



SEEKING SPACE FOR LOVE, SELF-DISCOVERY, AND INDEPENDENCE IN *LOVING FRANK*, BY NANCY HORAN¹

EM BUSCA DE ESPAÇO PARA O AMOR, AUTODESCOBERTA E INDEPENDÊNCIA EM
LOVING FRANK, DE NANCY HORAN

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Artigo submetido em: 17 set. 2023

Data de aceite: 6 dez. 2023

Data de publicação: 15 dez. 2023

ABSTRACT: Fostering to present an analysis of the impacts of Mamah Borthwick's relationship with Frank Lloyd Wright's architectural works, narrated through the historical fiction *Loving Frank*, by Nancy Horan (2007), this paper aims to discuss the concepts of architectural ekphrasis in order to delve into how the interaction with architecture can bring up Mamah Borthwick's – the main character – social context and close relationship with the *Woman Movement*. For that, the space within three houses has been analyzed and through ekphrases we discuss how the main character develops love, self-discovery, and search for independence. In order to that, this article is anchored by the notions proposed by Claus Clüver (2019), Gaston Bachelard (1994), and Miriam Vieira (2017; 2021a; 2021b).

Keywords: Architectural ekphrasis. Intermidiality. Home. Mamah Borthwick. Ellen Key. Frank Lloyd Wright.

RESUMO: Visando apresentar uma análise dos impactos da relação de Mamah Borthwick com as obras arquitetônicas de Frank Lloyd Wright, narradas através da ficção histórica *Loving Frank*, de Nancy Horan (2007), este artigo tem como objetivo discutir os conceitos de écfrase arquitetônica, a fim de aprofundar como a interação com a arquitetura pode trazer à tona o contexto social de Mamah Borthwick – personagem principal – e sua relação com o *Woman Movement*. Para isso, o espaço de três casas foi analisado e através de écfrases foi discutido como a personagem principal desenvolve o amor, a autodescoberta e a busca pela independência. Para tanto, este artigo é ancorado em noções propostas por Claus Clüver (2019), Gaston Bachelard (1994) e Miriam Vieira (2017; 2021a; 2021b).

Palavras-chave: Écfrase arquitetônica. Intermidialidade. Lar. Mamah Borthwick. Ellen Key. Frank Lloyd Wright.

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Access this article in the Complete Edition / V. 26 n. 2 (2023):



INTRODUCTION ³

Mamah Borthwick is the main character of the novel *Loving Frank*, written by Nancy Horan (2007). Being connected with the *Woman Movement* since her youth, her fight for freedom of love was intensified in her personal life by the choices she made in her trajectory. She agreed with the *Woman Movement*, but believed their fight should go beyond and embrace the individualism of women. In this context she seeks for self-discovery and independence while facing public opinion. All her social context and personal characterization and development is permeated by the spaces in which she lived.

The objective, then, of this paper is to present an analysis of the implications of Frank Lloyd Wright's architectural works on Mamah Borthwick, narrated through the historical fiction *Loving Frank*, by Nancy Horan (2007). The novel is titled in this manner since it is focalized on Martha Bouton – Mamah – Borthwick who was Wright's lover from around 1907 to 1914. In this way, the novel focalizes Mamah Borthwick's life, which brings up her social context and her close relationship with the *Woman Movement*. However, the narrative's third person narrator allowed this research to probe into architectural ekphrasis and interactions through literature. In this way, this article aims to discuss how the main character develops love, self-discovery and search for independence while living with Frank Lloyd Wright and connecting with some houses described in the novel.

In order to discuss the characters relationship with the houses, we anchored this research in Gaston Bachelard, as he sees "ground for taking the house as a *tool for analysis* of the human soul" (BACHELARD, 1994, p. XXXVII, emphasis on the original). The author also affirms that "memory and imagination

³ This article is part of the results of the Iniciação Científica Project titled "Implicações da relação do arquiteto e sua obra no romance *Loving Frank*, de Nancy Horan", developed from september 2022 to august 2023 in the sphere of PROPE, Pró-Reitoria de Pesquisa e Pós-Graduação da Universidade Federal de São João del-Rei.



remain associated, each one working for their mutual deepening (...), they both constitute a community of memory and image" (p. 5). The main theoretical concept that underpins this research, however, is the notion of architectural ekphrasis (VIEIRA, 2021a; 2021b), as it is used to support the analysis of the novel. In this way, Bachelard's notion of house and home help us understand how to interpret Mamah Borthwick's relationship with the houses described in the book.

Before we delve into the concept of ekphrasis, it is relevant to explain the word choice for Mamah Borthwick, as we will be referring to this character by her nickname. Martha Bouton Borthwick being her full name, Mamah was a nickname given by her French grandmother. As Mamah explained to Frank, she believed her grandmother "made it up because it sounded French" (HORAN, 2007, p. 17). It is important to state that Mamah worked as a translator and could speak many languages, and, in this same conversation, she confessed that it was because of her grandmother that it all started. In this way, since her nickname is meaningful to her personality and life trajectory, the novel's choice to refer to this character using the nickname Mamah will be followed throughout this article, unless there is an intentional necessity of stating different parts of her life by mentioning her surnames.

