

# SHINING BROW – Usonian Edition ANNOTATED

A Chamber Opera in Two Acts with no Interval

Libretto by Paul MULDOON

Music by Daron HAGEN (b.1944)

Commissioned by Madison Opera

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The Madison Opera / Roland Johnson

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UrbanArias / Robert Wood

## USONIAN

*means relating to the United States in Esperanto, which was an attempt to create an easily adaptable and universal language*

*Frank Lloyd Wright used this term to describe a series of affordable, small, single-story homes, which were characterized by the use of native materials, connection to the landscape, and their L shape. This style home developed into what is considered a ranch home today, and proliferates the suburban landscape of much of America.*

*Daron Hagen and UrbanArias have dubbed this version of SHINING BROW the “Usonian” version – meant to be compact and universal.*

## CHARACTERS

Frank Lloyd Wright	baritone, an architect
<i>celebrated American architect, interested in designing structures that were in harmony with their respective environment</i>	
Mamah Cheney	soprano, WRIGHT’s mistress
Louis Sullivan	tenor, WRIGHT’s mentor
<i>mentor to Frank Lloyd Wright, himself a celebrated architect credited as the “father of the skyscraper”</i>	
Edwin Cheney	bass-baritone, WRIGHT’s client
Catherine Wright	mezzo-soprano, WRIGHT’s wife

**SETTING:** 1903 – 1914 | In the memories of Frank Lloyd Wright

The opera concerns events that occurred between 1903 and 1914 during the great American architect Frank Lloyd Wright's life. Wright's determination to leave his wife and children, his relationship with Mamah Cheney, and the subsequent murders and conflagration at Taliesin are all part of the historical record. The opera takes Wright to the point at which he vows to rebuild Taliesin in Mamah's memory.

## ACT I | SCENE 1

WRIGHT is alone onstage, piecing together the events that lead up to the tragedy at TALIESIN. He is haunted by SULLIVAN and the unresolved issues between them. He is judged, rightfully so, by both CATHERINE and EDWIN who fluctuate between their historic characters and his nagging conscience. Lastly, he is loved and challenged by MAMAH, his idol.

SULLIVAN, as WRIGHT imagines him, emerges out of the darkness.

MEAS.#

CHAR.

SULLIVAN:

So much so, that even now I flinch  
at the very thought of a stone taking wing  
from **Madison, Wisconsin**;

It was every inch a proud and soaring thing  
that, true to **form following function**,  
lodged itself in my brow. As I did in his.

I was his **Lieber Meister**. He was a 'pencil in my hand'.

I was his *Lieber Meister*; he was a 'pencil in my hand';  
Together we would make our mark  
On the clean slate of America.

We dreamed of a mile-high building with a huge **tap-root**;  
But his ambition, or my pride –  
It's hard to say exactly which –  
Would drive a wedge between us ...

And this, perhaps, is how things were meant to be;  
**For Troy must fall, Achilles must slay Hector.**

NOTES

**Madison, Wisconsin** is where Wright started his schooling and career in civil engineering before moving to Chicago and ultimately landing in the studio of Adler & Sullivan. Wright never finished any formal training.

**“Form follows function”** is a quote attributed to Sullivan and served as a basis for key architectural theory in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The principle that the form of things in nature is dictated by their function; in the same way, the shape of buildings should be related to their intended purpose.

**Lieber Meister** is German for “Dear Master” and was a mutual term of endearment between Wright and Sullivan. It is understood that Sullivan had more than strictly professional / mentor feelings about Wright and their relationship. There was an unfulfilled romantic aspect on Sullivan’s end of things.

**Taproot** provides the counterbalance in a skyscraper. Referential of plant structure, the taproot is the single large root from which all the others spring. A deep foundation is needed the higher the aspiration.

Greek mythology reference regarding the battle for Troy, an ancient city in what is present-day northwestern Turkey. The Trojan war was caused by the abduction of Helen from Sparta, by Paris, a Trojan Prince. Achilles and Hector were

lauded warriors from opposing sides. Hector was the eldest son of Priam, king of Troy, and Achilles was a greek hero protected by the Gods. He slew Hector, and was himself slain by Paris, who shot an arrow into his heel.

And therein lies ...

CATHERINE/: *(as echoes)*

EDWIN And therein lies the poetry ...

SULLIVAN: And therein lies the **poetry of architecture**.

This line introduces Goethe to the audience linking poetry and architecture. His poetry and thoughts on architecture play heavily throughout the piece.

ALL: The poetry of architecture  
is a poetry of vision;  
we set our sights  
on unscaled heights  
with our **ground-plans and elevations**.

The poetry of architecture  
is a poetry of tension;  
we take as our theme  
the brick and the beam  
and we add an extra dimension.

But the poetry of architecture  
is not without its laws;  
there's someone at the bottom  
of every totem- pole:  
you can't make bricks without straw.

For the poetry of architecture  
has its Masters and its Schools;  
some are destined to stand  
with their pencils in their hands ...

*(WRIGHT uses this anthem to step forward relishing the thought of dominance as an architect. SULLIVAN looks away disgusted by his ego.)*

**Ground-plans and elevations** are basic building blocks for any architectural or design project. The ground-plan is a bird's eye view section of a building. It gives a horizontal view or god-like perspective. Elevations are flat, straight-on views of the facades or interiors of the building. They give the vertical information. Ground-plans show the functionality and relationship of space. Elevations, show the aesthetic / form of the space. Function and form.

WRIGHT: And some are destined to rule.  
  
*(EDWIN couples up with MAMAH, whom he ushers to WRIGHT's drafting table, on which are spread the plans of various houses.)*

CATHERINE: *(bitter and judgmental)*  
Some are destined to stand  
With their pencils in their hands  
*(with awe and regret)*  
... and some are destined to rule.  
  
*(CATHERINE crosses to SULLIVAN)*

WRIGHT: The poetry of architecture, Mister and Missus Cheney, is universal. The **Sioux and the Shoshone** might have taught the **Greeks and Romans** a lesson in harmony.

**Sioux** are a Great Plains Native American tribe and the **Shoshone** are a Native American tribe from present-day Idaho and Wyoming.

**Greeks and Romans** provided the foundation for most western architecture all the way through to the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Their classical principles are what the neo-classical *Beaux Arts* style are based on. Sullivan rejected this as an aesthetic that was not fit for the modern industrial age. However, the expo hosted by Chicago in the late 19<sup>th</sup>-century solidified this style as what was appropriate sidelining Sullivan's career. Wright, as Sullivan's pupil, was also on a path for a new and wholly American aesthetic.

MAMAH: *(spoken)*  
I can't quite imagine the appeal to **John Ruskin** of a few sticks covered with deer-skins.

**John Ruskin** is a 19<sup>th</sup>-century English art critic who wrote extensively about archeology and was a significant figure in the Arts and Crafts movement, from which Wright began to build his own architectural aesthetic. He wrote *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, a theoretical discourse on how to make architecture more honest and authentic in what it was saying visually and how and what it communicated to the user of the space.

EDWIN: *(spoken)*  
Mamah, please.

MAMAH: In any case, we might as justly speak of the ‘**music**’ of architecture...

