ME AND MY SHADOW: AN EXPLORATION OF DOPPELGÄNGER
AS FOUND IN THE MUSIC AND TEXT OF SUSAN GLASPELL'S THE VERGE

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This study explores the use of, and reaction to, the music used in Susan Glaspell’s *The Verge*. Through close textual and musical analysis, and by extension, historical investigation, the argument is made that Glaspell’s *The Verge* is a virtual “shadow” play, or doppelganger, of Jacques Offenbach’s opera *The Tales of Hoffman*, from which some of the music is taken. The exploration further contends that through the use of the hymn, *Nearer, My God, To Thee*, by Lowell Mason and Sarah Flower Adams, Glaspell also extends a vision of gender relations that reaches far beyond Hoffman’s misogynistic, patriarchal space insofar as it creates a compellingly powerful religious viewpoint: an embodiment of the Christian Godhead, as a precursor to the late twentieth century social and existential feminist perspective.
The dissertation is dedicated to my wonderful husband and eternal companion David, and my two beautiful daughters, Madison and Mackenzie, who have personally sacrificed more than anyone could ever know to help me achieve my personal goals. I will be forever grateful to each of you, now and always.
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INTRODUCTION

The choice of themes, and specifically musical choices, in Susan Glaspell’s play *The Verge* firmly establish her among the first to introduce the Modernist movement into America theatre, and as a revolutionary at the very forefront of the burgeoning American feminist movement at the dawn of the 20th century. Through historical research, focusing on an extensive examination of all of the primary works referenced in *The Verge*, the extent and import of Glaspell’s agenda, both as a playwright and a feminist, begin to emerge in a manner that cannot be ignored. The message brought forward through the use of music in *The Verge* is certainly powerful and forward thinking, even today, but when placed in a historical context the genius and depth of Glaspell’s revelation becomes stunning in its magnitude.

Music has always been a significant part of my life. My mother, Elizabeth H. Moore, was a nationally renowned voice teacher and my father, Leonard M. Moore, was the assistant conductor and a charter member of the Robert Shaw Chorale, founder of the Seattle Chorale, and the original Chorus Master of the Seattle Opera. For my siblings and me, life was one in which music not only played an important role, but was a foundation of family life and values. Opera was not merely a pastime in our home, and each of us learned to love and appreciate this art form early as both patrons and performers. My brother, Dr. James K. Moore, and sister, Dr. Kathleen Sasnett, continue to work as professional, award-winning opera singers performing throughout the world, as well as passing on their knowledge through academe as noted scholars. Though I have a deep appreciation and love of opera, I found myself more drawn to musical theatre performance as a professional vocation. After working as a musical theatre performer and recording artists for years, I returned to academia and it is here I became familiar with the works

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1 The primary source for this exploration and comparison is taken directly from Glaspell’s text as found in *Plays by Susan Glaspell*, edited by C. W. E. Bigsby.
of Glaspell. My fascination with the feminine and feminist voice in theatre first drew me to Glaspell, but it was her specific choice and use of operatic and spiritual music in the stage directions of *The Verge* that intrigued me. I was surprised not only by her use of music, which is unique in her body of work to this play, but also that in all of the volumes that have been written about her by contemporary scholars no academic study or examination of the significance of this particular aspect of her work had been undertaken. It is for these reasons I seek to provide a deeper level of understanding of the genius of Glaspell through an examination of the text and musical subtext of *The Verge*.

Perhaps the most difficult hurdle I had to overcome in this study was the vast amount of information and the presentation of that information in a manner that would be accessible to those without an operatic background. However, in order to fully understand the significance and impact of Glaspell’s work, it is paramount that an examination of the source material and historical foundation be provided. Thus, Chapter One must provide a clear, specific and lengthy definition and understanding of the historic period of music to which Glaspell is responding. A detailed musical analysis of both the Romantic period and Offenbach’s place within that movement, and the musical conventions he employs to support that movement, serve as the basis from which all comparisons can then follow. By fully understanding Offenbach’s opera and its origins within the patriarchal structure of Romantic Europe, an understanding can be reached of Glaspell’s modernist, feminist response and her impact on both theatre and feminism within the American experience.

My study continues with an explanation of the Romantic notion of the doppelgänger, positioning it as a philosophical conceit unique to the then-emergent modernist world-view. Significant to that exploration will be an account of how and why many German writers of the
nineteenth century, nipping at the heels of the Romantic revolution, embraced the notion of the
doppelgänger.

Having established the conventions of the Romantic period as a whole within the artistic
community, I then shift my focus specifically to the Romantic period as it relates to the creation
of operas in that period. I originally felt an in-depth and expansive assessment of the
characteristics representative of the Italian, German and French periods of Romanticisms in
opera, as well as the contrasts of each, would be a vital element to my study. While these
differences certainly come into play when considering the hard-fought artistic separation of the
French from both the German and Italian traditions, as French artists and musicians strove to
escape their influences to form a uniquely French nationalistic identity within the European
artistic community, I ultimately chose to include this information as Appendix A to my larger
study. It is enough, for my purposes, to note that nationalistic identity is significant when
considering that, although Offenbach was a native German, he adopted the artistic sensibilities of
France by writing *The Tales of Hoffman* in the French Romantic style.

In order to place both Offenbach, and by extension E.T.A. Hoffmann, within the historic
context of nationalist identity, a short biography of each provides an understanding not only of
these men as artists, but also explains the environment in which they created their works.
Understanding the origins of these men then allows for a fuller understanding of how their works
led to a philosophical exploration of the overriding principles of individualism, emotion, and
freedom so commonly expressed within the Romantic period. It is here that the notions of the
supernatural and the fantastic, as well as the primary import of the emotional realm of instinct
and feelings verses intellect, begin to emerge as a predominant philosophical focus for Hoffman
specifically and the Romantics in general.
Chapter One concludes with a textual and musical analysis of the Barcarolle itself. In understanding more about Offenbach’s placement of the Barcarolle in this historical context, there must be a consideration of the text, form, melody, vocal treatments, dynamics, texture, harmony, feminine cadence, and doppelgänger found within this piece of music. This theoretical musical analysis also includes an exploration of time signatures and accent pattern, which give a precise value to the rhythmic symbols represented in the Barcarolle. Rhythmic significance then becomes even more apparent when considering the duple and quadruple vs. triple meters used in the opera as tools to signify gender identification and, as in the case in Offenbach’s *The Tales of Hoffman*, to signify masculine dominance, as well as “feminine cadence.” This feminine cadence is manifested through the use of treble voices in the form of an appoggiatura, in which the melodic resolution is delayed over the orchestra’s masculine cadence.

Further analysis of the Barcarolle reveals the “waves” of emotion that place the Barcarolle as a major doppelgänger in and of itself, specifically as it is used in separate parts of the opera and the play, as both a seductive love song and as the underscoring for a violent murder. Finally, this theoretical analysis of the musical structure of the Barcarolle will open the path of understanding the piece which Glaspell so precisely instructed should be played during the production of *The Verge*, and provide a foundation for the examination of Glaspell’s use of this music.

After establishing the tradition of European, patriarchal Romanticism and providing an in-depth analysis of Offenbach’s place in that tradition, illustrated through the examination of his musical choices within the opera, Chapter Two can then focus on a comparison and contrast of *The Verge* and *The Tales of Hoffman*, specifically the significance of the characters in each work. Through this examination there begins to emerge an argument that Glaspell’s play “shadows”
Offenbach’s opera and, in effect, becomes a feminist, Modernist doppelgänger of the patriarchal Romantic tradition which is used as the framing device of Offenbach’s opera.

Chapter Two launches with an exploration of this doppelgänger, an emergent theme in the parallel worlds of the two works. Through an examination of the characters in each the prevalent theme of the doppelgänger, is clearly illustrated through the relationships present by both authors. Both Hoffman, of The Tales of Hoffman, and Claire, of The Verge, have unfulfilling relationships with three members of the opposite sex, in which each of their respective lovers are exposed as manipulators who ultimately betray the one they profess to love. In this example the doppelgänger of The Verge begins to emerge as an answer to the traditional voice set forward by both Hoffman and Offenbach.

By continuing with a close textual examination of each of the female characters found in The Tales of Hoffman and comparing them to those of the males characters found in The Verge, the focus of the gendered lens through which the authors present their characters, and intend their audiences to “see” each of the characters, becomes clear. Offenbach presents three different aspects of the male constructed “woman,” as seen through the eyes of the main character Hoffman, all of whom are firmly rooted in the patriarchal tradition. Glaspell, at the opposite end of the spectrum, presents three characters that, while archetypically male, are viewed through the lens of a truly Modern first wave feminist heroine. Chapter Two draws the parallels and points out the obvious contrasts in the three characters presented in each play through the eyes of the main character. Both plays expose that the three “loves,” of Hoffman and Claire respectively, are representational of the gender as a whole. However, while Offenbach adheres to and embraces the gender representations and expectations of his society, Glaspell’s character Claire is an answer to the misogynistic view presented in The Tales of Hoffman. In this manner Claire
becomes a continuation and drastic rethinking of Offenbach’s character “Stella” as seen through a first-wave radical feminist lens.

Having established the doppelgängers surrounding the primary characters, Chapter Two then focuses on the secondary characters in each work, specifically the “help meet.” Each of the texts presents a character who is, literally or symbolically, the opposite sex of the main character and who serves as a confidant and support to the main character: Nicklaus in *Tales of Hoffman* and Anthony in *The Verge*. Each of these characters encourages the creative strengths and achievements of their “friends.” Both are represented as sexually androgynous with their main purpose being the protection, support, and advancement of the artistic genius in their care. In later performances of *The Tales of Hoffman*, the character of Nicklaus (a pants role) is revealed, at the end of the opera, as Hoffman’s creative Muse. The character of Anthony, though not labeled as such, also takes on the function of Claire’s Muse. He strives to keep her focus narrowed on her creations and tries to protect her from those that would take her away from her artistic and creative goals. He becomes an element of inspiration when Claire shows signs of giving up. He is a continual support throughout the play and never wavers in his only objective: to support Claire and to make her become the artist and creator he believes she was meant to be.

Building on the discoveries made in Chapter Two, the historical positioning of Glaspell and *The Verge* within the first-wave feminist movement in the United States, becomes the focus of Chapter Three of my study. The chapter begins, first, with a biography of Glaspell in order to understand not only her origins, but how she found her placement as a playwright within this radical feminist movement.

With this understanding, the foundation is set for an investigation into the symbolic representation of first-wave feminism, and its conflicts, which are reflected in the play. A chief
example can be drawn in using the text and context to assert that Glaspell’s flora in *The Verge* is actually a symbolic representation of the disparate factions within the feminist movement of the time. By building on these discoveries consideration can be given to the importance of the first-wave feminist movement in the United States, specifically through the lens of the early twentieth century radical feminist group known as Heterodoxy. This portion of my study includes an examination of the members of this organization whose list of charter members include Susan Glaspell.

The significance and historical positioning of Glaspell’s *The Verge*, comes clearly into focus in Chapter Four, particularly when scrutinized in the context of the final work central to this study: the Lowell Mason and Sarah Flower Adams hymn *Nearer, My God, to Thee*. The hymn, by way of historical timing, provides a unique “American answer” to European Romanticism, while developing, expanding and punctuating the international feminist movement represented in the work of British poet and feminist, Sarah Flower Adams.

Adams is a dichotomy within herself, both described as an early British feminist, while at the same time being categorized in the literary tradition as a Romantic poet. Through an exploration of Adams’ life and works, which are few in number, there begins to unfold the existence of a conflation between the ideologies of her “romantic” poetry and her first wave feminist stance.

To understand Flowers’ role, there must first be an understanding of the “collaboration” of Mason and Flowers, as well as the revolutionary New England Protestant reformation of sacred music. Though this reformation included aspects of musical composition, much of what was considered revolutionary was the shift in the intended audience of musical worship and praise. This shift is found through the texts of the sacred music being performed. I explore the
New England Protestant revolution, for which Mason is solely credited, and identify which aspects may truly be attributed to whom, which leads to an examination of the texts of the hymns themselves for examples of the intended audience of praise.

The New England Protestant reformed school of thought surrounded the idea of “spiritual edification,” meaning that the focus in song was being shifted from merely “praising God” to the more “humanistic” focus in which the intellectual, moral, and spiritual improvement of the singer was also a consideration. Though humanism as a school of thought began in Europe, the idea of applying this concept to sacred musical worship by shifting from “praising God” to personal “edification” is perceived as being strictly American and seen as part of a nationalistic stance which lent support to the separation of the United States from its European roots.

The concept that this nationalistic stance is reflected in and supported by the hymn *Nearer, My God, to Thee*, is problematic. To herald this song as a prime example of this reformation and “shift” in focus, is to overlook the fact that the lyrics to the song were written by the *British* poet Adams. Additionally several of Mason’s European musical contemporaries, using their own European musical renderings, employed this very text.

This chapter also includes a full textual analysis of *Nearer, My God, to Thee*. An examination of the music, including the harmonic structure of this revolutionary hymn, which illustrates the simplicity of the musical arrangement, designed as such to maximize its availability to the average parishioner, is included in the discourse of this chapter. The actual analysis of the hymn is included in Appendix B.

It is my contention that Glaspell actually anticipated mid-twentieth century existential feminism. In support of this hypothesis, I include an examination of the religious themes found in *The Verge* by looking at the religious references contained within the text, their significance,
and their direct ties to the New England Protestant movement so popular at that time. By focusing on the themes of religious subjectivity found throughout *The Verge*, particularly those expressed in the stage directions and made apparent through a reading of the backstory of the hymn *Nearer, My God, to Thee*, the core of my argument emerges: that the character Claire in *The Verge* is a feminist embodiment of the patriarchal Christian Godhead as demonstrated in her God-like characteristics of an all knowing (God the Father), all feeling (God the Son), and all seeing (God the Holy Ghost).

I will conclude my study of *The Verge* by showing that through Glaspell’s ironic use of the musical selections of the Barcarolle from *The Tales of Hoffman* and the revolutionary hymn *Nearer, My God, to Thee*, she actually reimagines traditional Christian faith, spirituality, and patriarchy by rejecting the overt and covert gender bias underpinning those works.
CHAPTER ONE: ROMANTICISM, NATIONALISM AND MUSICAL THEORY

In order to understand the significance that Glaspell had on the modernist and feminist movements, specifically through her use of music in *The Verge*, an understanding the rules and morays of the traditions she intended to debunk is crucial.

When looking at the history of Western music, the conclusion may be reached that the advance has been a constant flow of forward development rather than a growth involving great individual leaps. Yet there has been the almost overwhelming instinctive pull by those looking back and analyzing to divide the continuum into concrete divisions or periods (New Harvard 715). It is in this tradition that today’s definitions of the common musical composition periods known as the Medieval, Renaissance, Baroque, Classical, Romantic, and 20th Century (or, now also termed Modernistic) compositional periods are established. Each of these is known and classified by the particular characteristics of the music it contains. For an example, the florid style of a representative Baroque composition is almost unheard of in the Romantic period. It is important to realize, however, that composers living in these periods were not largely influenced by the names that had been assigned to them, but were simply using their ability to express themselves within the construct of the musical language of their time. It is only in the looking back at these times and analyzing them that these names have become widely used. That being said, the Romantic period of music seems to be an exception to this rule. Many composers in the early 19th Century saw what was happening in the other Arts (literature, visual, etc.), and reacted by pushing the limits of what was acceptable, thus forming what was widely accepted at the time as the “Romantic Movement” in music.
The Romantic Period

The Romantic Period of musical composition spans the years from 1810 to 1910. As explained by Jim Sampson in the online form of *The Grove Dictionary of Music*, the characteristics and styles of Romantic Period music are varied and thus contain a number of sub-categories, which are somewhat difficult to delineate and are beyond the scope of this study. It will be helpful, however, to define “Romanticism” and what it means in musical terms and then to outline a number of major traits and general musical tendencies utilized by the composers of this time period.

According to Don Randel and the *New Harvard Dictionary of Music*, the word “romantic” is derived from the “romance,” a lengthy prose or poetic narrative that came into being during the Middle Ages and was the precursor of the modern novel. Since it had no equivalent in Classical Literature, it remained free of the constraints and conventions which governed the classical literary tradition of the Renaissance (714). Therefore, the term “Romantic” came to signify a freedom from classical tradition, and, in its place, a reliance upon the unrestrained creative imagination of the individual. Such is clearly the case with Romantic period music; the constraints of the Classical period, manifested through rules of form, genre, harmony, etc., were largely cast aside, or, more accurately, molded and blended into those elements which would be the catalyst for the expression of the true romanticist’s creative spark. Thus composers felt themselves free to explore the ranges of emotion and situation, and to express these using a broader canvas of musical colors and flavors than ever before. So much so, that the ultimate breakdown of tonality, which was complete by the second decade of the 20th Century, actually had its birth in the middle of the 19th Century. This practice can be traced to

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2 This section is a compilation of general knowledge, as well as information as found in the *New Harvard Dictionary of Music* and many articles found in *Grove Music Online* as noted in the bibliography. Additional information on the nationalistic Romantic movements throughout Europe can be found in Appendix A.
Wagner’s new harmonic language explored in his Romantic Opera *Tristan und Isolde* (1865). That birth was only made possible by what had preceded it, and was founded upon that which had come before.

Political instability also had its effect upon music in the 19th Century. The French Revolution(s) and the rise and fall of a few Napoleons, along with the revolutions in Germany and Italy in the same century, all had a profound effect upon the psyche of Western people in general, and musicians and artists in particular. In fact, Offenbach’s turn to comedic themes in his operettas can be said to be a direct result of these types of pressures, along with a desire and great ability to parody that which called itself serious, (i.e., “serious music”), and Wagner in particular. As a result, and due to other influences of literature, philosophy, art, etc., there arose a number of common traits and themes about and around which much of Romantic period music was built. The following are a few of the musical/artistic traits apparent in this period, contrasting them with what came before. Precisely and concisely stated, I quote extensively here from M. Tevfik Dorak’s fine article, as published on the *Grove Music Online* database, on Romantic period music:

Classicism is conservatism in creativity with emphasis on balance, control, proportion, symmetry and restraint. Romanticism is a more radical kind of expression; it seeks out the new, the curious, and the adventurous. It is characterized by restless seeking and impulsive reaction. Romantic art differs from classic art by its greater emphasis on the qualities of remoteness and strangeness. A fundamental trait of Romanticism is boundlessness. Throughout the Romantic period, the human mind was peculiarly attracted by disproportionate and excessive features. The tiny piano piece and the brief lyrical song, forms
which had been of no consequence during the Classical period, now assumed the highest significance. On the other hand, the moderate length of the classical symphony and opera was hugely extended (Mahler's symphonies, Wagner's operas) As against the classic ideals of order, equilibrium, control, and perfection within acknowledged limits, Romanticism cherishes freedom of expression, movement, passion, and endless pursuit of the unattainable (fantasy and imagination); a search for new subject matters. Because its goal can never be attained, romantic art is haunted by a spirit of longing. The creations of the romantic artist were emotional in character rather than guided by structural rules.

As Dorak goes on to note, this movement was not limited to music, but extended across the arts. There is also a cross-pollination of art forms in which painting and literature influenced music and theatre, and all of the arts began to turn to the philosophical for inspiration, as found in such sources as the folklore and tradition of Antiquity and exotic cultures, as well as the discourse of the day.

The influence of literature is especially powerful at this time, setting a tone for the other artists and artistic art forms within the scope of Romanticism. Nationalism also becomes a force within the movement, with Germany leading the way and, to some extent, setting the tone for the other nationalistic movements that would follow. Dorak notes:

- Romanticism in literature appears to precede the first signs of Romantic music (for example Goethe [1749-1832] and Wordsworth [1770-1850]). The romantic movement was fostered especially by a number of German writers and poets. Their influence on musicians was pervasive and enduring. Weber and Wagner
were attracted by the legends of Northern Europe; Schumann by the pseudo-philosophic romantic literature of his day; Chopin by his national poet Mickiewicz; Berlioz by the earlier romantic poet Shakespeare; Liszt by the contemporary French romantic poet Lamartine and by various French romantic painters, and so on. Thus, a fertilization of music by poetry, fiction, philosophy and painting took place, and with it was associated a further fertilization by the spirit of nationalism. Weber, Schumann, Wagner expressing the German spirit; Chopin, Poland; Liszt, Hungary; Dvorak, Bohemia; Grieg, Norway, and so on.

(1) In terms of music, the Romantic period is largely defined as a time when “feeling came to be consciously valued.” This “feeling” found its precedent in “the music of Monteverdi (Poppea), JS Bach (chromatic organ works, program music) or Handel (expressive arias),” all of which contain the bold, gallant style that will come to embody the Romantic movement. Literary precedence and its connection to the musical Romantic movement can also be found in “. . .the literary movement known as Sturm und Drang (dramatic works of Gluck in 1760s and some of Haydn's symphonies from the early 1770s such as Trauersinfonie and the Farewell). These temporary movements, however, did not progress to Romanticism” (1). Sturm and Drang, “are believed to be the precursor to the Gothic novel and also responsible for some of the more sanguinary aspects of the operas of the period, while also foreshadowing the political upheaval that will come later with the French Revolution.” (1)

As Dorak points out, this shift from Classical to Romantic was not instantaneous or particularly clear cut:
Classicism and Romanticism represent qualities which co-existed throughout the periods of musical history (1750-1900) [concurrent tendencies] normally assigned to one or the other. The change from Classic to Romantic is, in essence, a change of emphasis, not a sudden, total transformation. Musical Romanticism is more style than language characterized by Nationalism, Realism, Impressionism, and Expressionism. It remained faithful to tonality and to metrical periodicity. Emotion became more urgent and intense as form became freer and tone color richer. Remaining mainly tonal, Romantic music became more chromatic, the melodic structure remained periodic but phrase structure became less regular. Music became more poetic than abstract, more melodic than harmonic and more organic than mosaic. (2)

Another interesting note is that while the music moved towards more fully exploring feeling by moving, or touching the human psych, musicians themselves were moving from the model of the courtly musician to people with more public lives in which their audiences were shifting to an upper-middle class patron, rather than the royal, upper-class, court. In this manner the face of the performer changed to parallel the changing style of music. As James Moore stated in our interview, “this new public persona characterized a new generation of virtuosi who made their way as soloists. Examples of which are epitomized in the careers of Paganini and Liszt” (Moore Interview).

The move from Classical to Romantic in music is as strongly characterized by the shift in technique and form as it is by the political and aesthetic. On Classical music great weight is placed on form and order, whereas in Romantic music expression and lyrical content become paramount to successful composition. In fact, the shifts in rhythmic pattern, orchestral tone, and
harmonic balance, among others, are the traits that actually embody and define the aesthetic move into Romanticism. According to Dorak:

In Romantic music, long sections -- even an entire movement -- may continue as one unbroken rhythmic pattern, with the monotony and the cumulative effect of an incantation. A movement of a sonata in the hands of a Romantic composer is a series of picturesque episodes without any strong bond of formal unity…Romantic music is more lyrical/programmatic than the dramatic/absolute music of the Classical era…The massive use of orchestral tone colors is a Romantic trait, i.e., a wide range of instruments were given solo or combined passages within an orchestral context. The Romantic era was the golden age of the virtuoso. The emotional range of music was considerably widened, as was its harmonic vocabulary and the range and number of instruments. The most characteristic orchestral form is the symphonic poem in which the music tells a story or parallels its emotions. The most characteristic new genre is the solo song with piano accompaniment, [as found with] Schubert, Schumann, and Brahms. (2)

The move to soloist pieces, the focus on an epic, or poetic approach paralleled with the desire to elicit an emotional response, were certainly prevalent themes in Romantic music. Much of this was achieved through the actual structure of the music, in which chords found new basis and structure, tonality changed, and harmonies were viewed in a new an exciting light. Dorak continues:

In the Romantic period, the triadic system was exploited to the farthest consequences, chromatic alterations and…unresolved appoggiatura chords were used. Free modulation into distant keys without pivot chords became a common
practice. The increasing boldness of composers in modulating to ever more distant keys, and in coloring, or altering the notes of their chords more and more together with the less frequent use of perfect cadences, the strength of a single tonal center became diluted and tonality started to disintegrate. (2)

The significance of these music theory changes certainly factor into Offenbach’s work, and are explored more fully later in this study, as they relate to the emotional response Offenbach strives for in his structure of the Barcarolle. There are several chief characteristics identified as part of the romantic period, as cited by Dorak:

- Programmatic title, fuller instrumentation, wealth of dynamic and expression marks, performance directions, constantly changing orchestral color, use of the tenor registry of the cello, sharing of motives among the instruments, divided instrumental groups (divisi), frequently varying tempo, remote modulations, frequent use of diminished sevenths and other atonal implications. In piano pieces: large pitch range, use of pedal, octave doublings, brace joining. (4)

In addition to the above mentioned musical traits found in Romantic Period music, other influences such as the use of folk song material, nature as a theme, and philosophical concepts, which sometimes border upon fantasy, can be found. One of the latter, which becomes important to this dissertation, is the concept of the doppelgänger. Literally translated, a doppelgänger is a “double-walker.” It is a double (or twin) of the person seeing it, and is usually a harbinger of some evil or negative future happening, which could include the person’s own death. There have been many published cases of historical figures encountering their own doppelgänger, among them Percy Bysshe Shelley, John Donne, and Abraham Lincoln. During the Romantic period, in both literature as well as music, the doppelgänger was frequently used as a device to portray
one’s own darker side. Examples include Schubert’s song *Der Doppelgänger* (1828) from the poem by Heinrich Heine; Edgar Allen Poe’s short story *William Wilson* (1839); Fyodor Dostoyevski’s *The Double* (1846); Shelley’s *Prometheus Unbound* (1820); and E. T. A. Hoffmann’s *Elixiere des Teufels* (1815/16) and *Das Steinerne Herz* (1817).

**Romantic Period Opera**

Opera in the Romantic period, while somewhat contained within the larger romantic tradition, underwent less of a change than other art forms, simply because of the naturally occurring constraints (Parker). There are certain elements that all operas, musical dramas and operettas have in common, no matter what the time period, and there is no exception to this in the Romantic period. For example, the basic elements of literature based libretti, singing actors, costumes, makeup, orchestral accompaniment, etc. remain, even today, much as they always have. There are significant developments, of course, but the fundamentals elements have experienced diminutive changes. It is helpful to examine the advancement of musical language, plot lines, orchestration, etc. in regards to nationalistic lines, as it becomes fairly easy to see, and therefore note, the differences between German, Italian, and French romantic opera as the 19th Century progressed. It also brings into focus how Offenbach’s *The Tales of Hoffman* arose from these foundations and differences, a more complete analysis of which are outlined in Appendix A.

**Jacques Offenbach**

Jacques Offenbach was born Jacob Eberst in Cologne on June 20, 1819. His father, born Isaac Juda Eberst, left his native Offenbach, a town near Frankfurt on the Main River, around the

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3 This biography is an overview compiled from the works of Alexander Farris, Peter Gammond, and James Harding, as found in the bibliography of this study.
year 1800 to settle in Cologne, where he became known as “Der Offenbacher” which was finally simplified to Offenbach. Jacob was the seventh of ten children and the second son, born a short distance away from the square in Cologne which today bears his name. At an early age he was taught the violin, but at the age of nine took up the cello. With his brother Julius on the violin and his sister Isabella at the piano, they formed a trio which played in the bars of the city. In 1833 Isaac took his two sons to Paris, where Jacob was accepted into the Conservatoire, and Jacob and Julius found positions in a local synagogue choir before Isaac returned home to Cologne.

In Paris, the boys were soon known as simply Jules and Jacques. After a year of study Jacques left the Conservatoire and, after brief stints playing for two orchestras, he found a position playing for the orchestra of the Opéra Comique theatre. He made many important contacts while with the orchestra there, including the composer and librettist Halévy, with whom he briefly studied composition. He soon made a name for himself as a cello virtuoso, appearing with famous pianists like the young Anton Rubinstein, Franz Liszt, Felix Mendelssohn, and very often with Friedrich von Flotow (1812-83) with whom he performed jointly composed pieces. In 1844, he converted to Catholicism and married Herminie d’Alcain whom he had met at her mother’s salon. As a result of the revolution of 1848 he moved with his wife and daughter to Germany to escape possible violence, but returned to Paris after a brief stay.

In 1850 he was appointed conductor at the *Comédie-Française*, but still had trouble getting his own works accepted for production. In 1855, during the Exhibition season of that year, he rented a small theatre and quickly put together a program of short comic pieces and opened it as the *Bouffes-Parisiens* on July 5. The program was a tremendous success, enabling Offenbach to resign his position at the Comédie-Française and turn to composition and
The remainder of the 1850s saw Offenbach with much success, producing many of his own Opéras Bouffès, but also many of his contemporaries’ pieces as well. Offenbach’s productions were so well received that in 1857 the entire company was invited to tour to England for an eight-week season at St. James Theatre in London.

Originally his contract required him to only produce one-act musical plays with spoken dialogue. These restrictions were gradually lifted, and he was then able to compose and produce larger works for the stage. His two-act Orphée des enfers (1858) (the one which contains the now quite famous “Can-Can”) was a tremendous success and served as the prototype for the Opéra Bouffe of the future, though in the meantime he continued to concentrate on composing one-act works.

In 1860 he became a naturalized citizen of France and in 1861 was honored by his appointment as a Chevalier of the Légion d’Honneur. He was quite attached to his adopted country, and many of his works were quite patriotic in nature, certainly a sign of the respect he had for France. He now had four daughters and a son Auguste (1862-83), and owned two homes in France, one in the rue Lafitte, and a Villa Orphée in the Normandy resort of Etretat. The remainder of the 1860s was a very successful time for Offenbach, and saw the composition of many of his best works, some of which are mentioned above. His Opéras Bouffès by now had become established abroad, especially in Vienna, and while visiting there he composed and produced Die Reinnixen (1864) along with composing other instrumental pieces. As an example of his success in this time frame, the Exhibition season of 1867 found his works filling three Paris theatres, along with many of his productions abroad (Lamb, Offenbach).

When war broke out with Germany in 1870 (the Franco-Prussian war), Offenbach was attacked in the German press as a traitor to the fatherland, and attacked in the French press as an
agent of Otto von Bismarck. He took his family abroad for safety, spending most of the next two years in exile in San Sebastian, Spain, Italy, London, and Vienna. When he returned to Paris after the war, his irreverent operettas were out of favor with the public. It was felt that by "turning royalty into a farce and the army into a joke" his works had not only undermined Napoleon III, but were the cause, or at least one of the causes, of his defeat and the end of his reign. In June of 1873 he took over the management of the Théâtre de la Gaîté, and had some success producing new versions of his works. He was not a proficient businessman however, and suffered huge losses on a production of Victorien Sardou’s (1831-1908) La haine in 1874 which forced him into bankruptcy. He composed a Christmas piece Whittington (1874) for the Alhambra in London, and embarked on a trip to the United States for the Centennial of 1876. While in the USA, he presented some 40 concerts in Philadelphia and New York, as well as conducting performances of a few of his Opéras Bouffes. His tour in America was quite successful financially, and upon his return to France, he wrote a short book about his experiences entitled Notes d’un musician en voyage (Notes on a musician’s voyage) (1877).

During the final years of his life he experienced successes in London with Madame Favart (1878) and in Paris with La fille du tambour-major (1879), along with successful revivals of some of his earlier works. However, his main preoccupation was with the score of what would turn out to be his crowning achievement. When Offenbach was a young cellist in his thirties, he had an occasion to see a play entitled Les Contes Fantastiques d’Hoffmann written by Jules Barbier and Michel Carré. Even then he thought it would make an excellent subject for an opera and went so far as to speak with the playwrights about the necessary changes. He saw in E. T. A, Hoffmann the “embodiment of a German Romanticism not yet weighed down” (Hadlock 6) by what he saw as Wagnerist bombast and self-conscious modernism. This was the
German style he had admired in Weber’s *Der Freischütz* and had tried to emulate in his own *Die Reinnixen* of 1864 (Hadlock 6). By the mid 1870s, there was already a musical adaptation of the play in the works by Hector Salomon (1838-1906), a chorusmaster at *l’Opéra*, but when he heard of Offenbach’s genuine interest in using the idea, he graciously stepped aside, giving Offenbach the sole right to produce an opera on the subject (Harding 235).

With Carré having died in 1872, it was left to Barbier to craft the play into a suitable libretto for an opera. This was apparently accomplished by 1878, and work was begun on the score. Several musical ideas had presented themselves to Offenbach earlier in relation to *Les Contes*, and he incorporated them into the developing work (Dibbern 226). By this time he was not a well man, and it took him the approximately three years he had remaining in his life to complete the piano score. According to Andrew Lamb in his article entitled “Contes d’Hoffman, Les,” Hoffman’s driving force and main motivation seemed to be to leave the musical world something which would forever silence the critics of his lighter works and to show them he could compose something serious and dramatic, in addition to the 100 or so comic works he had composed thus far in his life. He died on October 5, 1880 of the gout, which had plagued him for many years, and finally came to affect his heart. At his death, he had completed the piano score of *Les Contes d’Hoffmann* and some 40 pages of the orchestration, far from being complete. Completion of the orchestration was done by Ernest Guiraud (1837-92), a good friend of the family, who also composed music for the spoken recitatives as he also did for Bizet’s Carmen.