Retracing back to the theoretical concepts anchoring this article, according to Claus Clüver: "Traditionally, definitions of 'ekphrasis' were restricted to artworks representing aspects of extra-artistic, phenomenal reality (...)" (CLÜVER, 2019, p. 239). The ekphrasis concept comes from the classic notion and defines the act of bringing up a vivid image in the listener's mind through both narration and description. Hence, ekphrasis was employed as a rhetorical device. With the possibility of mechanical reproduction, ekphrases started to be used as a literary tool. It was not until the 20th century that the concept was broadened into, as Clüver writes, "*the verbal representation of real or fictive configurations composed in a non-kinetic visual medium*" (p. 239, emphasis on the original). In Clüver's words: "Ekphrastic representation consists in verbalizing aspects of images or sculptural or architectural configurations in ways that make these represented objects 'clear and distinct' to the mind without literally showing anything (...)" (p. 239, emphasis on the original), that is, ekphrases are responsible for evoking in the listener or reader's mind a vivid image of the configuration narrated.

Furthermore, ekphrases may be interpreted by its psychological impact on the reader. Since it does not simply mimic an object, but rather the act of perception of an imagetic configuration, it may be considered beyond its referential qualities, according to Miriam Vieira (2017). Thus, still according to her, the discussion concerning ekphrasis should consider the emotional impacts on the reader and, as suggested by Clüver, "the observer's gaze ought to be the central concern of the discourse on ekphrasis" (CLÜVER, 2019, p. 240). In this way, he affirms that: "They are not verbal reproductions or transformations of a visual source, but verbalizations of an encounter" (p. 246-247), "(...) of a viewer's engagement with the object of an intensive gaze" (p. 247). What is emphasized here is that the emotional or even physical interaction of the observer with the architectural site is the central point of the analysis.



Because architectural ekphrasis may be interpreted by the way the character interacts and relates to the house described, it is fundamental to mention Vieira's (2021a; 2021b) interpretative model. The interpretative model is complex, but for the purposes of this paper – which involves the notion of architectural ekphrasis to interpret Mamah's characterization in relation to the spaces described in the novel, we will only comment on two aspects of it: the "performative" (VIEIRA, 2021b, p. 7, emphasis on the original) that requires the observer to interact with the space; and the "Contemplative" (p. 7, emphasis on the original) that brings the observer's memories and impressions from a fixed point of observation.

In the novel, it is possible to realize that, as it is focused on Mamah, this character's architectural perceptions are fundamental to her trajectory while she searches for love, self-discovery, and independence. In this way, Frank Lloyd Wright plays a relevant role as he is the one who presents her to architecture, and he is the one who makes concrete her house and home dreams. Therefore, the objective of this article is to analyze important houses for Mamah's trajectory: the *Good times house* – where she meets Wright and falls in love; the *Strand* – where she is able to picture details of how she wishes that Wright builds their house and how she wants her home to be. We should note that *Taliesin*, the house Wright built for them to live, will here be presented, but not analyzed in detail as the other two. That is why this article will examine Frank Lloyd Wright's architecture through Mamah's encounters with the spaces of these three houses verbalized in the novel and how these houses are important for the character's development.

Besides that, it is essential to highlight that *Loving Frank* by Nancy Horan (2007) is a historical fiction. In this way, the characters and houses present in the novel are historical figures as the author inspired herself in biographical facts to write it as fiction. Because of that, the relevance of this analysis also relies on intermedial studies. Since Clüver concludes that: "If the real or fictive image is the product of a visual encounter with the phenomenal world, the ekphrastic representation will usually suggest the producer's way of representing that world according to the semiotic and cultural conventions of the age" (CLÜVER, 2019, p. 240). As it transmediates a product from the phenomenal world, in this case architectural sites, he utters: "(...) ekphrasis is widely considered as a prime instance of intermedial or intersemiotic transposition" (CLÜVER, 2019, p. 246). In this sense, Vieira combined "Elleström's proposed model for studying the transfer of media characteristics between dissimilar media to the notions of embodiment and perspective (...)" (VIEIRA, 2021a, p. 72) to propose "an interpretative model for architectural ekphrasis that encompasses four horizontal and non-hierarchical typologies: technical, symbolic, contemplative, and performative" (VIEIRA, 2021a, p. 72). In this article, we will illustrate the contemplative and performative typologies.



ABOUT THE NOVEL *LOVING FRANK*

Loving Frank, by Nancy Horan (2007), is a historical fiction novel that narrates the story of Mamah Borthwick, who was born on June 19, 1869, and died on August 15, 1914. The novel tells her life from 1907, when she met Frank Lloyd Wright and started her love affair, to 1914, when she was brutally murdered by one of her employees at *Taliesin*, the same fact that was responsible for the house to be partially burned by flames. Although inspired by the historical personalities and facts, it is important to highlight that the novel is fictional: Horan researched about the characters using letters and news, but “took small liberties with matters of chronology (...)” (HORAN, 2007, p. 371), also with some characters, and with some scenes.