This references Goethe’s quote equating architecture to frozen music. Goethe, in fact, is referencing back to Vitruvius who is considered the first documented architect from the Romans. He wrote *Ten books of Architecture* that talks about how good and meaningful architecture must exhibit *utilitas, veritas, and venustas*. It must serve a purpose, have truth, and have beauty.

WRIGHT: Indeed, we might. Be it mud hut, mansion or mosque, Cabin, cathedral or **kraal** – They should all be somehow integral.

**Kraal** is a homestead in southern Africa,

WRIGHT: And Mah-mah – if I may?

MAMAH: *(correcting his pronunciation)*  
May-mah – if you would.

CATHERINE: Mah-mah. May-mah. My, my, my.

WRIGHT: May I say that what’s uppermost in my mind  
When I take my pencil in my hand  
To draw up a plan for *your Erehwon, your Utopia,*  
Is that...

**Erehwon** is a fictional country as well as the title of an 1872 novel written by Samuel Butler

ALL: ... **form and function are one.**

**Form and function are one** is a point / jab to Sullivan, showing him that he has moved past his mentor’s mantra to a better more integral approach.

MAMAH: What a curious expression – ‘my pencil in my hand’.

CATHERINE/: We know pretty much exactly what he has in mind  
EDWIN/ When he mentions his ‘pencil in his hand.’  
SULLIVAN

WRIGHT: Take, for example, this house in Buffalo;  
Each room **opens into the next**, so one may follow  
One’s bent, as it were, from the living room  
Through the den to the bedroom ...

The open plan was an innovation of Wright’s. Instead of compartmentalizing space with walls and doors, his domestic architecture centered around the hearth. The public space of the house was defined by its function through furniture and

seating arrangements. It was this openness that shed light on Wright and Mamah's affair. Neighbors in Oak Park could see into the Wright designed Cheney home and found Wright and Mamah in their connubial bliss.

EDIWN: It's faintly reminiscent of a maze ...

MAMAH: But a maze in which one finds oneself, my sweet,  
The way the greatest rivers must meander.

EDWIN: The way in every labyrinth there lurks a **Minotaur**.

Greek mythology reference to King Minos of Crete's famous labyrinth in which he kept a minotaur, a creature who was half man and half bull. Theseus a tribute and sacrifice sent from Athens to pay a debt to Minos slayed the Minotaur with help from the King's daughter Ariadne. Edwin is referencing himself as the Minotaur. A bull-headed brute conquered by the chosen prince.

MAMAH: ... like a meandering river ...

WRIGHT: Over the lintel of the hearth  
In this house in Buffalo I've had the following carved:

WRIGHT/  
SULLIVAN/: *The reality of the house is order*  
CATHERINE *The blessing of the house is community*  
*The glory of the house is hospitality*  
*The crown of the house is godliness*

MAMAH: What a curious sloping roof.

WRIGHT: That, Mamah, is a **hip-roof**;  
So called, I might say, because it follows the curve ...

**Hip roof** is a type of standard roof construction in which all sides slope inward. This type of roof was a favorite of Wright and always tended to be a shallow pitch to emphasize the horizontal quality of his organic architecture.

EDWIN: Far be it from me to lower the tone  
Of these proceedings, but when all's said and done  
There's the little matter of how much it'll cost ...

MAMAH: (*spoken*)

Edwin, you sound like **Banquo's ghost**.

A Shakespearean reference to Banquo from Macbeth. He and Macbeth are generals who encounter the witches prophesying of Macbeth taking the throne, but Banquo's lineage ultimately taking over. In Macbeth's jealousy he murders Banquo who returns as a ghost to haunt at a large feast in Act III. Banquo is a foil to Macbeth who does not give him to his own greed.

WRIGHT: It's still a tad early to say exactly.  
I'll have a more concrete idea by the end of the week.

MAMAH: Oh, Eddie, the cost is as nothing to the worth  
Of a house designed by Frank Lloyd Wright.

EDWIN: Just so long as it doesn't cost the earth.  
  
*(EDWIN and MAMAH take their leave)*

MAMAH: *(extending her hand)*  
Until the end of the week.

WRIGHT: *(kissing her hand)*  
Until then, Mamah.

EDWIN: *(spoken, abruptly)*  
Goodnight.  
  
*(EDWIN and MAMAH turn upstage back to audience.)*

WRIGHT: *(spoken)*  
Her hip ...  
*(sung)*  
And her scent. Was it musk?  
Not musk. Cedar perhaps. Perhaps **night-scented stock**.

**Night-scented stock** or *Matthiola longipetala* emits a pleasant scent in the evening and through the night. It has a four-petaled purple to white flower.

It all goes back to those **Froebel blocks**  
my mama gave me as a child.

**Froebel blocks** are a child's foundational teaching tool that are basic building block shapes. The blocks and the theory behind them were developed by German Friedrich Froebel who is also credited with developing the pedagogy behind *kindergarten*.

*La Belle Dame sans Merci, The Lady of Shalott* – these were my first patrons; I was their Master Builder.

Not stock. **Saxifrage**. A flower to split a boulder in the prairie of men’s hearts;  
(*Unbeknownst to him, CATHERINE has crossed to him.*)  
Mamah has pierced my heart like an **arrowhead**.

CATHERINE: Frank, my dear.

WRIGHT: Catherine. What brings you here?

CATHERINE: An arrowhead? But this is all so sudden.

WRIGHT: What bring you here?

CATHERINE: Is it **jasper** or **obsidian**?

WRIGHT: What brings you here?

CATHERINE: Is it **Minnetaree** or **Mandan**?

WRIGHT: What brings you, Cat?

CATHERINE: If **Moahomet won’t come to the mountain** ...

WRIGHT: Oh Catherine, dear ... now, Cat.

*La Belle Dame sans Merci* is a famous poem by John Keats about a fairy who lures men to their deaths. *The Lady of Shalott* is a famous Arthurian poem by Alfred, Lord Tennyson. The Lady lives in isolation, weaving constantly, and lives under a curse which forbids her from viewing the world directly; she can only observe it through a mirror.

**Saxifrage** is a mountain or sub-arctic flowering plant, named for its ability to “break stones”.

The arrowhead becomes a running reference throughout the rest of the piece. It is something ancient, precious, found in the wilderness. What is thought to be an arrowhead, ends up being a common piece of stone, nothing more.

Types of semi-precious stones. **Jasper** being a gemstone, typically red. Also used in the ancient world to make drills. **Obsidian** being jet black volcanic glass.

**Minataree** are a Great Plains Native American tribe described in a book by George Catlin. **Mandan** are another Native American tribe described in Catlin’s book, from North Dakota

A reference to the proverb, possibly Turkish, “If the mountain will not come to Muhammad, then Muhammad must go to the mountain” retold by Francis Bacon in his essays of 1625.



CATHERINE: We've scarcely spoken in a month.  
If not for mine, then for the children's sakes,  
Come home one evening at six  
If only to play a nursery game.  
I doubt if you even remember their names.  
Have you forgotten those evenings in **Oak Park**  
When we built upon the built-up dark  
And climbed aboard the old toboggan  
And ate roast chestnuts and pecans?  
At least do me the honor ...

Chicago suburb where Catherine and Wright first settled.  
Wright built their first house, which included a studio for him  
with a loan from Sullivan. Most of Wright's first domestic  
projects were built in this neighborhood including work he  
moonlighted on while working at Adler and Sullivan. This  
neighborhood today has the most concentration of Wright's  
domestic work, including the Cheney home.

