The Women

by T.C. Boyle



About the Book

Having brought to life the eccentric cereal king John Harvey Kellogg in **The Road to Wellville** and sex researcher Alfred C. Kinsey in **The Inner Circle**, T.C. Boyle now trains his fictional sights on an even more colorful and outlandish character: Frank Lloyd Wright. Boyle?s account of Wright?s life, as told through the tempestuous experiences of the four women who loved him, blazes with the author?s trademark wit and invention. Wright?s life was one long, howling struggle against the bonds of convention, whether aesthetic, social, moral or romantic. He never did what was expected, and despite the overblown scandals surrounding his amours and very public divorces and the financial disarray that dogged him through his career, he never let anything get in the way of his larger-than-life appetites and visions. Wright?s triumphs and defeats were always tied to the women he loved: Olgivanna Milanoff, an exotic, imperious Montenegrin beauty who was a student of the Russian mystic Gurdjieff and was known by Wright?s apprentices as ?the Dragon Lady?.

Discussion Guide

1. Imagine that you are Olga arriving at Taliesin for the first time, knowing everything you do about its previous two incarnations and the women who inspired them. What would you be feeling?

2. How does Boyle?s choice of narrator affect your reading of the novel?

3. Miriam?s first argument with Wright is over the fancy French meal she serves him. In what ways did his taste in food shape the major events of his life?

4. If Mamah hadn?t been murdered, might she and Wright have stayed happily together? What do you think of Ellen Key?s assertion that women have ?the right to love in their own instinctual way?? (p. 385). Does this include adultery and abandoning her children?

5. Just before Miriam marries Wright, she reads her own translation of a Japanese poem: ?The memories of long love,/gather like drifting snow?poignant as the Mandarin ducks/who float side by side in sleep? (p. 306). Mamah had translated a Goethe poem for Wright: ?Call it happiness!...Heart! Love! God!/I have no name/For it! Feeling is everything!? (p. 352). What does each quote tell about the woman who chose it?

6. Do you think Wright ever found his soulmate?

7. Consider Wright?s flagrant solicitation of loans he never intended to repay. Does a visionary owe a greater obligation to his art or to the social contract?

8. What do you make of Wright?s demand for exemplary behavior --- no drinking, carousing, or romantic entanglements outside marriage --- from his apprentices?

9. Have you ever visited a Wright building? If so, describe the experience.

10. Does Boyle?s portrait of Wright accord with your own notions about the architect?

11. Do you read many novels about historical figures? What kind of entrée does fiction provide that mere fact cannot?

Author Bio

T.C. Boyle is an American novelist and ?one of the greatest storytellers in the country? (Ron Charles, *Washington Post*). He has published 31 works of fiction, including BLUE SKIES and TORTILLA CURTAIN. He lives in Santa Barbara, California.

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