Since Offenbach did not live to see the first performance, and in fact died while the production was still in rehearsals, there is no definitive version of the opera. Guiraud’s version, first staged in 1881, took Offenbach’s work and changed it drastically. The Giulietta act was cut;
recitatives were composed as stated above; and music from the Giulietta act was inserted into other Acts, etc. It is safe to say that the first version of this opera was far removed from Offenbach’s vision. Since the time of the first production attempts have been made to recreate Offenbach’s original wishes for the work, but without his input, it is an impossible task that can never be fully accomplished. At the date of this writing (2008) there have been no less than 12 different versions of the opera produced, with the latest being only a few years ago (2000) after a new autographed manuscript was discovered in 1993 (Dibbern Introduction). For the purposes of this dissertation, the 1907 Choudens edition is referenced, since it is most likely the version Glaspell saw when she if/when she attended a performance of The Tales of Hoffman prior to writing The Verge in 1921.

E. T. A. Hoffmann Biography As Source Material For The Tales of Hoffman

Ernst Theodore Wilhelm (Amadeus) Hoffmann, author of fantasy and horror, jurist, composer, music critic, draftsman, caricaturist, and government official, lived a life as fantastic as any of his stories. He was one of the most influential of the German romanticist writers (Dibbern 3). He was born on January 24, 1776, in Königsberg, Germany, the youngest of three children, the second having died in infancy. His parents were both jurists; they separated when Ernst was two years old, his father moving to Insterburg, his mother staying in Königsberg, moving in with family. He was never to see his father again.

During his youth he studied both the sciences and the arts; music, painting, drawing, and he seemed to learn everything quite easily. He entered the University of Königsberg where he studied law and then had a rather unsettled career. In 1794 he fell in love with Dora Hatt, a

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4 This biography is an overview compiled from the works of Edith Borchardt, Don Michael Randel, Adelbert von Chamisso, Mary Dibbern, and Charles Rosen as found in the bibliography of this study.
married woman to whom he had given music lessons. Her family protested his affections, and was influential in having his employment transferred to Glogau. In 1802 he married Maria Thekla Michaelina Rorer-Tracinska (Micha). Hoffmann worked as a Prussian law officer and then held several positions as a conductor, critic, and a theatrical musical director in Bamberg and Dresden until 1814. He recognized that he would never be a great composer, so he turned to writing. In 1813 he wrote of Beethoven and his music: "Beethoven's music sets in motion the lever of fear, of awe, of horror, of suffering, and awakens just that infinite longing which is the essence of romanticism." (Gann 1) These same themes became central in his literary works.

*Ritter Gluck* (1809) was Hoffmann's first writing which delved into the fantastic. It juxtaposed interpretations of madness and possession in a musician who believes that he is the composer Christoph Willibald von Gluck. To pursue his interpretations of music, Hoffmann created an alter ego in the form of an imaginary musician, Johannes Kreisler. He began to use the pen name E. T. A. Hoffmann, telling people that the "A" stood for *Amadeus*, in homage to the composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791). However, he continued to use Wilhelm in official documents throughout his life, and the initials E. T. W. also appear on his gravestone.

His musical background is seen among others in the stories *Don Juan* (1813), in which a hotel guest undergoes supernatural experiences while watching a performance of Mozart's opera *Don Giovanni, Councillor Krespel* (1816), in which a young girl dies when encouraged to produce the perfect voice, and *Der Kampf der Sänger* (1818), based on a 13th-century tale about a contest of minnesingers, in which one of the competitors has the devil on his side. In 1816 Hoffmann attained a high position in the Supreme Court in Berlin; before that time he had suffered from poverty in Leipzig. An additional problem was Napoleonic Wars which shook Europe from 1792 until 1815, and forced occasionally Hoffmann to move from town to town.
His struggle between two roles, as a bureaucrat and as an artist, underlined many of his works, which attacked against bourgeois world. In the story *Der Goldene Topf* (1814) Hoffmann depicted the battle between the artistic world and the philistine, and *Das Fräulein von Scuderi* (1819) was about a goldsmith, a highly respected citizen, who becomes at night a criminal. Hoffmann's shorter tales were mostly published in the collections *Phantasiestücke* (1814) and *Nachtstücke* (1817).

Hoffmann died in Berlin from progressive paralysis on June 25, 1822. His tales, in which fantasy is closely intertwined with reality, had enormous influence particularly in the United States, and had a great effect upon the writings of Washington Irving, Nathaniel Hawthorne and Edgar Allan Poe. They also had a tremendous influence on Carl Jung; he read *The Devil's Elixirs* in 1909, and he said he found its problems "palpably real" and it influenced his theory of the archetypes. (Moore Interview.) Sigmund Freud was also affected by Hoffmann, and wrote in an 1885 letter to Martha Bernays: "I have been reading off and on a few things by the 'mad' Hoffmann, mad, fantastic stuff, and here and there a brilliant thought" (Freud 176) Hoffmann truly was the quintessential German Romantic, and a perfect subject for Offenbach’s finest work.

Detailed synopses of Hoffman’s stories upon which the opera *The Tales of Hoffman* are based (Appendix B) further confirm the extent to which Offenbach was influenced by the stories of the poet and author.

**Musical Analysis of the Barcarolle: Definition and Significance**

A brief synopsis of *The Tales of Hoffman* must be provided in order to fully understand the significance of the analysis of the music which follows. A fuller and more comprehensive synopsis is offered later in this study. *The Tales of Hoffman* follows a poet through his
explanation of three different relationships, or the three false loves of his life. Hoffman encounters: Olympia, a mechanical doll used by his enemies to torment and humiliate him; Antonia, the artist who loses her life to her art and is ultimately silenced; and finally Giulietta, the duplicitous whore who seeks to ruin Hoffman. At the end of the opera it is revealed that all three of these women are merely different facets of the personality of the opera singer Stella, the real object of Hoffman’s desire. With this brief plot synopsis, it is possible to begin to examine the significance the Barcarolle plays in both The Tales of Hoffman, and later in The Verge.

The French term Barcarolle is derived from the Italian barcarola, which means, in its broadest definition, song. More specifically, it refers to musical pieces that imitate or suggest the songs sung by gondoliers as they propel their boats through the canals of Venice. These songs were already widely known by the 18th Century. In The Present State of Music in France and Italy (1771), Burney reported that they were “so celebrated that every music collector of taste in Europe is well furnished with them” (Brown 1). A main feature of the Barcarolle is the 6/8 time signature, in moderate tempo, with a fairly monotonous accompaniment figure, thus depicting the gentle rocking motion of the boat and the water.

There are many examples of Barcarolles, beyond the example concentrated on in this dissertation. Schubert used the distinctive rhythm of the Barcarolle in many of his songs; Aus dem Wasser zu singen (D774; 1823) and Des Fischers Liebesglück (D933; 1827) are fine examples. Others include Frédéric Chopin’s (1810-49) Barcarolle in F# (op. 60; 1845-6), Souvenir de Paganini (1829), and Variations in D on a theme by Thomas Moore, all pieces for the piano. Felix Mendelssohn (1809-47) wrote three pieces entitled Venetianisches Gondellied (op.19 no. 6, op.30 no. 6, and op. 62 no. 5) which are contained in his Lieder ohne Worte, and he also wrote Gondellied in A (1837). Perhaps the most important example of Barcarolles would be
the series of 13 that Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924) wrote between 1880 and 1921. More recently
the Barcarolle is a familiar tune, used frequently by the advertising industry in commercials,
generally to create a soothing and languorous mood, much as would be experienced gently
rocking in a boat on the canals of Venice.

The Barcarolle in Tales of Hoffman is preceded by a 31 measure entr’acte; a French term
often used to indicate that part of a theatrical production that is performed between acts as an
instrumental intermezzo or interlude. The Entr’acte flows without a break into the beginning of
the Barcarolle, therefore this entr’acte actually serves a dual role: first, it serves as an interlude in
between the second (Antonia) Act and the third (Giulietta) Act, and second, it serves as a perfect
introduction to the Barcarolle proper. It is in 6/8 time, one of the characteristics of a Barcarolle,
and the tempo marking is Allegretto moderato, which is interpreted as “moderately quick.” The
form is free, with a further purpose being to introduce, gradually, the rocking rhythm of the
Barcarolle, i.e., an eighth note followed by an eighth note rest, then two eighth notes, followed
by another eighth note rest, and a final eighth note to end the measure which then meets with the
next measure where this rhythm is repeated. This rocking back and forth rhythm is first hinted at
in measure 5, is more fully developed in measures 10, 11, and 12, and enters permanently into
the piece in measure 20, remaining present until the end of the Barcarolle (see Figure 1). Note
that for the purposes of this study each Figure is referenced as shown in the original score, with
measure numbering added in this study for clarity, because Schirmer does not provide measure
numbers in the original score.

In addition to the rhythm being introduced, an important melodic motif is unveiled for the
first time: beginning on one pitch, moving up one whole step, repeating that pitch and moving
back down to the first pitch in measures 10-11, as also evidenced in the following
Another distinctive quality of the entr’acte is the introduction of a melody in the bass clef which ultimately leads into the new key of the actual Barcarolle demonstrated in measure 32 of the original score. This unique melody begins on the root note of the chord, goes down one half step, and then returns to the beginning note. The melody then outlines the chord all the way up to an octave and a third above the starting pitch, which all occurs in sixteenth notes. Finally the melody descends step-wise in syncopated eighth-sixteenth rhythm until coming to rest on the fifth scale degree (again, see Figure 1, above). While to the non-musically inclined this may seem confusing, the significance is extremely important in that this pattern defines and sets the stage for the emotional base of the piece and serves as the catalyst for all that comes later.

When this melody is first heard in measures 7 and 8, it outlines a b minor chord (see Figure 2). Its next appearance is in measures 15 and 16, where it outlines an F# seven chord (the dominant of b minor). Here it has a small change, in which the final note of the measure ascends to the sixth scale degree of the chord outlined. The next time the melody is heard is in measures 21 and 22, and this time it outlines an A 9 chord, which is the dominant of the third scale degree.
(D), which is also the key the actual Barcarolle is in. This structure sets up the melodic base that
mimics the lapping of the water on the bow of the boat. It also becomes a very effective chord
leading to the transposition. However, this time the melody, found within the chord, is truncated,
which means the final note is altogether missing. With this rise in pitch, there is an
establishment of not only the rise of higher water against the “boat,” but also a rise in the higher
waves of emotion being elicited from the listener. This same pattern also exists in the rise and
fall of human sexuality, in which the wave pattern is established as climax is sought and
achieved. This can specifically be related to The Verge, as this melody is first introduced during
a conversation about a sexual encounter. The music in Act I of The Verge, which is only inferred
at this point by the humming of Claire, mimics the rise, build and climax of sex while the
characters are discussing the act itself. Later the melody takes on a more sinister tone as it serves
as the introduction to the murder in the final act of the play, and it is in this moment that the song
itself becomes a doppelgänger of the same music used by Offenbach as a love song.

The melody returns in measure 24, with only the first part of the melody being heard, in
which it rises up each time and begins a third higher than the last time, while still outlining the
same chord, with this pattern repeated in measure 25. The final iteration begins in measure 26,
but it is elongated this time. After moving up to the top note, it descends chromatically for the
most part, and slows down rhythmically until it slowly settles on the low D in measure 32, which
is the beginning of the Barcarolle (see Figure 2; also Figure 5). With the mood set for the
listener previously by the musicians, the return of the melody in measures 24-26 described
above, serves to prepare the audience, emotionally, for the introduction of the vocals.
The harmony of the Entr’acte is fairly simple. It begins with a trilled f# marked piano (soft) for two measures, which creates a feeling of ambiguity, since there is no key apparent. However, the listener quickly hears that the key is actually b minor, since the chords b minor, F# Major and b minor (i, V7, i) quickly follow each other at the end of the second measure, firmly establishing the key (see Figure 3). By introducing this musical ambiguity, the listener’s ear is drawn into the piece, seeking a definitive answer to the musical question being posed. Trills are often used in this manner to reflect the song of a bird, which is often tied to parallels of love and freedom. In
this manner the audience is placed not only in the metaphorical “boat,” but also in the environment of nature itself. This also could be interpreted as the calls of love birds, calling to each other across the vast space of nature, and inviting the listener to join in this environment. In *The Verge*, Claire is surrounded by house guests when she introduces this melody through humming. In this setting she is able to innocently hum in front of her guests, while in truth making a specific statement, or love call, to her lover, Dick.

In fact, there is no harmonic movement from this i-V7-i relationship, moving back and forth from tonic to dominant to tonic until measure 17 (see Appendix D), where the only pitches sounding are a D in the bass clef and an F# in the treble clef, which could be either an i chord or a III chord. Either could fit harmonically, which is interesting because of the eventual transposition to D major, the mediant of b minor. After this ambiguous chord, there follows two measures of alternating chords, a vii diminished seventh chord moving back and forth to an i (bminor) chord with an added ninth, because of the melodic motif previously mentioned. All other notes in these chords remain the same; simply moving from the A up to the B in that rocking rhythm changes the chord (see Figure 4). This holds import because it establishes the pattern that will continue through the entire piece of music, which supports the theory of “waves” by supplying the rocking rhythm within the pattern structure of the chord progression.

![Figure 4: Measures 18-19](image)
Measure twenty marks the first time the V7/III (A7) chord is heard, the chord most necessary, and which must be heard, in order to make a seamless transposition to D Major. After two measures of this chord sounding, there is a reiteration of the two measures depicted in Figure 4, then, in measure 24 (see Appendix C), a couple of things happen. First, harmonically the A7 chord has to move again, with the chord essentially remaining unchanged until it resolves to D major in measure 32, at the beginning of the Barcarolle. Next, the piece incorporates a rocking motion in the treble clef, the changing from A to B and back again; harmonically, the purpose of this is to change the A7 chord to an A9 chord; still it serves as the dominant to D major. This rocking from A to B in rolling chords in the treble clef doesn’t stop until the very end of the Barcarolle, at measure 87. It is this pattern that helps to give the piece its Barcarolle quality. Finally, the rocking, rolled chords are an accompaniment to the melody which was described above (see Figure 5). In this section, the feminine voices are, as is usually the case, found in the treble range, where the melodic pattern is established. In the meantime the bass clef, the location of most male voices, establishes the pattern of movement, thus the men are literally moving the women along, musically, in this section of the opera. This “movement” proves itself important in The Verge as well. As with any seduction, real or operatic, there is a pattern in the give-and-take of the “conversation” and “movement” of the seduction in which power shifts from one gender to the other. This pattern of seduction is also established throughout the music and text of The Verge and is discussed thoroughly in chapter two.
The Barcarolle proper begins in measure 32 with a tempo change that has been gradually introduced at the end of the Entr’acte (see Figure 5, above). The tempo is now Moderato, a more relaxed tempo than the Entr’acte, which, with the transposition to the new key of D major, serves to depict floating upon the waves of the water, and the movement of the boat.

The overall form of the Barcarolle is binary; A B B’ A’ with a coda comprising the ending. The musical binary is also a reflection of the gender binary so central to both works, in which there is a statement-response pattern of sexual and sensual communications.

Figure 5: Measures 23-31
Note the rocking back and forth of the rolled chords in the treble clef, over the melody in the bass clef.

Form
The A section is contained in measures 34 through 41, the B section is from measure 42 through 49, B' lasts from measure 50 through 62, and the A' section is from 63 through the cadence in measure 78. The coda is from measure 78 though the end of the piece, measure 91. The number of measures for each individual section therefore, is 8, 8, 13, and 16, respectively, with thirteen measures for the coda which will be treated separately, since it serves a specific purpose. The A and B sections are each made up of two repeated four-measure phrases (see Figure 6).

The B' section is quite different; the reason it is called B' is that it begins exactly like the B section, but then goes through different melodic and harmonic variations before coming back and setting up the recap of the A section. It is comprised of two four-measure phrases just as the first two sections, however there is a five-measure section added, in which Offenbach uses repetitions of the text and harmonically comes back to the original key and begins the A section again. The A' section begins exactly as the first A section; in fact it is identical melodically and harmonically, however the texture is thickened by adding the chorus, who hum their pitches that simply outline the chords and bolster the structure of the harmony. Another significant difference is the final note which rises a minor third instead of staying on the same note as in the original A section. This begins an eight-measure segment that allows for further development and a lead up to the coda, which ends the piece. This A B A B pattern is comprised of sections in which Guiletta and Nicklas sing separately, combined with sections where the two voices come together in a duet. Thus the statement-response format once again mimics a courtship, but also brings great power to the musical union of the two voices, which also implies the power of the sexual union and climax.
A final interesting note about the overall form of this work; the form A B B A happens to coincide with the actual notes which depict the rocking motion of the boat (again, see Figure 6 and notice the A B B A played in octaves, in the treble clef, and in every measure). In fact, forty-three of the fifty-five measures in the Barcarolle that contain the rolled chords also contain within them the notes A B B A. It should be noted that within 80 percent of the measures of this piece there are notes that correspond to the overall form of the work. It is interesting to ponder
whether this was an intentional act on Offenbach’s part, or just strange and fortuitous coincidence.

**Melody**

The melody of the Barcarolle is at the same time graceful and sinuous. It is largely contiguous, meaning that there are very few intervals involving more than one step. In section A, again referring to Figure 6 above, in the eight-measure section, out of thirty possible intervals there are only four that are greater than a step in width, and those are only a minor third. The contiguous nature of this melody, along with the rhythm which is in imitation of the accompaniment under it, and certainly the text, all serve to give it its sensual nature. The melodic contour is fairly static. In section B, the same melodic constraints are followed; however, there are *no* intervals greater than a whole step in the eight-measure section. Again, this serves to bolster the underlying sensuous nature of the piece (see Figure 7).

![Figure 7: Measures 42-49](image)

The contour of the melody in this section resembles waves; starting on one pitch (A), gradually moving up to a top pitch (D), and gradually moving down until a return to the beginning pitch. This “wave” movement is very characteristic of the overall melodic/harmonic contour of the Barcarolle. Even in section A, where the melody does not seem to be following this pattern, the underlying harmony does follow the pattern. Thus this constant pattern creates
harmonic tension and then releases it by beginning on a D chord, the chord of most rest in the key of D, then moving to the dominant, A7 and adding a 9th, doing this for another measure to create added tension, and then coming back to rest on a D chord.

Continuing with the melodic analysis, in section B', where most of the harmonic action occurs, it would be expected to find a greater number of larger intervals in the melody. This, in fact, is not the case; the melody continues to be overwhelmingly contiguous and connected. Out of the thirty-two possible intervals, there are only four greater than a step: two major thirds and two perfect fourths (see Figure 8).

![Figure 8: Measures 50-61](image)

The melodic contour of this section also follows the “wave” pattern, both on a large scale and on a small scale. On a large scale, the melody begins on an A, gradually ascends to an E on the repeated word “embrasés,” and then gradually descends and ends on the same note as it began. On a small scale, waves can be seen within this larger framework, on the words “Verseznous vos caresses,” then on “Donnez nous vos baisers,” and on each of the repetitions of “vos baisers” (again, see Figure 8). More simply, the melody contains a dominant wave pattern with big interval skips occurring over several measures before the return to the beginning note and a submissive wave pattern with smaller interval skips occurring before the first-note return.
Again, the give-and-take pattern of seduction, or specifically the patterns of dominance and submission, are supported in the music of the opera called for in Glaspell’s stage directions for *The Verge*.

In the A’ section, the original melody returns and is unchanged until the last note, which sets up the eight-measure fragment that brings the piece to the coda. In this portion also the melody continues to be step-wise, however it rises to its highest point in the piece on the word “ivresseses,” holding the note before gradually descending and ending this fragment which sets up the coda (see Figure 9). Notice how the wave pattern emerges again on the words “Souris ânos ivresse, Nuit d’amour.”

![Image of musical notation]

**Figure 9: Measures 67-78**

The melody of the coda section is altogether different from the music that has proceeded it. In contrast to the rest of the Barcarolle, it consists of almost nothing but wider intervals. Also, unlike the previous melodic analysis where it was sufficient to analyze the main melody since it was easy to determine who was singing, the melody in the coda section must be analyzed taking both voices into account, remembering that the Barcarolle ultimately becomes a duet between Giulietta and Nicklas/Muse. Out of a possible thirty-seven intervals, thirty-two are of a distance greater than a whole step, with many of them being fourths and fifths, and also includes
two leaps of a seventh. In the coda, 87 percent of the intervals are greater than a whole step, which is diametrically opposed to the previous sections. Another difference is that there is no text in the coda; both the soloists and the chorus are instructed to sing “Ah” until the end.

The melodic contour again follows the wave pattern in both the solo voices, though it is more disjointed than in previous sections. There are many wave patterns to be seen, both large scale and small scale (see Figure 10).

![Figure 10: Measures 79-91](image)

A reason for the increase in the frequency of intervals in this section lies in the fact that there is no text, simply the exclamation “Ah,” which portrays an ecstasy beyond words, in which words are insufficient in the expression of feelings so deep that words cannot describe them and the only reaction left is “Ah!”. In this manner, our singers are first building the wave and intensity of the sexual act, then, at the height of their musical “bliss” achieving climax, and
finally quieting into the “after glow” of the post-coital moments. The two also end the piece in musical unison, and thus in an emotional and mutually shared climax.

**Treatment of the Vocal Parts**

It is significant, and important to note, that it is not a solo for Giulietta alone, but in fact culminates in a duet between Giulietta and Nicklas. The personification of Hoffmann’s Muse, Nicklas is seen throughout the opera as a confidant, protector, instructor, guardian angel, and always a friend to Hoffman. In this manner Nicklas is somewhat of a paradox, having just been established as the “man,” or pants role, in a climactic song with Giulietta, and at the same time serving as Hoffman’s “Muse” in an androgynous, or feminized role which is revealed at the end of the opera when he is exposed as Hoffman’s Muse. This paradox establishes Nicklas as a doppelgänger, in and of himself, in which he at once supports and promotes Hoffman in his conquests of women, but also demands, as the Muse, that Hoffman be faithful to and only love him/her.

It is interesting that it is the androgynous Nicklas who sings with Hoffman’s love interest Giulietta, and who actually begins the Barcarolle by singing the first verse, at the point in which Hoffmann is regaling his adoring audience with an explanatory tale on the pull and attraction of physical love. However, this connection becomes less difficult to understand when taken in the context of the entire opera as a whole. At the beginning of Act IV, Hoffmann has been through the embarrassing situation with Olympia, and the heart wrenching death of his love, Antonia. He is now prepared to explore the ultimate sacrifice he must make to finally experience physical love, in this case the loss of his literal reflection, and thus the loss of his honor, by committing the murder of Schlemiel. As a result of these events, Nicklas reverts to a role of protector and
nurturer in which he must once again save Hoffman, this time from the approaching authorities, and ultimately, at the conclusion these trials, restore Hoffman to his former glory, that of a reborn poet brought to life by his Muse, who assures Hoffmann that he is loved, and demands her complete and total devotion. When this occurs in the Epilogue, Hoffman realizes his Muse has always been there for him and in turn he agrees to gives himself completely, perhaps for the first time, and sings “O dieu, de quelle ivresse,” the exact words and music which he so passionately sang to Giulietta in the previous Act. Thus Giulietta and Nicklas are connected by both music and by Hoffmann’s love. It can then be argued that in the Barcarolle duet Nicklas is not, truly, the “man” with a romantic interest in Giulietta, but the “Muse in pants” acting on behalf of, and in some ways as a surrogate for, Hoffman. The lusty duet only serves as a point in which both characters are more closely aligned to their love for Hoffman, and not each other. The main distinction here, however, is that while the love of Nicklas/Muse is sincere, Giulietta’s love for Hoffman is the false love of the manipulative and materialistic Hoffmanesque “Woman.”

The musical treatment of the duet by Offenbach enforces this theory. Nicklas begins the Barcarolle by singing section A alone. Giulietta joins him in section B, beginning on the same note (unison) and breaking apart on the words “et sans retour”. This is repeated in the next four-measure phrase as well. In fact, Offenbach uses unison notes often throughout the Barcarolle to create a feeling of one voice, or person, breaking into two and coming together again (see Figure 11). In this manner Giulietta and Nicklas are expressing not one love for each other united, but two voices united in their love, both real and fabricated, of Hoffman.
In the B' section the voices echo one another, with Giulietta leading the way for the first part of the segment, and Nicklas leading in the second part, as seen in Figure 12.

In section A' the voices are in unison through the entire reiteration of the melody, until measure 77, see Figure 13, where Nicklas begins and Giulietta takes the melody from him on the same note. Nicklas then imitates her melody one measure later, until they come to unison.
octaves on the word “d’amour!” which is the beginning of the coda (again see Figure 13). In effect both have hit a point of unison in their “love.”

In the coda, the replication of the melody between characters is mirrored from the earlier section and is continued until the end of the piece. The first entrance to the coda is made by Giulietta, and can be seen in the final measure of Figure 13, above. Nicklas enters in the following measure in similar rhythm, but much lower in pitch (see Figure 14). The characteristic quality of the melody sung during the coda is that the vocal part begins on an eighth note and ascends to a held note, which is either a quarter note, dotted quarter note, or a tied quarter-dotted quarter note. Again, the overall melodic contour in this segment is a wave, which begins on a neutral note, ascends to a climactic note, then gradually descends in pitch until it comes to rest, this time, not on the note on which it began, but the final note of rest, a D for both voices, once again blending in unison, in measure 87 (again see Figure 14).

Figure 13: Measures 71-78
Dynamics

The dynamic levels suggested by the composer follow a familiar pattern. The Barcarolle begins with the dynamic marking “pp” meaning pianissimo, or very soft. There is no dynamic marking until measure 63, which is the beginning of the A’, when the chorus enters humming, and the first melody is heard once again. This does not mean that there is no dynamic variation in the preceding thirty-two measures; it only means that the composer (or editor) chose not to put one in. Musically, there would be a strong crescendo and then a decrescendo spanning the measures 50-62 (see Figure 15), since melodically and harmonically there is created a certain amount of tension, and then the release of that tension. The fact that the dynamic markings are absent does not mean that the piece will not be performed as such, but that because the intent and
emotional line is so obvious it is not worthy of note, as any composer or musician would realize that it is part of the overall and logical lyric line.

Figure 15: Measures 50-61
Note the absence of dynamic markings.
The dynamic marking at the beginning of the A' section is again marked “pp” as it was at the beginning of the Barcarolle. At measure 71 it is “p” (soft), with a crescendo in measure 73 to a “f” (loud) marking in measure 74. Then a gradual decrescendo is marked over the next several measures until a “pp” is given at the beginning of the coda at measure 78 going into measure 79. When the chorus comes in at measure 83, all voices have a “ppp” (very, very soft) marking, which is reiterated in measure 87 in the orchestra until the end (see Figure 16). Again, this goes hand in hand with the melodic contours and harmonic progressions, in which there is visually and aurally the feeling of a wave motion representing the sexual and emotional wave of the characters.

![Figure 16: Measures 83-91](image)

Note the “ppp” marking
**Texture**

In musical terms, the texture of a piece is determined by the “weight” of the music. Quite simply it can be compared to cloth in that some fabrics are quite simple in structure, as light-weave cotton, while others are quite dense, as tight-woven wool. In *The Tales of Hoffman* there is a texture that is somewhat “light,” but that also shifts during the Barcarolle to a “heavier,” or rather more dense, structure containing great depth.

Ironically the idea of the “weight” of musical texture is mirrored in *The Verge* itself. The play was originally received by audiences and critics as being a “light” endeavor without real weight or consequence and certainly not worthy of being taken seriously. It is only in more recent years that the “texture” of the play has been recognized by contemporary scholars of modernity who have begun to view the work through a decidedly different lens than previous critics, scholars and audiences, finding also in it a “heavier” structure laden with meaning and depth.

Returning to the Barcarolle, the texture, while being simple, does change somewhat throughout the piece, as does *The Verge*. The Barcarolle begins with chords sounding in the treble clef on beats 1, 3, 4, and 6 of each measure, marked to be played with a rolling motion of the fingers from bottom to top. In the bass clef, there is a single note sounded on beat one, and a simple chord sounded on beat three of each measure. That texture continues until measure 58, where the chords in the treble clef remain the same, but the bass clef support is arpeggiated, i.e., a chord is outlined by playing a series of pitches as in Figure 17. Note that in two of these measures there are two notes sounding on the first beat.
The next change in texture occurs in measure 63, at the beginning of the A' section. Again, the chordal and rhythmic structure in the treble clef remains unchanged. In the bass clef, staccato tones that outline the chord sound on beats 1, 2, 3, and 4, with an appoggiatura on the first note sounding an octave below. In addition to this change in the bass clef, the chorus enters, humming a chordal accompaniment. This remains the texture until the coda (see Figure 18).

Figure 17: Measures 54-61
Note the difference between the first line and the second line in the bass clef.

Figure 18: Measures 61-70
The only change in the texture in the coda is a more fully arpeggiated chord in the bass clef, and then finally, the characteristic rolled chords, rocking back and forth in the treble clef come to an end as the sound slowly subsides with one tone sounding in the bass clef on each beat (see Figure 19).

![Figure 19: Measures 83-91](image)
The last nine measures of the accompaniment.

**Harmony**

The harmony of the Barcarolle is, again, fairly simple. Offenbach did not push the limits of what was harmonically in use at the time he wrote this piece, but rather took the elements which were available to him and put them together in such a way to create a simple beautiful, effective piece of art.

The work begins in D Major. The moving up from A to B and back down again which has been pointed out previously has the harmonic effect of moving from the tonic (I) to the submediant (vi) over a tonic (I) chord, and back again. In the measures where a dominant (V) is used, the effect is simply to add a ninth, i.e., an A7 chord becomes an A9 chord and back again. This pattern repeats itself: I, V7, V7, I, through the whole of sections A and B.

The B' section begins as the others. However, in the second measure of this section, Offenbach uses a I7 chord (by introducing a C natural) in preparation for a brief transposition to
the sub-dominant key of G Major, which takes place for one measure in measure 53. In measure 54, he introduces a II7 chord with aid of a G#, which is the V7 of V chord in D Major. He holds that chord in play for the next two measures, and then relaxes back to D major by moving to an A7 chord, the dominant of D major. He elongates this section harmonically by alternating a vº7 (diminished seventh chord built on the fifth scale degree) with the more normal V7 for the next five measures, until the beginning of the next section (see Figures 20 and 21).

**Figure 20: Measures 50-53**

Note the C natural in the second and third measure of this excerpt.

**Figure 21: Measures 54-66**

The introduction of the G# in measure 54 of this segment leads to the A chord in measure 57. The diminished chord in measures 58 and 60 elongates the transition back to D major in measure 63.
The A’ section is harmonically equivalent to the A section until the last note, the beginning of measure 70. With the introduction of a D# and a C natural, this chord becomes a viiº7/ii chord (dº7), which is followed by a ii chord (e minor, with an added 6th) in the next measure. After immediately moving to a I chord and a V, this series repeats itself, ending on a I (D Major) chord at the beginning of the coda (see Figure 22).

The coda begins with the same I-vi/I-I sequence in the first measure, then the V7-9-7 sounds in the following measure, and this repeats twice. In the fifth measure of the coda, the tonic is reached, and for the next six measures the harmony remains there, except for added tones which naturally occur from the continuing rocking motion in the treble clef. The final measures contain the following slow chordal progression: I- IV- V7- I, with the tonic note D sounding in the bass throughout, and the final chord (D Major) playing for the final three measures.
The in-depth explanation of the harmonies above, while not essential to a study of the theatrical staging of either the opera or the play, is nonetheless of import, musically, as is the analysis of the hymn *Nearer, My God, To Thee* offered in this study. The complex analysis of harmony will come more clearly into view through the examination of the hymn in which Adams’ lyrics and Mason’s revolutionary musical structure, specifically the New England Protestant reformation chord structure, are served up as the American rebellion towards the rules of European Romanticisms.

**Feminine Cadence**

The melodic ending of a phrase on the weak portion of a measure or a beat, or portion of a beat, is known as a feminine cadence. The term was first used by Heinrich Christoph Koch (1749-1816) in his treatise on the “mechanical rules of melody” which was published in 1787. Many times feminine endings occur as the result of cadential appoggiaturas or other cadence figures. Offenbach, who studied composition would surely have been aware of this tool, and used it purposely in his work. In fact, there are many instances of feminine endings in the Barcarolle.

Looking at the coda section of the piece, it is obvious that part of the reason this section is so melodically different from the others is the many occurrences of the feminine cadences within the coda. At the beginning of the coda, Giulietta’s first two notes are a cadence from A to D, a common melodic ending, however it is used on the fourth and fifth beats of the measure, an example of a feminine ending or cadence using the first note as a quasi appoggiatura (see Figure 23).
Taking this as an example, and looking at the measures that follow, it is clear that there are many (Fifteen in total, with some of those being debatable) feminine endings in the few measures leading up to the last five bars of the piece. These final measures contain another feminine ending, but it is somewhat hidden in the chorus part. While all the other parts hold a D, the two tenor parts move, a third apart, up one step, down one step, down another step, and then up to where they began. This is the I- IV- V7- I harmonic cadence which was explained above. It is a feminine ending because of the other parts already hold the cadence; they have finished, and it is left to the tenors to end the piece harmonically two measures later than everyone else (see Figure 24). Coincidentally, or perhaps not, this is the exact sequence of notes Koch used in the aforementioned treatise as an example of a feminine cadence (Head).
Simply put, the feminine cadence, unlike the masculine cadence is one that ends on a “weak” chord. This concept could not have been lost on Offenbach, as this technique dates back to Shakespearean writings in which the verse ending on a weak, or unstressed syllable, was known as “feminine verse ending.” As with Shakespeare, Offenbach employed this technique to make a strong, and rather political, statement on the characters who are delivering the feminine cadence, specifically a Hoffmanesque “Woman,” and his androgynous man servant. The modernist view of the “New Woman” who has broken away, and is in fact diametrically opposed to the Hoffmanesque definition, is then expressed in Claire, who refuses to be held to that definition and who seeks to, and ultimately does, silence the dominant masculine voice, or cadence, that so narrowly defines her within the world of *The Verge*.