WRIGHT: Lloyd Junior ...

CATHERINE: ... of joining me for a late dinner ...

WRIGHT: John ... Kate Junior ...

CATHERINE: I'll wear the taffeta ...

WRIGHT: David ...

CATHERINE: ... dress and the pendant that reads ***Semper Virens*** ...

***Semper Virens*** is latin for "ever green."

WRIGHT: Frances ...

CATHERINE: ... that was given to me by Louis Sullivan ...

WRIGHT: Llewellyn ...

CATHERINE: For though I may have grown a little stout ...

WRIGHT: Has anybody been left out?

CATHERINE: ... still and all, Frank, still and all ...

WRIGHT: (*insistently*)  
Has anybody been left out?

CATHERINE: All of us. We've all been shut out by the wall

You've thrown up round yourself,  
Your pursuit of fame and wealth  
Would be laughable ...

WRIGHT: It all goes back to Froebel.

CATHERINE: ...if it weren't so cruel.

WRIGHT: All somehow integral.

CATHERINE: A paradox, Frank. In public you espouse the ideal  
Of family life – all that tittle-tattle  
Carved on lintels and picked out in **tesserae** –  
While your own life's in disarray.  
As for your prattle about 'integrity' ...

**Tesserae** are the tiles that make up a mosaic.

WRIGHT: *(spoken - final)*  
I'll be home no later than nine-thirty.

*(CATHERINE exits, leaving WRIGHT alone at his desk.)*

WRIGHT: Each room opens into the next, (Catherine, -)  
so one may follow one's bent, as it were,  
from glade through sylvan glade –  
till the valley of disenchantment gives way to the Great Plains.  
There Louis Sullivan and I dreamed  
of a mile-high building with a huge tap-root  
that was every inch a proud and soaring thing.

Only the other day I read a newspaper report  
of a man who complained of an ache in his heart.  
When they opened him up they found a lump  
of gristle and **keratin** big as a baby's first;  
that lump was his own twin  
whom he'd ousted in their mother's womb.

**Keratin** is the tough and strong protein found in horns, nails,  
claws, hooves, etc.

Not stock. Not saxifrage. Gardenia.

SULLIVAN/: *(ghosted by SULLIVAN)*  
WRIGHT He was my *Lieber Meister*; I was a 'pencil in his hand';  
together we would make our mark

on the clean slate of America.  
But my ambition, or his pride –  
it's hard to say exactly which –  
would drive a wedge between us ...

WRIGHT: Edwin, Edwin, what a curious name ...

**'Edwin' ... Edwin ... Brood.**

Mamah has pierced my heart

Like an arrowhead;

*(spoken)*

And the **Seminole, the Sioux, the Shoshone, the Sans**

**Arcs** –

*(sung)*

They come sweeping back across the land

To build upon the built-up dark.

EDWIN: *(humming the offstage chorus lines)*

A play on Edwin Drood, the title character of Charles Dicken's last and unfinished novel *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*.

**Seminole** were a Florida Native American tribe, later forcibly removed to Oklahoma. The **Sans Arcs** were a Native American tribe, a subdivision of the Lakota people

– ORCHESTRAL INTERLUDE OF 'HYMN TO NATURE,' a piece attributed to Goethe –

## SCENE 2

*The Cheney house in mid-construction.*

MEAS.#

CHAR.

NOTES

EDWIN:

*(spoken over the end of the interlude)*

Look out below. Here comes a bit of skirt.  
Dig deep, little lady, I'll give you something hard.

CATHERINE:

Far be it from me to suggest  
that this ruffian could lower the tone  
of the neighborhood, since it's already been  
lowered out of all recognition.  
By Frank Lloyd Wright and the Cheney woman.  
It's an open secret!

*(spoken)*

He's just another man of forty,  
Turning his back on years of connubial bliss.  
While she's no better than a common whore.

EDWIN:

*(with wounded pride)*

Three long days and three long nights in the belly of the beast  
Was as much as Jonah could bear;  
For more than three months,  
I've been trapped in the hump-backed whale  
Of this so-called 'prairie house'.

I know, I know, I know;

I know only too well the features of the 'prairie house' –  
its walls of rain, its window-panes of ice, its door of wind,  
its roof of hard-packed snow, and,  
at its core, a vast emptiness.  
The truth is that my mouth is full of nails.

For three long months I've hunkered in the **maw**,  
bowed under, mortgaged to the hilt,  
and pondered the universal law;  
for everything that's built something is destroyed.  
*(EDWIN spots a flint on the ground, picks it up.)*

The term used to describe Wright's domestic architecture of the period. It's characteristics included long low horizontal lines, obscured entryway and inward focus, open space planning, integrated storage, and lots of windows and natural light.

**Maw** is the jaws or throat of a voracious animal or the mouth or gullet of a greedy person.

So it was that the **Master Builder**

Assigned **Prometheus** his rock

And **Sisyphus** his boulder.

*(EDWIN scrutinizes the flint.)*  
And **Job** his little **pot-sherd**;  
I do believe it's an arrowhead.

*(EDWIN puts the flint in his breast-pocket)*  
For three long months I myself have been the **grist**  
to Frank Lloyd Wright's grist-mill.  
I've been pinned up by my wings.  
*Instead of the cross, the **Albatross***  
*about my neck is hung.*  
Everything's out of kilter.  
The very house stands at a list;  
there's not a line that's not somehow askew.

*(WRIGHT and MAMAH enter. They are in buoyant spirits, oblivious of EDWIN.)*

SULLIVAN: I know, I know, I know;  
I know only too well the features of the 'prairie house' –  
its walls of rain, its window-panes of ice, its door of wind,  
its roof of hard-packed snow, and, at its core, a vast emptiness.

WRIGHT: Each room opens into the next, if you remember,  
Like the chambers of the heart.

*(WRIGHT goes down on one knee.)*

Referencing Wright here in his doling out punishments, but also references the Christian God and mixes Greco-roman tropes with biblical ones.

**Prometheus** was a titan who was defeated by the Gods of Olympus. He gave mankind the gift of fire, and Zeus as punishment had him chained to a rock where every day an eagle would eat his liver only for it to regenerate the next day.

**Sisyphus** was a mythological king. He was inordinately proud of his own cleverness; as a punishment from the Gods, he was forced to roll a boulder up a hill, only to watch it roll down again. He repeated this task for eternity.

**Job** is a reference to himself in terms of his patience and perseverance. A pot-sherd is a pottery fragment usually unearthed as an archaeological relic

**Grist** is grain that is ground to make flour.

**Albatross** is a reference to Coleridge's poem *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, in which a mariner shoots an albatross, thereby cursing his ship. The body of the bird is hung around his neck as a reminder of his guilt.

SULLIVAN/: I know, I know, I know;  
EDWIN I know only too well the features of the 'prairie house' –  
its walls of rain, its window-panes of ice, its door of wind,  
its roof of hard-packed snow, and, at its core, a vast emptiness.

WRIGHT: *(spoken)*  
*As the kiss of two lovers at night*  
*Makes the darkness a choir,*  
*The dusk is a-quiver with light*  
*Of its heart's desire.*

MAMAH: *(extending her hand)*  
Oh, Frank, you've such a way with words.