Mamah Borthwick Cheney used to live at an old *Queen Anne* house on Oak Park Avenue, which had belonged to her parents, with her former husband, her children, her niece, and her sister. By living in Oak Park – next to Chicago – Mamah and Edwin Cheney decided to hire the architect Frank Lloyd Wright who had designed the house of one of their friends. As Mamah Cheney participated actively in the designing and construction process, her discussions with the architect got deeper and more meaningful which culminated in their close friendship and further love affair.

At some point, Wright invites Mamah to travel with him to Europe and, after a lot of emotional conflict, she decides to leave Edwin Cheney and pursue her love. While in Europe, news at Oak Park and Chicago made public her private life. Worried about her children and sister facing public pressure and also suffering from how she was depicted and from the lies about herself and her family on the news, she finds a book from Ellen Key, a Swedish feminist philosopher, and meets her ideas about divorce and love inside and outside marriage.

Mamah was a reflexive and studious person. She earned both a Bachelor and a Master of Arts from the University of Michigan, being involved with the *Woman Movement* throughout her whole life. After having the opportunity to talk to Ellen Key at the end of a speech she had attended, Mamah offers herself to be the English translator of the feminist in the United States. The two women agree to have a partnership and Mamah travels to improve her Swedish at The University of Leipzig, besides teaching there for a while. At this moment, she lives apart from Wright, who had gone back to the United States to take care of his children and to try to get his name respected again as an architect after the scandal created by the news and public opinion.

When Mamah goes back to the United States, she and Wright start living together in Wisconsin and build *Taliesin* for them to live. Mamah Borthwick finally reaches an agreement with Edwin Cheney and is able to divorce him. After they agree upon this matter, Mamah starts receiving her children every summer to visit her. In the end, one of their employees gets furious at her after she fires him, which led to the murderer of some workmen, Mamah and her



children, and to the arson fire that partially burned their home. Moreover, it is necessary to state that throughout her life, Mamah translated *The Morality of Woman, and Other Essays* and *The Woman Movement* (GUTENBERG, 2023), both by Ellen Key.

The historical figure Ellen Key was a Swedish feminist who was born in 1849 and died in 1926. Key was a philosopher who wrote books, articles, essays, and reviews about many different fields, such as education, literature and art, religion and politics, women's suffrage, and the question of marriage (LENGBORN, 2000, p. 1). Still according to Thorbjörn Lengborn: "The authors who were to have the greatest impact on Ellen Key's educational views were Rousseau, Goethe, Nietzsche, Comte, Mill and Spencer" (LENGBORN, 2000, p. 3). It is also necessary to add that: "She grew up in an atmosphere of liberalism. During the 1870s her political beliefs were radically liberal. She was republican minded, and the idea of freedom was important to her" (LENGBORN, 2000, p. 2). Besides that, the author also states that Key discussed individualism and socialism, contrasting egoism with cooperation/altruism. To this extent, Lengborn affirms that Ellen Key agreed with "Nietzsche's strong emphasis on the rights of the individual and of the personality" (LENGBORN, 2000, p. 3). In the novel, Mamah also notices this philosophical stream of thought when she reads *Love and Marriage* by Ellen Key. She affirms that what she likes about Key "is that she champions a woman's freedom to realize her personality" and highlights that: "For the longest time, it seems there's been almost no discussion of individualism in the *Woman Movement*" (HORAN, 2007, p. 129, emphasis added), emphasizing that Key was worried about "the deeper question of what a woman is and what she can be" (HORAN, 2007, p. 129), which makes the reader realize Key's view on individualism in the *Woman Movement*.

According to The Museum of Modern Art (MOMA), the historical figure Frank Lloyd Wright was a "pragmatist, technical innovator, and independent thinker, (who) designed cities and buildings and their interior furnishings across a prolific 72-year career, reflecting his vision of an ideal American society" (MOMA, 2023). About his life background, he was: "Raised in rural Wisconsin in a family of Unitarians (...)" (MOMA, 2023). When Wright relocated to Chicago, he "gained experience in various architectural practices, most notably with Louis Sullivan, (from whom...) he absorbed an appreciation for technology and engineering—and for Sullivan's exuberant organic ornament (...)" (MOMA, 2023). It was in 1893 that "Wright established his independent practice, (...) becoming the leading figure of the so-called Prairie School of architecture" (MOMA, 2023). Being one of the leading figures of the modernist movement in architecture in the United States, "he drew inspiration from many sources, including nature; Platonic geometric shapes underlying the theory and methods of the 19th-century educator Friedrich Fröbel; and the abstraction inherent in the art and architecture of Japan, where he first traveled in 1905" (MOMA, 2023). Besides all his influence in architecture, in the novel Frank Lloyd Wright has a major influence on Mamah throughout the narrative, since he is the one who introduces her to architectural concepts and the one who has a huge impact on her life's trajectory shift.



