

## The Importance of Setting Workshop by Lori Weber

### 1) The Mall:

I love the mall. Everything is ..... there. There are no holes in the walls, no scratches on the paint, no leaks in the ceilings. None of fronts of the stores are cracked. None of the millions of that carry the electricity and run the phones and web show. The tiles shine so brightly you can almost look and use them for mirrors. The plants in their huge pots to the sunlight so energetically you almost expect them to dancing right in front of your eyes. The gold, silver and fixtures sparkle. It's as though everything in the mall is some magic substance that keeps it totally immune to the people carry in from the outside world. Even the silver garbage cans shine. (*Klepto*, 16)



the glass  
wires  
hook-ups  
down  
reach up  
start  
chrome  
coated in  
dirt

### 2) The bird hospital:

I walk around, studying the cages. I feel like I'm touring a museum, looking at works of art. In one cage, Andy has made a kind of teepee structure out of some twigs, tied together at the top with string. Inside the teepee a little sparrow peeks out. In another, a kind of sofa has been fashioned out of strips of flowered material. A red bird is perched like a king on top of it. Some of the rocks that decorate the cages have been painted bright colours, yellow with purple stripes or green with red polka dots. They look like Easter eggs. (*Klepto*, 111)

### 3) The store office:

I am finally left alone in the office. It's a bare white room, not a single picture or poster on the walls. The only pieces of furniture are a desk and two metal chairs. . . . It's bare and white and cold, so people will be uncomfortable and say anything to get out of here. . . .

Suddenly, I think how if Andy were here, he could turn this cold room into a comfortable cage. He'd hang up some pleasing pictures for a start. He'd replace the hard folding chairs with cushioned ones. He might put a pile of straw in the corner for me to curl up in. . . .

I can't believe I'm in the same mall I used to love. . . . Its brightness and shininess just seem cold now. And, if I ever get out of here, I never want to look in any of those metal mirrors again. (*Klepto*, 135 & 136)

#### 4) The Lachine Canal:

It's the X down near the water that we are exploring today. The map takes us under a tangled mess of highway arms that span the southwest part of the city, most of them arching over railroad tracks that are overgrown with weeds. Then we drive through a long, dimly lit tunnel where a sidewalk runs beside us, separated by guardrails. I picture my mother walking along here and I shiver. It looks like it would be rat-infested. It's so dingy and dirty. What would my mother be doing here? . . .

We end up at the Lachine Canal, and can drive no further. We park behind a closed warehouse and climb the embankment to the path that runs beside the canal. The water is brown and littered with beer bottles and chip bags. (*Split*, 35)

#### 5) Mount Royal:

"Let's climb up to the cross," I say.

"What for?" Danny asks, but I'm already out of the car and heading up the path. He has no choice but to follow. We climb the steep stone stairs. The cross, which is made of hundreds of light bulbs, is shining above us, lighting our way. At the top, I run to the wire fence that encloses the cross and spread myself out against it. I can feel the heat of the bulbs behind me, warming my back. I imagine my face lit up like a giant . . . for all the city below to see. (*Split*, 60)



car and  
climb  
way. At  
spread  
me,

#### 6) The wine cellar:

My father is at the oars, his back to the camera. My mother is leaning back, letting one hand trail in the choppy water. Her mouth is open in a wide laugh, a responsive laugh, as though my father has just said something witty. The boat is headed toward a dock that juts out into the picture. At its tip is a sign: Lachine Rapids Rowing Boats, One Dollar a Ride. The X near

the water, I think. I feel like an archaeologist who has just discovered another secret tomb under the pyramids. (*Split* 141)

7) Tattoo Heaven tattoo parlour:

I tiptoe inside Tattoo Heaven. Standing in the middle of the room is like standing in the middle of a vat of blood. I feel like a small molecule in the midst of the transfusion. I open the can of black paint and grab a small brush. Then I dip the tip into the paint and begin to stab black dots onto the red paint around the door frame. I do the same around the window frame. Out the window and way to the left I can see the roof of the Verdun Arena, and beside it, on either side, tall apartment buildings that back onto the river. (*Tattoo Heaven* 46)

8) A Bedroom:

Behind the stone wall, Theresa is asleep in her bedroom. I close my eyes and see her room, spinning slightly. I see the white walls, beige curtains, and beige bedspread. I see, as though for the first time, how ..... her world is -- swept and washed free of germs on a daily basis. Life in a permanent cocoon, without any spot of colour. Even Theresa's clothes are white. And her body is part of the picture, too, her pale skin so transparent that her veins shine through. And inside those veins the white cells are racing around her blood outnumbering the red. Even her disease is one of colour.

(*Tattoo Heaven*, 126)



9) Dorion Street, east end:

“This is it,” my grandmother declares, stretching out her hand and pointing out a street that isn't a street anymore. The cement foundations of some of the houses are still standing, covered in spray paint and graffiti, but the houses themselves have been levelled.

“What happened? Was there some war in Montreal that I don't know about?”

My grandmother laughs. “No, sweetie. This is what happened when they built the bridge in 1925. The Jacques Cartier Bridge,” she says, pointing ahead to the green foot of a bridge that steps onto the street, like the leg of a giant monster. (*Strange Beauty*, 31)

10) The Queen of Sheba's House:

Later, we watch the large crane that holds the wrecking ball manoeuvre into place. I don't know why they need a wrecking ball. The house is so dilapidated someone could probably just jump on the roof to cave it in. . . .

Then the crane, from which the big steel ball hangs, motors up. A minute later, the ball falls like an angry fist from the sky to crush the memory of the odd woman whose name hardly anybody knew. (*Strange Beauty*, 123)

### **Creative Writing Activity:**

- 1) Choose a setting that you think could be used to convey something important about a character in a story. Use a place you are familiar with. It can be a well-known landmark, like the cross on Mount-Royal, or just some weird nook or cranny in your neighbourhood. It can be an inside or outside location. It can be a moving or stationary location. It can be a place your character goes to often or a newly discovered place. It can be a populated or solitary place, a dark or light place.
- 2) Write a short description of the location, setting your character in it somehow. Try to make the setting reflect something about how your character is feeling, or what your character is thinking about.
- 3) Share your writing with someone.

### **Analytical Activity:**

- 1) Choose a passage that describes one of the settings in the novel and write an analysis of the importance of the passage, focusing on what it reveals about one of the main characters.
- 2) Choose a passage about setting and write an analysis of the symbolism contained in the passage. What do the symbols represent? How are they connected to important themes in the novel?

- 3) Choose a passage which contains setting. Rewrite the passage, changing the setting in a way that would change the meaning of the book. Add or remove objects, change the locale entirely, or simply the time of day. Write a short report on how your changes result in a different reading of this part of the book.