

Intro Transcript

>>Welcome back.

We'll be discussing setting, description, and world-building today. For myself, when I was working on my novel, which was set in Detroit, I did a lot of research. One of the things that happens when you do research is you find these tidbits, these just great bits of history or objects and you want them in your book, but you don't really have any reason. Or you don't know why they would be in your book, they just seem fun.

For me, there was a specific hotel that I had researched that was set in the 1940s in Detroit, and it was the first black hotel in the city. I wanted it in my novel but, for several drafts, there was no reason for it to be there. It wasn't until I realized that I had a character who was trying to impress a woman, a woman who had more money than him, that I had a reason to have that hotel in the story. He tries to take her to that hotel, and it backfires horribly. But outside of that context, it's just a historical tidbit that lives outside of the characters, and it has no real depth. It's not rooted in the narrative itself, but once it was part of the character's desires and his motivations, then it feels very particular.

>> So the trick is to find the right setting for that object, for that building, so that it will come to life.

>> Exactly, and the right lens to view that object through.

>> Yeah. So for this session, we will hear from Peter Orner who will talk about how you create setting through description, description being the key to building a world.

And then Leslie Jamison will talk about creating a setting by inventing an inventory of objects. This reminds us of William Carlos Williams' famous line that, no ideas but in things. And we begin to

understand how each thing has resonance when put in its right setting in a work of fiction.

Finally, Paul Harding will discuss creating a setting the reader can experience through detailed landscapes and sensory attention. Paul is the author of two novels, most recently *Enon*. His first book, *Tinkers*, won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 2010. He graduated from the University of Massachusetts and the Iowa Writers' Workshop, and he has also received a Guggenheim fellowship. He has taught at Harvard and now he is a visiting professor at the Iowa Writers' Workshop.

Leslie Jamison is the author of two books, most recently *The Empathy Exams*. Her debut novel, *The Gin Closet*, was a finalist for the Los Angeles Times First Fiction Prize. She graduated from Harvard University and the Iowa Writers' Workshop, and she is currently a PhD candidate in American literature at Yale University.

>> And Peter Orner's most recent book, *Last Car Over the Sagamore Bridge*, is a New York Times Editor's Choice, and was named a Favorite Book of 2013 by the Wall Street Journal. He was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship, as well as the two-year Lannan Foundation Literary Fellowship. Orner is a Professor of Creative Writing at San Francisco State University and has taught at the University of Iowa Writers' Workshop.

>> Enjoy.