According to Shakespeare scholar Wesley Van Tassel, there are numerous examples of this technique throughout the works of Shakespeare. He notes, “Perhaps the most infamous use of this feminine verse technique in Shakespearean writing is Hamlet’s famous lines, ‘To be, or not to be; that is the question.’ The last syllable of ‘tion’ is a feminine ending spoken without stress. In this manner Hamlet is not only indecisive in his will to live, but is also presented in a subdominant, or feminine role, in which the quality of decisiveness, often attributed to the dominant male, is absent” (Van Tassel Interview).

**Doppelgänger**

The Barcarolle returns later to end the Act, and the subtle changes are interesting to note. After an eight-measure transposition after the large *tutti* number (a piece containing all voices), the Barcarolle returns, in the same key, and with the same harmonic sequence, but this time the texture is different. It begins as a solely instrumental piece, with the rolled, rocking chords.
appearing in the treble clef, and the melody, in sections A, B, and B', in the bass clef. Over this
texture change, Giulietta sings a few lines to everyone who is present, explaining that she is
g Getting ready to leave. Then, with the instrumental Barcarolle playing in the background,
Hoffmann duels with Schlemil, and kills him, in order to obtain the key to Giulietta’s boudoir.
Through the masculine lens of Offenbach, Hoffman is betrayed by Giulietta, when he loses his
reflection to her, which she in turn gives to Dapertutto. As the police arrive, Nicklas drags
Hoffmann away, before he can be arrested. While this action is unfolding, the chorus sings the
melody of the Barcarolle in section A.

The return of the Barcarolle at the end of Act IV is a doppelgänger of the Barcarolle that
has been previously introduced. Earlier, in defining the concept of a doppelgänger, it was
characterized as “…a double (or twin)…, and is usually a harbinger of some evil or negative…
happening (Dibbern 7-8).” This is clearly how the Barcarolle is used at the end of the Act, in that
it is melodically and harmonically a double of the previous version which portrays the joys of
physical love. However, when the Barcarolle returns, this time it portends and actually
accompanies betrayal, murder, and loss. This is a nearly direct parallel of the use of the
Barcarolle in The Verge, in which the music is preparatory to betrayal and murder, however
instead of loss; Claire is able to exact an emotional and spiritual vindication.
CHAPTER TWO: CHARACTER SIGNIFICANCE IN THE TALES OF HOFFMAN AND THE VERGE

The Fragmented Women of Hoffman’s Tales

When reading through Susan Glaspell’s play The Verge her use of musical references as thematic statements within her text becomes striking. She is very detailed in her stage directions as to what music is to be played or sung, when, and for how long. The use of, and reaction to, this specific music serves as a source for pivotal action, as well providing crucial information in the exchanges of dialogue between the main characters. What is Glaspell’s intention for the significance of the chosen music? What can be discerned by its placement? When these questions are explored more fully the concept of the fragmentation of identity emerges. A close analysis reveals the parallel themes of subjectivity and freedom, expressed through distinct lenses, which incorporate the Romantic notion of the doppelgänger. Through this analysis I will argue that Glaspell’s The Verge (1921) may be called a virtual “shadow” play of Jacques Offenbach’s opera The Tales of Hoffman.

As previously stated, the notion of the doppelgänger, or double, was embraced by many German writers, including Hoffman. As Mary Dibbern states in her text, The Tales of Hoffman: A Performance Guide, Hoffman was “obsessed” with the idea of the “disintegration of personality.” Dibbern continues, “This was a theory that a personality could separate into one or more additional egos, each possessing both its unique characteristics and some shared with the ‘other’” (167). It is in this sense then that I will explore the many instances of both the doppelgänger and fragmentation that exist textually between Jacques Offenbach’s The Tales of
Hoffman and Susan Glaspell’s *The Verge* and then, as a result, I will identify the connection between both works.

The most notable and obvious doppelgänger lies within the parallel worlds of the two plays, with each play containing and conveying the same themes of subjectivity and manipulation, but from entirely opposing viewpoints. *Tales of Hoffman* is presented through the viewpoint of the male protagonist Hoffman who assembles, through his stories, the identity of the male-constructed “perfect female,” Stella. The object of his obsession, Stella, the opera singer/artist, eventually runs off with another man, thereby establishing Hoffman as the definitive victim.

In *The Verge* Glaspell establishes the female character, Claire, who has also been manipulated through male construction. However, when the audience hears her story, which can be said to be parallel to Hoffman’s, it becomes apparent that in addition to being a continuation of her chronicle, her story is being presented through a very clearly defined feminist lens. Claire, who is clearly imprinted with Hoffman’s narrative, is not merely Glaspell’s shadow of Hoffman but an entirely new creation, which is actually a skillfully crafted continuation of the fragmented Stella characterized in Offenbach’s opera.

To begin this exploration, I will offer a comparative analysis between the textual content of the two works to fully understand the implications. I will compare and contrast the texts on several levels, beginning with the main characters of each play and how they are presented within the two worlds of the plays. Specifically, I will examine Hoffman’s presentation of characters through a distinctly masculine lens within a patriarchal social structure, and Glaspell’s presentation of characters through the newly formed first-wave feminist viewpoint.

In general terms, both the character Hoffman, of *The Tales of Hoffman*, and Claire, of
The Verge, are engaged in unfulfilling relationships with three members of the opposite sex, with each of the three characters, respectively, being exposed in their use of manipulation, which ultimately leads to the betrayal of the one they profess to love. To explore the specifics of this characterization, each of the texts must be examined in detail.

In beginning with Offenbach’s opera The Tales of Hoffman, there must first be a decision on which of the various versions will be used as the definitive source. For my purposes, I am quoting from the G. Schirmer Opera Score Edition, with the English translation by Ruth and Thomas Martin, but also referencing the 1907 Choudens edition, as it is the version most likely available to, and serving as the inspiration for, Glaspell’s The Verge. The notable difference between these two editions is the placement of the act in which the Barcarolle and murder scene occur, as the music is identical in each. The G. Schirmer Opera Score Edition is arguably, one of the most accessible translations of the libretto and, in this edition, contains the scenes that have been left out of performance, particularly in some early American and English productions.

The opera opens in the epitome of the male domain, a tavern or gathering place “adjoining the opera house” (2). This tavern serves as the waiting place where those who are not attending the opera will wait until the performers return. The audience is greeted almost immediately with the chorus singing a drinking song. Soon the character Councilor Lindorf is introduced, and he in turn intercepts a message and a key being sent from Stella, the “famous prima donna” (7), to Hoffman, the poet. The character, Hoffman, based on the writer E. T. A. Hoffman, is in love with the opera star, Stella. However, Lindorf, a rich admirer, also seeks to win her affections. Lindorf states, “Just as I thought! O Women! These are the men who rule your hearts! The lords you have chosen to govern your souls. A poet! A drunkard!” (10) The misogynistic idea is quickly established that women cannot and should not control their own
destinies. Women are to be protected and manipulated by men for their own protection. Lindorf
goes on to explain,

A man is truly worthy of envy, when, crushed by his love, he finds…both new
hopes and fond regrets! …I set a straight and unyielding course and reach my goal
by sheer force. I am a woman’s master…Tender love is not my sphere, I rule
women’s hearts through fear [repeated four times] I fight with deadly power, if I
must contend with a rival, he has not a chance of survival. Like Hoffman now, a
sorry sot, foolish garrulous poet…though he is loved and I am not, I’ll win
because I am a schemer, I’m a clever ruthless schemer. His beloved Stella sent
him her key, I guarantee she will find it used by me!” (13-16)

There can be no question here that women are viewed as property and that the rivaling parties
are more concerned with conquest than they are with relationship. The coveted property is
reduced from Stella herself to the key that will open Lindorf’s path with Stella, of course, being
seen as merely a pawn to be manipulated and coerced in this scenario. She is also presented as a
woman of negligible intellect as she is displayed as being unable to see through this “plot.” She
is painted as being weak in body and mind, and unable to protect herself from those who would
do her harm. Though she is famous and revered by her public for her magnificent artistic gifts,
she is heavily influenced, controlled, and manipulated by the men in her life from the very onset
of the play. Her “public,” views her differently, and is represented by a male chorus, led by the
student Nathaniel, who sings,

Here’s to Stella, my friends, in glowing admiration! [She] combines a heavenly
voice with her exquisite taste in the music of Mozart. She’s the infinite grace of
nature as well as the triumph of art! Let us raise a toast in her honor! A toast in
Stella’s praise! (28)

Even with this praise from her fan base, it is Stella’s talents that are being praised. Her talents
are the “object” of their affection, while the actual substance of Stella as a person is never a
consideration for exploration. There is nothing but objectification of Stella being presented here
by all men concerned, with the only difference being whether they are manifesting their
objectification as praise or manipulation.

As with *The Tales of Hoffman*, the audience is introduced to the main character Claire in
the opening of *The Verge* before she enters the stage area. Through a brief expositional section
the audience is introduced to several concepts, which provide a wealth of information about the
character of Claire and establishes immediately her opposition to the character of Stella. The
first clues offered about Claire are in her environment, specifically an expressionistic stage
design showing an area which, while attached to the house, is actually a separate room and
greenhouse/laboratory. Glaspell immediately establishes for Claire her own space, which is very
uncommon for any woman at this point in history. In fact, Glaspell’s contemporary Virginia
Wolfe pens *A Room of One’s Own*, in this same time period in which she states that, “a woman
must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction” (4), or more specifically the
personal liberty to be creative. Additionally, Claire’s room can be accessed by a glass door,
providing her with a window on the world, as well as a spiral stairway, implying an ability to
ascend, and finally a trap door set into the floor, providing a means of escape, if necessary.
Before a word is spoken, it is understood that Claire’s space is not only the essence of the
woman’s domain, an indoor garden, but a symbol of power, creativity and independence.

Just as Stella is introduced to her audience through her off stage “voice,” Claire is
introduced to her audience from off stage through her voice on the telephone. However, the
introductions are decidedly different. While Stella is established as a weak character, Claire is immediately established as a character of power and command. Anthony, Claire’s helper/companion, answers the phone buzzer and is given explicit directions concerning the tending of the garden by Claire from the other end of the line. Anthony gives a clear indication of relationship by referring to his employer as “Miss Claire,” establishing the respect she commands and expects from him. Anthony then proceeds to carry out these commands, much like a dutiful servant, in order to do everything Claire has asked of him towards the end of protecting of her plants which are, literally and figuratively, her creations.

Claire’s genius is manifested in the breeding of new species of plants, with her eventual goal being that one of these new creations will be truly unlike any other, thus allowing her to create a new and glorious entity beyond any idea of the conventional. This creation is to be a unique and magnificent genus that is not necessarily better than extant plants, but will be different from all other known species in its exceptional individuality.

The same can be said of the character Hoffman who is striving for the same ideal. Hoffman is a poet and Nicklas, who serves as his Muse, is fighting for his attentions and affections. It is surmised that together the two can create great new works if only the Muse/Nicklas can keep Hoffman under control, and away from the women who would do him harm and continually keep him from reaching his artistic, personal, and professional goals and potentials. The comparison between Hoffman and Claire is immediately apparent as both strive to create that which is unique and exceptional.

Likewise, the relationship between Stella and Claire is also immediately established from the beginning. The audience is introduced from the opening scene of each work to two exceptional women. Both Stella and Claire are unique artists of repute, and both are recognized
and lauded for their artistic contributions. But just as quickly, it is established that the comparison end and the characters are instead marked by a stark picture of contrast. Stella is introduced through the eyes of the male characters, all of whom want something from her and think little of her beyond her artistic and feminine qualities. Claire is introduced by a very different male character in the doting Anthony, who lauds his employer’s exceptionality and caters to her needs, desires, and whims. Stella is conceived and created by a man in the late nineteenth century European romantic era, and Claire is conceived and created by an American modern feminist. This marks the introduction of the same type of character, though not the same character type, as each is presented through two decidedly and distinctly different lenses.

In *The Verge*, after the short expositional section, the audience is finally introduced to Claire and can quickly ascertain, without question, she is a woman trapped within a male-dominated society. She is decidedly being “acted upon” and subjugated within this patriarchal social structure by each of the men surrounding her. The men in Claire’s life, who include Harry, her conventional husband; Richard, her lover; and Tom, the confidant who seeks to understand the “artist” in her, each attempt to control different aspects of Claire’s fragmented life and personality. Each of Claire’s men views her from different points of reference because of *their* constant individual needs and desires. These needs become projected onto her and, in turn, color and control all their interactions with her.

Though Claire’s agency is continually in question, and the focus of much conflict, none of these men can argue, or doubt, Claire’s inherent genius. With all of these men in agreement about her genius, Claire appears to become obsessed in her desire to have complete and total fulfillment in both her professional and personal lives. This obsession with freedom and fulfillment is in constant conflict with the controlling desires of the men in her life, despite the
fact that they believe in her ability and intellect.

By way of severe contrast, *The Tales of Hoffman*’s Stella is revealed only through the eyes and stories of the character of the romantic poet, Hoffman. Hoffman’s love for Stella is overpowering his love for his Muse, the power that feeds his creativity. His creative Muse, represented through the companion character Nicklas, is continually trying to reach and protect the poet. Hoffman, depressed by his great love for Stella, drinks himself to distraction, and cannot seem to create anything new while wallowing in the midst of this obsession. After Hoffman’s introduction, while still in the tavern, his friends, the students, press him to tell them a story worthy of the wonderful poet they esteem. Hoffman agrees to tell them the story of his three past loves and it is these three stories that provide the basis of the opera.

In examining the comparison of Hoffman’s stories of the three “loves” of his life to the three men (loves) in Claire’s life, one can draw a direct correlation. The correlation between these two works is only reinforced when taking into consideration the music of the Barcarolle being an integral part of both stories, which is played and woven throughout each story.

In *The Tales of Hoffman* the audience is introduced to his obsession with the loves of his life through Hoffman himself. As the students press him by singing, “Let us start with a song! You Hoffman know many! . . . Let it be something gay!” (35). Hoffman’s friends request his performance of a song about the dwarf Kleinzack, a character popularized through the stories of E. T. A. Hoffman. Hoffman starts with that story, but stops part way through “as if absorbed in his dream” (41). Hoffman begins to sing about:

…those features [which] were amazing…I never saw a face so charming. I can see it clearly, fair and bright as day. A memory treasured dearly. Mad with love, I deserted all I once had cherished and rushed out, through the fields, through the
valess, and the plains. Dark as night was the hair in its waving billows, falling softly descending in delicate shadows. Those eyes a pure and azure blue, cast a glance so naive, so serene, and so true. And then with both our hearts, desiring and adoring, were gently borne away. A tender voice rose soaring to heaven above. A sweet and vibrant voice rose to heaven high above! But in my heart remains the echoes of my love. (41-44)

The students laugh and ask “what of the dwarf?” Hoffman answers, while still in the “dream,” I spoke of her!” and then followed immediately by, “No, of no one, no! Just a whim of my brain. I prefer the dwarf” (45) Hoffman then continues to sing of the dwarf and begins to drink more heavily. Finally one of the students, Nathaniel, states, “I’ll bet Hoffman is in love!” Hoffman replies, “The devil may take me, if I am ever such a fool”(51). The men continue to sing of the devil Satan and his wife, but state that “this will never do! For someday we all may be married!” (51-53). Hoffman is then confronted by Counselor Lindorf, who is obsessed not only with the idea of owning or controlling Stella, but with being the only man that Stella will ever love. It is then revealed that Lindorf, who is continually pursuing Stella, is already married. This leads to Hoffman insulting Lindorf. In retort, Lindorf enrages Hoffman by telling him that Stella has given him the key to her personal apartment, when in reality the key had actually been sent to Hoffman through a messenger but, unbeknownst to Hoffman, was intercepted and purchased by Lindorf. Lindorf then challenges Hoffman stating: “You’ll regret this, mark my word” (56).

After this exchange, it is clear Stella is the prize to be won. She has been reduced once again to being not only an object with nothing to say in the matter, but a prize that might be won by one of her obsessive “suitors.” Stella is reduced to nothing but a trophy in the eyes of these men. Hoffman continues his rant by blaming Lindorf for all of the misfortunes in his life.
However this is not enough to extinguish Hoffman’s rage, so he then turns on the students and begins to demean the women in each of their lives by name. He calls their women “stupid puppets,” with hearts of ice and states that they sell their “charms without a blush,” in essence calling them stupid whores. Instead of being outraged by Hoffman’s cruel and disturbing insults, the students follow suit, singing, “Is your own love such a gem that you disdain all ours so greatly?” (61). Hoffman then reveals the basis for his story:

My own love? Stella, three women in the selfsame woman! Three souls in one person united! The doll, the artist and the courtesan…One love? Not so! Better say, Three loves. Enchanting trio of lovely sirens…Would you like me to tell you the tales of my loves? (61-63)

Hoffman then begins his tales of the three women, who he has already revealed in the passage above, as the fragmented aspects of Stella, the perfect woman. Referring to these “loves” as the “lovely sirens” is extremely provocative. The three sirens of Greek mythology were half-women, half birds, whose singing was so stimulating it drove men to jump from their ships, to perish, or make them shipwreck their boats. They would then be consumed by the sirens themselves. Again, the idea of Woman as the destroyer of innocent men is enforced. It is not difficult to see the obvious parallel being made between the three fragmented aspects of opera singer Stella, whom Hoffman purports to love, and the three Sirens who use their voices to kill and destroy. As this exploration continues, I will examine, and explore in detail, the tales of Hoffman’s “three” women personified in the one character of Stella.

Hoffman’s first “love” story involves Olympia, a mechanical doll he perceives to be real. Olympia is created, owned, and manipulated by a controlling scientist, Spalanzani. A rival of Spalanzani, Coppelius, believes he has created Olympia, because he constructed, and gave to
Olympia, a set of realistic eyes. As the scene opens the audience is told that Spalanzani wants to use Olympia to “regain the five hundred crowns [he] lost” when his swindler banker, Elias, declared bankruptcy (70). Hoffman is a scientific pupil of Spalanzani and is introduced by him to his “daughter” Olympia. Spalanzani states, when referring to Olympia, “every smile is angelic! What a triumph of science! You will find Olympia a dear!” (72) Hoffman is confused and does not understand “what science has to do with his daughter” (73). Hoffman then declares that he will become “anything” he needs to be to gain the favor of the Spalanzani, believing that this declaration will allow Hoffman permission to court the beautiful “daughter” with whom he is infatuated. Though Olympia has never met Hoffman, he sees her asleep and declares that they were meant to be together always with “one precious love to share” (75). Any wishes or desires that Olympia herself may have are not only ignored, but established as a point unworthy of any consideration.

Nicklas, his companion/muse, tries to protect Hoffman and brings it to his attention that he has only “seen her once or twice” and then it was only a “glance [at Olympia] through a curtain.” Though Nicklas tries to steer Hoffman in a more logical direction, with suggestions he woo Olympia directly and over time, Hoffman refuses to leave and declares he “love[s] her madly” (79-82). In the midst of Hoffman’s declarations of love Coppelius, the man who believes he has created Olympia, arrives and brings with him specific eyeglass lenses with which to view Olympia, which makes her appear real. He encourages Hoffman to gaze at Olympia through these magic lenses, which were devised to make an “object” appear real, all the while referring to Olympia as “ours.” Again, women are referred to as the property of the men that manipulate and control them.

Coppelius goes even further concerning the use of the magic lenses stating that they will
let Hoffman “know the heart of a woman, if it is pure or false or inhuman…come and take a
look, it’s an open book…they show the world in sunshine or as black as night” (89). Coppelius
sells the lenses to Hoffman. After putting on the glasses, Hoffman responds, “Gracious heaven,
how divine! What an exquisite radiance in her face! Olympia, is it you? What price would be
too high for this vision, this ideal of delight (91).” Spalanzani returns and begins to argue with
Coppelius as to who “owns” Olympia and the riches she will bring as they both want a full and
equal share in the “possession” of this valuable “property.” Spalanzani agrees to pay Coppelius
five hundred crowns for full ownership, with the sale being guaranteed by Elias, the bankrupt
banker. Coppelius agrees to the terms, and signs the document to complete the transaction and
secure full ownership (93). As a joke, they both agree that they will allow Olympia to “marry”
the love struck student, Hoffman. The townspeople now enter to “meet the charming daughter”
of Spalanzani stating that they have all heard she is “so very sweet, beautiful, intelligent, a model
of education” (99). Spalanzani presents “his daughter” to the crowd (101). The crowd sings
“She has such lovely eyes, she has such a fair complexion, her figure is perfection. She’s pretty
as can be…Adorable and charming! Her manner is disarming…A charming sight to see!” (103-
105). It is interesting to note at this point that the crowd joins in the morays of the day in
objectify Olympia by first seeing only her eyes, complexion and figure and point to them as the
mark of charm and, thus, worth. Olympia then sings and performs for the crowd using a
dazzling array of vocal gymnastics. The crowd, of course, is spellbound by her talents, praising
her unique and advanced artistic abilities as she leaves the floor.

The townspeople are then led into the party. Spalanzani asks Hoffman to stay with
Olympia and “entertain my child” (120) while he goes in to dine with the rest of the crowd and
Hoffman happily agrees. Nicklas, in the meantime, suspects that some subterfuge is underway
when he hears the sound of a spring being wound tightly. Spalanzani brings Olympia back to sit with and be wooed by the unsuspecting Hoffman, where upon Olympia and Hoffman share a romantic scene. After much singing, Hoffman states, “you are mine!!” (126). Again, the aspect of ownership is pressed. Olympia has not suggested she loves Hoffman in any way, yet Hoffman makes this declaration after spending a very short period of time with her.

At the end of the song, Olympia abruptly stands and leaves Hoffman’s side. Hoffman tries to follow, but Nicklas stops him telling him that he is being played for a fool and that the crowd is now saying that Olympia is not real and that she was never alive. Hoffman refuses to believe Nicklas. In the meantime, Coppelius has found out that Spalanzani has cheated him and that the check he received was worthless. Coppelius seeks revenge and goes into Olympia’s room. After a few minutes, Olympia returns to dance for the crowd on the arm of Hoffman. Olympia begins to dance faster and faster until she whirls Hoffman onto the couch breaking his special lenses. Olympia then stops, again abruptly, and suddenly leaves the room. Nicklas and the crowd think that Hoffman may be dead, but find that he has just lost consciousness. The entire chorus sings about “poor Mr. Hoffman” (143). Hoffman begins to revive as Spalanzani comes to see what has happened. They both hear a shattering of glass and broken springs from off stage. Hoffman screams and runs offstage calling Olympia’s name, but is met by Coppelius, who enters laughing stating he has “smashed Olympia to bits” (145). Spalanzani is furious that he has lost his moneymaker. Hoffman runs offstage and comes back “pale and horrified,” to the humiliation of the crowd laughing at his pain. Hoffman sings, “She was a puppet! My Olympia!” as Nicklas tries to calm him and the crowd sings “She was just a lifeless puppet” and “It was too fantastic.” (150-151). With this, the scene ends.

This first story of “love” establishes woman as not only the creation of man, but presents
her as his “doll,” created to be his play thing and do bidding, or be destroyed. Woman as doll serves to be both manipulated and, when necessary, used as collateral against the debts of others. Again, woman is objectified and treated as property to be used as men see fit. She is given, in this case literally, no life or agency of her own and is casually destroyed at will by those who “created” her for their own ends and profits.

The concept of woman as property is certainly not a new one. Indeed, even today women around the globe continue to suffer the same objectification by their male “owners” as in times past. Nor, is the idea of woman created and treated as doll, original to this story. There are stories dating back to Greek literature and myth regarding statues that come to life (Galatea), as well as the deformed God Hephaestus creating mechanical servants and golden handmaidens who help him carry out his work. The notion of the creation and manipulation of “puppets” of both genders controlled by a “puppet master” has been fictionalized for centuries in various artistic and literary works.

Along with the fictionalization, there were also realized conceptions of “artificial people” in many societies. According to the article “The History of Robotics” by Adam Currie, there are references to the creation of artificial humans in Egyptian, Greek, Roman, and Norse mythology as well as in Medieval Persian, Japanese, Chinese, Jewish, and Arabic cultures of the seventeenth century. The Japanese craftsman Hisashige Tanaka, known as the “Japanese Edison,” created many mechanical toys and published a text describing their capabilities such as “serving tea, [as well as] painting Japanese Kanji characters.” His landmark text *Karakuri Zui* (Illustrated Machinery) was published in 1796 (15).

The concept of and fascination with robots is evidenced in recent Western history in the notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci, dating approximately 1495 and rediscovered in the 1950s.
These notebooks contained detailed designs of a humanoid robot, in the form of a mechanical knight, who was able to sit up, wave its arms and move its head and jaw (Robotics, 1). It should also be noted that according to Currie, the “first electronic autonomous robot was created by William Grey Walter at Bristol University, England in 1948. It was named Elsie.” (2) The creators in every case listed here were masculine in gender and, with the exception of Leonardo da Vinci’s “mechanical knight,” their creations seem to be programmed with actions in areas which could best be described as part of the historically accepted feminine sphere, specifically servitude and creation.

With this abbreviated history of the genderless “robot” being noted, and the time period in which they were being fictionalized realized as well, the literary genre of the “fantastic,” of which E. T. A Hoffman is an author of note, comes to the forefront. Through the reflection and fascination with automation and the idea of the automaton coming forward in literary and artistic works of the period Hoffman places himself within the genre of the fantastic. Fantastic literature, defined by some as a genre of writing which intrudes fantasy elements into a story that is basically representational, “real-feeling,” or as a literary technique which often introduces a “devil” into a contemporary setting. This specialized new genre was employed by many authors and painters beginning in the late 17th century and beyond, and the stories of E. T. A. Hoffman are among them.

The doll represented in Offenbach’s The Tales of Hoffman is a mechanized instrument which works the same as the robot, discussed above, but has been perfected on the outside to resemble the perfect woman in form and shape, yet is an automaton. Thus, in this instance, the terms doll and robot become synonymous terms when examining the character Olympia. In researching the subject of “woman as doll,” I came up with very little. However my supposition
was nonetheless supported in a section of Kitti Carriker’s treatise entitled *Created in Our Image: The Miniature Body of the Doll as Subject and Object*. She states, “…these creations capture and convey a melodrama of unease and contradiction…Surprisingly enough, while studies of the double abound, those on the doll are in short supply” (12). Carriker cites a “painstaking piece of nineteenth-century research *A Study of Dolls* (1897) by Hall and Ellis” which explores the societal ramifications of the playful use of the doll as toy. Even in that study Hall and Ellis note the “lack of attention to such [social] issues and the meager and fragmentary doll literature” (13). Carriker continues, “In almost a century, very few studies on the topic of dolls have followed the groundwork laid by Hall and Ellis” (13). It is in this limited void that I briefly touch on this issue.

Carriker states that “Paul Coats [a noted British Humanities scholar] suggests that Hoffman [in his short story *The Sandman*, where the robot/puppet character of Olympia is originally placed, and the story upon which this section of the opera *Tales of Hoffman* is based] is responsible for initiating the connection between the automaton and the doppelgänger, observing that the emergence of the double in literature is simultaneous with the invention of machines sophisticated enough to behave like humans” (31). Hoffman’s life sized doll Olympia is, however, human only in appearance. She “lives” an artificial existence and is flawless in appearance. She has no concept of how others view her, and hasn’t the mental capacity with which to view herself. As Carriker puts it, Olympia is “never distressed” by the ramifications of self-awareness (42).

By using the feminine ideal as a goal for the “doll” in this story, Hoffman opened a door for analysis from noted “authorities” within the realm of the newly established “aesthetic theory.” Many scholars and artists were attracted to Hoffman’s works, such as Freud who
analyzed Hoffman’s story *The Sandman* in his essay entitled “The Uncanny,” and André Breton who played a dominant role in the development of Surrealism. According to Freud the uncanny is “Unheimlichkeit” which translates literally from the German as “un-home-like-ness.” Uncanny, the opposite of home and comfort, thus creates a distinct aesthetic experience which gives the reader a feeling of disquiet and is meant to give them a sensation of overall anxiety and/or distress (Svenaeus 1), similar to being separated from the home, the known, the comfortable.

Though it may be debatable as to how “distressing” fantastic literature was at the time, Carriker comments along the same lines by stating, “Perhaps for the modern reader, well used to computerized and mechanized intelligence, Hoffman’s story may not carry the same emotional impact that it did for those earlier audiences” (31). When discussing Jacques de Vaucanson’s creation of a mechanical duck, an animal automaton which could eat, digest grain, flap its wings and excrete, and which became a novelty of Hoffman’s day, Carriker quotes E. F. Bleiler as stating, in the introductory essay of Hoffman’s *Best Tales*, that Hoffman was horrified at the “possibility of mistaking an automaton for a human being…Hoffman’s reactions were three fold: admiration for their skill, horror at their inhumanness, and perhaps fear” (31). Carriker continues, “Fearing the uncanny juxtaposition of animate and inanimate, Hoffman and his characters…experience horrified disbelief when they encounter the automaton, who is also a double, the animated inanimate duplicate” (32). This “horror” is portrayed by the Hoffman character in Offenbach’s opera as well.

In examining *The Verge* through a feminist lens, the “horror” found in the portrayal of woman as a puppet, doll, or robot, created and manipulated by her “keepers” becomes evident. The robotic aspects of Claire’s existence in her relationship with her husband, Harry Archer,
establishes the full ramifications and “horror” established in Glaspell’s play, and are discussed in detail later in this study.

Certainly the embraced or accepted concept of “woman” as a self-defined and autonomous entity within industrialized western societies is a relatively recent event. The earliest days of the European feminist movement were surrounded by other seemingly more substantial and masculine-driven movements that were defining a period or political revolution or stance. The new field of psychoanalysis being explored by Freud did little to further the cause of women’s rights. Freud was too busy defining woman as the absence of the masculine to even contemplate what the feminine could/would contain.

What may be more intriguing is Hoffman’s inability to see Olympia for what she is. He is mesmerized by Olympia’s artificial perfection and beauty and is consumed with his attraction for this “overgrown toy” (42), yet Hoffman’s blindness to these matters is never questioned nor called into play. He is always portrayed as the victim, not responsible for his own gullibility. To mistake an inanimate object for a living being would seem to call one’s perceptions into question. But such is not the case with Hoffman. Olympia’s origination is never a point of inquiry, nor is Hoffman’s inability to see Olympia at her best without the aid of special glasses. Hoffman’s personal or professional (in this story he is supposed to be a scientist) responsibility is never a topic of exploration or discussion.

It should not be ignored that the creation story of the perfect woman also has religious roots. In exploring the very origin of woman in Judeo-Christian literature, which of course held a very prominent foothold during the Romantic era, woman is placed as the creation of a supreme masculine deity, created from man, by Man (God), for man.

And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness…So God created
man in his own image, in the image of God created he him...And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul. And the Lord God placed a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man who he had formed...And the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it...And Adam gave names to all cattle and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him. And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof. And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. (Gen. 1:2)

This text, sacred to many, states clearly that Man was made by God out of the dust of the earth, with the express purpose being to tend to the garden and have dominion over all other creations. Woman however, according to this same narrative, was made from Man, and was brought by God to Adam, with the purpose of being a “help meet” to him. In these verses woman is given no lofty charge or purpose of her own and in this manner Eve is really the original doll, created to be confined to her service of man. I would venture to guess that these several verses have caused more pain and angst to women and empowered more men than few others. Certainly, they have been used as the justification for the unrighteous dominion over, and subjugation of, women in the western world for centuries. Manipulation and control can certainly come in many forms and this instance merely being one of them, however that which holds such power, cannot be ignored. The ramifications of this religious element will be explored further and come into
play when exploring the religious aspects of *The Verge*.

The next Hoffman story to explore is that of Antonia. The scene in the opera opens with Antonia seated at the clavichord, singing to her recently deceased mother. She sings of the joy she has lost at the death of her mother.

Joy has fled, vanished forever! Oh love that once was mine! Oh painful bitter memory! Your image fills my thoughts through the day, through the night…But my love, true and eternal, will live on in my heart…My heart and soul belong to you. I am yours, yours alone! I will always be yours…we are far, far apart.

