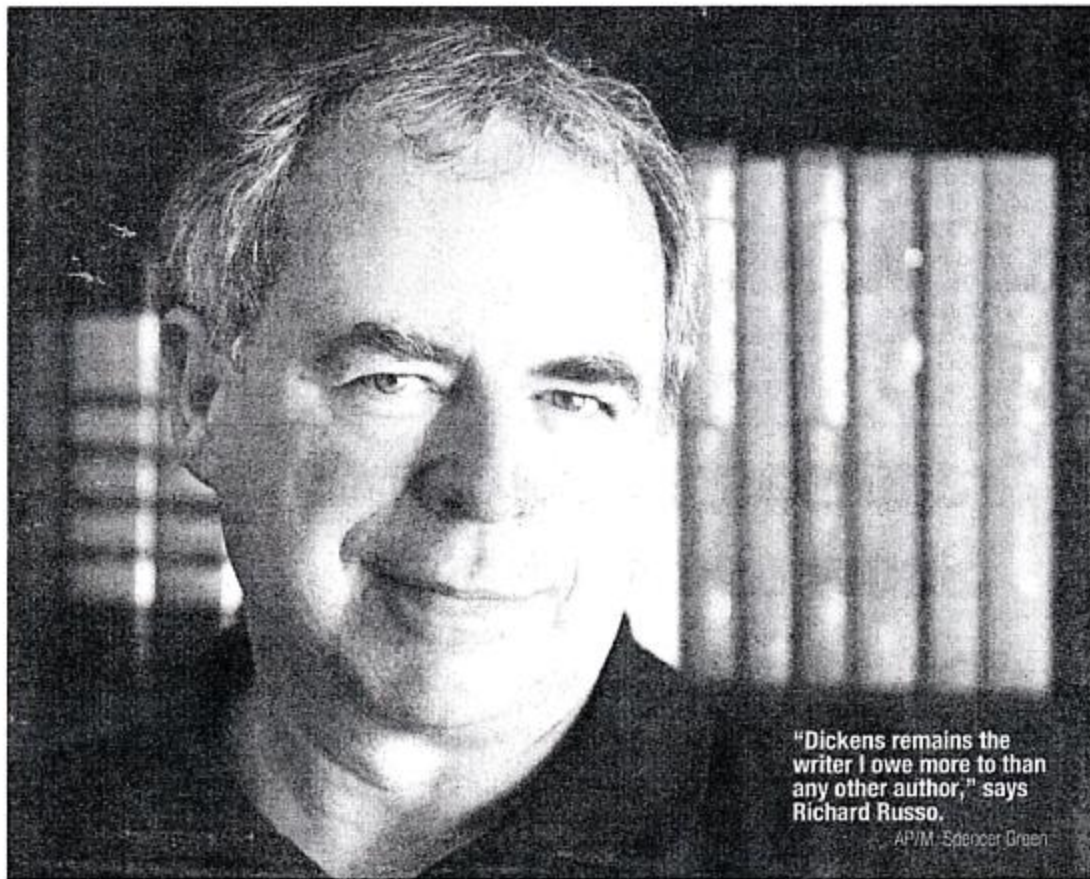
"Foolscap, or the Stages of Love" by Michael Malone: "I tend to give gifts of people I think are under-read. I did that with Richard Yates. [And] I find myself giving Michael Malone books a lot. I really love his writing, and he doesn't write nearly enough to please me."

"The Long Goodbye" by Raymond Chandler: "Chandler is always writing about manhood and what it means to be a man

in America. But in the early work, it's all violent fantasy stuff. By the time Marlowe makes his appearance, you see manhood being re-imagined in his mind. It's not so much guns and toughness and male bravado; it's become something much more subtle."

"The Golden Bowl" by Henry James: "I feel absolutely no desire to read 'The Golden Bowl.' I just don't do that — I don't read for credit anymore."

"In graduate school, I read his book 'The Princess Casamassima,' and I won't do that again. Life is too short."



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AP/M. Spencer Green

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