WRIGHT: *(taking her hand)*  
Those were the words of the **Welsh bard, Taliesin,**  
To **the Lady of the Lake**, with whom he ...

**Taliesin** was a Welsh poet and bard in the 6<sup>th</sup> century C.E..  
Wright named the home he built in Spring Green for Mamah  
Cheney Taliesin, which literally translates to "Shining Brow".  
**The Lady of the Lake** is another Arthurian Legend allusion.  
Arthur is said to have received the sword Excalibur from the  
Lady of the Lake

MAMAH: ... had a secret liaison?

WRIGHT: Something of that ilk.

MAMAH: A lover's tryst?

WRIGHT: She was less a lover than a muse.

MAMAH: How dull. So it's what you might call an allusion?

WRIGHT: I borrowed those lines from a **masque**  
By a certain **Richard Hovey**.

**Masque** was a form of amateur dramatic entertainment,  
popular among the nobility in 16<sup>th</sup>- and 17<sup>th</sup>-century England.  
**Richard Hovey** used the term in the title of his *Taliesin: A*  
*Masque*, which was published in 1896. He also wrote  
Dartmouth's alma mater.

MAMAH: Do you mean 'borrowed' or 'purloined'?

WRIGHT: Borrowed.

MAMAH: How positively dull.  
*(distractfully)*  
Was the house always meant to list?  
It seems somewhat topsy-turvy.

WRIGHT: Be it mud hut, mansion or mosque, a Minnetaree earth-lodge,  
a cabin with antlers of an elk gracing its eaves –  
be it the **Chapel of the Holy Grail** –  
They should all be somehow integral.

The resting place of the Holy Grail, which according to  
Arthurian legend is the cup or platter used by Jesus at the Last  
Supper, and in which Joseph of Arimathea received Christ's  
blood at the Cross

MAMAH: It's faintly reminiscent of a maze.

WRIGHT: To borrow a phrase from my old mentor, Louis Sullivan ...

EDWIN: *(singing out from within the house)*  
In every labyrinth ...

*(WRIGHT starts, releases MAMAH's hand and gets to his feet as  
EDWIN appears.)*

... there lurks ...

MAMAH: Eddie ...

WRIGHT: ... a Minotaur.

MAMAH: Oh Eddie, you sound like Banquo's ghost.

EDWIN: Far be it from me to lower the tone  
Of these proceedings, but when all's said and done  
There's the little matter of the Wedding Guest.

MAMAH: Please, Eddie. Try not to be distraught.

EDWIN: I've just been pondering the motto over the hearth.  
I think it should read;  
*For everything that's built something is destroyed.*

WRIGHT: I hope you don't mind, Ed;  
I borrowed your wife for the afternoon.

EDWIN: Mind? Why should I mind?

MAMAH: Why so crestfallen, so forlorn?

EDWIN: *(EDWIN moves towards MAMAH)*  
So crestfallen?  
*(EDWIN takes MAMAH's hands and presses them to his head.)*  
So forlorn?

WRIGHT: In the phrase I borrowed from Louis Sullivan ...

EDWIN: Can't you feel those little nodes of gristle and keratin?

MAMAH: I feel nothing, Eddie.

EDWIN: For three months I've been losing hope.

MAMAH: *(snatching away her hands)*  
You know I simply can't abide your self-pity.  
  
*(EDWIN puts his hands to his head.)*

EDWIN: For three long months I've tried to ease  
The pain of these nodes of gristle and keratin  
But have found no salve, no **Balm of Gilead**.  
It's been to no avail, to absolutely no avail.

MAMAH: I feel nothing, Eddie, not the merest hint  
Of remorse, not a pang of guilt for having followed my bent,  
As it were, towards my own enfranchisement.

**Balm of Gilead** was a rare perfume used medicinally, that was mentioned in the Bible, and named for the region of Gilead where it was produced. The expression stems from William Tyndale's language in the King James Bible of 1611, and has come to signify a universal cure in figurative speech. "Is there Balm in Gilead?" refers to a line from Edgar Allen Poe's *The Raven*, asking if there will be healing over the loss of love. The raven replies, "nevermore"



EDWIN: If not for mine, then for the children's sakes,  
Come home one evening at six;  
You've made us all a laughing-stock.

MAMAH: For three long months I've been ostracized  
but the nods and winks and twitching curtains  
have only strengthened my resolve;  
my love for Frank Lloyd Wright  
will prevail even when all else fails.

WRIGHT: For three long months I've tried to loose the **knot**,  
That binds Mamah and myself.  
I'm consumed by guilt,

Yet I'm adamant as **Percival**...

References the **Gordian Knot**, a legend of Phrygian Gordium associated with Alexander the Great. It is often used as a metaphor for an intractable problem solved easily by finding a loophole or thinking creatively.

**Percival** was a knight of the Round Table, who found the Holy Grail.

EDWIN: For three long months I've tried to ease  
MAMAH: For Three long Months I've been ostracized  
WRIGHT: For three long months I've tried to loose

EDWIN: The pain of these nodes  
MAMAH: But the nods  
WRIGHT: The knot,

EDWIN: Of gristle and keratin  
MAMAH: And winks and twitching curtains  
WRIGHT: The inextricable, Gordian

EDWIN: Bu have found no salve,  
MAMAH: Have only strengthened my resolve  
WRIGHT: Knot that binds Mamah and myself.

EDWIN: No Balm of Gilead  
MAMAH: My love for  
WRIGHT: I'm consumed by guilt,

EDWIN: It's been to no avail  
MAMAH: Wright to prevail  
WRIGHT: Yet adamant as Percival

EDWIN: To absolutely no avail.  
MAMAH: When all else fails.  
WRIGHT: In the Chapel of the Holy Grail.

MAMAH: I'm leaving you tonight!

EDWIN: One of these days I'll boast  
a set of antlers fit to grace  
the eaves of any 'prairie house'.  
If all else fails,  
I'll swallow **hydrochloric acid**;  
I'd hang myself by a rope

from a **purlin** if I thought  
it might be to some avail.

MAMAH: To no avail. I won't go back to needlework,  
Monotony, the Oak Park dark.  
To absolutely no avail. I won't go back to needlework,  
To the drab monotony of **plain one, purl one**.  
My love for Frank Lloyd Wright will prevail.

*(EDWIN steps back into the shadows.)*

WRIGHT: Let us set sail;  
Together we will make our mark  
On the well-worn slate of Europe;  
In Rome, or Paris, or Berlin,  
We'll build our Chapel of the Holy Grail.

*(WRIGHT sweeps MAMAH off her feet and exits.)*

– ORCHESTRAL SEQUE –

This references what Julian Carlton did after enacting the tragedy at Taliesin. He swallowed hydrochloric acid, which eventually killed him days later.

**Purlin**, in architectural framing, is a structural piece of a roof which supports rafters.

A knitting expression of how the stitches lay out. A plain stitch has the yarn always held at the back of the work. When purling a stitch, the yarn is always at the front.

### SCENE 3

*Escape to Europe*

MEAS.#

CHAR.

MAMAH:

Earth and air and fire and water;  
All somehow integral.  
We – are – all – within – Nature;  
She – is – within – us – all.  
*Die Menschen sind alle in ihr und sie allen.*  
*(MAMAH gets up from her desk and moves towards the window.)*  
Frank. How much longer must I endure our being apart?