(219)

Antonia is a singer of great talent, just as her mother was before her. Yet her mother died mysteriously. In this section of the opera Antonia asks her mother to watch over her and to let her know if the love of her current suitor, Hoffman, is true. Antonia’s father, Crespel, has forbidden her to sing again, though Antonia states, “My mother returns to life in my music! Her voice, through my own was singing again.” Crespel makes Antonia promise that she will never sing again because it will kill her (224), and blames Hoffman for giving her the continual yearning to sing. Crespel sings, “It is Hoffman’s fault. He aroused her desire to sing!” (225). For this reason, Crespel has taken Antonia and they have fled to Munich in order to escape Hoffman’s influence. Upon arrival, and after settling in, Crespel tells his servants to let no one in to their home. The butler, Franz, who is extremely hard of hearing (referred to in the text as “deaf as a post”) completely misunderstands his master’s instructions. Soon Hoffman has tracked them down and when he arrives at their home, Franz is very pleased to see him and allows him entrance (233). When Hoffman and Antonia are reunited they sing of love being a melody which, of course, Antonia will not be allowed to sing. Hoffman declares, “Now, you are
mine forever! And we shall belong together—never to part. In a world of our own, all our
own…Now you are mine forever!” (238). Hoffman goes on to admit that “[Antonia’s] music
makes me jealous, you love it so!” (240). Antonia begs Hoffman to “not ever forbid me to sing
as my father did…Oh, let me sing once more, one last time, I promise.” (241). Since Hoffman
does not understand why Crespel has forbidden Antonia to sing, he agrees to her pleas. Antonia
begins to compares herself to a rose, which will soon fade and die. Hoffman also compares
Antonia to a rose singing, “Her beauty is flaming like roses in June. But will it be there in
September?” (246). They continue to sing that their love is like “the song of blossoming
flowers” (247).

This metaphor of the flowers, and especially the reference to roses, has significance when
comparing this section of Tales of Hoffman to The Verge. Because of the lengthy aspect of this
connection, this trope will be explored more fully and discussed in chapter three of this
dissertation.

Crespel soon returns and suspects that Hoffman has been there, but his train of thought is
interrupted by the appearance of the character known as Dr. Miracle, a diabolical figure for
whom Crespel blames the death of his wife (Antonia’s mother). Crespel continually refers to
him as the “doctor of death” (250). Miracle warns Crespel that Antonia suffers from “the same
disease as her mother” and that she must be put in his care (252). Dr. Miracle claims that he is
the only one who can save Antonia with his “superior power” and that “All will be well if you
[Crespel] and Antonia] obey!” (254). Miracle goes on to state that they must “yield to my
power” and “trust in me alone” (256). Crespel gives in and tells Miracle to be brief. Miracle
asks Antonia her age and takes her pulse, which is found to be “uneven and fast” (259). Miracle,
much to Crespel’s horror, then demands that Antonia sing. Antonia sings as commanded. Her
cheeks become flushed as she “presses her hand to her feverish heart” (260). Miracle states that it would be “a shame” to “leave so fair a prey to death’s voracious jaws,” but there may be time to save her (260). Miracle states that Antonia must take his “potent elixir” once a day, every day, or she will die. Crespel does not believe or trust him and calls Miracle a “monster in human form” (262). Miracle responds by singing “you must trust in your doctor. He will cure this illness...let me relieve your pain.” During an extended vocal trio between Miracle, Crespel, and Hoffman, Hoffman sings, “Do not fear—I will save you. The devil mocks the power of love...He shall not win, you will be made well again” (265). Crespel finally pushes Miracle out of the house and locks the door behind him. However, Miracle soon reenters “through the wall” and continues to sing the trio with the others. In the next scene Antonia reenters, but Hoffman has changed his “tune” considerably stating that Antonia should never sing again and that she must promise him that she will not. Hoffman sings, “Let us flee together and banish from your mind these dreams of a career, of fame and glory. And with all your heart, trust in me...my life would hold no meaning if you were not beside me” (272). Antonia promises Hoffman that she will never sing again. Hoffman replies, “Wonderful Antonia! How can I ever thank you?” (272). Antonia and Hoffman agree that they will meet the next day. Antonia, left alone with her thoughts, believes Hoffman has given in to the pleadings of her father. “Alas, my tears were all in vain! I gave my word; I’ll never sing again.” (273), and with this line the scene closes. The next scene begins immediately with Dr. Miracle “appearing suddenly” behind Antonia. He begins to taunt Antonia with the line,

You’ll never sing again? How well did you consider the promise you have given?
The sacrifice you made...Your beauty, and your youth, your art, sacred gift, these possessions that God has given you to foster, must be buried deep in the
monotony of marriage? In your ecstatic dreams have you never heard the sound of wildly cheering crowds, your name on their lips, and the frenzied applause of enchanted admirers who carry your fame to the ends of the world? All this ecstatic joy and everlasting glory that your innocent youth would rashly cast aside for doing the humdrum tasks. A servant to a flock of noisy children, who would spoil your perfect beauty!” (276)

Antonia replies with,

What strange and fearsome voice is whispering in my mind? Is this the voice of evil, or the voice of God? No, no, I will not yield to the voice of temptation! My soul is safe and strong in the armour of love! No fame and no worldly, ephemeral glory would compare with the joys of love! (277)

Miracle continues his chanting. He sings, “What is this love that you believe in? You’d sacrifice your beauty to Hoffman’s brutal ways? Your pretty face is all he loves, and he like all other men, will get bored with his wife and cast you aside!” (278). Antonia then cries,

My will is not my own! I must obey my father and keep the word I gave to the man whom I love. I pledged eternal faith and promised not to sing! Ah! Who will save me from myself, from this demon? My mother! Dearest Mother! (279)

Antonia then begins to hear what she thinks is her mother’s singing voice (through the machinations of Miracle) coming through her mother’s portrait on the wall. Her mother and Miracle implore Antonia to use “the gift which the world is to lose! . . Once again [the mother] is singing, and wildly there beyond, the sweet applause is ringing!” (283). Miracle suggests, “Why not sing again together?” Miracle grabs a violin to accompany the macabre duet as Antonia and her mother sing until Antonia begins to falter. She cries out, “What desire makes
me burn and glow and thus consumes me? (286). Upon which her mother’s voice is again heard calling her to sing with her once more (287). Gasping, Antonia gives in to her darkest desires and sings, “I yield to the power that transports me! . . . A single moment more to live, still, and then my soul will leave this earth! . . . A moment of sweet existence and I will gladly die! (291-294). Antonia falls, “dying, on the sofa” (294). Hoffman and Crespel rush in, but it is too late. Antonia sings with Hoffman of their love, then dies in his arms. Crespel mourns, but blames Hoffman for her death as she was singing with him when she expired. Crespel vows to kill Hoffman. Nicklas enters and saves Hoffman again by getting him away from Crespel, who then calls for a doctor, but Miracle is the one who appears and pronounces Antonia dead. With this declaration, the scene ends.

This scene clearly illustrates the marginalized woman’s voice being manipulated and abducted by the overriding patriarchy which has established a climate of fear and ultimate destruction for women who use their gifts. Antonia has the choice of a conventional life with Hoffman, being cast in a traditional woman’s role proscribed as fulfilling by a male-dominated society. A musical career is portrayed as being threatening to Antonia, though her heart is clearly longing for the fulfillment of her career as an artist. She is to listen to the masculine warning and do what she is told, or she will die. Antonia has been robbed of her voice and her agency by those who have their own needs and desires, which are perceived to hold precedence over her own. She is presented as being unable to be trusted to make the decisions in which her happiness and her very life hang in the balance. She must be controlled “for her own good.” Indeed, when she chooses not to listen to the ever-present controlling masculine voices, she is destroyed. To make the manipulation worse, the feminine voice, controlled by Miracle, is used against Antonia as a tool to enact her very destruction. The message clearly being stated is that
only the masculine voice is to be trusted and followed. Antonia’s desires hold no import. Her
“happiness” has been determined by the controlling men surrounding her.

The final “tale” in *The Tales of Hoffman* opens with the piece of music for which the opera is best known and is, by far, the most recognized item within the opera. The Barcarolle theme begins as the curtain rises (153). This musical theme represents the opera and is played at several strategic times both in the opera as well as Glaspell’s *The Verge*. At the opening of this act, the first voices heard are the voices of Giulietta and Nicklas, singing this now famous melody which proclaims the glory of love. On the veranda outside of Giulietta’s apartment, overlooking the grand canal of Venice, the tight harmonies are heard of the soprano, Giulietta, and the mezzo, Hoffman’s companion, Nicklas (a pants role). According to this translation, the words are as follows:

Joyous night, oh night of love, your mystic shadows bless us. Starry heavens high above, Oh joyous night of love! Time is fleet and bears away the passions that possess us. Far from this enchanted shore, returning nevermore. Enjoy while you may your beloved’s caresses, before the time of day speeds the moment away.

Far away. Ere the dawn speeds the moment away.

[The chorus now joins in]

Ah! Joyous night, oh night of love, your mystic shadows bless us! Starry heavens high above, Oh joyous night of love! Starry heaven’s above! Ah! Night of ardent caresses! Smile on us, oh night of love—Oh joyous night of love! Ah! (154-159)

Listening to this treatise on love are many onlookers. Among them are Dapertutto, Hoffman, Schlemil and his friend Pitchinaccio, and a full chorus of people enjoying the night air. Hoffman soon interrupts the festivities proclaiming that treasuring love is not the way he
finds enjoyment. He states that he “does not find it sweet to swoon at beauty’s feet” and then pretend to get pleasure from it. He continues to sing that the songs he loves are those that involve drinking and laughter. Hoffman then goes on to discuss the follies of love. In the section labeled “Couplets Bachiques” Hoffman, very tellingly, explains his thoughts on love, singing:

A love that is timid and shy must die! But love amid laughter and wine, divine!
With wild ecstatic desire, let your heart be flaming. For pleasures spiced with fire, let your soul be aiming. Let love’s delight last but, one night. Ah! Though heaven endows beauty’s face with grace! Yet under that unfeeling shell—lies hell! Those dreams of endless bliss in its sweet profusion; those yearnings for a kiss are a mere illusion. That chaste disguise, those innocent eyes, are only lies, are lies, all lies! The devil take all the lovers who and sigh and long. A rousing toast to the revel and the joyful song (160-165).

Watching this scene unfold is the character Schlemil, the current love interest of Giulietta, a beautiful courtesan. They have not seen each other for a few days due to a jealous quarrel. This quarrel leaves the door wide open for Giulietta to taunt Schlemil by flirting with Hoffman. Giulietta, who has just met Hoffman, introduces him to Schlemil which causes immediate tension between the two men. They decide they will all play roulette together, and a confrontation ensues regarding who will escort Giulietta inside to the party. Schlemil grabs Giulietta’s hand and Hoffman is left outside with Nicklas. Nicklas tries to get Hoffman away from the festivities and warns him that he “has two horses ready” and that “the very moment you start dreaming your mad dreams of love, we are leaving” (169). Hoffman rebukes Nicklas by singing, “Can you tell me what dreams I am likely to have when reality is king? Since what time
does one love a courtesan?” Nicklas reminds Hoffman that Schlemil loves Giulietta, and Hoffman replies degradingly, “But I am not Schlemil!” Hoffman continues by saying that he does not care if Schlemil hates him, “I do not mind his spite, if Giulietta will be mine tonight” (170). Nicklas continues to try to get Hoffman to leave the volatile situation, but to no avail.

Dapertutto, a devil of sorts, has been listening to this argument, and begins to devise a plan which will capture Hoffman’s soul and begins the process by challenging Hoffman and warning him of Giulietta’s “magic eyes” which he states are “infallible weapons in the battle of passions.” Dapertutto “swear[s] by [his] evil powers” that Hoffman will “bow to her charms” (171) and continues to taunt Hoffman by singing, “I want Giulietta to enchant you, make you yield in her arms!” Out of Hoffman’s earshot, Dapertutto then casts a spell on a diamond or “precious stone,” which will be used to “draw Giulietta in your power; no heart can long endure strong against your allure. Heart and soul you may claim; a moth consumed by flame…bring me my prey, my helpless prey…Sparkle and shine, dear gem of mine and cast your spell around her” (175). Giulietta appears and is, of course, unable to resist this beautiful gem that Dapertutto has placed before her. Giulietta, mesmerized by this gem, states to Dapertutto, “What can I do for my lord and master” (176). Dapertutto reiterates his use of Giulietta’s charms in the “conquest of men” and states,

> You surpass any rival, and you have brought to me the shadow [soul] of Schlemil, but I vary my pleasures. I want the reflection [soul] of Hoffman by tonight! . . . Your Hoffman is no easy prize. I overheard what he said to his companion. He wants your love—but not your heart! (178).

This revelation, challenges Giulietta to partake in Hoffman’s undoing, and she begins her seduction. Giulietta states that it would “wound [her] heart” if Hoffman left the party with “no
good-bye” (179). Hoffman immediately declares that he loves Giulietta “more than life itself.” Giulietta derides Hoffman and calls him a “foolish man” stating that his mere presence alone with her will “bring [him] disaster!” She explains further that “if Schlemil should find you here tonight, he would kill you for sure. Oh, listen to me I entreat you! Tomorrow I promise to meet you! Go! Go! My heart, my very life are yours forevermore!” (181). Hoffman then replies,

Your words caress my soul, and hold my heart enraptured. My senses are aflame with newly born desire! I feel myself consumed by sweet devouring fire! My every secret thought your magic eyes have captured!... Your words possess my soul and hold my heart deeply enraptured! My every secret thought, my every thought. Ah, your words possess my heart and soul! (183)

Giulietta, after seeing that Hoffman is thoroughly besotted, asks him for “something uniquely your own” (184). She goes on to explain that she wants a “likeness of [his] face…,” Hoffman’s image in a reflection. Giulietta goes on to explain,

Your features thus detached will be freed to live on and on, evermore in my heart…Oh grant me this favor, I implore you!... It is my wish, be it ever so foolish, you must do this for me… Give me this cherished souvenir! Your own life, your soul and reflection, to hold forever dear...Your reflection must be mine! I ask for this alone...You must not refuse me this favor! I’m placing myself in your hands. Your reflection—give it to me! (185-192)

Hoffman, as a token of his love and trust, grants her this “favor” as they sing a rousing love duet which states that come tomorrow the “world is [their] own” (195).

Schlemil, encouraged by Dapertutto, then walks into this love scene. Schlemil’s friends suggest that they all kill Hoffman, but he declines, for the moment. Dapertutto steps forward,
commenting on Hoffman’s “pale” appearance—suggesting he look into a mirror to see for himself. Hoffman then discovers that he has no reflection and that he has lost his soul due to the betrayal of Giulietta. Hoffman cries, “Lost for her! (199), at which point the crowd laughs at his loss. Nicklas tries to intervene and pull Hoffman away, but Hoffman refuses stating, “No! No! I love her. I love her. I will stay!” (200).

The opera then moves into the section labeled the Septet (201). This involves six different individual narratives as well as a chorus being sung against each other with counterpointed melodies. Musically, the purpose of these very complex counterpointed sections, which are notoriously difficult for the audience to follow, is to build the individual characters to an emotional and musical climax which forces action on the part of those discussing their viewpoints. The section begins with Hoffmann alone and is layered by one character after the other until all are singing full force against each other. In essence the narratives are as follows:

**Hoffman:** My heart hopelessly dooms me! My senses flame and sear my soul! This cursed love burns and consumes me, Love, my feeble will cannot control. Mad with longing I bow before her while she rules me with hell’s own charms. I detest and I adore her. I want to die, to die in her arms. My dreams delude me and draw me into her spell. I curse the love that has subdued me I curse the power of the spell. The flame, my will cannot quell. I detest and I adore her. My heart helplessly cast before her…Still I cannot break her spell, her evil spell. I scorn her in my mind. At heart I still adore her. Always, always, poor heart!

**Dapertutto:** All in vain you will implore her, seeking love within her arms! Giulietta, although you adore her, has sold to me her fatal charms. Wretched fool! I own her magic spell! Wretched fool! His dreams delude him, with his
heart helpless before her…She betrayed him who blindly adores her. Every glance betrays this obsession, for a flaming stone in her possession. Just to taste the thrill of its charms, she must betray love. Yes, betray love. Poor heart!

Giulietta: I love this man who ardently wooed me, but I cannot resist the spell. The diamond’s flame bound and subdued me, I must surrender to its spell. My Hoffman, I adore him. I must betray him in my arms! This precious gem has stronger charms. How could I refuse this possession, this flaming gem, my obsession! To gain this one possession, I must betray my love…my poet, my Hoffman!

Nicklas: Hoffman, how blindly he adores her. Deluded by her charms, he casts his burning heart before her! Every glance betrays his obsession, like an ardent confession. He is lost in her spell, her evil spell. He scorns her in his mind, his heart still burns in love. His tortured heart still burns in love, poor heart!

Schlemil: Wretched poet, I abhor! You’d soon delight in her charms if I did not hold this glittering sword safely in my own possession, ready to keep her from your arms! My friend, I handle it well. I will shatter the spell of your love and your mad obsession. Wait, my friend, and tremble! Hoffman!

Pitichinaccio [Schlemil’s friend]: Wretched fool!… Though you believe she adores you…you are caught in your foolish obsession! Always, always, poor heart! Poor heart!

Chorus: Poor fool! Poor love-sick fool! Hoffman, captive and helpless before her! You adore her. She has lured you by her charms! Accursed all who adore her! They perish in her arms. Poet, forget this love! Be wise and beware!
Hoffman! (201-211)

When the Septet ends in emotional climax, the Barcarolle begins to play in the background and continues to play throughout the climatic scene in this act. Giulietta sings, “The sound of the Barcarolles! . . . It is time to say good-bye! (212). Giulietta departs the stage with a last glance at Hoffman. Nicklas, seeing that Hoffman is not getting ready to go, tries to get Hoffman to follow him. Hoffman refuses to go until he can get Giulietta’s apartment key from Schlemil. Schlemil challenges Hoffman by stating, “This key you will obtain only with my life,” and raises his sword. Hoffman replies, “Then I will take one with the other” (213). Dapertutto, watching the scene unfold and knowing that Hoffman does not have a weapon, immediately presses his own knife into Hoffman’s hands. The fight ensues and after a short skirmish, Schlemil is mortally wounded. Hoffman takes Giulietta’s key from around the neck of the dying Schlemil, and rushes into Giulietta’s apartment, while Dapertutto collects his knife. During this violent encounter, the soothing melody of Barcarolle continues to play juxtaposed against the murderous action.

Giulietta soon appears in a gondola on the Venetian Grand Canal outside of her apartment. She is obviously leaving everything and everyone behind. Hoffman rushes back onto the terrace of the apartment and watches her departing. As Giulietta’s gondola begins its journey past the scene of the Schlemil murder, Giulietta sees what has happened. She then sees Hoffman running back onto the terrace. Giulietta laughs at Hoffman. Dapertutto says to Giulietta, “What will you do with him now? Giulietta says, “I’ll make you a present of him!

As a surprise to everyone, Pittichinaccio, Schlemil’s friend, calls out to Giulietta. He calls her his “angel” and gets in the gondola with her. They embrace. Hoffman is stunned, but unable to turn away. Nicklas, who has been trying to protect Hoffman all along, warns Hoffman
that the police are coming and drags him away while the chorus members continue to sing the last measures of the Barcarolle. Dapertutto remains behind and laughs as the final measures of this scene are sung.

This tale represents the male construction of woman as a seductress and certainly capitalizes on the masculine fear of woman as the temptress and the betrayer. She is willing to beguile in order to achieve her own ends. Woman is herewith presented as selfish, unfeeling, and uncaring. Sex is her tool of choice to get what she wants, regardless of the destruction it may cause. Additionally, the material possession of the dazzling gem is more important to woman than the life of her “conquest.” She is unable to resist the mesmerizing temptation of having this property even if it means sacrificing the life of another. Woman is the ultimate betrayer of man and a whore to materialism.

This again harkens back to the Judeo-Christian element of Eve betraying Adam in the Garden of Eden for want of the apple. Eve is duped by Satan, and in allowing that to happen, she in turn betrays Adam, tempting him to eat of the fruit of the tree of good and evil. Because of this betrayal, Adam (and all humankind) ultimately loses access to this garden and Adam loses his god-like dominion over the plants and animals in the garden. Woman is continually portrayed as the reason for the fall of Adam and mankind. In the Bible Genesis reads:

And the Lord God said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done? And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat…Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee. And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt
not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the
days of thy life;…So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden
of Eden Cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the
way of the tree of life. (Gen. 3:24)

From the very onset of creation then, Woman has been cast as being inferior of intellect, able to
be duped by a male presence (Satan) and, by offering Adam the fruit, she then becomes the
ultimate temptress and instigator of the fall of Man. This last tale of Hoffman’s clarifies and
emphasizes the Biblically-established portrait of Woman as betrayer of all humankind.

The epilogue returns to the tavern, where Hoffman has been relating his “tales.” The
Barcarolle is again played as an introduction to this section. Hoffman sings, “You have now
heard the story of my three loves, whose memory will stay in my heart till my dying day” (305).
The shouts and acclamations for Stella’s triumphant performance are heard in the background.
As the ovations for Stella are heard, Nicklas rises suddenly declaring, “Now I see! Three women
in one woman. Olympia, Antonia, Giulietta, all three in one single woman: La Stella!” (307).
Hoffman warns him to be quiet. He does not want to be reminded of Stella again, and sings of
drinking himself into oblivion. Hoffman drinks with the students until he falls into a drunken
stupor. Stella returns and finds Hoffman in this state. She turns and leaves the tavern, and
Hoffman, for the last time. Stella is escorted off the stage by Lindorf, Hoffman’s rival for her
affections.

Just as the three women represented here are fragmented aspects of Stella, the opera itself
is a physical representation of fragmentation given that ordering of the stories was not dictated
by Offenbach himself, due to his death prior to the first performance. There are two endings to
this opera, and the order in which the three stories are told have been decided by the various
production teams mounting the show.

In one of the endings Nicklas is revealed as Hoffman’s muse and companion, which offers a significantly different aspect to this story. Nicklas is written as mezzo-soprano “pants role,” and this character is represented as both genders in the opera. Nicklas, who tries to protect Hoffman throughout his stories is both the female muse, and also the male best friend. In what is now referred to as the “alternate ending,” the muse reveals herself “surrounded by radiant light.” She sings,

Have you forgotten me, your Muse? I, your faithful friend, whose touch so often dried you eyes? I, who made your sorrows end, and set your dreams to soaring toward the sky? Am I nothing to you? The storms of your passions will subside. Hoffman, the poet, arise! I love you, Hoffman, Be mine! (316)

Hoffman replies,

Your words possess my soul and hold my heart enraptured. My senses are aflame with newly born desire. I feel myself consumed by sweet devouring fire. My every secret though your magic eyes have captured. Those twin stars that brighten the sky! And I feel, oh my dear beloved, your tender impassioned caress on my longing lips and my eyes…Muse of mine—I am your own! (316)

Hoffman “falls back intoxicated.” Stella then enters and the Muse/Nicklas and says, “Too late Madame” and sends Stella away with Lindorf, as the students sing of “filling up” the glasses and complete the drinking song. With this, the opera ends. Clearly the misogynistic Tales of Hoffman is a telling example of the patriarchal voice declaring man’s construction of woman: woman as doll, as seductress, as artist, and finally, as the betrayer of men. There is no representation whatsoever from the female perspective in this work.
What’s in a Name?: Glaspell’s Fragmented Men

*The Verge* explores that missing feminist voice. Just as the women in *The Tales of Hoffman* are seemingly disparate personalities, but are in actuality different sides of the opera singer Stella, so too Claire, in *The Verge*, shows different sides of her fragmented identity, as represented by her connections and interactions with the men in her life. Claire is but the mirror and continuation of the male-constructed Stella. The feminist construction of Claire reveals the symbolic result of this patriarchal smothering and control of the female persona. Like the women in *Tales of Hoffman*, Claire is continually acted upon until she finally snaps. Claire exists in answer to this historically misogynistic view of woman.

The parallels between *The Verge* and *Tales of Hoffman* go even further. In examining the men in Claire’s life, as well as their expectations of her, it becomes apparent that all four areas (doll, seductress, artist, and betrayer) of the male perception of the “total” female are present. To explain this concept fully, an examination of the basic aspects of *The Verge* must be undertaken.

As stated before, Claire is a recognized genius who works with plant life, and whose goal is to create a new species. There are three plants that Claire has been working on in her laboratory: a group of roses, the Edge Vine, and her newest creation, the Breath of Life. These plants are clearly symbolic representations of the different aspects, or sides, of Claire’s fragmented personality. The rose, is a conventional flower, traditional in every sense, both beautiful and fragrant, however Claire has come to despise the rose, viewing it as ordinary, conformist, unadventurous and predictable. Claire has come to regard the rose as abhorrent and boring. The rose is a representation of the conventional side of Claire, the female roles that the male-controlled world has assigned to her: that of wife, mother, and subject.

Claire’s first original creation is the Edge Vine, which is described at the beginning of the
play as “a strange vine.” Glaspell continues the description, “It is arresting rather than beautiful. It creeps along the low wall, and one branch gets a little way up the [surrounding] glass. You might see the form of a cross in it, if you happened to think it that way” (58). The Edge Vine is a plant that cannot decide whether or not it is going to live or die. It is a fragile one-of-a-kind species that cannot reproduce. Claire says of the Edge Vine, “It’s turning back isn’t it? …it’s had its chance. It doesn’t want to be—what hasn’t been” Then says to the vine itself, “I thought you were out—but you’re going back home” (61). Claire, throughout the play, is continually trying to get the Edge Vine to embrace its “otherness,” but the plant is constantly “running back to what it broke out of” (62). Claire, as the Edge Vine’s creator, takes the Edge Vine’s resistance to embrace its “otherness” as a personal failure. She sees this same weakness in herself as it is reflected in her personal relationships with the men in her life. Claire finds herself fearful of vacillating between wanting to be autonomous and unfettered, or lonely and misunderstood. For Claire this loneliness and misunderstanding are manifested in the option of going back to being “protected” and “safe” which will then lead to frustration, anger and a total lack of personal and professional fulfillment. This is the condition in which Claire finds herself at the beginning of the play. She is on this “edge,” unable or unwilling to take that final step into “otherness” for fear she will be out there all alone.

Claire then turns all her hopes and efforts into her new species, the Breath of Life. At the beginning of the play Claire and her helper Anthony are waiting for the Breath of Life to finally flower. This plant is kept in its own room, away from all others so it can grow freely, unaffected by the other plants, again calling to mind her contemporary Virginia Wolfe’s feminist views of a need for *A Room of One’s Own*. This plant creation is even given its own heat source. The Breath of Life is enclosed, but given plenty of room to grow and evolve freely. This, of course,
is representative of Claire as she wants to be. Awaiting the flowering Claire says, “…if the heart has held its own, then Breath of Life is alive in its otherness” (62). This is Claire’s major focus throughout the entire play: will the Breath of Life entirely embrace its otherness and become all it was meant to be? The plant and Claire are on “the verge” of becoming something totally new and unique to the entire world. This “flowering” will be the culmination and justification of all Claire’s creative endeavors. Will it happen or, more importantly, can she let it happen? As demonstrated later, the florae take on an even larger symbolic significance.

Shortly after the play opens, Claire begins singing the Barcarolle from *The Tales of Hoffman*. At first glance this may be seen as merely an introduction of a simple love ballad. However, this is only the first time the melody will be heard in the play. She sings the refrain of the Barcarolle to both her husband Harry, and again in front of her lover Richard, in both cases to soothe the ruffled feathers of these men when Claire’s behavior is deemed by them, yet again, to be inappropriate. Claire refuses to acquiesce to their will, but through the romantic nature of the song reminds them both of past sexual encounters. Through this action, both men are appeased for a time. The music has calmed them. The moment passes and the song is not revisited until later on in the play when she is being seduced by Tom, the man she thinks she might be able to love fully. Claire and Tom are up in her greenhouse on “the verge” of commencing a sexual relationship. The Barcarolle begins to play on the phonograph downstairs, where Harry, her husband, is entertaining guests. Claire states to Tom, “I will risk the life that waits, perhaps he who gives his loneliness—shall find” (89). The music begins very quietly as the seduction begins. As Claire and Tom begin to become aware of the music, Claire says, “Don’t listen. That’s nothing. I tell you—it isn’t that. Yes I know—that’s amorous—enclosing. …We will come out—to radiance—in far places” (89). The music gets louder and louder.
Claire gives in and says, “Oh, then let it be that [a conventional relationship]! Go with it. Give up—the otherness. I will!” (89). Tom continues,

(drenched in her passion, but fighting) It’s you. (in anguish) You rare thing
untouched—not—not into this—not back into this—by me—lover of your
apartness. (She steps back. She see he cannot…she stand th ere…a long moment.
Then she runs down the stairs.) (89)

The music of the Barcarolle continues to get louder and louder as the scene progresses. Claire finally screams, “Harry! Choke that phonograph! . . . Harry! If you don’t stop that music, I’ll kill myself!” (89-90). Harry responds by stating, “What is there to get so excited about? Claire immediately responds, “Stop that phonograph or I’ll…” (90). Harry immediately replies “Why of course I’ll stop it.” (The music comes to a grating stop) (90). Harry continues “. . . Certainly you could have asked me more quietly to turn off the Victrola…what harm was it doing you way up here” (90).

When Claire hears the Barcarolle being sung on the phonograph, she is about to be seduced into a relationship with Tom that will silence her own voice and kill her uniqueness. As the music grows louder and louder, the patriarchal voice is getting louder and louder as well, making her own feminist voice recede into the background, unable to be heard. She almost succumbs to the power, but in an act of vehemence screams, “If you don’t stop that music, I’ll kill myself!” (90). Claire has full knowledge that if she listens to the seduction of the ever controlling male voice, she will cease to be able to discover, hear or sing her own song. As the volume of the music swells, Claire’s violent reaction is also Glaspell’s reaction, not only the seductive love song, but also the messages of subjectivity and oppression contained within the opera itself.
Harry, Claire’s husband, wants Claire to be his doll and trophy wife. Before they were married Harry took Claire on wild adventures, flying planes as high and as fast as they could go, but, after marriage, Claire becomes grounded. Harry now seeks to squelch Claire’s imagination, and is now embarrassed by her uniqueness, wishing she would not be so “queer” and begging her to do things the way other wives do them. He controls and manipulates Claire continually. In the first act of the play Harry states, “Claire used to be the best sport a man ever played around with” (71), and play with her he does, much like a cat with a mouse. He humiliates and tortures her by always trying to change who she is.

The name “Harry,” a derivative of Henry, according to the website *Behind the Name: The Etymology and History of First Names*, is “from the Germanic name Heimiric which means ‘home ruler,’ composed of the elements *heim* ‘home’ and *ric* ‘power, ruler.’” *The Oxford English Dictionary* online simply defines the word harry as “to persistently carry out attacks on an enemy or an enemies territory; persistently harass,” however, *The Webster’s College Dictionary* gives a more full definition stating word the harry means “to harass; annoy; torment. . . to ravage as in war; to devastate…to push (a person) forcefully, tormentingly…to lay waste” (601). Thus Harry’s very name describes his character and motive toward Claire. He is destroying her. To extend this line of analysis further, Harry’s last name is Archer. This name can also be explored in several ways. *The Webster’s College Dictionary* also defines the root word or prefix “arch” to have several meanings, including: “crafty, sly; denoting individuals…having authority over others of their class;” and “…a combining form meaning chief, leader, ruler;” and finally, “archaic” (70). This same dictionary also gives the well known definition of the word “archer” as “a person who shoots with a bow and arrow” (70). Claire’s husband Harry is an archer who uses words of degradation as weapons and, just as the arrow carrying archer, he shoots his words
to wound, maim, destroy, and eventually to kill his prey, in this case his wife Claire.

Richard, a family friend of Harry’s, referred to throughout the script as “Dick,” her lover, is also aptly named. *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines dick as “a male penis; a stupid or contemptible person.” Definitions of “dick” in *The Webster’s College Dictionary* include: “to have sexual intercourse with,” as well as, “to victimize; cheat” (368). Richard sees Claire as the seductress, a sexual object to be used and exploited for his own gratification. He puts Claire’s safety in jeopardy as he continues and pushes this adulterous affair. Dick victimizes Claire continually by his very presence in her home, where he fraternizes with other members of her family. Claire fears they will be found out, yet Dick continues to be omnipresent. He seeks to control her sexual being and he exploits her adventurous spirit. Dick relishes the exhilaration he feels by having this affair with his friend’s wife, because he is both dull and monotonous and depends exclusively on Claire and the illicit affair to bring excitement and pleasure to his boring existence.

The third man in Claire’s life is “Tom,” defined in *The Webster’s College Dictionary* as “the male of a species” (1375), and similarly in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as, “the male of various animals.” By the strictest definition Tom is then, the epitome of the male species. However, the website *Behind the Name: The Etymology and History of First Names* states that the name, a form of Thomas, is a “Greek form of the Aramaic name Te’oma which means ‘twin’. In the New Testament this is the name of the apostle who doubts the resurrected Jesus (John 20:25). The imagery of a twin comes into play when Claire finally comes to realize Tom’s duplicitous nature and that he is, in effect, his own “evil twin” or doppelgänger. It is also in this moment that Claire comes to realize that, like his Biblical namesake, Tom doubts her ability. Tom sees Claire as the eccentric, but talented, artist. However Tom is unable to help her achieve
her potential without making her become “ordinary” through the very act of loving her. Tom’s affections are conventional and he can only love her as everyone else loves her, which will ultimately make her responsible for taking care of his needs by having to answer his expectations of her abilities.

Tom’s last name, Edgeworthy, is significant as well. Tom is only worthy of keeping Claire if she remains in her “edge vine” state; a state in which she is always returning back to the known and comfortable, wanting to reach out, but continually being drawn back, and thus bringing into question her very survival. Tom is not “worthy” of the Breath of Life. He can only remain a part of Claire’s life if she becomes stagnant, staid, and unable to reproduce or develop into all she was meant to be. Claire must kill Tom, just as she finally kills her Edge Vine (78), in order to evolve and become a new creation and creator. By placing her hands around Tom’s neck and squeezing, Claire is choking his voice as well as his words. She is literally removing his Breath of Life. In silencing Tom, Claire is really trying to silence the male domination she has endured throughout her lifetime, and quiet the patriarchal voice that will not allow her to be what she must be, who she must be, and finally allow her to achieve that which she is capable of achieving. With the death of Tom, the “male of the species,” Claire’s needs can finally be met and her goals and dreams realized.