MAMAH'S HOUSES: SEEKING SPACE FOR LOVE, SELF-DISCOVERY, AND INDEPENDENCE

As it is possible to realize by the plot summary given previously, *Loving Frank* is focalized on Mamah's life and on her social challenges to find freedom in love for her and other women. However, the third person narrator in this novel allowed the studying of architectural ekphrasis through this historical fiction. Ellen Key's ideals, discussed and translated by Mamah, permeate the lives involved in this narrative and instigate the novel's reader. In this way, the architectural ekphrases connect the space(s) of the three houses described in the novel to this relevant social and philosophical context symbolized in Mamah's pursue for love, self-discovery, and independence through the architectural environments called *Good times house*, the *Strand*, and *Taliesin*.

Mamah Borthwick Cheney used to live with Edwin Cheney at her parents' old *Queen Anne* house. Edwin Cheney was first interested in asking Frank Lloyd Wright to design a project for a new house. At first, Cheney took Mamah to see Arthur Huestly's house – one of Cheney's friends who worked with him. Afterwards, the couple had a first interview with Wright, and Mamah was convinced by the architect and started working with him, actively participating in the designing and construction process of the *Good times house*, as it was named by Wright. This first contact with architecture and with the architect shifted Mamah's life perspectives and she fell in love with Frank Lloyd Wright. This and, furthermore, the decision of traveling to Europe with him was a big transformation into Mamah Borthwick's life trajectory.

Later on in the narrative, the main character visits and describes Ellen Key's house: the *Strand*. This passage shows how Mamah went from only thinking in abstract about a house for her and Frank to picturing how she wanted her home to be and how she wanted it to feel. In this way, through the relationship between Mamah and this architectural site, it is possible to not only analyze architectural ekphrasis, but also grasp and contextualize her social history and personal relationship with the feminist movement related to love inside and outside marriage discussed by Key and translated by Mamah. However, it is fundamental to add that throughout this passage Mamah is constantly thinking about Frank Lloyd Wright and considering that he is the one responsible for designing and building this house. In this way, Mamah dreams about their home, but it is Wright who is responsible for building houses.

In such wise Wright's importance is always present in Mamah's dreams and thoughts as she believes him to be the one to whom she will share her feelings and expectations in order to together turn their house and home into reality. Furthermore, in the novel there is the ekphrasis of the construction process of *Taliesin* – the house they built in Wisconsin and lived there as their home for about four years. Thus, it is also an excerpt that deserves close analysis from which it will be possible to compare the dreams inspired in Mamah by Ellen Key's ideals



represented through the house known as *Strand* to what actually became Mamah and Wright's house and home: *Taliesin*. However, as already mentioned, due to length matters, *Taliesin* will be only presented, but not thoroughly analyzed.

THE FIRST TRANSFORMATION: FROM *OLD QUEEN ANNE* TO THE *GOOD TIMES HOUSE*

Even though it was said that the narrative has a third person narrator, before the first chapter there are some pages written in italics signed by Mamah Bouton Borthwick in 1914 – the year in which Mamah was murdered. We believe, then, that these are some of her journal pages where she reflects about the beginning of her journey with Frank Lloyd Wright: the transformation from her parents' *Old Queen Anne* into the *Good times house*.

Edwin and Mamah Cheney got married in 1899 and started living in "*the house (Mamah had grown) up in for the sake of (her) widowed father, who had never adjusted to living alone*" (HORAN, 2007, p. 3, emphasis on the original). They used to live at an "*old Queen Anne (house) on Oak Park Avenue*" (p. 3, emphasis on the original) and Mamah "*didn't mind (...)*" (p. 3, emphasis on the original) living there: "*It was full of the things of (her) childhood, and (she found) it comforting after so many years away*" (p. 3, emphasis on the original). In the end, it was Edwin Cheney who "*was possessed by the idea of having something modern*" (p. 3, emphasis on the original). About that, it is relevant to highlight Gaston Bachelard's utterance that: "We comfort ourselves by reliving memories of protection. Something closed must retain our memories, while leaving them their original value as images" (BACHELARD, 1994, p. 6) to affirm that this old *Queen Anne* house was retaining her childhood and her parents' memories.

Mamah, then, continues by mentioning that: "*The only thing Edwin (had) never been able to abide (was) disorder (...)*" (HORAN, 2007, p. 4, emphasis on the original) and supposes that it was "*the lack of it, that finally pushed him to do something beyond talk about a new house*" (p. 4, emphasis on the original). She declared that she had "*tried to keep things neat (...)*" (p. 4, emphasis on the original), but complained that nothing could be done "*about a dark old place with windows painted shut and fretwork curlicues cluttering the corners of every door frame (...)*" (p. 4, emphasis on the original) and "*about horsehair-stuffed furniture with two decades of dust that simply (couldn't) be pounded out (...)*" (p. 4, emphasis on the original), which can be interpreted symbolically for not only objects, but also the traditional beliefs of her parents. On account of all this, Mamah was pushed into breaking with her traditional parents' house and getting a new, modern one from the architect Frank Lloyd Wright.