I look out from the walls of Troy,  
like **Helen** sighing for a sail.  
I see nothing. Only a camisole of a clothes line

Over **Friedrichstrasse**.

It might be a **Rhinemaiden**,  
A damsel in distress.  
She calls to me, ‘Cuckoo ... cuckold ...’  
As seamstress calls to seamstress  
Across a mile-wide quilt.  
I feel nothing. Not the merest hint  
Of remorse. Not a pang of guilt  
For having followed my bent,  
As it were, from Boone, Iowa,  
And the monotony of needlepoint  
To the realm of **Julia Ward Howe**;  
As they say in Boone –

Or used to say – **per ardua ad astra**.  
I’ve gone to such pains  
to throw off my manacles of yarn ...  
*(MAMAH makes a show of wringing her hands, moves back towards the desk.)*  
... the truth is that my mouth is full of pins.  
*(MAMAH picks up the piece of paper.)*

NOTES

**Helen** of Troy was thought to be the most beautiful woman alive in Greek Mythology. Her face launched a thousand ships.

**Friedrichstrasse** a major shopping street and cultural center in central Berlin.

**Rhinemaiden** is one of the keepers of the famous Rhinegold in Norse mythology and Wagnerian opera

**Julia Ward Howe** was an American poet, famous for writing *The Battle Hymn of the Republic*. She was also an abolitionist and advocate for women’s suffrage.

**Per ardua ad astra** means “Through Adversity to the Stars.” It is from a book by H. Rider Haggard and was adopted as the motto of the Royal Air Force.

Am I destined merely to darn  
The socks of **Johann Wolfgang von Goethe**?

*(MAMAH sets it back on the desk and moves towards a chair.)*

*For everything that's built something is destroyed.*

*(MAMAH runs her hand along the lapel of WRIGHT's distinctive overcoat, which is draped over the chair.)*

Am I destined to mend the torn pocket  
of Frank Lloyd Wright's overcoat?  
To be nothing more than a vassal  
destined forever to kowtow?  
To be some well-wrought urn, or some pot of basil,  
Into which a great man may flow?

*(MAMAH moves back towards the window.)*

For three long months he's languished in **Fiesole**  
Laboring over a portfolio of drawings;  
I sit, meanwhile, my pencil in my hand,  
And look back down the valley  
Of disenchantment  
That runs from here to Chicago.

*(SULLIVAN sings out from the darkness, stage right.)*

SULLIVAN: Another brandy and *crème de menthe*.

MAMAH: Even now I hear an echo  
In the built-up dark, as Catherine, dear Catherine,  
Cries 'cuckoo ... cuckold ...'  
*(CATHERINE echoing)*  
To the **Gadarene swine** in the **Cliff Dweller's Club**.

**Johann Wolfgang von Goethe** was a German writer and statesman. His works include epic and lyric poetry; prose and verse dramas; memoirs; an autobiography; literary and aesthetic criticism; treatises on botany, anatomy, and color; and four novels. In addition, numerous literary and scientific fragments, more than 10,000 letters, and nearly 3,000 drawings by him exist.

**Fiesole** is a picturesque town near Florence, Italy. Wright spent most of his time there away from Mamah as he prepared his portfolio *Ausgeführte Bauten und Entwürfe von Frank Lloyd Wright*, published in 1911 by German, Ernst Wasmuth.

**Gadarene Swine** is a reference to one of the miracles of Jesus in the gospels. A man was possessed by demons, and Jesus exorcised them out of the man into a herd of swine, which rushed into a lake a drowned.

While I embroider the **quatrains**  
Of Goethe's high-and-mighty verse  
I hear a higher, mightier voice resound;  
*(mimicking CATHERINE)*  
'There can be, and there will be, no divorce.'  
Though he's a stag dragged down by his own hounds,  
**Actaeon to my Artemis,**  
Edwin's honor knows no bounds.  
But me? Can I? How can I redeem myself?  
On a November evening in Berlin, as the light further dims,  
I look out from my chamber  
At that camisole, those three sheets in the wind,  
At what remains of my life.  
And perhaps I do feel the merest hint  
Of remorse as a violin  
Rehearses from the apartment  
Opposite the high-flown  
Maunderings of a new piece of music  
By **Richard Strauss**. So much for **Avalon**.  
So much for our making our mark  
On the well-worn slate of Europe.

*(SULLIVAN looks up suddenly from his newspaper.)*

SULLIVAN: So Frank has got an **elephant** portfolio?  
An elephant's graveyard, more like.

*(SULLIVAN begins to tear out a column from his newspaper, which he folds meticulously.)*

MAMAH: I stand on the edge of an abyss. I look into a chasm.  
There is no Balm in Gilead, no **holy chrism**

**Cliff Dweller's Club** is a private arts club in Chicago, located above Orchestra Hall. The main meeting space was called the "kiva", in one of many references to Native American culture in the club. It was the haunt of Louis Sullivan.

**Quatrains** is a stanza of four lines, especially one having alternate rhymes.

**Actaeon**, in Greek mythology, was a hunter who gazed upon the naked form of **Artemis**, the Greek goddess of the hunt and the moon, while she was bathing. For his transgression, he was transformed into a deer, and devoured by his own hounds.

**Richard Strauss** was a German composer best known for his operas, which include *Salome*, *Elektra*, and *Der Rosenkavalier*.

**Avalon** is a legendary island where King Arthur's sword Excalibur was forged, and where he was later taken to recover from his wounds.

**Holy chrism** is consecrated oil used in certain Christian religious functions. Also called myrrh.

Nor **extreme unction**

**Extreme unction** is a Christian sacrament in which a priest anoints and prays for the recovery and salvation of a critically ill person.

With which to anoint my **shining brow**.  
Only a cataclysm of burning oil ...

**Shining Brow** is the literal translation of the name Taliesin.

SULLIVAN: ... and true to form following function ...

MAMAH: ... and molten lead, an avalanche  
of fire and brimstone, broken glass and bricks  
taking wing ...

SULLIVAN: ... he lodged himself in my shining brow.  
He was every inch a proud and soaring ...

MAMAH: So much so ...

SULLIVAN: *(spoken)*  
Bring me that brandy, you son of a bitch.

*(SULLIVAN puts his hands to his head, MAMAH turns in a decisive gesture.)*

## ACT II | Scene 1

*A Christmas memory at Taliesin*

MEAS.#

CHAR.

NOTES

CATHERINE/: When it comes to good old-fashioned scandal,  
EDWIN I can tell you ...  
Scandal. Scandal. **Sodom and Gomorrah**  
Wouldn't hold a candle

**Sodom and Gomorrah** Biblical cities that were destroyed for their hedonism and lack of morals.

To this **flesh-pot** of Spring Green.

**Flesh-pot** is a place providing luxurious or hedonistic living

Not since Sodom and Gomorrah  
has anyone launched such an assault  
on everything we hold dear.

EDWIN: Keep your eyes peeled for a **pillar of salt**.

Referencing Lot's wife as she turned to look at the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah she was turned into a **pillar of salt**.

CATHERINE/: It's an assault.  
SULLIVAN/ Now we've Sodom and Gomorrah  
EDWIN *Here* in Spring Green!  
An assault on everything that we hold dear.