While his role as a “man” in her life is somewhat in question, as discussed a length in the next section of this study which explores the “Muse” or “helpmeet” of the protagonists in each work, the meaning of Anthony’s name is also noteworthy in the examination of name origins. Ironically, the only references in the Oxford English and The Webster’s College Dictionaries are to suffragist Susan B. Anthony and to St. Anthony, the founder of Monasticism. Given that Glaspell, as outlined in Chapter Four of this study, was at the forefront of the “First Wave”
feminist movement, which was in many ways defined by Susan B. Anthony, and that the Provincetown Player’s were rooted in a tradition of monasticism, it seems unlikely that Glaspell’s choice of this name for the Muse and helpmeet was random. The website *Behind the Name: The Etymology and History of First Names* states that Anthony is, “From the Roman family name *Antonius*, which is of unknown Etruscan origin. It has been commonly (but incorrectly) associated with Greek ἄνθος (*anthos*) ‘flower’, which resulted in the addition of the *h* in the 17th century.” Although the website notes that the definition of flower as an incorrect translation of the Greek, the timeline is such that this would have been the accepted definition when Glaspell was penning this work.

The final name to explore is that of “Claire.” The name is not defined in either the *Oxford English Dictionary* or *The Webster’s College Dictionary* because it, unlike the other names, is not an English word unto itself. However, the website *Behind the Name: The Etymology and History of First Names* states that the name is a derivative of the French name Clara, and is a “Medieval name derived from Latin *clarus* ‘clear, bright, famous’.” Claire sees meaning beyond the mere representation of the words she hears. She sees consequences to her actions as well as those of the men surrounding her. She sees herself, not only as she is, but also as she is meant to be. She sees her potential, and will settle for nothing less.

To take this exploration a step further, I contend that if the characters of Tom, Dick and Harry are conflated, a clearly intended representation of “every-man” which is Glaspell’s further indictment of the power of the patriarchal controlling voice, is established. The culturally dominant voice of patriarchal dominance that has constructed and characterized Woman as a doll or toy to be manipulated and controlled; a sexual object for his own personal gratification; a hysterical artist that is in such need of male “guidance” that without it she will cease to exist;
and, finally, when left to her own devices, the cunning betrayer of man and all mankind, the “Eve” of destruction. This “everyman” is also the very essence of the character of Hoffman as he is presented in the opera. Tom, Dick and Harry are representative of Hoffman, just as the three women in Hoffman’s stories are representative of Stella/Claire.

**Exploring the Doppelgänger: The Role of the Helpmeet**

The parallels Glaspell establishes reach far beyond the symbolism of the character names and, in fact, extend to the point of *The Verge* becoming a doppelgänger of *The Tales of Hoffman*. In the Romantic tradition the doppelgänger, or as it literally translates “double walker,” was a common literary device of German writers of the nineteenth century, including E. T. A. Hoffman, whose life and literature is the subject of Offenbach’s opera. The notion of the doppelgänger also establishes the idea of the disintegration and fragmentation of personality, in which the authentic is shadowed by the “other.” Glaspell is among the first of the Modernist to use the Romantic notion of the doppelgänger not in the traditional sense of the “evil twin” but as the lens through which her work can begin to illuminate the emerging feminist viewpoint. If Glaspell’s work is viewed through the traditional masculine lens of the Romantics, then Claire becomes the obvious and ultimate betrayer of men, who is not to be trusted and eventually is perceived to be insane. However, if the Modern feminist lens is applied to the same character, Claire then becomes an uncompromised and complete being, who is finally mentally, spiritually, and creatively free from patriarchal control. Just as Antonia’s voice is silenced through this patriarchal control, Claire is able to discover her voice through her opposition to and ultimate submission of the patriarchal voice.

Another of Glaspell’s doppelgänger s can be found when examining the secondary
characters of both works: Nicklas, Hoffman’s “muse” and companion, and Anthony, Claire’s confidant. Both are portrayed throughout their respective works as rather androgynous beings. Both Nicklas and Anthony are defined as male in gender within their individual texts and storylines, however, they are identified, written and portrayed throughout the texts as having characteristics of the traditional female gender, specifically in that they serve only as devotees of the more dominant male characters. In this manner each becomes almost gender neutral, a stance which is strengthened by the fact that neither is shown as having any other relationships within the texts beyond that which they share with Hoffman and Claire respectively.

As I have covered previously, Nicklas has the daunting task of trying to save Hoffman and keep him from harm. Though Hoffman continually places himself within difficult, humiliating, and/or threatening circumstances, Nicklas repeatedly comes to Hoffman’s rescue and works to protect him from himself and all others. This seems Nicklas’ only goal and function.

In the first act, Nicklas tries to protect Hoffman from the manipulations of the creators of the doll, as well as trying to open Hoffman’s eyes to the truth of Olympia’s mechanical origins. Nicklas begs, pleads and tries to inform Hoffman of his follies, only to have Hoffman ignore his continual pleadings. Nicklas is the one who runs to Hoffman’s aid when he is being danced to death by a corrupted Olympia. It is Nicklas who first investigates and discovers that Olympia is merely a doll. It is also Nicklas who tries to calm Hoffman when he is made a fool of when the truth surrounding the creation of Olympia is discovered by all.

So too, in the Act surrounding Antonia, Nicklas is not present throughout the most of this section. Nearing the end of the act, her father Crespel accuses Hoffman of being the one who killed Antonia. As Nicklas enters the final scene with Hoffman, Crespel cries out to Hoffman,
“It is you who killed my child! You wretch! I want to see you die! A weapon! A knife! A knife! (298). The doting muse, Nicklas, is the only one who physically stops Crespel from harming Hoffman, and in fact only appears as a character in this act to perform the sole act of saving Hoffman from the physical harm of an enraged and grief-stricken father. He does not sing, and is not physically present except to stop Crespel from killing Hoffman.

In the story surrounding Giulietta, Nicklas is present from the beginning, and sings the Barcarolle with the soprano Giulietta. As the scene progresses it becomes clear that Schlemil is in pursuit of Giulietta and, therefore, is jealous of Hoffman’s interest in her. Nicklas warns Hoffman immediately, and tells him that he has “two horses ready.” Nicklas cautions Hoffman saying, “the moment you start dreaming your mad dreams of love, we are leaving” (169). When Hoffman loses his reflection due to Giulietta’s betrayal, Nicklas is horrified and tries to physically take him “from this place” (199). But Hoffman refuses to leave. The pleadings of Nicklas during the Septet section are to no avail. The warnings of Nicklas go unheeded by Hoffman, and yet Nicklas does not give up, but continues to try to get Hoffman away safely, even after the fight ensues between Hoffman and Schlemil. While the murder is taking place, Nicklas is keeping watch for Hoffman and does not return until Schlemil is dead. As the police are approaching and Hoffman is about to be caught, Nicklas saves Hoffman from being apprehended by literally “dragging” him from the scene (217).

Again, in the final scene of the opera, it is Nicklas that sends Stella away by stating that she has come too late and by showing her that Hoffman is dead drunk. Nicklas then points Stella in the direction of Lindorf and tells her that the “Councilor is awaiting you,” which finally severs all ties between Stella and Hoffman (317). Again, Nicklas (working as the “finger of the Muse”) saves Hoffman from the ultimate betrayer: Woman.
When examining the characters of Anthony and Nicklas there are several similar points upon which to draw comparison. Anthony is always trying to protect Claire, and is never a fully developed functioning character. His presence seems only to be present as a support to Claire and her botanical projects. Anthony sees, understands, and appreciates Claire’s extensive vision surrounding her creations. He is the perfect “help meet” for Claire. Anthony is completely self sacrificing and requires nothing for himself. His only function seems to be one of foundational support, in which he provides emotional, spiritual, and physical comfort for Claire as she undertakes her projects. In the end, Anthony tries to save Claire from herself, but in this case, does not succeed.

Anthony’s role as “help meet” is established in Act One of *The Verge* before any other characters enter and even before any dialogue is spoken. The play begins with Anthony in the greenhouse tending to Claire’s plants. He is described as a “rugged man past middle life” (58). He is diligently tending to Claire’s garden and begins taking instruction from Claire over the phone. Anthony is very upset because the temperature has dropped to 49 degrees, which he feels will put the plants in danger. Claire reassures him through the phone conversation that she has shut off the heat to the house and diverted the “energy” to the greenhouse which, of course, is going to cause the house guests to freeze. Anthony is immediately relieved when he hears the news that the plants will be spared. As the crisis seems to be past, Anthony again is “preparing the soil—mixing, sifting” and continues to monitor the thermometer. All the while, there is a buzzer going off, which Anthony consciously decides to ignore: “The buzzer goes on and on in impatient jerks which mount in anger. Several times Anthony is almost compelled by this insistence, but the thing that holds him back is stronger…Anthony goes on preparing the soil” (58-59). The person behind the buzzer turns out to be the master of the house, Harry, who is
very angry because he and his guests are left in the cold, while Anthony and Claire’s plants have
been given all the heat. His exchanges with Anthony are very telling of the power base within
the household. Harry comes charging into the greenhouse, leaving the door open to the frigid
elements and endangering Claire’s precious plants. Anthony begs him to shut the door,
explaining the need for continual warmth needed by the plants. Harry demands to know why
Anthony did not answer his buzzer. Anthony declares that “Miss Claire—Mrs. Archer told me
not to” (59). As the conversation between Anthony and Harry progresses, further indications of
Anthony’s loyalties are revealed:

Harry: [Claire] Told you not to answer me?

Anthony: Not you especially – nobody but her.

Harry: Well, I like her nerve – and yours…

Anthony: She thought it would be better for the flowers.

Harry: I am not a flower – true, but I do need a little attention – and a little heat.

Anthony: You see the roses need a great deal of heat.

Harry: The roses have seventy-three I have forty-five.

Anthony: Yes, the roses need seventy three.

Harry: Anthony, this is an outrage!

Anthony: …Why, Miss Claire would never have done what she has if she hadn’t
looked out for her plants in such ways as this. Have you forgotten that the Breath
of Life is about to flower? . . .

Harry: I see you admire her vigilance.

Anthony: Oh, I do. (fervently) I do. Harm was near, and that woke her up. (59)

It is immediately evident that Anthony has a defined assignment within the household. He is not
present to take care of the head of the household, members of the family, or their guests, but holds his position solely to help Claire with her creations. Anthony continues his argument with the other “servant” of the household, Hattie, who is represented as a traditional domestic servant, and described as a “maid with a basket.” Hattie has followed Harry’s directions by bringing breakfast for all of the family members and guests into the plant “sanctuary.” As Hattie is setting up the toaster and hot plate next to one of the plants, Anthony cries out,

**Anthony:** You – you think you can cook eggs under the Edge Vine?

**Hattie:** I guess Mr. Archer’s eggs are as important as a vine. I guess my work is as important as yours.

**Anthony:** There’s a million people like you – and like Mr. Archer. In all the world there’s only one Edge Vine. (60)

Hattie, whose name is of German origin and, according to several sources, is the feminine version of the name “Harry,” and means “ruler of the house” or “home ruler,” is representative of the traditional servant who will blindly follow the orders given by the person who supplies her paycheck. She seems unable and unwilling to even acknowledge the work that Claire and Anthony are doing within the greenhouse. She seems resentful of Anthony’s relationship with the mistress of the house and works to cause Anthony distress. After Hattie has brought the household breakfast items into the greenhouse, a glimpse of this tension is unveiled when Harry reenters the greenhouse:

*(Door opens, admitting Harry; after looking around for the best place to eat breakfast, moves a box of earth from the table.)*

**Harry:** Just give me a hand, will you Hattie? *(They bring it to the open space and he and Hattie arrange breakfast things. Hattie with triumphant glances at the*
distressed Anthony)

**Anthony:** *(deciding he must act)* Mr. Archer, this is not the place to eat breakfast!

**Harry:** Dead wrong, old boy. The place that has heat is the place to eat breakfast.

*(To Hattie)* Tell the other gentlemen – I heard Mr. Demming is up, and Mr. Edgeworth, if he appears, that as long as it is such a pleasant morning, we’re having breakfast outside. To the conservatory for coffee. *(Hattie giggles, is leaving)*...

**Anthony:** But Miss Claire will be very angry.

**Harry:** I am very angry…

**Anthony:** *(an exclamation of horror at the thermometer)*. The temperature is falling. I must report. *(he punches the buzzer, takes up the phone)* Miss Claire? . . . A terrible thing has happened…Yes, it is about Mr. Archer…He is here…Yes, he is having breakfast served out here- for himself and the other gentlemen are to come too….But the door keeps opening – this stormy wind blowing right over the plants. The temperature has already fallen. – Yes, yes, I thought you would like to come. *(61)*

Hattie very clearly relays her loyalties to the head of the household, and thus the patriarchal society in which they live, within this exchange. She continues to do so when she returns several scenes later when Anthony is working in the greenhouse. Hattie clearly interrupts Anthony as he is working for Claire when she rushes in to inform Anthony that there is a terrific amount of unrest between Dick and Harry, and that Harry is chasing Dick around with a gun. The exchange begins,

**Hattie:** You don’t know how he is. I went in the room and -
Anthony: Well, he won’t hurt you, will he?

Hattie: How do I know who he’ll hurt – a person whose – (seeing how to get to him) Maybe he’ll hurt Mrs. Archer.

Anthony: (startled, then smiles) No; he won’t hurt Miss Claire.

Hattie: What do you know about it? – Out here in the plant house?

Anthony: And I don’t want to know about it. This is a very important day for me. It’s the Breath of Life I’m thinking of today – not you and Mr. Archer….

Hattie: Don’t you think I ought to tell Mrs. Archer than –

Anthony: You let her alone! This is no day for her to be bothered by you. At eleven o’clock (looks at his watch) she comes out here – to Breath of Life…

Hattie: …He wants to get to Mrs. Archer too – just a little while ago. But she won’t open her door for none of them. I can’t even get in to do her room.

Anthony: Then do some other room – and leave me alone in this room. (92-93)

The alliance of each of the companion/servants to their proscribed “masters” is clearly defined. Anthony will protect Claire and her creations at all cost, even if it means ignoring that a guest’s life has been threatened, in the same manner that Nicklas exists solely to protect Hoffman.

Anthony’s relationship with the men of the household, established early on, continues to be revealed throughout the play and runs parallel to the relationships between Nicklas and the women represented in The Tales of Hoffman.

The first act provides a revealing exchange between Harry and Anthony, as noted above. As each of the men is introduced, the absolute absence of any feeling from Anthony towards the guests of the household becomes evident. His focus is in one direction and one direction only: protecting Claire and her creations. As the guests are invading the plant sanctuary that
heretofore had only been open only to Claire, her plants and Anthony, they are also compromising her creations by allowing the temperature to become compromised. Harry, to get back at Claire for diverting all the heat to the greenhouse, has invited Dick and Tom to join them there for breakfast. Claire is immediately summoned by her protector, Anthony. When Claire appears Anthony goes to the inner room of the greenhouse. Claire confronts the men who would do her plants harm. Through this exchange, Claire’s (and shortly thereafter Anthony’s) relationship with the men is revealed to the audience:

**Claire:** What are you doing here?

**Harry:** Getting Breakfast. (all the while doing so)

**Claire:** I’ll not have you in my place!

**Harry:** If you take all the heat then you have to take me.

**Claire:** I’ll show you how I have to take you. (with her hands begins scooping upon him the soil Anthony has prepared) […]

(Dick is hurled in)

**Claire:** (going to the door, as he gasps for breath before closing it) How dare you make my temperature uneven! (she shuts the door and leans against it)

**Dick:** Is that what I do? (a laugh, a look between them, which is held into significance.)

**Harry:** (who is not facing them) Where is the salt?

**Dick:** Oh, I fell down in the snow. I must have left the salt where I fell. I’ll go back and look for it.

**Claire:** And change the temperature? We don’t need salt.

**Harry:** You don’t need salt, Claire. But we eat eggs.
**Claire**: I must tell you I don’t like the idea of any food being eaten here, where things have their own way to go. Please eat as little as possible, and as quickly.

**Harry**: A hostess calculated to put one at one’s ease

**Claire**: I care nothing about your ease. Or about Dick’s ease.

**Dick**: And no doubt that’s what makes you so fascinating a hostess.

**Claire**: Was I a fascinating hostess last night, Dick? (softly sings) Oh, night of love (from the Barcarolle of ‘Tales of Hoffman)

**Harry**: We’ve got to have salt. (He starts for the door. Claire slips in ahead of him, locks it, takes the key. He marches off, right.)

**Claire**: (calling after him) That ends always locked.

Tom, who has yet to enter, is locked out in the cold. He finally gains entry by firing off a pistol to get everyone’s attention inside. Upon entry Tom joins the rest of the men in conversation about Claire. He tries to explain to the others about why Claire is different, special, to no avail. Anthony comes back into the room carrying a sprayer for the plants,

**Harry**: …Anthony, have any arrangements been made about Miss Claire’s daughter?

**Anthony**: I haven’t heard of any arrangements.

**Harry**: Well, she’ll have to have some heat in her room. We can’t all live out here.

**Anthony**: Indeed, you cannot. It is not good for the plants. (72)

Again, it is clear that Anthony cares only about the plants, as they are related to Claire. Even the promise of the arrival of Claire’s daughter does not deter him from his protective tasks. The exchange continues,
Tom: Claire’s daughter has arrived. (looking in the inner room [for Claire] – returns to the phone) I don’t see her. (catching a glimpse of Anthony off right) Oh, Anthony, where is Miss Claire? Her daughter has arrived.

Anthony: (after a baffled moment) She is working on something very important in her experiments.

Dick: But isn’t her daughter one of her experiments?

Anthony: (after a moment) Her daughter is finished.

Tom: (at the phone) Sorry – I can’t get to Claire. She appears to have gone below. (Anthony closes the trap-door) I did speak to Anthony, but he says that Claire is working on one of her experiments and that her daughter is finished. […] I hate to reach Claire when she does not want to be reached. Why of course – a daughter is very important, but oh, that’s too bad. (putting down the phone) He says the girl’s feelings are hurt. [Tom gently taps on the trap door] (Anthony smiles at the gentle tapping – nods approval as Tom returns to the phone) She doesn’t come up. Indeed I did – with both fists – Sorry.

Anthony: Please, you won’t try again to disturb Miss Claire, will you?

Dick: Her daughter is here, Anthony. She hasn’t seen her daughter for a year.

Anthony: Well, if she got along without a mother for a year – (he goes back to his work) (72-73)

This exchange clearly shows Anthony’s total devotion to, and understanding of, Claire. The relationships regarding family and friends are non-existent to Claire which, in turn, directs Anthony’s course of action regarding their status within his domain. Anthony has no thought for himself or anyone else outside the influence of Claire, and the only subjects they discuss concern
the nurturing of Claire’s plants. There is no other relationship exposed between them. Though
Claire clearly has had relationships of a sexual nature with the three other men in her life, the
person she depends on the most is asexual towards her. Like Nicklas, Anthony seems an
androgynous being whose sexuality is not a factor in any of the personal exchanges. Anthony,
like Nicklas with Hoffman, seems to have one purpose, and one purpose only – to protect and to
support Claire.

There is one readily identifiable and important difference between the characters of
Nicklas and Anthony: the outcome of their protective practices. Nicklas is able to save the
romantic Hoffman from himself. Anthony, however, is unable to “save” Claire from her
seemingly destructive end. Even when he tries to take the murder of Tom upon himself
declaring, “I did it, don’t you see? I didn’t want so many around,” he is discounted by the “real”
men of the group who embody masculinity in its definition within the bounds of this society.

Thematic parallels also begin to emerge in a close examination of the endings of each
play, as both protagonists must, in decidedly different ways, forsake love in order to fulfill the
destiny their Muse has desired for them. In The Tales of Hoffman the power of love is seen as
standing in the way of Hoffman’s creative genius. Through the telling of his stories he comes to
the conclusion that he has ultimately been manipulated and betrayed by “Woman” in all her
guises. Hoffman is portrayed as the ultimate victim who must sacrifice and endure his losses to
be able to fulfill his creative genius. Thus Hoffman must “kill” his love for Stella in order to
fulfill his “higher calling” as artist. Only through this sacrifice can Hoffman be labeled as a
Romantic hero who has chosen his “God given” creative art over his worldly love. Claire, on the
other hand, experiences the same manipulation and subjectivity by the men in her life; however
her choice to kill the love that would hold her back and thwart her creativity is labeled, by all but
Anthony, as the act of an insane lunatic. These juxtaposed endings provide a clear and undeniable distinction between notions of the idealized “romantic” and the modernist representation of womanhood.

When examining the presentation of characters in each text, as well as the significance of the symbolism found within the meanings of their names, the parallel themes of subjectivity and freedom begin to emerge. However, the distinct difference between the two establishes the doppelgänger used so effectively by Glaspell as a modernist and feminist statement. Through her, at that time unique and revolutionary, presentation of the female protagonist, Glaspell not only presents a virtual “shadow” play of Offenbach’s opera, but begins to redefine the Romantic tradition of the doppelgänger and of the “New Woman” on the American stage.
CHAPTER THREE: THE FIRST-WAVE FEMINIST MOVEMENT AS FOUND WITHIN THE VERGE

Susan Glaspell the Woman and Artist

In order to fully understand the revolutionary message of The Verge, it is important to first understand not only Glaspell and her place as a “New Woman” within the first-wave feminist movement in America, but also her humble beginnings and her place, as a woman, within this historical time period.

There are many biographies of Susan Glaspell. She has become a topic of interest for contemporary feminist scholars as her life, works, and “voice” have been rediscovered and reexamined through a new historicist perspective. The scholarly essays and books of Marcia Noe, J. Ellen Gainor, Veronica Makowsky, Linda Ben-Zvi, Barbara Ozieblo and Brenda Murphy, to name but a few, have offered a deep and rich exploration of Susan Glaspell’s time, and a thorough examination of her existing works.

There are, however, difficulties in trying to construct a biography of depth. As Ozieblo states in Susan Glaspell: a Critical Biography “in spite of living an extraordinary life for a woman of her time…Glaspell constantly ceded center stage to the men she loved, making it extremely difficult to reconstruct either her life or her personality” (3). For the purposes of this study, I will merely touch on a few highlights of Glaspell’s world so as to inform my perspective on The Verge.

According to many of her earlier biographers, including Arthur Waterman and C.W.E.

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5 The biography of Susan Glaspell and the historical information regarding the Provincetown Players is compiled from a variety of sources as outlined in the bibliography.
Bigsby, there seems to be some discrepancy regarding the year of Glaspell’s birth. For a time her birth date was generally accepted as being in the year 1882, but through the examination of primary documents it seems that this birth year would have made Glaspell just seventeen years old when she graduated from college and became a reporter. Though this is not impossible, it is highly improbable. Ben-Zvi, in her recent work *Susan Glaspell: Her Life and Times*, acknowledges the dispute and cites three sources that clarify Glaspell’s birth year as being 1876: 1) The Scott County, Iowa census of 1880, which lists her as being four years old, 2) Glaspell’s college records which state she was twenty-one upon entrance, and 3) the diary of Lydia Ricker, Glaspell’s great aunt (22). Thus 1876 is the date of birth generally accepted by contemporary scholars. All seem to agree that Susan Keating Glaspell was born in Davenport, Iowa to a pioneering family that helped to settle that area of the country. She was the middle child, and the only girl born to her parents, with two brothers, one older and one younger. Her mother, the former Alice Feeney Keating, was a teacher who had given up her vocation, as most young women of the time were expected to do when they got married. Biographer Ben-Zvi contends that this loss of personal worth and identity caused an emotional frailty that plagued Glaspell’s mother throughout her lifetime and became the basis for the personal sacrifice, strong encouragement and emotional support that Alice had given her daughter in the early years of her career and development (20-25).

Being from a struggling farming family, Glaspell did not “fit in” with many of the local girls who had come from more financially secure families. This aspect of being raised in the mid-west as an “outsider” who does not “fit in” to the local circumstances or the people around her would later become a foundational aspect in many of the female characters found in Glaspell’s literary and dramatic works.
Glaspell was educated in Davenport public schools, and was chosen as “one of six who gave a commencement address entitled ‘Songs that Live’” (Ben-Zvi 25). All biographers make reference to the fact that Glaspell was a society editor and reporter for The Weekly Outlook, the social section of her hometown newspaper The Davenport Morning Republican. Here she wrote essays and commentary regarding social issues of the day including the “morals and mores that caught her eye” (Ozieblo 20). Though the controversies regarding women’s issues and voting rights were sweeping the country, Glaspell didn’t openly report on these issues, but, according to Ozieblo, “the freeing of women from societies ludicrous chains is a theme that pervades all of her essays for the Weekly Outlook” (21). As time passed, these themes would continue and strengthen throughout all of Glaspell’s works.

Upon graduation from high school, she then attended Drake University in neighboring Des Moines (Ben-Zvi 25). According to both Ben-Zvi and Ozieblo, Glaspell was admitted as a junior having “skipped” her freshman and sophomore years, due to her “Latin certificate.” (Ben-Zvi 35) and entered with the intent to study philosophy (Ozieblo 22). Drake University was founded in 1881 and affiliated with The Church of Christ and, according to Ozieblo, though the University was religiously based, the founding elders wanted to “provide young people with a liberal education in science and the arts” (22). Ozieblo quotes The Drake University Bulletin dated June 1900, as stating that they had determined to “offer all the advantages in all departments to both sexes regardless of race, creed or color” (22).

Glaspell’s days at Drake have been described in various terms. Waterman points out that she was recognized as a budding writer and was “second in candidacy for the office of editor of the school newspaper, and was chosen class toastmistress and storyteller at graduation,” and her studies at Drake included the Classics, Literature, and the Bible (18). Ben-Zvi notes that
Glaspell contributed four pieces to her school newspaper, *The Delphic*, and that she “won the right to represent Drake at the state debate” (37) and participated heavily in her graduation activities. Ozieblo concentrates her remarks on Glaspell’s activities in the *Margaret Fuller Club*, a campus club that “felt themselves [to be] social and literary leaders” (23). The Margaret Fuller Club, named after the famed writer who criticized the lack of educational and professional opportunities available to women, had limited membership, and stood for “the value of personality through intellectual and social development on a high level of responsibility” (Ozieblo 23). All biographers agree that Glaspell was recognized early on for her gifts of oration and writing, and that she was described as being a forthright, intelligent, vivacious and socially skilled young woman. She expressed her ideas openly and freely, both in writing and performance, had a dynamic personality, and was well liked and admired.

After graduation, Glaspell got a job as a reporter for the *Des Moines Daily News*, covering such things as local politics, including the coverage of legislative sessions. Soon she had her own column at the paper using the byline “The NEWS Girl” (Waterman 20). Ben-Zvi also notes that the *Des Moines Daily News* gave Glaspell the responsibility of covering the “state legislature and murder cases” (38). It is here that Glaspell was called upon to cover a murder trial that would prove to have a great impact on her professional life.

The Hossack murder trial involved a mother of nine children, Margaret, who was accused of hacking her financially successful farmer husband to death as he lay sleeping in their bed. Married for thirty-three years and sleeping beside him when he was killed, Margaret Hossack claimed to have not been awakened while he was murdered by an intruder, and heard only a “strange sound, like two pieces of wood striking” which finally woke her up (Ben-Zvi 41). At first it was accepted that a prowler had committed the crime, until it was discovered that there
were no missing items from the farmhouse. When the bloody ax was found under the family’s corn crib and the neighbors hinted that there had been marital discord, Mrs. Hossack was arrested during her husband’s funeral (Ben-Zvi 42). Glaspell covered all aspects of the trial in print from December 3, 1900, to the conviction of Margaret Hassock on April 11, 1901 (Ben-Zvi 42). Glaspell, who had repeatedly revealed herself as sympathetic to the defense, filed her report on the conviction, the story that would be her last for the paper (Ben-Zvi 47). This trial, and the circumstances surrounding it, would later become the basis for Glaspell’s best known play and short story, *Trifles* and *A Jury of her Peers*.

Shortly after the trial coverage, Glaspell returned to Davenport to pursue her personal writing career. She began by writing and sending stories to several different contests and magazines, and though not immediately successful, she soon became quite well known for her published short stories. Her first magazine stories can be characterized as romantic, in which young love conquers all obstacles and attains the required happy ending, however her work at this time was also noted for its depth of characterizations and realistic style. Glaspell won a $150 prize for her “short story periodical *Black Cat* which was “published in their August 2004 edition” (Ben-Zvi 51). She was so successful at this endeavor that she continued to publish stories in magazines for several years (Ben-Zvi 50-51).

In the summer of 1902, Glaspell moved on to pursue her graduate degree at the University of Chicago. Though she only completed one semester of graduate school, it was in Chicago that she met many of the colorful and bohemian individuals who would continue to shape her life and her works. As Ozieblo states,

…in the summer of 1902, when she enrolled in the University of Chicago, it was more foreboding than familiar. Holding sway at the time were Robert Herrick,
William Vaughn Moody, Robert Lovett, Henry Fuller and Clara Laughlin…

Her choice of the University of Chicago was not as unusual…For midwestern writers Chicago was the sought after Mecca, promising freedom from boredom and alienation of small town life. (53)

During this time Glaspell began to find great success with her writing. Over the next several years, building on her journalistic experience in both Davenport and Des Moines, she wrote several stories for the Chicago Daily News and other Chicago papers. Glaspell seems to have found her writing voice during these years and wrote short stories filled with her personal experiences. Ozieblo continues,

The same tone of pointed irony and social commentary colors Susan’s Chicago based short stories written between 1902 and 1907. …they demonstrate a growing facility with language and interesting details, as well as clearly delineated central characters…Her theme of human connection seemed to touch the reading public. By 1904 she had already been able to place her work in the leading magazines in the country, including Harper’s, Munsey’s, Frank Leslie’s Monthly, and Youth Companion. (58-59)

Glaspell was a successful writer during this Chicago period, earning enough through her publishing to take care of her needs. She returned to Davenport in 1904 as a celebrity in her hometown, and although a celebrity, she was still not accepted by the community because her social standing had not changed. If anything, her social status had grown more dire because she was still an unmarried woman, nearing 30 years of age, and now identified with the big city’s New Woman, which many found very threatening. Glaspell continued to be the woman on the outside looking in.
This “outsider” status was also a reality for George “Jig” Cram Cook, the son of the Davenport’s “most respected lawyer” (Ben-Zvi 78). While Glaspell was establishing a successful career as a writer Cook, with four degrees and no vocation, was living alone in the family cabin in Buffalo reading Nietzsche (Ben-Zvi 78). Recently divorced, with several failed attempts at earning a decent living, Cook felt he was also the misunderstood outsider. Ben-Zvi states it best, when describing Cook’s life, in saying, “In passion, Jig was unparalleled. He lived passionately, thought passionately, loved passionately, talked passionately and failed passionately” (65-66). After licking his wounds, Cook returned to Davenport and in 1907, and he and friend Frank Dell, also a writer, formed the Monist Society of Davenport. As a socialist, Cook created this group of “free thinkers” from those people on the fringes of Davenport’s conservative social classes, including Susan Glaspell. Ben-Zvi quotes Glaspell’s biography of “Jig” Cook entitled, *The Road to the Temple*,

> Some of us were children of pioneers; some of us still drove Grandmother to the Old Settlers’ Picnic the middle of August. Now—pioneers indeed, that pure frightened, exhilarating feeling of having stepped out of your place and here, with these strange people, far from your loved ones and already a little lonely, beginning to form a new background….People changed their lives…The group provided the courage to tell your father what you thought now, fortified by these others, who, fortified by you, would go home and tell what they thought…Supper-tables of Davenport would be different that night because of the Monist Society. Courage being struck alive, no telling what would be done with it…In many ways, his leadership of the Monists foreshadowed Jig’s role as leader and catalyst in another ‘beloved community’ ten years later: the Provincetown
By all accounts, Glaspell was hooked, not only to the ideology, but to the charismatic leader of the Monists. The group would meet every Tuesday to discuss international philosophies and approaches to life. This club fit nicely with Glaspell’s educational background and interest in philosophy. She had studied the viewpoints of Goethe, Emerson’s Transcendentalists, and the work of Maeterlinck and Darwin. The Monists provided a place where Glaspell’s intellectualism finally made her fit in, and though run by men, they accepted her as an intellectual equal. Spending most of her life in Davenport as a lonely social outcast, she must have felt that she had finally found a home of sorts.

Cook, during the founding of the Monist social club, was beginning a love affair with another woman, Mollie Pierce, who was an actor in a mid-west touring company. As Cook awaited his divorce decree from his first wife, he wrote to Mollie often, begging her to join him. Instead, Pierce moved to New York City. According to Ben-Zvi, Glaspell knew Mollie and visited her in New York. “How she knew her is not clear, but the literary circles in Chicago and New York were small enough so that their paths could easily have crossed” (87). After meeting with Mollie in New York, Glaspell would bring news back to the waiting Cook. Glaspell’s visits to both Cook and Pierce are captured in correspondence between the two lovers. While Cook was waiting for Mollie to join him in Davenport, he made mention often in his letters of Glaspell, as a friend and companion. Though Glaspell and Cook spent an increasing amount of time together, as reflected in these letters, Cook reassured Mollie that she was still the only one for him (Ben-Zvi 89). Apparently, at some point in time, the relationship between Cook and Glaspell took a romantic turn. As Ben-Zvi quotes Glaspell,

He would be married within a few months. But that last night something outside
ourselves brought us together, and there was a new thing between us ever after. The next few years were full ones for the two who had looked out through the cone of night with a cosmic emotion neither could have felt alone, but they were not experiences shared. And yet, separated though we were—I in New York, then Paris, and Jig married and living at the cabin, we were never really separated after we came together that night of snow and stars.” (91-92)

Though the relationship between Cook and Glaspell had changed, Mollie arrived in Davenport in February of 1908, after Cook’s first divorce was finalized. Mollie Pierce and Jig Cook were soon married in Chicago.