As soon as Mamah and Edwin Cheney had an interview with the architect, "*Edwin didn't have to prod anymore*" (HORAN, 2007, p. 6, emphasis on



the original). Mamah “took on the job of working with Frank, who seemed delighted by (her) tentative suggestions” (p. 6, emphasis on the original). In such a manner, she “started to comprehend cantilevered roofs and the rhythmic beauty of hands of leaded windows he called ‘light screens’” (p. 6, emphasis on the original) and “Pretty soon (she) was part of the team” (p. 6, emphasis on the original), spending “hours dreaming up a garden plan with a landscape architect, Walter Griffin, at the studio” (p. 6, emphasis on the original). “By the time (they) moved into ‘the Good times house’, as Frank had called it from the beginning, (they) counted the Wrights among (their) friends” (p. 6, emphasis on the original). As it is possible to realize, Frank Lloyd Wright was the one responsible for, as an architect, grasping what the couple had in mind and translating it into the construction process. In this way, it is Wright who concretizes their wishes for rebuilding their house.

According to Miriam Vieira, the term medialities is used by Jørgen Bruhn in order to discuss media as “specified clusters of communicative forms” (BRUHN, quoted by VIEIRA, 2021a, p. 61) that “may be briefly defined as tools of communicative action inside or outside the arts” (BRUHN, quoted by VIEIRA, 2021a, p. 61). In other words, still stated by Vieira, “when understood as a process, architecture may be considered a medium due to its inherent potential to store communication” (p. 61). In this way, architecture, in accordance to Vieira, is developed through a dynamic communicative undertaking as “the communication between those involved (client, architect, engineer, technicians, construction workers, and others) in relation to the edifice’s modality modes is key to the fulfillment of an architectural process” (p. 61). In this way, she states that “every stage is accomplished through specific qualified submedia (graphic and technical representations) that not only ‘crave’ for transmediation but also operate as part of a predetermined hierarchical process” (p. 61, emphasis on the original), being one of the first steps the client’s thoughts and wishes for a house. As she writes: “(...) the material modality concerns both the physical materiality and the mental relationship involved (...)” (p. 64) in the process. Because of that, the architect is the one who translates what is in the client’s mind. In the case of Wright and Mamah relationship, they got so synchronized during this process that it culminated in their close friendship and further love affair.

Therefore, as Miriam Vieira highlights: “(...) if architecture is to be understood as a process spanning several stages, materiality will also manifest itself inside the minds of those involved in said process, as discussed by cognitive studies” (VIEIRA, 2021a, p. 64). Frank Lloyd Wright, then, is the one responsible for concretizing Mamah and Edwin Cheney’s desires while they sketched and built the *Good times house*. Besides, still according to Vieira: “In architecture, communication and human experience do not endure virtually, as in literature; they happen, effectively, within a materialized space” (p. 66). In this way, after presenting a bit about Mamah’s context and her beliefs about this house, we will discuss her experience while interacting with the *Good times house*.

As a child, Mamah described herself as “wild” (HORAN, 2007, p. 18): her “father was an amateur naturalist” (p. 18) and he used to take Mamah and her sisters down “a dry stream near Kankakee to hunt for fossils” (p. 18). But,



while describing her childhood to Wright, she confessed that this “worried her mother to death (...)” (p. 18), since “she preferred finding God in the second pew of Grace Episcopal Church” (p. 18). Mamah affirmed that: “It unnerved her (mother) to see her daughters smashing rocks with hammers” (p. 18) as “She was wary of trilobites and Darwin and her father's talk of the ‘human animal’” (p. 18, emphasis on the original). Although also being worried about her sisters, Mamah believed that her mother fretted even more about herself as “she thought (Mamah) was far too... dreamy, (Mamah guesses), or suggestible” (p. 18), and illustrated it by recounting the time in which her father had brought home a telescope: her mother, after taking “a good long look through it (...)” (p. 18) said to her father: “Don't show Mamah. It will be overwhelming for her” (p. 19). All this is relevant to emphasize her mother's beliefs and to understand Mamah's personality in opposition to the traditional social expectations of her time.

Furthermore, in the narrative, Mamah mentions again her beliefs about her mother's worries, now to her friend Mattie. She affirms that she wished her mother had seen her getting married, as “none of (her mother's daughters) was married when she began falling” (HORAN, 2007, p. 74). Mamah had a Bachelor of Arts from Michigan University, and, even though she agreed with Mattie that, at first, her mother had been proud about herself and her sisters studying, Mamah believes that: “She was disappointed at the end (...)”, since “off (they) went to work” (p. 74) instead of getting married: “She came to think that education had made (them) unsuited for marriage” (p. 74). All her mother's beliefs represented the traditions of that time. Moreover, although Mamah disagreed with that by supporting the *Woman Movement* and wished for “much more personal freedom to gain beyond (the suffrage)” (p. 74), these traditional beliefs put pressure on herself.