*(WRIGHT and MAMAH enter, MAMAH keeps a discreet distance while WRIGHT, in his distinctive hat and coat, greets the assembly.)*

WRIGHT: Good morrow.

CATHERINE/: ... Gomorrah.  
SULLIVAN/  
EDWIN

WRIGHT: Good morrow.

CATHERINE/: Gomorrah. Gomorrah. Gomorrah.  
SULLIVAN/  
EDWIN

*(WRIGHT's public pronouncements are intercut with private ruminations.)*

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WRIGHT:

*(public)*

Ladies and gentlemen, let me take this occasion  
To welcome you to Taliesin.

You know only too well  
The details of my private life,  
How a great misfortune befell  
Myself and my wife,  
How we drifted further and further apart.

*(private)*

Can a man be a faithful husband and father  
And devote himself to his art?  
The truth is that my back is to the wall.

*(public)*

Our love is seen as a serious upheaval  
Of 'conventional' mores.  
I'm 'the very embodiment of evil',  
She's 'no better than a common whore'.

To hell with the 'conventional'.  
The average man may live by average laws;  
But the artist must forge in his own maw  
Some new vision of order,  
An even more exacting moral code.  
For the artist must take a higher road,  
A harder road,  
Through the dark night  
Of the soul towards a necessary light.

*(private)*

... the light, the truth and the light ...  
The truth it that my back is to the wall.  
The truth ...

*(public)*

That light comes from within;  
From there, and there alone.  
For seven long years we have been prey  
to rumors and allegations.



I prithee now; ***Let him who is without sin  
Cast the first stone.***

Let it lodge in the 'Shining Brow'  
Of Taliesin.

For, just as Taliesin is not 'on', but 'oF',  
A gently sloping hill,  
So my love for Mamah Cheney is truly integral.

This is our Avalon.  
This is our Chapel of the Holy Grail.

*(WRIGHT begins to fold his prepared speech.)*  
Now, ladies and gentlemen, we wish you all  
A very merry Christmas.  
We hope you will join us in a glass of sherry,  
Here in this house that hill might marry.

EDWIN: Never mind a 'house that hill might marry';  
When are you gonna marry Mamah Cheney?

CATHERINE: Don't you have any qualms of conscience?

WRIGHT: *(impatiently)*  
The artist must take a harder  
And a higher road.  
And that, ladies and gentlemen,  
Is my final word.

*(WRIGHT pulls MAMAH aside. They sing a descant above  
CATHERINE, SULLIVAN, and EDWIN who counter  
them.)*

CATHERINE/: He's swept us off our feet  
SULLIVAN/ And danced us round and round  
EDWIN Then flung us back, exhausted,  
On the muddy ground.

WRIGHT: Together, Mamah, we will take that harder  
And higher road.

An allusion to a response Jesus gave in John 8:7 when reminded  
of the mosaic law of stoning to punish adultery.

You pierced my heart like an arrowhead.  
You did me mortal hurt.

MAMAH: *(Teasing him)*  
An arrowhead? But this is all so sudden.  
Is it jasper or obsidian?

WRIGHT: Mamah, try to maintain ...

MAMAH: Is it Minnetaree or Mandan?

CATHERINE/: So much so  
SULLIVAN/ That even now we flinch  
EDWIN At the thought of all this hullabaloo  
For the sake of a **column inch**.

**Column inch** referencing the press coverage given to the Wright/Mamah affair.

MAMAH: Can a man devote himself to his art  
And be a faithful husband and father?

WRIGHT: A great man may be true to both.  
He need never choose  
One path over another.  
You, Mamah, are both mother  
And muse.  
When all is said and done  
You are both **key- and corner-stone**.

**Key- and corner-stone** are architectural/masonry terms. The keystone is the top stone in an arch. It secures and stabilizes the arch. The corner-stone is the first corner laid in masonry construction.

*As the kiss of two lovers at night  
Makes the darkness a choir,  
The dusk is a-quiver with light  
Of its heart's desire.*

*(WRIGHT taking a dried rose out of MAMAH's hair.)*

MAMAH: Those lines you borrowed from a masque  
By Richard Hovey.

WRIGHT: The rose I borrowed from *Der Rosenkavalier*.

*Der Rosenkavalier* is an opera by Richard Strauss. “The Knight of the Rose”. The passage quoted in *Shining Brow* is the “Presentation of the Rose”, in which Octavian (the knight) gives a silver rose to the young Sophie, as a token of her engagement to another man, Baron Ochs.

MAMAH: *Ist wie ein Gruss vom Himmel.*

It is like a greeting from heaven.

WRIGHT: And its scent? Is it musk?

MAMAH: *Ist bereites zu stark,  
Als dass man's ertragen kann.*

It is already too strong, that you can bear it.

WRIGHT: Accept, Mamah, as a token of my love.

MAMAH: It reminds me of that night in Dresden  
When we ate roast chestnuts and pecans  
And built upon the built-up dark.

WRIGHT: We built upon the built up dark.  
That was the night we met Richard Strauss.

MAMAH: That was the night **you** met Richard Strauss;  
I was merely a codicil to your iron will.

WRIGHT: Accept it, Mamah, as a token of my love.

SULLIVAN/  
CATHERINE/  
EDWIN: Is she destined to go down in history  
As a codicil to Wright's iron will?

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MAMAH: My heart goes out to Catherine. So pure. So noble.  
So noble, so woebegone.  
Though Frank and I may seem the picture of connubial  
bliss ...

I'm destined for ever to do **crewelwork** on quatrains.  
And now a **Great War** has begun.  
The **Goths under Alaric**,  
Come sweeping back across the land  
To build upon the built-up dark.

**Crewelwork** is a type of surface embroidery using wool.  
**Great War** refers to World War I  
**Goths under Alaric** refer to the Visigoths who sacked Rome in  
410 C.E. under the rule of their king, Alaric.

My heart weighs like an anchor.

MAMAH/: *(spoken)*  
CATHERINE/ I am the birch stripped of its bark.  
SULLIVAN/ I am a raven swooping over the squadron.  
EDWIN I am a hang-nail on a finger.  
I am the eye that looks askance.  
I am a flint that holds no spark.  
I am the rain falling at a slant.  
I am a half-moon-shaped gold **torc**.  
I am a sponge steeped in vinegar.  
I am the hart. I am the hind.  
I am the green and burning tree.  
I am the cloud no bigger than a hand.

WRIGHT: *(fiercely)*  
I will go down in history!