In the meantime, Glaspell finished her first novel, *The Glory of the Conquered*, and left Chicago soon after, (by some biographer’s estimations, solely to get away from Cook), first for New York, and then abroad. While in Europe, Glaspell was in the midst of a hotbed of theatrical activity. “Art exhibits and salons; operas, plays, French lessons, and lectures” filled her year (Ben-Zvi 97). As she travelled and experienced the culturally enriching activities, Mollie gave birth to Jig’s daughter on December 4, 1908. While still in Europe, Glaspell’s first novel was published to much acclaim. *The New York Times* is quoted as stating, “*The Glory of the Conquered* brings forward a new author of fine and notable gifts” (Ben-Zvi 98). Glaspell was now a celebrity. With the status of being a successful writer with a growing reputation, she decided to “sail home” for a visit in June of 1909. Upon her return she visited Cook and Mollie and immediately fell again into the role of confidant to both. This proved to be too much for Glaspell and she traveled to New York and Colorado, again to put distance between them. Glaspell visited the post-office one day and discovered a letter from Jig in which he stated,

Have you ever had a feeling that there are loose ends—important strands slipping
out of grasp—essential elements evaporating? It was in some such darkness this morning that I came out of sleep and found my mind’s hands groping for a lost, important strand in the dwindled rope of life, and came with a splendid shock and sense of salvation upon the thought—Susan! (Ben-Zvi 101).

Finding out that Jig needed her, she dropped everything to join him and never left him again.

Though Mollie was again pregnant, Glaspell and Cook rekindled their love affair. Bound by shared radical views, and a deep love that had been recently renewed, they became inseparable. In the town of Davenport, the “other woman” proved to be a particularly difficult label to wear. They began to take on social challenges and writing projects together as they also worked on their separate novels. According to Ben-Zvi, by the summer of 1910, though Mollie was about to give birth, it became obvious that Glaspell and Cook were together and in love. They were no longer hiding their feelings for one another and even their friends, under the circumstances, were against the romance. On August 23, 1910, Mollie gave birth to a son whom they named Harl (105-107). After much pleading and arguing on Mollie’s part to save the marriage, Cook refused to back down. Mollie agreed to allow a divorce on the grounds of desertion. To rub salt into the open wound, Cook tried to convince Mollie that though she had two children to raise alone, she should try to get a job, and not just any job, but one that would be deemed suitable “for his ex-wife to perform” (Ben-Zvi 109). With his second marriage behind him, having turned his back on both his ex-wives and all of his children, and now with a very financially independent and mature love interest, Cook could pursue his writing with a new vigor. Cook and Glaspell moved back to Chicago together.

While Cook was awaiting yet another divorce, Glaspell again spent her time travelling between Chicago, Davenport, and New York City. She published her second novel, The
Visioning, in 1911. Though not as successful as her first, she again established herself as a literary power to be recognized. She also continued to publish her short-stories which had a much broader market. Jig also began to publish articles in socially progressive magazines, and became the associate editor of the “Friday Literary Review” which was published as a part of the Chicago Evening Post (Ben-Zvi 114). It was through this association that Glaspell and Cook made lasting friends with such literary giants as Jack London, Upton Sinclair, and many others who would later be associated with the Provincetown Players. It was also during this time that the Abbey Players of Dublin brought the plays of Synge to Chicago (Ben-Zvi 116). This introduction of an amateur theatre company producing new works was foundational for the small amateur theatres that would soon spring forward in the United States, including the Provincetown Players.

Glaspell, according to Ben-Zvi, “visited Chicago as much as she could, [but] most of the time between 1911 and 1913, she was…in New York…in 1912, the direction for most Midwestern writers was eastward, particularly toward Greenwich Village” (117-118). While awaiting Cook’s divorce, Glaspell and Cook were often physically separated by their jobs and responsibilities, but were finally married in New York, on April 14, 1913. Glaspell, at the age of thirty-seven, had finally conventionalized her relationship with Jig. The two honeymooned in Provincetown, Massachusetts where they continued to spend their summers while wintering in Greenwich Village, New York. According to Waterman, in Susan Glaspell, this move was “an important change in her life. Not only was she entering marriage, but she was also moving from the nineteenth century into the twentieth; from the conservative Midwest to the liberal East; and artistically, from the conventional novel to the experimental play” (45). This statement seems a bit simplistic, since they each spent many days and months in the East, particularly Susan, and
clearly both had established, and continued to maintain, a liberal ideology long before their marriage and move to Greenwich Village.

The timing of Glaspell’s excursions to New York is also important in establishing a timeline involving the production schedule of Offenbach’s opera *The Tales of Hoffman*. According to *The New Kobbe’s Opera Book*, the opera *The Tales of Hoffman* débuted in New York City in 1882. It then played London and Paris from 1907-1910 and was finally performed at the Metropolitan Opera House in 1913 (552). Glaspell was reportedly in London and Paris when the opera was performed and most assuredly was in New York City when *The Tales of Hoffman* débuted at the Met in 1913. Though there is no actual record of her attending a performance of this work, it is widely known that she was actively engaged in cultural activities and had been attending opera in both London and Paris during her time abroad. Having a tremendous library of music to choose from, it does not seem that she arrived at the incorporation of the Barcarolle within her play *The Verge* by chance. Her familiarity with the music and its use in the opera during both a seduction and as the underscore to a murder seems too perfect to be coincidental. This being said, there is no way to prove one way or the other that she actually attended this particular opera on any of these occasions, though it seems highly unlikely that she did not.

It is interesting to note that Glaspell never adopted Cook’s name, perhaps as a feminist statement or simply because she had established a thriving career without it. Glaspell and Cook spent those early years in New York and Provincetown, and eventually purchased a small house on Cape Cod, in an effort to escape the stifling summer heat, encouraging many of their friends to do the same. These friends, were also members of the “Liberal Club, a Meeting Place for Those Interested in New Ideas” (Murphy 7). Hailing from both Chicago and Greenwich Village,
the Liberal Club members included: the sisters Anna and Rose Strunsky; William English Walling...Ida Rauh and Max Eastman; Neith Boyce and Hutchins Hapgood; Mary Heaton Vorse; Edna Kenton; Jack Reed; and Harry Kemp, among others” (Ozieblo 53). The group of writers, journalists, actors, and bohemian artists began to set a pattern of wintering in New York’s Greenwich Village and spending the summers in Provincetown. Never a group to leave “work” at home, they were constantly at their desks and moving from one project to another, regardless of location (Ozieblo 60). This was the perfect place, the perfect time, and the perfect group of people to pen a new chapter in American Theatre.

As Edna Kenton states in *The Provincetown Players and the Playwright’s Theatre: 1915-1922*, “What happened began overnight” (15). In the winter of 1914, the Washington Square Players, a theatre ensemble in New York, was rehearsing their first play of the season. Glaspell and Cook had begun to write a play themselves, based upon the newly explored writings of Freud and Jung and the budding industry of psychoanalysis. They began to banter about with dialogue filled with “misunderstood theory and misapplied terms,” and began to use this witty dialogue as the basis for a new play, called *Suppressed Desires* (15). The Washington Square Players found it too narrow in focus and did not feel the scientific aspects would have audience appeal. Neith Boyce sat down shortly after this and wrote a one-act play of her own entitled *Constancy*. With these two “homegrown” plays in hand, the group decided to produce them on their own. Using the Hapgood’s residence as the “theatre,” this group of creative friends performed *Constancy* against the backdrop of the ocean view, and then had the audience flip their chairs around so the actors could use the interior décor of the Hapgood living room as the “interior set” for *Suppressed Desires*. The next morning Mary Heaton Vorse, caught up in the excitement and spirit of the group, gave them an old fish house at the end of a “deserted wharf”
which she owned and rented as studio space. Thus The Provincetown Players were born (Kenton 16).

The group worked that summer and some of the next to complete a small stage and seating area, and Suppressed Desires and Constancy were repeated that second summer, along with two new plays, Contemporaries by Wilbur Daniel Steele and Change Your Style by Jig Cook (Kenton 17-18). During this time the Washington Square Players were also beginning their second season, but with their bill dominated by European works. This prompted The Provincetown Players to form a theatre that would provide a “native stage for native works” (Kenton 19). The group was opposed to the New York commercialism dominating the Broadway Stage, and wanted to produce new works by new American playwrights. As it turned out, this provided them a stage for their own plays.

Though somewhat delayed in comparison with Europe, there is no difficulty finding supporting material concerning the political, social, and psychological exploration being incorporated into many American theatrical works during the time of Glaspell and the Provincetown Players. In this time period the theatrical world was exploring the ramifications of embracing the psychological and philosophical explorations of Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Søren Aabye Kierkegaard. As noted in W. David Sievers’ Freud on Broadway, the “psychological maturing of the American Drama” was closely connected to the Little Theatre Movement and was directed to be a revolt against commercial entities found on “the Great Trite Way” whose works were being produced and funded by Belasco, Klein and Thomas (52). Though not the first to bring psychological drama to the American stage, the now famous Provincetown Players were born as a reaction to the current offerings found at the time in commercial theatrical houses. Seivers explains,
…it was the summer of 1915 before a group of serious young artists and writers, who found themselves vacationing at Provincetown, Massachusetts, met to do something about the lamentable state of the American Drama. All were amateurs in the theatre, but all had a passionate conviction that the theatre could and should be a medium of serious artistic expression…it was decided to produce some one-act plays. On the first bill, given at the home of Hutchins Hapgood, was

*Suppressed Desires*, by Susan Glaspell and her husband, George Cram Cook. (52)

The one-act comedy satirized the “fad” of psychoanalysis and the prevalence of the “amateur psychologist” within the bohemian social structure in New York City. The play was not born out of a social vacuum, as Glaspell and Cook were living in Greenwich Village, which, at the time, was a hotbed for this intriguing new trend. As Sievers notes,

The intellectuals would rather ‘psych’ each other than eat. They were so fascinated by ‘this lingo about the libido’ that Susan Glaspell was to exclaim in despair, ‘you could not buy a bun without hearing of someone’s complex.’ (53)

Another account of this permeation of psychoanalysis can be found in Murphy’s, *The Provincetown Players and the Culture of Modernity*. Murphy states that many members of the group were fascinated with the subject and were they themselves being “psycho-analyzed.” According to Murphy, such noted personalities as Floyd Dell, Max Eastman, and Robert Edmond Jones, were among the intellectuals in Greenwich Village who were under a psychologist’s care, while Eugene O’Neill and Hutchins Hapgood were intrigued, but not enough to commit to analysis (30). It is notable as well that this group of artists also had a fascination with mesmerism and doppelgänger. The themes were so prevalent, both in Europe and the
United States, that Sievers devotes an entire chapter of *Freud on Broadway: A History of Psychoanalysis and the American Drama* to the subject.

It is easy to see how straightforwardly the ideas surrounding Glaspell’s first works would emerge from this creative and experimental environment. Though *Suppressed Desires* was originally rejected for production by the Washington Square Players, which had become the “best New York showcase for [non-commercial] European playwrights” (Murphy 9), it was on the first playbill of the newly formed Provincetown Players where it was somewhat well received. This reception warranted a second production that same summer, at an old fish house on an abandoned wharf owned by Vorse. This location soon became the home of the Provincetown Players which has since been recognized as one of America’s first and foremost experimental theatre companies. In her loving memoir entitled *The Provincetown Players and the Playwright’s Theatre, 1915-1922*, Edna Kenton, the secretary for the legendary performance troupe, states that the Glaspell/Cook comedy *Suppressed Desires* was performed several more times by the same company – most often with positive reception (18).

It was in this atmosphere that Glaspell wrote many of her plays, *Trifles* and *The Verge* among them. The Provincetown Players also attracted great talents such as Margaret Wycherly, Robert Edmond Jones, Edna St. Vincent Millay, and Eugene O’Neill. This group managed to stay together during the war years, and produced works of immediate, and in some cases lasting, significance to the American stage. O’Neill’s *Hairy Ape*, and *The Emperor Jones*, Glaspell’s *Trifles* and *The Verge*, and Millay’s *Aria Da Capo* to name but a few. The Provincetown Players offered from seven to nine new plays every season and became a destination for New York audiences in the summer. At the end of this group’s run its various members had “produced ninety-seven plays by forty-six American playwrights, and almost two-thirds of these plays had
already become a vital part of American drama, on the stage and in books” (Kenton 161).

All good things must come to an end, but by all accounts, the demise of the company was a difficult one. Due to the commercial success of O’Neill’s works, many in the company wanted to take the performances to the professional stages of New York. Though many texts and biographies have reported on the demise of the company, each offering the various points of view, suffice it to say that the goals originally agreed upon did not satisfy all the members and that the leadership and ownership of the company was drawn into question. It really had never been a company controlled by democratic process, and the group was divided into two distinct factions: those who wanted to follow Cook and those who wanted to follow O’Neill and Robert Edmond Jones. As the infighting was coming to a climax, Glaspell, Cook, Edna Kenton, and a few other trusted friends met on February 24, 1922 and incorporated the names The Provincetown Players and Playwrights’ Theatre. They did this so these names could not be used again without their permission (Kenton 146). By doing this, no one would be able to capitalize on the name association. A few days later, Cook and Glaspell sailed for Greece and left the company behind to finish the season without them. According to Kenton,

the days and nights were filled with turmoil, with ‘directors,’ and we finally settled the moot matter of directorship by an all-inclusive program line: ‘Produced by the Provincetown Players’…We foresaw that The [Hairy] Ape would go uptown, taking with it most of our players…Eugene O’Neill, Kenneth Macgowan, and Robert Edmond Jones proposed that they take over the playhouse. Susan and Jig, still in Greece, were cabled this. They cabled back, ‘for termination’…Let the new group go in, with new names for group and for playhouse. Let us die cleanly and well—The Provincetown Players and the Playwrights’ Theatre.
From its humble beginning on “one night” in 1914 The Provincetown Players ran through the summer of 1923, with Cook and Glaspell at the helm, and helped to establish the first experimental modernist theatrical movement in the United States. Glaspell, has recently been “rediscovered” as one of the best female playwrights of the time, but continues to be one who still is constantly in the shadow of Provincetown playwright O’Neill, whom she helped bring to the notice of the American theatrical community.

After leaving the United States with Cook, Glaspell’s life took some unexpected turns. On January 14, 1924, a little more than a year after the couple arrived in Greece, Cook died. Glaspell left Greece soon after and returned to the United States. She met and married her second husband, Norman Matson in 1925, but her artistic efforts for the immediate future concentrated on writing of the biography of Cook, *The Road to the Temple*, which was published in 1927. The text is viewed by most biographers as being a loving memoir that centers around Glaspell’s perceptions of Cook’s “genius” and that Glaspell and her accomplishments are noticeably absent from the text (Ozieblo, Ben-Zvi, Waterman, etc.). Not surprisingly Glaspell’s portrait and appraisal of Cook’s abilities and talents was not fully accepted nor embraced by most who had worked with Cook, and the book, though interesting, failed to immortalize Cook or place him on the historical pedestal as the misunderstood and maligned artistic genius Glaspell believed he was. Again, Glaspell and her abilities willingly took a backseat to the accomplishment of men in her life.

Glaspell continued to write throughout the rest of her life. She edited and published a group of her poems entitled *Greek Coins* in 1925. She wrote another play, *The Comic Artist*, with Matson which was produced and performed at the Strand theatre in 1928. In that same year
she wrote her fourth and fifth novels, *Brook Evans* and *Fugitive’s Return*, which were published in 1928 and 1929, respectively.

In 1930, Glaspell wrote her final play, *Alison’s House*, which was loosely based on the life and death of a character much like the eccentric and cloistered poet Emily Dickinson. Though not her strongest work, the play garnered the most attention, and earned Glaspell a Pulitzer Prize in 1931. The award was surrounded by controversy. As Bigsby states in *Plays by Susan Glaspell*, “*Alison’s House* is not a good play” (27), and most critics agree. That Glaspell received the honor of the Pulitzer Prize is not surprising, but the fact that she received it for this play is disappointing.

Matson left Glaspell, for a much younger woman, in 1932 and she reportedly suffered from depression for several years thereafter. She was appointed as the “head of the Midwest Play Bureau of the Federal Theatre” and held that position for two years before she resigned in 1938 and returned to Provincetown where she spent the rest of her life. She wrote four more novels, but no more plays, and “she died of viral pneumonia on July 27, 1948 having written some of the most original plays ever to have come out of America” (Bigsby 31).

There is no doubt that Susan Glaspell’s works were influenced by her background in Iowa and later in Massachusetts. She was a master at developing the idea of isolation within her female characters, which she must have felt herself at times as a creative entity adrift in those artistically revolutionary years. Her female characters lack power over their situations, reflective of the time period, thus experiencing isolation in all forms: emotional, physical, social, spiritual and intellectual. Her female characters are misunderstood, and unrecognized or unappreciated, by the men who ultimately exercise control to the point of pushing many of these women beyond their means to endure. Glaspell’s female characters are readily identifiable as the “Other,”
objectified by the very men that, according to the dictates of society, were there to protect and defend them. Ultimately these men held, and used, the keys to destruction, leaving Glaspell’s female protagonists flailing and robbed of everything but their desire to continue to exist. As a final solution, some of Glaspell’s women even kill their oppressors, as evidenced in *Trifles* and *The Verge*.

Glaspell herself participated in a grievous social taboo by falling in love with a married man, who left his wife and children to marry her. In 1913, this must have been a terrific challenge for her, and this theme is reflected in many of her plays. Whether she is trying to justify her personal position as the branded woman, as in *Alison’s House*, or trying to represent the woman left behind by her husband, as in her play *The Outside*, or as the woman who made the “right” choice according to society, but exists in a loveless marriage until she can stand it no longer and finally snaps with disastrous results, as in *Trifles*, the theme of adultery and its ramifications are used repeatedly.

We are left to wonder how Glaspell felt about these issues on a personal level. As Ozieblo clarifies,

Joining the ranks of many famous writers, Glaspell destroyed her personal letters; her extant diaries, held by the Berg Collection of English and American Literature at the New York Public Library, are mostly empty, a few pages half filled with cryptic sentences to remind her of ideas for plays and stories. [We] must rely on the races of her life that she could not destroy, such as her plays and novels, and the letters and autobiographies of friends, in which she is but a minor character in the drama of their lives. And there is Glaspell’s *The Road to the Temple*, the biography she wrote of her husband, in which she transformed herself into his
handmaiden, erasing herself altogether. (Ozieblo 3)

Fortunately, and thanks in part to the success of The Provincetown Players, as well as her prolific talents as a novelist, the American theatrical and literary traditions are left with a body of work which, when examined fully, reveal the genius behind the mere words on the page.

**The Uprising of the “New Woman”**

The rise of the image of the “New Woman,” with her latchkey in one hand and a cigarette in the other, was expressed in cartoon, written word, and on stages throughout Europe and the United States. This highly educated, employed, and liberated “New Woman” was seen in many circles as threatening the very fabric of the family and the middle-class values of hearth and home. She is described in *The New Woman and Her Sisters* by Vivian Gardner and Susan Rutherford as being “plain and bespectacled, in an armchair, in her sensible or hygienic, or rational dress” (4). One of the most popular *Punch* cartoons of the day featured “Donna Quixote,” who was featured:

surrounded by images of ‘disorderly notions’ that crowd her imagination…Behind her there is an Amazon holding aloft the flag of the divided skirt, another fighting the dragon of Decorum and a third tilting at the windmill of Marriage Laws. The decapitated head of ‘Tyrant Man’ sits by one foot…The accompanying poem has her cry,

In spite of babies, bonnets, tea,

Creations Heir, I must, I will be—Free! …

Nay, ‘tis a goal to those who long to roam,

Unchaperoned, emancipated, and free,
With the large Liberty of the Latch-key! (Gardner and Rutherford 5)

In the United States, The National Woman’s Suffrage Association, the National Women’s Party and the Women’s Peace Party were changing the face of politics. The availability and accessibility of international travel after the war was at an all-time high. The new concepts of psychological sciences and exploration of the “inner” being were being discussed in social circles around the world. The magnitude of how all these things affected the arts and creative artists cannot be understated. These social movements were revolutionary impulses that had not been experienced or translated to the American stage. It was against this world canvas that Glaspell created and painted her character Claire in *The Verge*.

Linked to these artists and to this period of time was also the emergence of the radical group *Heterodoxy*, of which Susan Glaspell was an active member. The formation of this club for unorthodox women came at a time of great social upheaval in the United States. With its development, the group’s founder Marie Jenney Howe, a Unitarian feminist minister, had created something truly unique. According to historian Judith Schwarz, in her text entitled *Radical Feminists of Heterodoxy: Greenwich Village 1912-1940*, “Feminism was the one belief that united every member” (25). Though women were not granted the basic right of voting by the federal government until 1920, this “luncheon club” of unorthodox professional women began meeting in Greenwich Village in 1912. Schwarz states that Heterodoxy demanded that everything be “off the record” and no press were allowed into the meetings at any time. Though many of the women were successful writers, novelists, doctors, public speakers, actresses, and journalists, it was understood that all could speak freely without fear of being misquoted in any paper the next day. Heterodoxy claimed one hundred and ten identifiable members (18).
The shared experiences of Heterodoxy members, which were the focus of many meetings, helped develop strong rich friendships between highly creative and talented women who may not have met in any other setting…The little world of Heterodoxy was a warm, secure one, an irreplaceable part of the lives of the members. (Schwarz 93)

Among the listed members were women who figured prominently across the daily headlines, as well as being foundational to the various women’s movements of the day. Even to this day these names are recognized and lauded. Members included: author and feminist Charlotte Perkins Gilman; famed choreographer Agnes deMille; labor organizer Elizabeth Gurley Flynn; playwright and Pulitzer prize winning author and activist Zona Gale; journalist and drama critic Ruth Hale; educational psychologist Leta Stetter Hollingworth; suffragette, and Chair of the New Jersey state chapter of the National Women’s Party who was jailed for picketing the White House as part of her campaign to win the right for women to vote, Alison Turnbull Hopkins; famed novelist and short story writer Virginia Douglas Hyde; Marie Jenny Howe; Civil rights activist and member of the NAACP Grace Nail Johnson; actress and labor activist who helped form the Actor’s Equity union Fola La Follette; art and literary patron Mabel Dodge Luhan; noted sociologist and President of the American Anthropological Association Elsie Clews Parsons; Manhattan Opera House press agent Anna Marble Pollock; prolific essayist and novelist Nina Wilcox Putnam; one of the founders (along with Susan Glaspell and others) of the Provincetown Players, Ida Rauh; radio broadcaster, radical political cartoonist, newspaper, drama, and book critic Lou Rogers; actress Mary Shaw; renowned Yiddish poet Rose Pastor Stokes; radical artist, writer, and labor journalist Mary Heaton Vorse; film actress and organizer of both the Washington Square Players and the New York Theatre Guild, Helen Westley; and
film and stage actress Margaret Wycherly (Schwarz 116-128). Also among this prestigious list of notable members is Susan Keating Glaspell, who was an active and integral part of this organization.

As a playwright and journalist of note, Glaspell participated, along with many other female playwrights around the world, in the representation of women on the stage, featuring them in a new and revolutionary light. Gardner states in her introduction to *The New Women and Her Sisters: Feminism and Theatre 1850-1914*, “women dramatists began to engage more directly with political issues in their drama” (10). Gardner continues,

…women in the theatre had anticipated the challenge of the New Woman to the establishment…these theatrical women had already subverted normal expectations of female behavior—often at the expense of their own reputation and social position—and many were ready to grasp the opportunities offered by the New Woman movement for more substantial freedoms. (12)

This can certainly be said of Glaspell and several of her contemporaries, both on the stage and off. In this context it is also clear that the female characters Glaspell presents in *The Verge* are a microcosm of the issues surrounding the feminist movement of the day. Glaspell uses these characters, both the men and the women in the play, as social and political archetypes, bringing the ideological chasms existing between the sexes to light. Further, it becomes obvious that Glaspell’s expressionistic use of the various florals throughout the play parallel the social, political, and philosophical divisions found within the early feminist movement in the United States, as which are explained further in this Chapter. Each of the plants are skillfully cultivated by Glaspell to become symbolic representations of the feminine archetypes so dominant in this time period, specifically: Claire Archer as the New Woman, symbolically represented by the
plant Breath of Life; her daughter Elizabeth, exploring the political and social reasoning found in of the young women of the day, represented by the new creation striving to find its place, the Edge Vine plant; and her sister Adelaide, ever the traditionalist, represented symbolically as the Rose. Within this exploration the themes of fragmentation and the ramifications of this division, as related to the modernist concept of “self” and the corruption of personal identity, are established.

The most obvious, and the character central to the above argument, is that of Claire. Claire is the archetype of this New Woman, or Modern Woman, of the early twentieth century. Before Claire even appears on the stage the audience is made aware of her strong, and critics would say, overpowering and controlling creative presence. Anthony is immediately seen taking instructions from her (58). Claire, though unseen, is the focus of the discussion as she gives him instructions on how to protect her plants in her professional sphere of influence, her laboratory. Claire is immediately presented to her audience as an educated woman of power and knowledge. Anthony, a middle aged, and presumably, white male, respects her, asks her opinion, and follows her orders. As the opening telephone conversation begins, it is made clear that Anthony does not take orders from any of the men in the house, including the traditional “head of the household,” Harry Archer. In fact, the audience is made aware early on that Anthony ignores the needs of the men in the play, always championing Claire and her cause above all else. The action is spelled out clearly in the opening stage directions and the banter between Anthony and Harry that follows,

(Anthony is at work preparing soil—mixing, sifting. As the wind tries the door he goes anxiously to the thermometer, nods as if reassured and returns to his work. The buzzer sounds. He starts to answer the telephone, remembers something,
halts and listens sharply. It does not buzz once long and three short. Then he returns to his work. The buzzer goes on and on in impatient jerks, which mount in anger. Several times Anthony is almost compelled by this insistence, but the thing that holds him back is stronger. At last, after a particularly mad splutter, to which Anthony longs to make retort, the buzzer gives it up. Anthony goes on preparing soil. A moment later the glass door swing violently in, snow blowing in, and also Mr. Harry Archer, wrapped in a rug.)

**Anthony:** Oh, please close the door sir…the stormy air is not good for the plants.

**Harry:**…Now what do you mean, Anthony, by not answering the phone when I buzzed for you?

**Anthony:** Miss Claire—Mrs. Archer told me not to.

**Harry:** Told you not to answer me?

**Anthony:** Not you especially—nobody but her.

**Harry:** Well, I like her nerve—and yours.

**Anthony:** You see, she thought it took my mind from my work to be interrupted when I am out here. And so it does. So she buzzes once long and—Well, she buzzes her way, and all other buzzing

**Harry:** May buzz.

**Anthony:** (nodding gravely) She thought it would be better for the flowers. (58, 59)

Claire is definitely calling the shots here, and Anthony is taking instructions from none but her. Harry and the other men are intrusive in Claire’s laboratory and, in essence, are not allowed within her “sphere.” Though the men are guests at Claire’s home, the men’s needs are
grossly subservient to those of Claire’s flowers. Claire’s position as master of her domain is fixed from inception. Her husband Harry, resents this intrusion into his existence, and continues to argue this point throughout this next section.

**Harry:** I am not a flower—true, but I too need a little attention—and a little heat. Will you please tell me why the house is frigid?

**Anthony:** Miss Claire ordered all the heat turned out here. (patiently explaining to Miss Claire’s speechless husband) You see the roses need a great deal of heat.

**Harry:** *(reading the thermometer)* The roses have seventy-three I have forty-five.

**Anthony:** Yes, the roses need seventy-three.

**Harry:** This is an outrage! *(59)*

This conversation reveals that Harry does not understand the needs of the plants (women) and, as a matter of fact, he does not care if the plants (or women) live or die as long as his immediate personal needs are met. Does he try to help himself by dressing himself more warmly? Does he ever try to answer his own needs by addressing the problem through other means? Does he ever offer to help Claire with any of her experiments or creations? No. Harry wants Claire, very simply, to address his needs, even if it means that something in and of her will be neglected and may die as a result. He continues to be unsupportive of Claire’s professional work, especially when it becomes clear that her personal aspirations will cause him to suffer any ill effects, or discomfort. Claire and her creativity are viewed by him through a very patriarchal, and misogynistic, lens. For Harry these very feminine places, and its inhabitants, are seen as the enemy and he can only tolerate their existence if he is not disturbed by their presence. The conversation continues:
Anthony: Why, Miss Claire would never have done what she has if she hadn’t looked out for her plants in just such ways as this. Have you forgotten that Breath of Life is about to flower?

Harry: And when is my breakfast about to flower?—that’s what I want to know.

Anthony: Why Miss Claire got up at five o’clock to order the heat turned off from the house.

Harry: I see you admire her vigilance.

Anthony: Oh, I do. (fervently) I do. Harm was near, and that woke her up.

Harry: And what about the harm to—(tapping his chest). Do roses get pneumonia?

Anthony: Oh, yes—yes indeed they do. Why Mr. Archer, look at Miss Claire herself. Hasn’t she given her heat to the roses?

Harry: (pulling the rug around him, preparing for the blizzard). She [Claire] has the fire within.

Anthony: (delighted) Now isn’t that true! How well you said it (with a glare for this appreciation, Harry opens the door. It blows away from him) Please do close the door! . . . Growing things need an even temperature. (while saying this he gets the man out into the snow). (59-60)

Again, the representation of the misogynistic masculine world view comes clearly into focus. It was not until 1919 that the federal government of the United States, comprised solely of men, reluctantly agreed to grant women the right to vote by passing the 19th Amendment, ironically called the Anthony Amendment. It was not until August 26, 1920, after being ratified by three-fourths of the States, that the 19th Amendment became law and women were granted the
right to vote. Men had had a firm grip on the way the country, and by extension the conventional American household, was to be run. When women began to infiltrate professional circles, some men were highly uncomfortable with this “advancement” and questioned the place of women within society.

Harry is representative then of this masculine archetype of the early 20th century male head of household. When Harry returns, he again opens the door to the sanctuary and threatens the “lives” inside. As he invades Claire’s space, he comes with his own agenda: to make the space his, and to force Claire into taking care of his needs. If Claire will not come to him then her demanding husband will take his daily needs to her, and force her to deal with them, whether she likes it or not.

Interestingly, Hattie, though a woman, becomes an extension of the male patriarchy through her blind support of the male head of household, Harry. With her use of the name “Hattie,” a female variation of the male name Harry, Glaspell establishes that she is merely a mirrored image, or perhaps fragmentation of, Harry and his point of view. This is clearly demonstrated in her reply to Anthony in which she says, “The plants won’t poison him, will they?” (60) In this one line Glaspell firmly establishes that Hattie has no concern for the feminine/plants, but only supporting the masculine/master.

Also worthy of note is the fact that Hattie is the one character in the play who is lacking in social graces and education. In response to Anthony’s concern for the Edge Vine, she responds, “It don’t look like nothin’, anyhow.” (60) Anthony then mocks her lack of breeding and education by replying, “And you’ve not got the wit to know that that’s why it’s the Edge Vine.” (60) Not only does Glaspell make a strong statement for the education of women, given that the one uneducated woman in the script is destined to a life of servitude, but she also makes
a statement on the obvious class division that will not allow someone like Hattie to move beyond her station in life at this point in history.

Perhaps the boldest statement made by Glaspell, however, is the symbolic representation embodied in the flowers as they relate both to Claire and to each of the women in the script, with the obvious exception of Hattie who is aligned with the male. There are three plants that Claire has been working on in her laboratory: a group of roses, the Edge Vince and her newest creation, the Breath of Life. These plants are clearly symbolic representations of the different aspects, or sides of Claire’s fragmented personality, and of the other female characters in the play. In a larger sense, these flowers are then representational figures of the social and fundamental divisions found within the first-wave feminist movement of the United States in the early 1900’s. The male characters as well, become symbolic of the masculine equivalent of this turbulent time period.

Detailed textual analysis reveals that the symbolic aspects of the rose are represented in the characters of Adelaide and Harry; the elements of the Edge Vine are represented in Elizabeth and Dick; and, finally, the aspects of the Breath of Life are represented in the characters of Tom and Claire. However, while each of the men is in some way represented in the various florae, Tom is the one man who falls short in his ability to fully grasp and accept the new and altered species represented in Claire’s creation. As will become evident in the following analysis, Tom’s voice must be silenced in order for Claire’s to be heard.

**Adelaide/Rose**

The rose is conventional and traditional in every sense, and also the flower which Claire has come to despise. Beautiful and fragrant, the rose is viewed by Claire as ordinary, conformist,
unadventurous and predictable. Claire has come to regard the rose as abhorrent and boring. At
the beginning of the play the roses are discussed by Anthony as “needing a great deal of heat”
and requiring “seventy three degrees” to exist. It is also stated that roses can get pneumonia if
not cared for properly and that Claire has given all her heat to the roses to help them survive
among her other plants. Harry chimes in to note that Claire has the “fire within” (59-60).