After finishing her studies at the university, she lived at “Mrs. Sanborn's boardinghouse on Seventh Street” in Port Huron (HORAN, 2007, p. 5, emphasis on the original). During those years in Port Huron, she confesses that “while (she) was teaching at the high school and, later, running the library, (she) romanticized what (she) did by day—handmaiden to knowledge, doctor of the soul, dispensing books like pills to my students and patrons” (HORAN, 2007, p. 5, emphasis on the original). Here, again, it is possible to connect this notion to Bachelard's (1994) as he gives importance to daydream. He affirms that “the house shelters daydreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace” (BACHELARD, 1994, p. 6). Because Mamah's parents' old *Queen Anne* did not help these dreams flourish, when it is demolished and substituted by a modern design made by Wright, it symbolizes Mamah breaking with the strains of traditional beliefs about freedom in love.

At that time, however,

(... she) lived uneasily among stacks of papers in (her) room; a long, unfinished essay on individualism in the Woman Movement, an unpublished translation of some eighteenth-

century French essayist who had possessed (her) for a while, books upon books with pages marked by newspaper clippings, envelopes, pencils, postcards, hair combs. (And even) Despite great bursts of energy, (she) couldn't seem to put together a proper magazine article, let alone the book (she had) imagined (she) would eventually write. (HORAN, 2007, p. 5, emphasis on the original)

In this context, Edwin Cheney started coming from Chicago regularly in order to visit her at the boarding house.

Mamah reveals, then, that Edwin Cheney *"had a gift for small talk and an infectious laugh"* (HORAN, 2007, p. 5, emphasis on the original), which made him *"win over the inhabitants of Mrs. Sanborn's boardinghouse (...)"* (p. 5, emphasis on the original). About that, it is essential to state that Mamah admits that, *"to (her) dismay (...)"* (p. 5, emphasis on the original), when *"he began to show up on Friday evenings, the landlady and her little family of renters (...) cleared out of the parlor so the relationship could blossom"* (p. 5, emphasis on the original). In this way, the literary and reflexive aspiring feminist kept daydreaming about leaving her mark while actually conforming herself to her nighttime frustrations and to the restraints of tradition marked by her mother's beliefs, especially about marriage.

Therefore, when, *"At thirty, after years of study and solitude and independence, (she) found (herself) sharing dinners not only with a new husband but also with (her) father and (her) sisters, Jessie and Lizzie (...)"* (HORAN, 2007, p. 3, emphasis on the original), she also realized that: *"(... in the three years (she) had been married, it hadn't been so hard to be Mrs. Edwin Cheney"* (p. 3, emphasis on the original). However, their strengths were very different, as Mamah was literary and reflective while Edwin Cheney *"was a good man (... and he got things done"* (p. 5, emphasis on the original). These excerpts are fundamental to the reader's understanding of Mamah's conformity. She got used to being married, and it was not difficult, until she met Frank Lloyd Wright.

All in all, taking down her parents' house was also the milestone for her first life transformation, shifting the flow of following traditional expectations, hence, she admits: *"(... she) said yes to a new house the way (she) said yes to the balding young man who kept traveling from Chicago to Port Huron to ask (her) to marry him. After a point, (she) just plunged in"* (HORAN, 2007, p. 5, emphasis on the original). That is why, Mamah wondered if Edwin reflected *"on the fact that it was he who craved the place entirely his own"* (p. 3, emphasis on the original). Falling in love with Frank Lloyd Wright, getting to know his beliefs about modernist architecture while sharing "deep discussions" (p. 16) that "were a stark contrast to her discourse with Edwin" (p. 16) made Mamah take a first step in her pursuit for self-discovery. All that is symbolized by putting down her parents' old *Queen Anne* house.



Having mentioned Mamah's emotional background related to this first house, we will present two excerpts in which she observes and interacts with the *Good times house*. The first excerpt is from the first chapter when, after coming on foot from a lecture Frank Lloyd Wright had given, "She paused on the sidewalk to look at her house" (HORAN, 2007, p. 11). Mamah, then, observed as the "Tiny iridescent squares in the stained-glass windows glinted back the late-afternoon sun" (p. 11-12) while memories of the open house day came back to her mind: "She remembered standing in this very spot three years ago, during an open house she and Ed had given after they'd moved in. Women had been sitting along the terrace wall, gazing out toward the street, calling to their children, their faces lit like a row of moons" (p. 12). It is important to state that this is a contemplative architectural ekphrasis of the house, since the character is on the same spot focalizing the house.