– **FIRE INTERLUDE** –

**Torc** is a neck ornament consisting of a band of twisted metal, worn especially by the ancient Gauls and Britons.

## Scene 2

WRIGHT & SULLIVAN Confrontation

MEAS.#	CHAR.	NOTES
	SULLIVAN: Frank.	
	WRIGHT: <i>Lieber Meister.</i> <i>(They shake hands.)</i>	
	SULLIVAN: Well! I... You're well, I trust?	
	WRIGHT: I'm well. And you?	
	SULLIVAN: So so.	
	WRIGHT: I often think of you perched on a ledge At the Cliff Dwellers' Club Like an <b>Anasazi</b>	<p><b>Anasazi</b> ("Ancient Ones") are thought to be ancestors of the modern Pueblo Indians, inhabited the Four Corners country of southern Utah, southwestern Colorado, northwestern New Mexico, and northern Arizona from about A.D. 200 to A.D. 1300, leaving a heavy accumulation of house remains and debris.</p>
	In <b>Canyon de Chelly</b> or <b>Mesa Verde</b> .	<p><b>Canyon de Chelly</b> is now a National Monument established on April 1, 1931 as a unit of the National Park Service. Located in northeastern Arizona, it is within the boundaries of the Navajo Nation and lies in the Four Corners region.</p>
	SULLIVAN: An Anasazi? You speak far better than you know. The Anasazi were eclipsed By the <b>Hopi</b> and the <b>Navajo</b> .	<p><b>Mesa Verde</b> is now a National Park is in southwest Colorado. It's known for its well-preserved Ancestral Puebloan cliff dwellings, notably the huge Cliff Palace.</p> <p><b>Hopi</b> are a tribe of the Southwest, descended from the Pueblo peoples. <b>Navajo</b> are a tribe of the Southwest, with close linguistic ties to the Apache.</p>

WRIGHT: The Hopi, **the Haida, the Huron, the Hunkpapa Sioux**  
Might have taught the Greeks and Romans  
A lesson in harmony.

**Haida** are a tribe located in Alaska and British Columbia.  
**Huron** are a tribe also known as the Wyandot People. A  
confederation of Iroquoian cultures, whose ancestral territory  
was in southern Ontario  
**Hunkpapa Sioux** are a branch of the Sioux People; a Great  
Plains tribe.

SULLIVAN: I know, I know, I know, I know, I know;  
I know only too well why you see me  
'perched on a ledge'  
of the Cliff Dwellers' Club:  
I am Prometheus on his rock.  
*(SULLIVAN raises his glass.)*  
There's an eagle or vulture feeding on my liver.  
*(He drains the glass.)*  
I know only too well why you see me hanging in chains,  
Full of self-pity, pie-eyed, peripheral.

WRIGHT: No, no, no, no, no;  
When I see you perched on a ledge  
At the Cliff Dwellers' Club  
I'm thinking of your dream of architecture –  
To borrow your phrase –  
'virile and indigenous'.

SULLIVAN: Do you mean 'borrow' or 'purloin'?

WRIGHT: I mean 'borrow'.

SULLIVAN: It's a sore point, Frank.  
*(pause)*  
What of your own dreams?

WRIGHT: I had a dream of a house that hill might marry.  
Its walls are of stone from a local quarry.  
Its roof bespeaks the strength of native oak.  
The hill is a mass of apple trees in bloom,  
Gooseberries, cherries, plums,  
Heavy horses and Holstein cows,  
Hens and ducks and swans and geese.  
Be it beer garden, bedroom, or bank...

They should all be organic, don't you think?  
Form follows function. Form and function are one.

SULLIVAN: A phrase you purloined, Frank, from me.

WRIGHT: Do you mean 'purloined' or 'borrowed'?

SULLIVAN: I mean 'purloined'.

*(WRIGHT moves towards the window.)*

WRIGHT: You were my *Lieber Meister*. I was 'a pencil in your hand'.

SULLIVAN: It's a sore point, Frank.

WRIGHT: Together we would make our mark  
On the clean slate of America.

SULLIVAN: But your ambition ...

WRIGHT: Or your pride –

SULLIVAN: I think I know exactly which –

WRIGHT: Would drive a wedge  
Between us.

SULLIVAN: It's a sore point, Frank.

WRIGHT: *(moving towards SULLIVAN)*  
Is there no Balm in Gilead?

SULLIVAN: *(getting to his feet, steadying himself on the table)*  
Would that there were, Frank; would that there were:  
For ten long years I've cowered in the **Gothic arch**  
Of his **Leviathan**,  
How he would damn  
Me with faint praise, then steal my thunder  
As Prometheus stole fire,  
All to the greater glory of his name;  
There's malice in your magnanimity.

**Gothic arch** is an arch pointed at the top.  
**Leviathan** is a sea monster, identified in different passages from the bible with the whale, the crocodile, and the Devil himself.

WRIGHT: *(turning away)*  
For ten long years I've tried to heal the breach  
Between you and myself.  
You know only too well  
How great I deem you to be. You were my first mentor.  
You were the first to fire my imagination.  
I am the keeper of your flame;  
Why should you hold me in such enmity?  
  
We hold so much in common.

SULLIVAN: Oh? So much?

WRIGHT: So much. The fact that we're both **Celts**.  
I often think of you perched on a ledge  
At the Cliff Dwellers' Club  
Like an Irish high king  
On the ramparts of **Tara**.

**Celts** were a European cultural group centered in the British and Irish islands.

**Tara** was the ancient seat of the high kings of Ireland.

SULLIVAN: Not Tara, Frank. The parapets of Troy.  
The Irish are 'a pack of hounds  
Dragging down every noble stag'.

WRIGHT: Goethe?

SULLIVAN: Goethe.

WRIGHT: Eddie? Why so crestfallen? So forlorn?

EDWIN: For three long hours I've tried to reach  
You by telephone, all to no avail.  
*(EDWIN takes a telegram from his breast pocket.)*  
I've had this telegram  
From Spring Green.

WRIGHT: *(spoken)*  
Well, read it.

EDWIN: 'Taliesin destroyed by fire'.



WRIGHT: By fire? And Mamah?

EDWIN: Nothing.

WRIGHT: Nothing?

EDWIN: Please, Frank. You're distraught.

SULLIVAN: Try not to be ... I'm sorry, Frank.

WRIGHT: What?

EDWIN: Quickly, now. We must be off.

WRIGHT: I know, I know, I know, I know, I know.

EDWIN: We can still catch the 5:05.

WRIGHT: The 5:05?

EDWIN: The train. It's almost five o'clock.

WRIGHT: I know, I know, I know ...

*(EDWIN has helped WRIGHT into his coat; he now steers him out.  
SULLIVAN calls after them.)*

SULLIVAN: Please, Frank. Please don't go.

*(SULLIVAN goes over to the window.)*

I cry out from the **Slough of Despond**

While the **Mohawk, the Shawnee, the Delaware,**

**Slough of Despond** is a fictional, deep bog in John Bunyan's allegory *The Pilgrim's Progress*, into which the protagonist Christian sinks under the weight of his sins and his sense of guilt for them.

**Mohawk** are the most easterly *tribe* of the Haudenosaunee, or Iroquois Confederacy.

**The Shawnee** are an Eastern Woodlands tribe.

Come sweeping back across the land  
That was not 'borrowed' but 'purloined';  
***De profundis exclamavi ad Te Dominum.***

**The Delaware** are an indigenous people of the Northeastern Woodlands, who live in Canada and the United States

From the depths, I have cried out to you, O Lord.

### Scene 3

*The smoldering ruins of Taliesin*

MEAS.#

CHAR.

NOTES

ALL:

Out of the depths we heard them cry again;  
Out of the depths of hell.  
We formed a human chain  
To bring water from the well.

Our efforts were all in vain;  
We did little more than stand by  
As bricks took wing and a black rain  
Fell from the sky.

The door was shut.  
We broke it down.  
We mounted the burning stair.  
Then and only then  
We were truly made aware.