Perhaps, in this case, the required “heat” is a symbolic representation of the amount of
energy the “New Woman” must assert in order prod traditional women into recognizing the
importance of the women’s movement in general and the right to vote in particular. Glaspell is
asserting, with her symbolism of the rose, that the largest barrier standing in the way of the
feminist vote was in large percentage the women themselves. On the east coast there were very
active and outspoken women, while in other parts of the country there were many who seemed
threatened by the possibilities of even limited power being bestowed upon them. Home and
family were central to their lives and, in many cases, husbands made all the decisions regarding
the running of the household, outside of the “womanly” realm of children and child rearing.
Many women seemed to fear the increased responsibility that the vote represented for them.

Adelaide certainly represents the 19th century woman who is not only afraid of change
and power, but actually resistant to them. As stated by Elaine Hedges in her essay Small Things
Reconsidered: “Jury of her Peers”

The 19th century ideology of domesticity defined women’s sphere as that of the
home, but within that home it gave her, in theory, a queenly role, as guardian and
purveyor of the essential moral and cultural values of the society. That role was
frequently symbolized, especially in the domestic fiction of the 19th century, by
the hearth fire, over which the woman presided, ministering, in the light of its war
glow, to the physical and emotional needs of her family…Women’s dreams were above all domestic—to create a home as a paradise. (64)

Not only is Adelaide the perfect vision of this social construct, she is bewildered and angered by her sister Claire’s reluctance to take on her role as a mother, wife and mistress of her own manor.

The set up for Adelaide’s attitudes are established before she steps on stage, in Act II, with Glaspell’s exacting stage directions and description of the prescribed scenic design of the room in which the sisters will meet. “The room, in which Adelaide encounters Claire, is described as, “a tower which is thought to be round but does not complete the circle. The back is curved, then jagged lines break from that, and the front is a queer bulging window—in a curve that leans. The whole structure is as if given a twist by some terrific force” (78).

As Adelaide makes her way into the room, Glaspell immediately establishes the difficulty Adelaide has in even entering Claire’s warped vision of the world, when she says from the stairs, “Dear - dear, why do they make such twisting steps.” The world Claire occupies is “twisted” and difficult for the traditional Adelaide. When asked by Harry if she is “…Making it all right?” Adelaide replies “I can't tell yet… No, I don't think so.” In a few short lines of dialogue Glaspell establishes that the journey into Claire’s world is not only difficult for Adelaide, but one she is not going to “make it” in.

While this is not a world where Adelaide can belong or one she can successfully inhabit, she insinuates her way into it, nonetheless. However, as is demonstrated in the following dialogue, Adelaide does not enter Claire’s world to become a part of it, but rather with a desire to question its very existence and if possible change it, and by extension Claire, to conform to the safety and pattern of the world she has come to accept as “normal.” She begins with an attack of the physical space itself.
**Harry:** This is the first time you've been up here?

**Adelaide:** Yes, in the five years you've had the house I was never asked up here before.

**Claire:** (amiably enough) You weren't asked up here now.

**Adelaide:** Harry asked me.

**Claire:** It isn't Harry's tower. But never mind - since you don't like it - it's all right.

**Adelaide:** (her eyes again rebuking the irregularities of the tower) No, I confess I do not care for it. A round tower should go on being round.

**Harry:** Claire calls this the thwarted tower. She bought the house because of it. (going over and sitting by her, his hand on her ankle) Didn't you, old girl? She says she'd like to have known the architect.

**Adelaide:** Probably a tiresome person too incompetent to make a perfect tower.

**Claire:** Well, now he's disposed of, what next?

**Adelaide:** (sitting down in a manner of capably opening a conference) Next, Elizabeth, and you, Claire. Just what is the matter with Elizabeth?

**Claire:** (whose voice is cool, even, as if herself is not really engaged by this) Nothing is the matter with her. She is a tower that is a tower. (79)

While Adelaide sees the young Elizabeth as a woman well on the path to a “normal” life, Claire sees her as one with a fixed path in which the pattern is becoming set. Though Claire has sent Elizabeth out into the world to be educated, Claire finds the girl reverting back to a traditionalist view, one that seems not only logical but necessary to survival for her sister Adelaide. When Claire says Elizabeth is a “tower that is a tower,” Adelaide immediately quips back with “Well,
is that anything against her? ” (79). In the world of the “traditional rose” a tower must be a
tower (79).

Claire goes on to explain that what she perceives as the shortcomings of her daughter can
be attributed to her ex-husband, Elizabeth’s father. She describes her daughter as, “…just like
one of her father's portraits. They never interested me. Nor does she.” Claire prefers the
paintings of Blake, which are described in an endnote by editor Bigsby: “…[Blake] rejected
traditional realism and experimented with techniques and materials for painting and printing”
(81). Again Claire establishes that Elizabeth, though given the opportunity to become more,
keeps creeping back to traditional values, much like the Edge Vine, which she destroys in the
face of her daughter. For Claire, Adelaide is representative of traditional values, the rose, and
everything she has come to despise and Elizabeth is the Edge Vine that keeps moving back to the
comfort of the established rose, back to Adelaide.

While Claire is repulsed by the traditionalism her daughter is seeking, Adelaide sees it as
a normal progression because, according to Adelaide and her traditional values, the worst case
scenario has already played out for Claire:

**Adelaide:** A mother cannot cast off her own child simply because she does not
interest her!

**Claire:** (an instant raising cool eyes to Adelaide) Why can't she?

**Adelaide:** Because it would be monstrous! (30)

In Adelaide’s view Claire’s failure as the matron of hearth and home, and more importantly as a
mother, is not merely a failure, but a monstrous and deliberate act. Claire counters with, “And
why can't she be monstrous - if she has to be?” (31). In Claire’s view, in order to survive, she
must become that which is abhorrent to established societal values, and in fact the direct opposite of what Adelaide represents. Claire longs to be the absence of everything Adelaide embodies.

Running out of patience and arguments, Adelaide then brings up the question of breeding and the expectations with which they were raised:

**Adelaide:** You don't have to be [a monster]. That's where I'm out of patience with you Claire. You are really a particularly intelligent, competent person, and it's time for you to call a halt to this nonsense and be the woman you were meant to be! (31)

Throughout this exchange, Claire has been looking at a book of the drawings of William Blake. In the stage direction she is “holding the book up to see another way” and responds to Adelaide “What inside dope have you on what I was meant to be?” (31). Claire longs to see the world in a manner that is different, opposite, upside down from the life that her sister insists is her birthright and burden.

The sister’s opposition of viewpoint is most poignantly illustrated in the dialogue that follows:

**Claire:** So - you being such a tower of strength, why need I too be imprisoned in what I came from?

**Adelaide:** It isn't being imprisoned. Right there is where you make your mistake, Claire. Who's in a tower - in an unsuccessful tower? Not I. I go about in the world - free, busy, happy. Among people, I have no time to think of myself.

**Claire:** No.

**Adelaide:** No. My family. The things that interest them; from morning till night it's-
Claire: Yes, I know you have a large family, Adelaide; five and Elizabeth makes six.

Adelaide: We'll speak of Elizabeth later. But if you would just get out of yourself and enter into other people's lives –

Claire: Then I would become just like you. And we should all be just alike in order to assure one another that we're all just right. But since you and Harry and Elizabeth and ten million other people bolster each other up, why do you especially need me?

Adelaide: (not unkindly) We don't need you as much as you need us.

Claire: (a wry face) I never liked what I needed. (31)

In this exchange, much is established. Claire views the tower as her sanctuary, while Adelaide views the tower as a self-inflicted imprisonment. For Claire the prison is not the unconventional room that she occupies and has chosen for herself, but the conventional world which has been assumed and thrust upon her sister, which she sees her daughter falling into. Claire is saying that Harry, Adelaide, Elizabeth and “ten million other people” need each other in order to achieve self-validation, while she needs only herself. Adelaide argues that it is actually Claire who needs them. In the simple line “I never liked what I needed,” Claire makes a declaration on the state of mediocrity. While not going so far as to say she does not “need” them, she reinforces her position that they are not necessary to her existence, in effect that she is not one of the mediocre who must rely on others for self-validation.

The next sequence that occurs can be referred to as the tower of “babble.” Much like the Biblical tower of Babel, each of the participants is talking wildly, mad to be understood and drive their viewpoint home, while none, in fact, understands a word the other says.
Harry: I am convinced I am the worst thing in the world for you, Claire.

Claire: (with a smile for his tactics, but shaking her head) I'm afraid you're not. I don't know - perhaps you are.

Adelaide: Well, what is it you want, Claire?

Claire: (simply) You wouldn't know if I told you.

Adelaide: That's rather arrogant.

Harry: Yes, take a chance, Claire. I have been known to get an idea – and Adelaide quite frequently gets one.

Claire: (the first resentment she has shown) You two feel very superior, don't you?

Adelaide: I don't think we are the ones who are feeling superior.

Claire: Oh, yes, you are. Very superior to what you think is my feeling of superiority, comparing my 'isolation' with your 'heart of humanity'. Soon we will speak of the beauty of common experiences, of the - Oh, I could say it all before we come to it.

Harry: Adelaide came up here to help you, Claire.

Claire: Adelaide came up here to lock me in. Well, she can't do it.

Adelaide: (gently) But can't you see that one may do that to one's self?

Claire: (thinks of this, looks suddenly tired - then smiles) Well, at least I've changed the keys.

Harry: Locked in. Bunkum. Get that out of your head, Claire. Who's locked in? Nobody that I know of, we're all free Americans. Free as air. (80)
This statement is one that can only be made by a man in this period of history. For Claire domesticity has become a trap. Women, at this point, have no legal place in American society. “Throughout much of the 19th century married woman were defined under the law as ‘civilly dead,’ their legal existence subsumed within their husbands, their rights to their own property, wages, and children, either non-existent or severely circumscribed.” (Hedges 65).

Having failed on the fronts of breeding, decorum and duty, Adelaide now plays the trump card she hopes will turn the tide in her argument with Claire: religion. It is in this arena that the expectations of subservience, not only to husband and family, but to God himself, cannot be denied. Adelaide urges Claire to “…come and hear one of Mr. Morley's sermons…” and it is here that Glaspell introduces both the concept of religion and the hymn *Nearer, my God, to Thee*, which is central to and is examined in detail in Chapter Four of this dissertation.

Adelaide’s ploy to wield religion as a weapon against Claire fails as swiftly as her previous attempts, and Claire is able to finally “win” the clash of ideologies, if only for the moment.

**Claire:** It's rather clever, what she does. Snatching the phrase - (a movement as if pulling something up) standing it up between her and - the life that's there. And by saying it enough - 'We have life! We have life! We have life!' Very good come-back at one who would really be - 'Just so! *We* are that. Right this way, please -' That, I suppose is what we mean by needing each other. All join in the chorus, 'This is it! This is it! This is it!' And anyone who won't join is to be - visited by relatives, (regarding Adelaide with curiosity) Do you really think that anything is going on in you?
Adelaide: (stiffly) I am not one to hold myself up as a perfect example of what
the human race may be.

Claire: (brightly) Well, that's good.

Harry: Claire!

Claire: Humility's a real thing - not just a fine name for laziness.

Harry: Well, Lord A'mighty, you can't call Adelaide lazy.

Claire: She stays in one place because she hasn't the energy to go anywhere else.

Adelaide: (as if the last word in absurdity has been said) I haven't energy?

Claire: (mildly) You haven't any energy at all, Adelaide. That's why you keep so
busy.

Adelaide: Well - Claire's nerves are in a worse state than I had realized. (81)

In this sequence Claire uses the word “energy” to expose the underlying fear that rules
Adelaide’s existence. Adelaide “laziness” is the complacency and fear that prohibit her not
merely from undertaking a different approach, but from even considering a differing viewpoint.
Thus Adelaide has “lost” this portion of the battle left only with the argument that Claire has bad
“nerves,” which is the common diagnosis for unruly women in this period of history.6

Harry describes the group as being in a “big circle” (82). For the group as a whole this
circle represents the comfort in the conformity of “being gay” (82). For the group, representative
of polite society, this state of being gay is one in which Claire need only accept her role as the
gay housewife who need only take a trip to calm her nerves. For Claire, on the other hand, the
circle represents the confinement of conformity, and she is only one able to see the outside of the
circle by shooting darts into the circle. She does not want to be shut inside of the circle, with the

6 Coincidentally it is also this penchant for “bad nerves” that leads to a nationwide drug epidemic as housewives,
teachers and mothers throughout America are becoming addicted to the opiates in their “nerve” tonics.
rest of them, where she is expected to be gay, which in this case implies not only a joyfulness, which is the common definition of the time, but really a certain level of mindlessness in which no one can question the parameters of the circle itself. The concept of this circle is established in the following:

**Adelaide:** …What is it, Claire? Why do you shut yourself out from us?

**Claire:** I told you. Because I do not want to be shut in with you.

**Adelaide:** All of this is not very pleasant for Harry.

**Harry:** I want Claire to be gay.

**Claire:** Funny - you should want that, (speaks unwillingly, a curious, wistful unwillingness) Did you ever say a preposterous thing, then go trailing after the thing you've said and find it wasn't so preposterous? Here is the circle we are in. (describes a big circle) Being gay. It shoots little darts through the circle, and a minute later - gaiety all gone, and you looking through that little hole the gaiety left. (81)

In this manner the act of being gay is not just an unfavorable one, but destructive. The process Claire describes is really one in which her identity is being stripped away, pieces of her soul robbed, by the act of being the mindless version of happiness that is being insinuated upon her. The irony of this moment cannot be lost. Adelaide, who is nothing if not skilled in her attempts to manipulate Claire, turns to affection as her next weapon of choice.

**Adelaide:** (going to her, as she is still looking through that little hole) Claire, dear, I wish I could make you feel how much I care for you. (simply, with real feeling) You can call me all the names you like - dull, commonplace, lazy -that is a new idea, I confess, but the rest of our family's gone now, and the love that used
to be there between us all - the only place for it now is between you and me. You were so much loved, Claire. You oughtn't to try and get away from a world in which you are so much loved, (to Harry) Mother -father - all of us, always loved Claire best. We always loved Claire's queer gaiety. Now you've got to hand it to us for that, as the children say.

Claire: (moved, but eyes shining with a queer bright loneliness) But never one of you – once - looked with me through the little pricks the gaiety made - never one of you - once, looked with me at the queer light that came in through the pricks.

Here Glaspell establishes the fact that although Claire once dwelt in this world of gaiety, that even as a child she realized the price she was paying for the affection of others. This is only reinforced by Adelaide’s response: “And can't you see, dear, that it's better for us we didn't? And that it would be better for you now if you would just resolutely look somewhere else?” It seems that even Adelaide has some vague awareness of the price that Claire has paid, but that Claire can still redeem herself if only she will ignore her truth. Adelaide continues her manipulative approach with:

Adelaide:…You must see yourself that you haven't the poise of people who are held -well, within the circle, if you choose to put it that way. There's something about being in that main body, having one's roots in the big common experiences, gives a calm which you have missed. That's why I want you to take Elizabeth, forget yourself, and -

Claire: I do want calm. But mine would have to be a calm I - worked my way to. A calm all prepared for me - would stink.
Adelaide: (less sympathetically) I know you have to be yourself, Claire. But I don't admit you have a right to hurt other people. (82)

Claire cannot be “calm” until she is able to be herself, one that is driven to transcend the ordinary. Likewise Adelaide, the traditional rose, cannot imagine a world in which self-destiny takes precedence over the constant needs of others and, in fact, can only view this approach as one that is ultimately hurtful and harmful to others. Also in keeping with the traditional, rose-like stance, Harry weighs in with the typical male response of the day:

Harry: I think Claire and I had better take a nice long trip.

Adelaide: Now why don't you? (82)

In perhaps one of the funniest, most ironic and telling lines of the play Claire responds, “I am taking a trip.” For Claire the journey she is on, the creative journey, the journey of life unfettered, is exactly the trip she is on and wants to be on, while her husband and sister frantically try to manipulate her out of her journey.

Now Adelaide takes her final stab at Claire by attempting to turn her words, and accusations, right back at her:

Adelaide: Well, Harry isn't, and he'd like to go and wants you to go with him. Go to Paris and get yourself some awfully good-looking clothes - and have one grand fling at the gay world. You really love that, Claire, and you've been awfully dull lately. I think that's the whole trouble.

Harry: I think so too.

Adelaide: This sober business of growing plants -

Claire: Not sober - it's mad.

Adelaide: All the more reason for quitting it.
**Claire:** But madness that is the only chance for sanity.

**Adelaide:** Come, come, now - let's not juggle words.

**Claire:** (springing up) How dare you say that to me, Adelaide. You who are such a liar and thief and whore with words! (82)

The only way Claire can emotionally and artistically survive is if she is allowed to jump into the chasm, where she will receive no support in any way, shape or form. She refuses to talk herself into accepting anything less, though Adelaide is trying to draw her back. After the exchange concerning madness, Adelaide accuses Claire of “juggling” words. It is then that Claire becomes enraged, verbally attacking Adelaide, because it is Adelaide who has been “juggling” words since barging into the tower in her attempt to lure Claire back to a conventional point of view. And, once again, Harry aligns himself with the tradition, the rose, by turning the accusation back on Claire when he says, “Of course not, Claire. You have the most preposterous way of using words.” Claire then clarifies her view on words:

**Claire:** I respect words…I'm tired of what you do - you and all of you. Life - experience - values - calm - sensitive words which raise their heads as indications. And you *pull them up* - to decorate your stagnant little minds -and think that makes you - And because you have pulled that word from the life that grew it you won't let one who's honest, and aware, and troubled, try to reach through to - to what she doesn't know is there. (83)

Claire pointedly asks why Adelaide has come to see her and Adelaide, in a last ditch attempt to “talk some sense” into Claire and in her final manipulation technique, explains:

**Adelaide:** To try and help you. But I begin to fear I can't do it. It's pretty egotistical to claim that what so many people are, is wrong. (Claire, after looking
intently at Adelaide, slowly, smiling a little, describes a circle. With deftly used hands makes a quick vicious break in the circle which is there in the air.) (83)

In another clear and detailed stage direction, Glaspell demonstrates that Claire is unwilling to join the circle. When every technique, including breeding, guilt, religion, pity, and arrogance, to name but a few, has failed Adelaide, Harry drops the final bomb as the man, and authority, of the house. If Claire will not see their point of view and join the circle of gaiety, then she must be truly mad and must see a “nerve” doctor who can cure and restore her. In fact, Harry has already made the arrangements and invited the doctor to examine Claire without her knowledge or permission. Harry has sabotaged and subjugated Claire who will not bow to his wishes.

Also in Act II, having failed in her first attempt, Adelaide returns to the tower after dinner, where she embraces the very essence of female servitude and conformity in her efforts to agree with and please the men at every possible turn. Harry entreats Claire to “come down now,” from both the tower and from her radical stance, to rejoin polite society, of which Adelaide provides a model. Adelaide is also complicit in her role as Judas, in delivering the sacrificial lamb, in this case Claire, to Dr. Emmons, whose mission is to crucify her ego. All the while, Adelaide insists that Claire has been “working too hard” and that her single-minded dedication to her plants is not “sound.”

Adelaide: (capably taking the whole thing into matter-of-factness) What I think is, Claire has worked too long with plants. There's something - not quite sound about making one thing into another thing. What we need is unity. (from Claire something like a moan) Yes, dear, we do need it. (to the doctor) I can't say that I believe in making life over like this. I don't think the new species are worth it. At least I don't believe in it for Claire. If one is an intense, sensitive person
Claire: Isn't there any way to stop her? Always - always smothering it with the word for it? (91)

In her comment Claire draws attention to the fact that Adelaide is not speaking with her own voice, but in fact serving as a puppet for the views of the men, and gleaning what little power she appears to have from their words and thoughts, which she in turn wields against Claire.

At this point Claire is totally backed into a corner, literally and figuratively, and begins to search for an escape. When Emmons counters with “...she can't hurt with words” (91). Claire responds,

Claire: (looking at him with eyes too bright) Then you don't see it either, (angry)
Yes, she can hurt it! Piling it up - always piling it up - between us and – What there. Clogging the way - always, (to Emmons) I want to cease to know! That's all I ask. Darken it. Darken it. If you came to help me, strike me blind!

Emmons: You're really all tired out, aren't you? Oh, we've got to get you rested.

Claire: They - deny it saying they have it; and he (half looks at Tom – quickly looks away) - others, deny it - afraid of losing it. We're in the way. Can't you see the dead stuff piled in the path? (Pointing.)

Dick: (voice coming up) Me too? (91)

It is at this point that Claire indentifies her means of escape. By drawing attention to Dick, she can, in effect, hide.

Claire: (staring at the path, hearing his voice a moment after it has come) Yes,

Dick: - you too. Why not - you too. (after he has come up) What is there any more than you are?
Dick: (embarrassed by the intensity, but laughing) A question not at all displeasing to me. Who can answer it?

Claire: (more and more excited) Yes! Who can answer it? (going to him, in terror) Let me go with you - and be with you - and know nothing else!

Adelaide: (gasping) Why - ! (92)

Only in running to Dick, and thus exposing her affair to not only Adelaide and Dr. Emmons, but also her husband, Harry, and Tom, the supposed love of her life, can she find any means of escaping the scrutiny of the group. In this manner, Claire usurps Adelaide’s power completely in becoming her own Judas and betraying herself and her lover.

In a last ditch effort to maintain the false control which is merely a mirror of the male view, Adelaide clings to the two prevailing answers of the day by insisting that in order to “stop” Claire, they must either use force or drugs. In this manner Adelaide firmly aligns herself with the patriarchal mores of the day in which violence and/or drug-induced oblivion are the only obvious and “normal” answers to conflict or the “other.” Harry continues to insist that Claire is sick, again enforcing the patriarchal view that any woman uncontrollable must be mentally deficient. It is also in this passage that Harry is finally able to hear, and absorb, the truth of his wife’s affair.

Adelaide: It's time to stop this by force - if there's no other way. (the doctor shakes his head)

Claire: All I ask is to die in the gutter with everyone spitting on me. (changes to a curious weary smiling quiet) Still, why should they bother to do that?

Harry: (brokenly) You're sick, Claire. There's no denying it. (looks at Emmons, who nods)
Adelaide: Something to quiet her - to stop it.

Claire: (throwing her arms around Dick) You, Dick. Not them. Not - any of them.

Dick: Claire, you are overwrought. You must –

Harry: (to Dick, as if only now realizing that phase of it) I'll tell you one thing, you'll answer to me for this! (he starts for Dick - is restrained by Emmons, chiefly by his grave shake of the head. With Harry’s move to them, Dick has shielded Claire)

Claire: Yes - hold me. Keep me. You have mercy! You will have mercy.

Anything everything - that will let me be nothing! (92)

As the scene draws to a close, it would appear that Claire, is retreating, but it is in this moment that she makes the decision to proceed to her role as the Breath of Life. In running to Dick, she is not running for the comfort and solace of the lover who will save her, but is, in fact, using Dick as a diversion. When Harry finally becomes cognizant of the affair, his rage, and focus, turn to Dick and Claire is, if only for that moment, free of the pressure being exacted upon her from all identical, and patriarchal, angles. And it is in this revelation of the affair that Claire is able to deftly and finally silence the patriarchal voice parroted by the now powerless Adelaide.

Elizabeth/Edge Vine

Elizabeth, Claire’s daughter, is represented throughout the play as the Edge Vine.

Claire’s first original creation, The Edge Vine is described at the very beginning of the play as “a strange vine.” Glaspell continues the description, “It is arresting rather than beautiful. It creeps along the low wall and one branch gets a little way up the [surrounding] glass. You might see
the form of a cross in it, if you happen to think of it that way” (58). The Edge Vine is a plant that cannot decide whether or not it is going to live or die. It is a fragile one-of-a-kind species that cannot yet reproduce. Throughout the play Claire is constantly trying to get the Edge Vine to embrace its “otherness,” but the plant continues “running back to what it broke out of” (62).

Claire, its creator, sees the Edge Vine’s resistance to embrace its “otherness” as a personal failure. The Edge Vine has the potential for greatness, but lacks the stamina and fortitude to see the mission through to the end. The possibility seemed to be present that the Edge Vine could have become a new species, like the Breath of Life, but it has stopped short and has reverted back to being a “normal” and traditional plant like the Rose. Similarly, Elizabeth reverts to simply wanting a family and a husband and does not embrace the possibilities of a career in her future, although she is a young woman who has embraced an education and the possibilities of newly gleaned power through receiving the right to vote and have a say in her future. Elizabeth is destined to, and aspires to, become like Adelaide, a prospect that is in direct opposition to Claire and her wishes.

The discussion regarding The Edge Vine begins after Claire has come into the laboratory. She and Anthony have been watching and hoping for the Edge Vine to “make its mark” and choose to be something more than what it has been: a disappointment to its creator. It is interesting to note that Claire and Anthony have given the Edge Vine everything it needs to succeed and become the “other,” a stand back and watch to see if the plant can find its way. They do not force the plant to achieve its potential; they merely supply the fertile field and give it the space to achieve “greatness.” The Edge Vine clearly makes the choice to recede into “normalcy.” Claire is obviously disappointed with this choice, while Anthony continues to see
hope where Claire see none. This is illustrated clearly in the following stage directions and
dialogue:

Claire: … (she is disturbed -that troubled thing which rises from within, from
deep, and takes CLAIRE. She turns to the Edge Vine, examines. Regretfully to
ANTHONY, who has come in with a plant) It's turning back, isn't it?

Anthony: Can you be sure yet, Miss Claire?

Claire: Oh yes - it's had its chance. It doesn't want to be - what hasn't been. (61)

Claire can see the writing on the wall with the Edge Vine. It has chosen its reversal and
has stunted its own growth. It will never be more than what it is. It is damned and has stopped
from all progression. Claire, taking this decision very personally, sees the plant’s choice as a
setback in her work and therefore her life. Her voice carries such angst and pain that Harry
reacts with kindness, a decidedly uncharacteristic stance given the behavior he exhibits
throughout the rest of the play.

Harry: (who has turned at this note in her voice. Speaks kindly) Don't take it so
seriously, Claire. (Claire laughs)

Claire: No, I suppose not. But it does matter - and why should I pretend it
doesn't, just because I've failed with it?

Harry: Well, I don't want to see it get you - it's not important enough for that.

Claire: (in her brooding way) Anything is important enough for that - if it's
important at all. (to the vine) I thought you were out, but you're - going back
home. (61-62)

Harry, yet again, misses the point. The loss of this “child” to Claire is devastating, yet
Harry insists that Claire’s investment in her work is simply “not important” enough to warrant
the pain caused by the loss. Harry continues to minimize and marginalize the importance of Claire’s failures, as well as her accomplishments. Claire’s life’s work holds simply no import to Harry. Anthony is the one who, once again, encourages Claire and focuses optimistic attention to Breath of Life and its continued chance of future potential and survival as he states, “But you're doing it this time, Miss Claire. When Breath of Life opens, and the heart is revealed, Claire replies, “Yes, if the heart has (a little laugh) held its own, then Breath of Life is alive in its otherness. But Edge Vine is running back to what it broke out of” (62). While Claire is sorrowful for her loss, it is again Anthony who is able to bring her focus back to the hope held for the future of the Breath of Life.

After this focused conversation about Edge Vine and its failure, the impending arrival of Claire’s daughter Elizabeth is brought into the discussion. This is marks the first mention of Elizabeth or of Claire being a mother. Glaspell skillfully places these discussions back-to-back, thus weaving and establishing the correlation and comparison between the two entities: the Edge Vine and Elizabeth. This also provides the audience a sneak preview of what lies ahead.

After a disparaging segment regarding Claire’s ex-husband, Elizabeth’s father, Harry reminds Claire, “Isn’t his daughter—and yours—due here today?” Claire’s response sets the stage for Elizabeth’s arrival when she declares, “I knew something was disturbing me. Elizabeth. A daughter is being delivered unto me this morning. I have a feeling it will be more painful than the original delivery. She has been, as they quaintly say, educated; prepared for her place in life.” (69-70) To have a visit from a child be more painful than the delivery, and to have a mother verbalize that sentiment, especially taken within the context of this historical time period, had to have been rather shocking to many in 1921. When “hearth and home” were to be the things with which dreams are made, how could a “mother” possibly speak of her daughter’s
visit in such terms? Harry, of course jumps in to express the traditionalist “dig” by introducing Adelaide as the answer to Elizabeth’s needs.

**Harry**: And fortunately Claire has a sister who is willing to give her young niece that place.

**Claire**: The idea of giving anyone a place in life.

**Harry**: Yes! The very idea! (70)

This discussion of “place” is very important and brings into focus the continual problems facing “working” mothers, whether in 1921, or today. Adelaide clearly represents the essentialist stance of the female/feminine role in life. One is born a woman to become a wife and mother. A mother’s place is in the home, to be homemaker and helpmeet, and where she is fully expected to be the “sacrificial lamb” to her family’s needs. As has been established and will continue to be explored in this study, Claire, as creator, is the antithesis of the ideology of forcing “place” on anyone. Just as she does not force “place” on her plant Edge Vine, likewise she did not, and does not, force a social “place” upon or with her daughter Elizabeth. She wants Elizabeth, to discover the possibilities and potentials of “place,” just as she wants the Edge Vine to establish its own “place.”

As Elizabeth’s visit draws closer, Claire continues to engage in very controversial arguments. She and Harry begin to discuss the possibilities brought about by war. Claire saw WWI as a chance for the United States to become something other than what it had been. By winning the war, the United States had the potential to change the world, and to begin again, by letting the women, who had been allowed to work during the war, back into the factories where they could hold permanent jobs and, finally, claim wages of their own. Women’s move into the workforce is commonly associated with WWII, however, while perhaps not as far-reaching and
evident, women populating the workforce pre-dates WWI and begins to increase during the war years. According to Tae H. Kim in the article “Where Women Worked During World War I,” which is part of a study done by the Harry Bridges Center for Labor Studies at the University of Washington, titled “STRIKE: Seattle General Strike Project,”:

Women had worked in textile industries and other industries as far back as 1880, but had been kept out of heavy industries and other positions involving any real responsibility. Just before the war, women began to break away from the traditional roles they had played.

As men left their jobs to serve their country in war overseas, women replaced their jobs. Women filled many jobs that were brought into existence by wartime needs. As a result, the number of women employed greatly increased in many industries. In the U.S. there were, before the war, over eight million women in paid occupations. After the war began, not only did their numbers increased in common lines of work, but as one newspaper stated [Seattle Union Record. April 24, 1918], ‘There has been a sudden influx of women into such unusual occupations as bank clerks, ticket sellers, elevator operator, chauffeur, street car conductor, railroad trackwalker, section hand, locomotive wiper and oiler, locomotive dispatcher, block operator, draw bridge attendant, and employment in machine shops, steel mills, powder and ammunition factories, airplane works, boot blacking and farming.’ (1)

When the men came home from the war, many women were forced out of the job market and back into their lives of domesticity. Jobs were given to the men so they could support their families as the natural breadwinners. This left women at a tremendous financial and social
disadvantage. Many women did not want to be forced to revert back, like the Edge Vine, into
the pattern of behavior that had been set for them by others. Claire continues to fight for a touch
of “madness.” To think beyond the limits set by society. To go places women had not been
allowed to go.

Claire: Yes. But the war didn't help. Oh, it was a stunning chance! But fast as
we could - scuttled right back to the trim little thing we'd been shocked out of.

Harry: You bet we did - showing our good sense.

Claire: Showing our incapacity - for madness.

Harry: Oh, come now, Claire - snap out of it. You're not really trying to say that
capacity for madness is a good thing to have?

Claire: (in simple surprise) Why yes, of course. (70)

Claire’s concept of “madness” is not insanity, but the physical incorporation of what is
now referred to as “thinking outside the box.” Only, in this case, the four walls encasing
domesticity and motherhood in its ancient and essentialist format is the “box” under discussion.
Claire wants a “reimagining” of what it means to be “woman,” and she wants desperately to have
her own daughter, and by extension all young women of the day, to catch that vision.

Elizabeth’s visit is again discussed by the house guests where it is revealed that no
arrangements have been made for Elizabeth and her arrival is imminent. Claire and Anthony
refuse to engage in the discussion and go “below” to continue working on the plants. Elizabeth
arrives. The men seem absolutely baffled when asked to deal with the situation regarding
Elizabeth. This continues to speak to the difficulty the men have when dealing with anything
within the realm of the domestic or female “sphere.”
Tom:...(the buzzer. Tom looks around to see if anyone is coming to answer it, then goes to the phone) Yes? . . . I'll see if I can get her. (to Dick) Claire's daughter has arrived, (looking in the inner room — returns to phone) I don't see her. (catching a glimpse of Anthony off right) Oh, Anthony, where's Miss Claire? Her daughter has arrived.

Anthony: She's working at something very important in her experiments.

Dick: But isn't her daughter one of her experiments?

Anthony: (after a baffled moment) Her daughter is finished.