About that, Miriam Vieira's proposal "encompasses (...) horizontal and non-hierarchical typologies (...)" (VIEIRA, 2021a, p. 72), as it happens in this first passage when Mamah observes the Good times house. For Vieira: "There are cases in literature wherein characters contemplate architectural environments, buildings, or even urban landscapes from a specific point of view, without the focalizing agent physically interacting with the focalized architectural site" (p. 73). She continues, then, that: "Here the notion of perspective plays a highly relevant role, since it is the focalizer's relation to the architectural site that will determine its contemplative nature" (p. 73). In this case, there is only emotional interaction with the house, as memories jog in while Mamah contemplates it from a fixed viewpoint.

That is why Mamah, who had lived in the previous old *Queen Anne* house and who had participated actively in the designing and construction process, stops on the same spot she had three years before and reflects upon the house: "It had struck Mamah then that her low slunk house looked as small as a raft beside the steamerlike Victorian next door. But what a spectacular raft, with the 'Maple Leaf Rag' drifting out of its front doors, and people draped along its edges" (HORAN, 2007, p. 12). Mamah then remembers Edwin Cheney joining her contemplative moment three years before, but their perspectives were different as "His face was beaming that day, so full of pride and the excitement of a new beginning" (p. 12), for "Mamah, though, the housewarming had felt like the end of something extraordinary" (p. 12). In this contemplative architectural ekphrasis it is also possible to realize how Edwin Cheney and Mamah had different perspectives towards the house. As we have been demonstrating, they have different personalities, and, at this moment, it is possible to realize that their differences seem to be intensifying as they are getting apart, since Mamah resents leaving this extraordinary experience to go back to her old conformity routine.

The second excerpt is from chapter two when Mamah's daughter "grabbed hold of her mother's thumbs and walked haltingly down the hall toward the living room" (HORAN, 2007, p. 13). In this passage, Mamah does not simply contemplate her house, but she interacts with it as, once "the west windows and the heavy woodwork conspired to make the living room dark" (HORAN, 2007,



p. 13) by this time of the year, "Mamah aimed her daughter toward the adjoining library, where sun streamed through a south-facing window" (HORAN, 2007, p. 13). In relation to theoretical aspects, Vieira explains that: "Since embodiment plays a crucial role in the understanding of architecture as both process and media product, one may identify passages in which the observer, be it the narrator or a character, takes full advantage of the architectural medialities presented thus far" (VIEIRA, 2021a, p. 73), which is the case of this passage from chapter two.

Miriam Vieira continues that: "In such cases, all modalities, along with embodiment, have an impact on the characters' performative actions while touring an architectural site—going up and down, in, out, and around it" (VIEIRA, 2021a, p. 73), and that is why "The reader ceases to be a mere spectator and becomes involved in a virtual performance" (VIEIRA, 2021a, p. 73). Retracing back to the narrative, on the adjoining library Mamah "paused to stand in the light" (HORAN, 2007, p. 13-14). The reader can, then, perceive through the ekphrasis that "warmth felt like joy itself to Mamah" (HORAN, 2007, p. 14), which makes the reader go, together with Mamah, inside the jotting memories as "It seemed that sometimes, when the sun hit her face in just this way, her skin had its own memory" (HORAN, 2007, p. 14), then, "She could be 5 years old again, looking out at the summer fields from the window of the Iowa farmhouse where (she)'d been born" (HORAN, 2007, p. 14). Therefore, it is possible to realize that this passage is an example of, according to Vieira's interpretative model, a performative ekphrasis.

THE *STRAND* HOUSE

By working together in the construction process of the *Good times house*, Mamah and Frank Lloyd Wright developed a close friendship that culminated in a love affair. Mamah and Edwin Cheney had a relationship based on stability and conformity to traditional expectations towards women. About that, Mamah recalls on the preface that he promised to be her anchor by saying: "*Take my love for granted (...) and I shall do the same for you*" (HORAN, 2007, p. 7, emphasis on the original). Such words Mamah considered "*a recipe for disaster*" (p. 7, emphasis on the original) in her journal in August 1914. With Wright, however, Mamah "knew they'd grown too close" (p. 16) when she "found herself saving up insights to tell Frank—thoughts she never would have shared with her husband (...)" (p. 16). It is possible to realize in these excerpts that Mamah and Wright's relationship is based in discussions and that the dreamer inside Mamah craves for talking to him, something she got used to not doing with Edwin Cheney.

After some time of having an affair, Wright invites Mamah to travel with him to Europe. Mamah, then, has a lot of emotional conflict to decide. Meanwhile, she tells Edwin Cheney about their affair and departs in order to visit her old friend Mattie who had been pregnant so she could try to organize herself and make a decision. About this conflict, at some point, she writes in her diary



that: "(She has) been standing on the side of life, watching it float by. (She wants) to swim in the river. (She wants) to feel the current" (HORAN, 2007, p. 35, emphasis on the original). Hence, she resolves to move to Europe. As this happens, her story gets exposed in local newspapers at Chicago and Oak Park being accused of terrible things, including lies, and being criticized by many.