We slid them out to rest on the muddy, muddy ground.  
As if wild clove and mint might somehow absolve the blame.  
Wright knelt by each sheeted mound  
And heaped it with boughs and blooms.  
As if **sumach and sassafras** might somehow ease the rancor.

**Sumach** is a shrub or small tree of the cashew family, with compound leaves, fruits in conical clusters, and bright autumn colors.

**Sassafras** is a deciduous North American tree with aromatic leaves and bark. The leaves are infused to make tea or ground into filé.

WRIGHT: Emil Brodelle...Ernest Weston...  
David Lindblom...Thomas Brunker...  
Has anybody been left out?

EDWIN: Please, Frank.

WRIGHT: For ten long hours they were trapped  
in the hump-backed whale  
Of this so-called 'prairie house':  
The truth is that I myself am the whale;

I am both **Ahab and Ishmael**.  
The truth is that my mouth is full of steel;

**Ahab and Ishmael** are characters from Melville's *Moby Dick*.  
Ahab is the monomaniacal captain who pursues the whale Moby Dick. Ishmael is the narrator of the tale, and the sole survivor of the Ahab's vessel.

So much so, I'm flayed and **flensed**  
And my blubber rendered to boiling oil  
The oil that poured down on Mamah and your children.

**Flensed** is the removal of blubber from whales

EDWIN: Please, Frank. Don't fan the embers.

WRIGHT: Forgive me, Ed. Forgive me; forgive me, Ed.  
It's cost us both. It's cost us both the earth.  
My mouth is full of mud.

EDWIN: It sounds like you might believe in fate.

WRIGHT: It seems somehow appropriate  
**That a fire should crack the boulder of my heart;**  
My mouth is full of stones.

Reference back to saxifrage and the flower that breaks boulders.

EDWIN: I used to believe that some Master Builder  
Assigned Sullivan his rock and you your boulder  
*(He removes a flint from his pocket and hands it to WRIGHT.)*  
And me this little pot-sherd.

WRIGHT: *(examining it)*  
She pierced my hardened heart like an arrowhead.

EDWIN: It's not arrowhead, Frank. It's a broken-off flint.  
Accept it as a token of the randomness of things.

WRIGHT: The **seeming** randomness of things.

EDWIN: The randomness of things.  
This broken-off flint  
Is an emblem of the haphazard;  
It's no more part of some grand design  
Than **Carleton** taking a violent  
Turn and setting fire to Taliesin.

The only reference to the perpetrator of the crime at Taliesin.  
**Carleton** was the butler at Taliesin for a short time. His motive

for the murders and arson are still unknown. He died days after the events.

WRIGHT: No, no, no, no, no;  
Had I not set myself above the 'average' laws  
For 'average' men,  
This might still be our Avalon,  
Still be our Chapel of the Holy Grail.

EDWIN: The Holy Grail's a **stove-in pail**.  
The **Holy Rood's** a splintered tree.  
I view your notion of destiny  
With nothing less than disdain.  
That there is some grand design  
Is the height of self-delusion.

**Stove-in pail** is a make-shift wood-burning stove.  
**Holy Rood** is a Christian relic thought to be a fragment of the cross on which Christ was crucified.

WRIGHT: Is there no balm in Gilead?

EDWIN: Would that there were, Frank; would that there were.

WRIGHT: Is there no holy chrism  
With which to anoint her brow?

EDWIN: Her **brow is ashen**, Frank. Her hand is cold.  
*(pause)*  
I'm going now.

Christian reference to Ash Wednesday and the expiation of sin.

WRIGHT: Oh, please don't go.

EDWIN: I must go. I must attend to the burial of my children.

WRIGHT: And Mamah?

EDWIN: Would that I could, Frank.  
Would that I could.

WRIGHT: Good-bye, Ed.

I stand on the edge of an abyss.  
I look into a chasm.  
*(He ponders the flint.)*

So much for my so-called 'lack of scruples'.  
So much for my 'ostracism'.  
(*He puts the flint in his pocket.*)  
And her scent? Was it musk?

Not musk. Pine; the scent of a plain pine box  
Where she'll lie in this hallowed ground.  
(*WRIGHT unfolds the paper MAMAH left in the pocket. He reads the Goethe translation.*)  
She sweeps us off our feet  
And dances round and round,  
Then flings us back, exhausted,  
On the muddy ground.

(*The disembodied voice of MAMAH ghosts WRIGHT.*)

WRIGHT/:  
MAMAH  
We lie on the muddy ground  
And take her in our arms.  
She's nowhere to be found  
Amongst her thousand forms.

ALL:  
Though she takes a thousand forms  
She's always in one place.  
She takes us in her arms.  
She holds us in a fast embrace.

WRIGHT:  
Would that she might take me in her arms.  
Would that I might fill the grave myself.

MAMAH:  
That something is destroyed  
Is itself a grand illusion.

WRIGHT:  
I will make of their *De Profundis*  
*a Kyrie Eleison.*

I think the **balsam-fir**  
That springs up a hundredfold  
In the aftermath of a forest fire;  
Surely there is balm in Gilead?  
The **Gila Apache, the Adirondack,**

From the depths comes a Lord, have mercy.

**Balsam-fir** is a North American fir, native to most of eastern and central Canada and the northeastern United States.

**Gila Apache** are a branch of the Apache tribe living along the Gila River in Arizona and New Mexico.

All perceived the **intricate Order** in even a pine cone.  
That she is dead and gone  
Is itself a grand illusion;  
She'll be both key- and corner-stone  
Of a new Taliesin.  
She is the house. She is the hill.  
She is the house that hill might marry.  
I will dedicate both field and hall  
To Mamah's memory.  
She is within us all,  
We are all within Nature.  
Through spring and summer, winter and fall,  
We will – we must – endure.  
Would that the **Osage**, bows in hand,  
Might come sweeping back across the land ...  
It all goes back to those cowboy books  
My mama gave me as a child.  
I'll fill her plain pine box  
With wild flowers, **marjoram**,  
And mulberry leaves.  
Oh, would that she might take me in her arms.  
Would that I myself  
Might fill her unmarked grave.  
Why mark the spot where desolation began  
And ended? It followed the curve  
Of an old toboggan.  
So much, then, for the domain  
Of the **Ottawa, the Ojibwa**, the Omaha Sioux,  
**The Potawottoman**;  
So much for all that tittle-tattle:  
They've all gone into the built-up dark.  
Yet my heart goes out to Louis Sullivan.  
In the prairie of my heart, a little  
Bird cries out against oblivion;  
I know, I know, I know, I know, I know.  
A **shrike**, perhaps. A **siskin**, or some such finch.  
So much. So much So much ... So ...

**The Adirondack** is a reference to the Iroquois and the Algonquin tribes who settled in the mountain range.

Referencing the Fibonacci Sequence ever-present in nature.

**Osage** is a Midwestern Native American tribe of the Great Plains

**Marjoram** is a somewhat cold-sensitive perennial herb or undershrub with sweet pine and citrus flavors.

**Ottawa** are a tribe of the Great Lakes region, related to the Ojibwa.

**Ojibwa** are a tribe of southern Canada

**Pottawottoman** are a tribe of the upper Mississippi and western Great Lakes region

**Shrikes** are carnivorous passerine birds of the family Laniidae.

**Siskin** is a small passerine bird in the finch family Fringillidae.

