

Lyon City

Lawton Falls is the town in which Lizzie Borden famously axed her father to death. Mr. Borden was the rich owner of the mill in Lawton Falls at that time, a city where workers certainly earned their pay, but for all the hard work, the place was rather prosperous. According to the back cover of the book, Lawton Falls is now a dying mill city, perhaps best described in the opening paragraph of "The Miracle," where a once viable, if ugly, church, is described as abandoned.

Perhaps the axe murders were a portent of spiritual crises to come.

If the city of Lawton Falls is characterized by spiritual decay, it is equally characterized by ethnic identity and conflict. Over the entire collection of stories, we see the city as a set of ethnic groups, almost all Catholic, which word means, you may know "universal." (There is one Jewish character, which still means the question is about religion, not, for example, eye-color.) So the city as Lyons describes it here appears to be held together by a common religion, even though that basis is sometimes barely a memory or even not at all present to the consciousness of the characters. These Catholics are subdivided into Italians, Puerto Ricans and Cubans (why no Irish?). Thus, national/linguistic identities sometimes seem to hide a religious commonality. We will see in all the stories different kinds of spiritual crisis, often religious, frequently of different origin. But Lyons always seems to be fretting about spiritual failures: the city is multi-ethnic, spiritually troubled, and it isn't clear that religion is the answer.