In the middle of all internal emotional conflict and external public disapproval, she meets Ellen Key's ideals and gets embraced by them. In this way, after spending most of her time reading *Love and Marriage* – the first book from Ellen Key she had contact with, "It was as if Mamah Cheney, the troubled woman in the headlines, had ceased to exist" (HORAN, 2007, p. 130). After attending a lecture from the feminist philosopher, Mamah has the opportunity of talking to her about her life story and beliefs. During this conversation, Ellen Key aroused Mamah to consider her necessities and initiatives by instigating her to follow her "spiritual quest" (p. 134) in order "to discover who (she is) and where (she) want(s) to go" (p. 135). Because of that, Key questions Mamah about her job and Mamah offers herself to become her translator. That journey involves studying Swedish at the University of Leipzig and translating some essays from Ellen Key.

All in all, Ellen Key plays an important role on Mamah's journey into discovering her own path and identity. That is why "translating Ellen's essays (Mamah) had found more than peace of mind. She had discovered the state of her soul set down in ink" (HORAN, 2007, p. 137). At this moment she lives apart from Frank Lloyd Wright as he had been in Italy working with architecture there and, when Mamah finished her Swedish studies and was about to join him, Ellen Key invites "her to visit her new home on Lake Vattern" (p. 147). Mamah, then, contacts Frank Lloyd Wright and extends a bit more their time apart in order to visit Ellen Key's new house.

This house is named the *Strand*, which means a "coast, a shore" (CAMBRIDGE, 2023). It is a very significant name, since Ellen Key had confessed to Mamah that she was "tired of the nomad life" (HORAN, 2007, p. 135), which relates to its meaning of coast or shore, in other words, a place in which you rest after a long journey on the sea, or, quoting the sentence painted in Key's house: "'Where life's sea has given us a strand'" (HORAN, 2007, p. 148). Key also states that she is "building a *home* now" (HORAN, 2007, p. 136, emphasis on the original) and affirms that: "When (her) house is completed, (she intends) to inhabit it" (HORAN, 2007, p. 136). This can also be related to Gaston Bachelard's concept for home, as he utters that "all really inhabited space bears the essence of the notion of home" (BACHELARD, 1994, p. 5). These two women, Mamah and Ellen Key, both share the personality of adventurous and reflexive women. They also have in common the fact that they are seeking for self-discovery.

This similarity is emphasized by their notion of home and by the fact that Key's house makes Mamah picture how she wants her home to be and to feel. It is while visiting the *Strand* that Mamah "could picture some details" (HORAN, 2007, p. 149) about the house she wanted "for herself and Frank" (p. 149) and affirms that: "In the past, she had thought only in the abstract about (it



...)” (p. 149). It is Frank Lloyd Wright, however, as the architect, who “would make it a miracle of light and space” (p. 149) translating her dreams into a concrete house. “And she would make it feel the way this place felt” (p. 149), in other words, she would turn it into the home she could now picture in detail.

Throughout this passage, there is also a contemplative ekphrasis. When Mamah was “Sitting in the sun-filled room, a lake breeze quivering the beech leaves outside, she was struck by the honor of being among the first guests at *Strand*” (HORAN, 2007, p. 150, emphasis added), the reader experiments through Mamah’s words the feelings the *Strand* produced on her skin. And it is possible to identify a performative ekphrasis when Ellen Key presents and conducts Mamah throughout the house from pages 148 and 149: the reader is conducted together through the “(‘light and healthy’ aesthetic” (p. 148, emphasis on the original), the “circular columned portico” (p. 148), and much more. Even though it was not designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, the house called *Strand* is fundamental in Mamah’s life trajectory, since it is there that she can imagine her house and home concretely—the one Wright will be responsible for designing and building. In this house Mamah can perceive how she wants to feel in her home and this has a great impact on her as she seeks for self-discovery.

Before heading to our final words, it is worth mentioning that the house known as *Taliesin* was thought, designed, and built by Frank Lloyd Wright in Wisconsin for himself and Mamah. The historical figures actually lived there from 1910 to 1914. *Taliesin* is worth mentioning because it is the architectural environment which became Mamah and Frank Lloyd Wright’s both house and home. Unfortunately, with her life being interrupted by the arson fire, Mamah was only able to start her search for independence.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Loving Frank written by Nancy Horan (2007) is a historical fiction novel that allowed the research of many different aspects related both to architectural ekphrasis and to the social context described in the narrative. This article aimed to present an analysis of the implications of Frank Lloyd Wright’s architectural works on Mamah Borthwick characterization, narrated through *Loving Frank*.

In the end, it is possible to realize that the spaces encountered in the novel – the *Good times house*, the *Strand*, and also *Taliesin* – are full of memories. It is possible to extract from the architectural ekphrastic passages Mamah’s life trajectory and to delve into the social context she was into, fighting for individualism in the *Woman Movement* and for freedom in love, inside and outside marriage. In this way, Gaston Bachelard’s (1994) notion has underpinned this article together with intermedial studies in order to connect Mamah’s trajectory



seeking for love, self-discovery, and searching for independence through the interaction with Frank Lloyd Wright's architecture.

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