Tom: (at the phone) Sorry - but I can't get to Claire. She appears to have gone below. (Anthony closes the trap-door) I did speak to Anthony, but he says that Claire is working at one of her experiments and that her daughter is finished. I don't know how to make her hear - I took the revolver back to the house. Anyway you will remember Claire doesn't answer the revolver. I hate to reach Claire when she doesn't want to be reached. Why, of course - a daughter is very important, but oh, that's too bad. (putting down the receiver) He says the girl's feelings are hurt. Isn't that annoying? (gingerly pounds on the trap-door. Then with the other hand. Waits. Anthony has a gentle smile for the gentle tapping - nods approval as TOM returns to the phone) She doesn't come up. Indeed I did - with both fists - Sorry.

Anthony: Please, you won't try again to disturb Miss Claire, will you?

Dick: Her daughter is here, Anthony. She hasn't seen her daughter for a year.

Anthony: Well, if she got along without a mother for a year - (goes back to his work) (72-73)
The audience had been informed previously that the Edge Vine was “finished” in its evolution and had chosen to revert, and that Elizabeth too is “finished,” yet the audience does not know why, only that Elizabeth is not worth her mother’s time and effort, and indeed, will not be helped by such.

The men have reported their findings to Elizabeth, and are told Elizabeth’s feelings are hurt by Claire’s response. Typically, the everyman represented by Tom, Dick, and Harry are perplexed and pushed to action only because Elizabeth is displaying “hurt feelings,” or any feelings for that matter. The masculine trait of being unable to deal with a woman’s “feelings” send all the men running to disturb Claire as she works, again making the firm statement that children are the woman’s problem—and the woman’s only. She, as the domestic overlord, needs to stop everything she is doing, no matter the importance, and deal with the child.

While waiting for Claire to come out and deal with the problem of Elizabeth, the men engage in a very interesting side conversation regarding the plants in the laboratory. Dick, who is a non-commercial artist who makes abstract pencil drawings, says,

**Dick:** Plants are queer. Perhaps it's safer to do it with pencil

(regards Tom) - or with pure thought. Things that grow in the earth –

**Tom:** (nodding) I suppose because we grew in the earth.

… (They are silent) I had an odd feeling that you and I sat here once before, long ago, and that we were plants. And you were a beautiful plant, and I - I was a very ugly plant. I confess it surprised me - finding myself so ugly a plant. (73)

Here a clear correlation between people and plants is established. Dick, the sexual side of everyman is seen by Tom as being the beautiful plant, while Tom “the male of the species” perceives himself as being a “very ugly plant.” It is revealed later in the play that Tom appears
to be something he is not, and therefore is exposed as the truly “ugly plant” he is, striving to jeopardize Claire’s brilliant future through emotional and sexual manipulation.

Immediately following this brief exchange Elizabeth enters the scene. Her description is, somewhat generic and representative of a class of the young, educated, and cultured women of her time.

(A young girl is seen outside. Harry gets the door open for her and brings Elizabeth in…Elizabeth comes forward. She is the creditable young American - well built, poised, 'cultivated', so sound an expression of the usual as to be able to meet the world with assurance - assurance which training has made rather graceful. She is about seventeen - and mature. You feel solid things behind her.)

**Tom:** I knew you when you were a baby. You used to kick a great deal then.

**Elizabeth:** (laughing, with ease) And scream, I haven't a doubt. But I've stopped that. One does, doesn't one? …Is mother here? (73)

Elizabeth used to kick and scream as a baby, obviously expressing her own personal needs and desires, but as she has “matured” she has “stopped that.” As Elizabeth has grown up she has followed the “pattern” established by traditional society for her. Elizabeth has stopped expressing and being physically active in the attainment of her own needs and desires. She has lost her “voice” as an individual and has joined the “choir” of unoriginal “singers.”

**Harry:** (crossly) Yes, she's here. Of course she's here. And she must know you're here, (after looking in the inner room he goes to the trap-door and makes a great noise)

**Elizabeth:** Oh -please. Really - it doesn't make the least difference.

**Harry:** Well, all I can say is, your manners are better than your mother's. (73)
Again, it is Harry, the traditionalist, who recognizes and appreciates Elizabeth’s submissive and
demure approach to Claire’s emotional and physical abandonment and Harry’s discomfiture with
the situation. In Harry’s mind, this is the way a woman of culture and breeding should behave;
always subservient and soft-spoken, looking out for the needs of others and putting her own
needs dead last in order of importance. Elizabeth says, “But you see I don't do anything
interesting, so I have to have good manners,” (lightly, but leaving the impression there is a
certain superiority in not doing anything interesting) (74). Here Elizabeth reveals herself to feel
superior because she has the good sense not to have “to do anything interesting.” Elizabeth sees
nothing but idle pleasure in the life void of accomplishment that stretches out before her. This
would now be referred to as a “trophy wife” existence. Her life will consist of marriage, family
and domestic “bliss,” as modeled to her through her “real” mother and mentor, Adelaide.

In this next exchange the subject turns to a comparison between the commercial art of
Elizabeth’s father and the drawings of Dick, the modernist non-realistic artist.

**Elizabeth:** (Turning cordially to Dick) My father was an artist.

**Dick:** Yes, I know.

**Elizabeth:** He was a portrait painter. Do you do portraits?

**Dick:** Well, not the kind people buy.

**Elizabeth:** They bought father's.

**Dick:** Yes, I know he did that kind.

**Harry:** (still irritated) Why, you don't do portraits.

**Dick:** I did one of you the other day. You thought it was a milk-can.
Elizabeth: (laughing delightedly) No? Not really? Did you think - How could you think - (as Harry does not join the laugh) Oh, I beg your pardon. I - Does mother grow beautiful roses now?

Harry: No, she does not. (The trap-door begins to move. Claire's head appears.)

(74)

Elizabeth established herself as appreciating the conventional mode of realism vs. the creative antithesis found within modernity. Harry, of course, joins the argument on the side of commercial realism. Elizabeth has already firmly established herself as being everything her mother abhors. And at the end of the exchange Elizabeth, after viewing all flora in the laboratory, notices the roses and is drawn back to the conventional rose. Though Elizabeth started into this world “kicking” and “screaming,” she now seeks to be silent, passive and appreciates the roses in Claire’s garden. What a fitting entrance for Claire. The much anticipated meeting between mother and daughter has arrived. As Elizabeth runs to greet her mother, Claire warns Elizabeth to be careful as Claire is carrying a box of lice to put on the plants. Elizabeth naturally recoils, but continues to try to engage her mother by creating conversation. During the conversation Elizabeth’s ignorance of her mother’s work is revealed as she struggles to pretend to understand what Claire does and why she does it. After a very brief greeting, Claire starts to retreat to the inner sanctum of the laboratory. Harry stops Claire in her tracks,

(Claire, who has not fully ascended, looks at Elizabeth, hesitates, then suddenly starts back down the stairs.)
Harry: (outraged) Claire! (slowly she re-ascends - sits on the top step. After a long pause in which he has waited for Claire to open a conversation with her daughter.) Well, and what have you been doing at school all this time? (74)

In this terribly uncomfortable section of small talk, with many sustained and uncomfortable pauses, several things are revealed. Foremost, mother and daughter are simply unable to communicate in any substantive manner, but it also becomes evident that a pattern is emerging. Elizabeth identifies with her teacher “Miss Lane” and her peers and girlfriends instead of her mother. Elizabeth refers to being an integral part of an established, and presumably, popular group. Elizabeth studies, “the things one studies” and does the “things one does.” “All the girls” do “all the things” together. And the “things” mentioned are all lighthearted and frivolous in nature. Nothing of substance is offered as part of Elizabeth’s educational experience, and there is absolutely no individuality expressed throughout the dialogue. Claire groans after each of these statements as she sees how far her daughter has slipped into the ordinary and conventional. Claire abhors predictable conformist patterns and being a member of a recognized group with shared ideologies, yet she is staring one right in the face in the form of her own daughter. Elizabeth has become everything Claire is not and, in fact, that which Claire despises.

At the end of this section Elizabeth declares how she is happy to be an “American,” because “all the girls” (74) presumably feel the same way. Claire groans heavily again. What “being an American” entails is certainly under debate in this period of history. Traditionalists would certainly see the American ideal as one in which the status quo of “rugged individualism, was maintained, creating the great American myths (still purported today as the American dream) in which Elizabeth is different, exactly like everyone else. However, those leading the
charge in on social issues were often swept under the umbrella of “anarchy,” characterized by those fighting for the rights of marginalized populations. Civil Rights workers, Women’s rights activists, Union representatives, workers organizations with Communist underpinnings—all questioning the established and entrenched government of the United States and corporate America, were trying desperately to change the landscape, and future, of the country. These trailblazers wanted to create a new world. Individualism, and the power of the individual, was heralded in many circles, however the parameters of that individualism were diametrically opposed in the traditional and new woman of the time.

Headlines were filled with the names of leaders of movements who were active in changing the face of every day existence. Hundreds were dedicating their lives by working to change the “status quo” in a manner that would make their existence different and, hopefully, better for all. Certainly, Glaspell would be numbered among those striving for difference. Against this landscape were the uninterested few who wanted a life of no substance or change, who would happily plod along behind. As “true Americans,” Claire is representative of the former, and Elizabeth, Harry, and Adelaide, the latter.

After this verbal bantering, ending with Claire groaning in pain, Elizabeth asks if Claire is ill. Harry, again, uses the excuse that Claire has been “working very hard” with her plants, inferring that Claire probably needs a rest. Elizabeth decides she wants to help Claire with all her “amusing” work. It becomes very clear that Elizabeth believes that Claire’s life’s work is part of a fad, or simple pastime, something that holds no value to the world. Elizabeth does not have the capacity to understand the depth of the stakes involved with being a creator. Again, Elizabeth sees helping her mother with “growing flowers” as the “in” thing to do, particularly
since Elizabeth is obsessed with doing what is acknowledged and sanctioned by her school chums.

Elizabeth: Oh, I do so want to know all about it? Perhaps I can help you! I think it's just awfully amusing that you're doing something. One does nowadays, doesn't one? - if you know what I mean. It was the war, wasn't it, made it the thing to do something?

Dick: (slyly) And you thought, Claire, that the war was lost.

Elizabeth: The war? Lost! (her capable laugh) Fancy our losing a war! Miss Lane says we should give thanks. She says we should each do some expressive thing - you know what I mean? And that this is the keynote of the age. Of course, one's own kind of thing. Like mother - growing flowers.

Claire: You think that is one's own kind of thing?

Elizabeth: Why, of course I do, mother. And so does Miss Lane. All the girls–

Claire: (shaking her head as if to get something out) S-hoo.

Elizabeth: What is it, mother?

Claire: A fly shut up in my ear - 'All the girls!

Elizabeth: (laughing) Mother was always so amusing. So different - if you know what I mean. (75)

Elizabeth wants to spend time and be involved with Claire for her own amusement, rather than for the purpose of her own education and/or growth. She sees Claire’s work as being ornamental and frivolous, not life changing. Elizabeth has chosen to minimalize Claire’s life and work.

Elizabeth soon reveals that Claire, who is a person of recognized breeding and of good family, has been the topic of discussion among Miss Lane and the school girls as being an
example of someone doing some “beautiful, useful thing.” And by doing so, Claire has become someone her male ancestry of “great teachers and preachers” can be proud. This, through blood relation, is also being said of Elizabeth. Again, these ideas are antithetical to Claire’s position and stance.

Elizabeth: …I think it's going to be awfully amusing to be around with mother now - and help her with her work. Help do some useful beautiful thing.

Claire: I am not doing any useful beautiful thing.

Elizabeth: Oh, but you are, mother. Of course you are. Miss Lane says so. She says it is your splendid heritage gives you this impulse to do a beautiful thing for the race. She says you are doing in your way what the great teachers and preachers behind you did in theirs.

Claire: (who is good for little more) Well, all I can say is, Miss Lane is stung.

Elizabeth: Mother! What a thing to say of Miss Lane, (from this slipping into more of a little girl manner) Oh, she gave me a spiel one day about living up to the men I come from. (Claire turns and regards her daughter.)

Claire: You'll do it, Elizabeth.

Elizabeth: Well, I don't know. Quite a job, I'll say. Of course, I'd have to do it in my way. I'm not going to teach or preach or be a stuffy person. (75)

Elizabeth does not understand in the least that Claire is not giving her a compliment with this statement and that living up to “the men I come from” is not position Claire aspires to, and, further, that it has nothing to do with Elizabeth’s concept of not becoming a “stuffy person.”
Claire is somewhat removed from the discussion until Elizabeth simply goes too far by claiming she has been “liberated in the world.” Claire responds to a very surprised Elizabeth, with a very clear message. Claire says,

**Claire**: (low) Don't use those words.

**Elizabeth**: Why - why not?

**Claire**: Because you don't know what they mean.

**Elizabeth**: Why, of course I know what they mean!

**Claire**: (turning away) You're -stepping on the plants. (75)

Indeed, Elizabeth is literally and symbolically stepping all over Claire’s creations by claiming liberation when she has so unmistakably bought into the patriarchal control of the past. She has reverted to her ancestor’s way, and has become subservient to their conventions. Elizabeth is so blinded by the social mores that she does not even understand what has happened to her. She came into the world as a daring new life and has not fulfilled any of the promised potential. The Edge Vine has reverted back to what it was not meant to be. Elizabeth has indeed figuratively, and to Claire, blasphemously, “step[ped] on the plants.” Elizabeth, with her ignorance and lack of vision, continues to do just that. She hammers at Claire, trying to enter her world, which is a world in which Elizabeth does not and cannot, by her own choice, belong. Harry prods Elizabeth on in an effort to force Claire to deal with Elizabeth directly.

Elizabeth continues to prove that she doesn’t understand the concept behind the creation of the plants by declaring that Claire is producing a “better” kind of plant. Claire responds that the plants “may be new” but that she “doesn’t give a damn whether they’re better.” Better is, quite simply, not the point. Elizabeth asks if better is not the goal, then what is special about these plants. Claire replies,
Claire: (as if choked out of her) They're different.

Elizabeth: (thinks a minute, then laughs triumphantly) But what's the use of making them different if they aren't better?

Claire: ...I don't have to answer [that]. ..She is not interested.

Elizabeth: But I am, mother. Indeed I am. I do want awfully to understand what you are doing...

Claire: You can't help me, Elizabeth:... Why do you ask me to do that? This is my own thing. Why do you make me feel I should - (goes to Elizabeth) (76)

Claire promise that she will do all the frivolous “gay” things that Elizabeth wants to do, as long as Elizabeth does not ask to help Claire with her plants again. Claire begs Elizabeth to drop the subject. Claire promises,

Claire: ...Anything else. Not - this is - Not this.

Elizabeth: As you like, mother, of course. I just would have been so glad to – to share the thing that interests you. (hurt borne with good breeding and a smile)

Harry: Claire! (which says, 'How can you?)

Claire: (who is looking at Elizabeth) Yes, I will try.

Elizabeth: ...Why, of course - I don't at all want to intrude. ...(in her manner of holding the world capably in her hands) Now let's talk of something else. I hadn't the least idea of making mother feel badly. (76)

Claire tries frantically to explain, to a group of people who will never understand, why her plants are so important,

Claire: (desperately)...These plants - (beginning flounderingly) Perhaps they are less beautiful - less sound - than the plants from which they diverged. But they
have found - otherness, (laughs a little shrilly) If you know - what I mean….
(excitedly)…They have been shocked out of what they were - into something they
were not; they've broken from the forms in which they found themselves. They
are alien. Outside. That's it, outside; if you - know what I mean.

Elizabeth: (not shocked from what she is) But of course, the object of it all is to
make them better plants. Otherwise, what would be the sense of doing it?

Claire: (not reached by Elizabeth) Out there - (giving it with her hands) lies all
that's not been touched - lies life that waits. Back here - the old pattern, done
again, again and again. So long done it doesn't even know itself for a pattern – in
immensity. But this - has invaded. Crept a little way into - what wasn't. Strange
lines in life unused. And when you make a pattern new you know a pattern's
made with life. And then you know that anything may be - if only you know how
to reach it. (this has taken form, not easily, but with great struggle between
feeling and words) (76-77)

At this point Claire makes a direct comparison between the Edge Vine and Elizabeth.

Claire begins to use the exact words Elizabeth has used in the previous section to call for the
destruction of the Edge Vine, and in reference to Elizabeth and those like her. This reference
goes past Elizabeth with no recognition that she is included in this desire for destruction. Claire
states.

Claire: I should destroy the Edge Vine. It isn't - over the edge. It's running, back
to - 'all the girls'. It's a little afraid of Miss Lane, (looking somberly at it) You are
out, but you are not alive.

Elizabeth: Why, it looks all right, mother.
Claire: Didn't carry life with it from the life it left…. (her ruthless way of not letting anyone's feelings stand in the way of truth) Then destroy it for me! It's hard to do it - with the hands that made it.

Dick: But what's the point in destroying it, Claire?

Claire: (impatiently) I've told you. It cannot create.

Dick: But you say you can go on producing it, and it's interesting in form.

Claire: And you think I'll stop with that? Be shut in - with different life - that can't creep on? (after trying to put destroying hands upon it) It's hard to - get past what we've done. Our own dead things - block the way. (77)

As Claire is discussing the need for her special plants to be able to reproduce themselves, a direct correlation is being drawn to the young women of the day. If, after winning the right to vote, young women did not make the choice to move on and continue the quest for further recognition of the vast inequity dealt to all women, then all they had gained could and would be lost. The patriarchal social structure could, and if given the chance would, reclaim the right to disenfranchise women on every political front, and with the very real possibility of those rights never being regained. This hard-fought battle needed to be recognized and championed by those young women who could continue the fight for basic women’s rights. Claire does not want those that have been given the privilege of an education and cultural enrichment to slip back and become complacent, to gladly allow their small power based to be so quickly usurped. The Edge Vine, though having great potential, refused to move on, and slipped back to old traditions. Claire is declaring that Elizabeth has done the same. Tom reminds Claire that the Breath of Life still holds promise. He says,
**Tom:** But you're doing it this next time, Claire, (nodding to the inner room.) In there!

**Claire:** (turning to that room) I'm not sure.

**Tom:** But you told me Breath of Life has already produced itself. Doesn't that show it has brought life from the life it left?

**Claire:** …If it is less sure this time, then it is going back to - Miss Lane. But if the pattern's clearer now, then it has made friends of life that waits. I'll know to-morrow. (77)

With this, Elizabeth now demonstrates how fully entrenched she has become in the patriarchal social structure. She begins to condemn Claire for her ability to create using religion as the ultimate controller and suppressor. Though the religious aspects of the play are explored more fully elsewhere in this study, it warrants mention here that Elizabeth throws the Christian religion in Claire’s face to try to stop her potential advancement. Elizabeth tells her mother that these creations are “wrong.” To use creative powers is something God would be against and she warns that if Claire continues on this blasphemous path, the Christian God will be very displeased. Claire responds violently,

**Claire:**…And that's all you know of adventure - and of anguish. Do you know it is you - world of which you're so true a flower -makes me have to leave? You're there to hold the door shut! Because you're young and of a gayer world. . . ? Do you know why you're so sure of yourself? Because you can't feel. Can't feel -the limitless - out there - a sea just over the hill. I will not stay with you! (buries her hands in the earth around the Edge Vine. But suddenly steps back from it as she had from Elizabeth) And I will not stay with you! (grasps it as we grasp what we
would kill, is trying to pull it up. They all step forward in horror. Anthony is
drawn in by this harm to the plant)

**Anthony:** Miss Claire! Miss Claire! The work of years!

**Claire:** May only make a prison! (struggling with Harry, who is trying to stop
her) You think I too will die on the edge? (she has thrown him away, is now
struggling with the vine) Why did I make you? To get past you! (as she twists it)
Oh yes, I know you have thorns! The Edge Vine should have thorns, (with a long
tremendous pull for deep roots, she has it up. As she holds the torn roots) Oh, I
have loved you so! You took me where I hadn't been.

**Elizabeth:** (who has been looking on with a certain practical horror) Well, I'd say
it would be better not to go there!

**Claire:** Now I know what you are for! (flings her arm back to strike Elizabeth
with the Edge Vine)

**Harry:** (wresting it from her) Claire! Are you mad?

**Claire:** No, I'm not mad. I'm - too sane! (pointing to Elizabeth - and the words
come from mighty roots) To think that object ever moved my belly and sucked
my breast! (Elizabeth hides her face as if struck)

**Harry:** (going to Elizabeth, turning to Claire) This is atrocious! You're cruel. (He
leads Elizabeth to the door and out. After an irresolute moment in which he looks
from Claire to Tom, Dick follows. Anthony cannot bear to go. He stoops to take
the Edge Vine from the floor. Claire's gesture stops him. He goes into the inner
room.)
Claire: (kicking the Edge Vine out of her way, drawing deep breaths, smiling)

O-h. How good I feel! Light! (a movement as if she could fly) (77-78)

Claire pulls the Edge Vine out by the roots, finally destroying this creation. There is no question that she would also like to have done the same to Elizabeth. Claire kicks the Edge Vine out of the way as she has finally kicked Elizabeth out of her life as well. The burden of trying to be a “good mother” to Elizabeth has been lifted, and she is now free, on this front, to become who she is really meant to be. Claire is the “other” and is comfortable with the position.

Claire/Breath of Life

Claire, described as “having the fire within” (59), is a direct parallel to the Breath of Life plant which is also referred to having “something alive—inside the outer shell” (96). At the beginning of The Verge the audience is informed that the Breath of Life is about to flower, and the very same can be said of Claire, who is beginning the process of evolving into something new and different. When Claire enters the scene for the first time, the audience is told that “another kind of aliveness is there” (61). Upon arrival, Claire immediately tries to take charge of her newly invaded space but the men, and their daily individual needs, constantly stand in her way.

Claire: I'll not have you in my place!

Harry: If you take all the heat then you have to take me.

Claire: I'll show you how I have to take you. (with her hands begins scooping upon him the soil Anthony has prepared)

Harry: (jumping up, laughing, pinning down her arms, putting his arms around her) Claire - be decent. What harm do I do here?
**Claire:** You pull down the temperature… (going to the door, as he gasps for breath before closing it) How dare you make my temperature uneven! (she shuts the door and leans against it)

**Dick:** Is that what I do? (A laugh, a look between them, which is held into significance). (61)

The seemingly playful act by Harry of pinning Claire’s arms down by encircling her body with his arms is, in all actuality, an act of physical force and control. Claire states that the men “pull down the temperature” in the laboratory where the plants need the heat, but the men also pull her temperature down, depleting her creative energies by insisting she take time out of her professional life to deal with such frivolous things as taking care of their breakfast.

Throughout these sections of dialogue Anthony continues to help Claire and keep her attention toward her plants. When she is disappointed by anything that takes her away from her creative goal, Anthony tries to keep her on course. Just as he helps her in making the Breath of Life find its place, he also helps Claire, representative of the Breath of Life, discover her place. When the men intrude, he reminds Claire of her mission.

**Anthony:** But you're doing it this time, Miss Claire. When Breath of Life opens - and we see its heart - (Claire looks toward the inner room. Because of intervening plants they do not see what is seen from the front - a plant like caught motion, and of a greater transparency than plants have had. Its leaves, like waves that curl, close around a heart that is not seen. This plant stands by itself in what, because of the arrangement of things about it, is a hidden place. But nothing is between it and the light.)
Claire: Yes, if the heart has (a little laugh) held its own, then Breath of Life is alive in its otherness...(62)

Claire is also of “greater transparency” than most people. She is “alive in [her] otherness,” but the men surrounding her continue to try to hold her down to “normalcy.” They continually try to get her to revert back into what is socially acceptable (like the Edge Vine). The men, (and women as represented in the Adelaide/rose/traditional and Elizabeth/Edge Vine/neo-traditional), use manipulative tactics, but Claire ultimately refuses to allow them control her. She tries to explain herself, and works to get them to understand, but none of them is capable of understanding something for which they have no reference, no context. Harry tries to shame Claire, Dick uses sexual innuendo and advances, and Tom appears throughout the script to be “understanding” and supportive of Claire’s efforts, but reveals his true character and intention later on in the script. Likewise, Adelaide and Elizabeth lord the patriarchal concepts of duty, honor, decorum and station over Claire, and also find no result. This pattern of relationship is revealed shortly after the men have been introduced. Claire says,

Claire: I must tell you I don't like the idea of any food being eaten here, where things have their own way to go. Please eat as little as possible, and as quickly.

Harry: A hostess calculated to put one at one's ease.

Claire: (with no ill-nature) I care nothing about your ease. Or about Dick's ease.

Dick: And no doubt that's what makes you so fascinating a hostess.

Claire: Was I a fascinating hostess last night, Dick? (softly sings) 'Oh, night of love - ' (from the Barcarole [sic] of 'Tales of Hoffman' [sic]) (62)

With this section, then, it becomes clear that Claire is continually torn between taking care of the needs of others; what she wants, or needs, to experience as a sexual entity; and her
greater desire, which is her work. The sequence also provides another example of Harry, the staid traditionalist, using sarcasm to try to shame Claire into behaving as the socially constructed woman of the house role demands. He desires, above all else, to have Claire be the “hostess” to her guests, which in this sense, again, means meeting the expectation of continual subservience in meeting everyone else’s needs. There is no thought of support for Claire or her work. In fact Harry is so obsessed with the decorum of the “hostess” that he is completely oblivious, at this point, to the extra-marital affair that Claire is so blatantly parading in front of him.

It seems that when Claire has clear a view of her “otherness,” she then seems to retreat for a while, only to try to forge through again and again while others try to hold her back. This surge forward and retreat wave is subtle but ever present. Thus the character of Claire, in and of herself, comes to represent the waves of emotion so clearly present in Offenbach’s composition of the Barcarolle, in which the music follows a pattern of ebb and flow, as outlined in the beginning of this study.

In the following dialogue Claire gives the first hint of this pattern of thought, in which she vacillates between the urge to follow her desire to be the “other,” and the draw of fitting in with others and being “normal.”

Claire: …So - the fortifications are unassailable. If one ever does get out, I suppose it is - quite unexpectedly, and perhaps - a bit terribly.

Harry: Get out where?

Claire: (with a bright smile) Where you, darling, will never go.

Harry: And from which you, darling, had better beat it.

Claire: I wish I could, (to herself) No - no I don't either. (63)
Harry immediately tries to assert himself upon Claire’s domain by lighting a cigarette. When Claire tells Harry to put out the cigarette because the smoke it is not good for the plants, and that they are not accustomed to it, Harry replies, “Then I should think smoking would be just the thing for them.” Once again Harry is trying to force his world upon Claire and her “subjects.” Claire responds by ignoring him and getting back the work at hand.

**Claire:** There is design…

**Dick:** What is this you're doing, Claire?

**Claire:** Pollenizing. Crossing for fragrance. ([Dick] turns away) (At that she wants to tell him. Helpless, as one who cannot get across a stream, starts uncertainly.)

**Claire:** I want to give fragrance to Breath of Life (faces the room beyond the wall of glass) - the flower I have created that is outside what flowers have been. What has gone out should bring fragrance from what it has left. But no definite fragrance, no limiting enclosing thing. I call the fragrance I am trying to create Reminiscence, (her hand on the pot of the wistful little flower she has just given pollen) Reminiscent of the rose, the violet, arbutus - but a new thing - itself.

Breath of Life may be lonely out in what hasn't been. Perhaps some day I can give it reminiscence. (63)

This discussion surrounding the pollinating of Claire’s Breath of Life is at once very unexpected and interesting. Why would Claire want to give her new creation something from the traditional rose, which she despises? This new plant, as yet, has no “history,” or memories to call upon to flavor its “scent”. Claire is trying to provide a foundation for the Breath of Life, a
foundation from which it can veer. This simple act is interconnected to feminist standpoint
theory which relates to feminist epistemology. In brief, feminist standpoint theory,

adapts and develops the Marxian idea that different social groups have different
epistemic standpoints, where the material positioning of one of the groups is said
to bestow epistemic privilege….By attempting to reveal the epistemological
implications of the fact that knowers are diversely situated in social relation of
identity and power, feminist epistemology represents a radicalizing innovation in
the analytic tradition…(Cambridge 305)

This non-traditional way of gaining “knowledge” or a way of knowing is foundational to
the continued advancement of the Breath of Life. If Claire can give this new plant
“reminiscence,” of what has been before, it can use that knowledge to change direction away
from what has already existed, thereby forging a new path. If the plant can use that
“reminiscence” then it will not fall into the same traps that led to subjugation, just as knowledge
has the potential to save Elizabeth (the Edge Vine) from the failure of her human female
predecessors.

As Claire continues to try to make the men understand why she is pursuing this dream,
Harry again jabs at Claire’s attempts at explaining herself and her drive toward “otherness,”
which will move her away from the mold that was made for her by society. Again she is
frustrated in the attempt and goes back to her plants where she is accepted and needed.

**Harry:** Explain that this is what came from the men who made the laws that
made New England…the gentlemen of culture who—

**Dick:** Moulded the American mind!

**Claire:** I want to get away from them!
**Harry:** Rest easy, little one - you do.

**Claire:** I'm not so sure - that I do. But it can be done! We need not be held in forms moulded for us. There is outness - and otherness.

**Harry:** Now, Claire - I didn't mean to start anything serious.

**Claire:** No; you never mean to do that. I want to break it up! I tell you, I want to break it up! If it were all in pieces, we'd be (a little laugh) shocked to aliveness (to Dick) - wouldn't we? There would be strange new comings together - mad new comings together, and we would know what it is to be born, and then we might know - that we are. Smash it. (her hand is near an egg.) As you'd smash an egg. (she pushes the egg over the edge of the table and leans over and looks, as over a precipice)

**Harry:** (with a sigh) Well, all you've smashed is the egg, and all that amounts to is that now Tom gets no egg. So that's that. (64-65)

Tom’s lack of breakfast is not the key point here, but something much larger. In her destruction of the egg, just prior to Elizabeth’s arrival, Claire destroys the “mother” image of the ova, clearing the way for her to fully embrace the God stance of creator later in the play. In the next exchange she is standing on the precipice of her move to the Godhead when she declares:

**Claire:** (with difficulty, drawing herself back from the fascination of the precipice) You think I can't smash anything? You think life can't break up, and go outside what it was? Because you've gone dead in the form in which you found yourself, you think that's all there is to the whole adventure? And that is called sanity. And made a virtue - to lock one in. You never worked with things that grow! Things that take a sporting chance - go mad - that sanity mayn't lock them
in - from life untouched - from life - that waits, (she turns toward the inner room)

Breath of Life, (she goes in there). (65)

At this point Glaspell introduces a telling and interesting overview of Claire as she is defined by the patriarchal “everyman” represented by Dick and Harry. It is also interesting to note that Tom, who is locked outside, is looking at this conversation and cannot understand what they are saying. In this manner Tom maintains, at this point in the script, what the audience is brought to believe, until the final act, is his loyal and sympathetic stance towards Claire. Harry and Dick, as they are discussing Claire, are exposed in their true nature. Harry is the unyielding traditionalist who is labeled as lacking any imagination, and Dick, is the free-wheeling modern man completely void of any responsibility:

Harry: Oh, I wish Claire wouldn't be strange like that, (helplessly) What is it?
What's the matter?

Dick: It's merely the excess of a particularly rich temperament.

Harry: But it's growing on her. I sometimes wonder if all this (indicating the place around him) is a good thing. It would be all right if she'd just do what she did in the beginning - make the flowers as good as possible of their kind. That's an awfully nice thing for a woman to do - raise flowers. But there's something about this - changing things into other things - putting things together and making queer new things – this.

Dick: Creating?

Harry: Give it any name you want it to have - it's unsettling for a woman. They say Claire's a shark at it, but what's the good of it, if it gets her? What is the good
of it, anyway? Suppose we can produce new things. Lord - look at the ones we've got. (65)

Both the traditional, represented by Harry, and the modern, represented by Dick, are threatened, by Claire’s desire to create, with neither being able to fully accept or understand her viewpoint, or even her need to have a viewpoint.

The introduction of the character of Tom sets the stage for the ultimate conclusion in which Claire finally, and fully, accepts her role as the Breath of Life. There are some puzzling points to this introduction. When Tom is introduced, he is carrying a revolver, supposedly in order to gain the attention of Harry and Dick, who have already invaded the inner sanctum of Claire’s laboratory. Does Glaspell introduce the gun in an effort to establish the male-dominated tendency towards violence, which Claire points to as prevalent in the aftermath of WWI (70)? Perhaps she is, in fact, employing a popular theatrical and literary device in foreshadowing a violence that never comes to fruition. By introducing Tom’s “gun” and not allowing him to use it, save to call attention to himself, Glaspell is in effect emasculating Tom.

Tom’s emasculation becomes even clearer in the final scene of the play when the “armed man” is overtaken by the “helpless woman.” As the scene begins, with a flurry of action, Harry, now fully aware of the affair, pursues Dick with a gun, while Anthony implores Claire to face the reality, whether successful or not, of her penultimate creation. It is also in this final scene of the play that the murder takes place and that Claire becomes the symbolic representation of her greatest creation, the Breath of Life. Despondent and fearful of failure, Claire turns to her androgynous helpmate, Anthony:

**Claire:** I can't go in there, (she almost looks at Tom), not today.

**Anthony:** But, Miss Claire, there'll be things to see today we can't see tomorrow.
Claire: You bring it in here!

Anthony: In - out from its own place? (she nods) And - where they are? (again she nods. Reluctantly he goes to the door) I will not look into the heart. No one must know before you know.(In the inner room, his head a little turned away, he is seen very carefully to lift the plant which glows from within. As he brings it in, no one looks at it. Harry takes a box of seedlings from a stand and puts them on the floor, that the newcomer may have a place.)

Anthony: Breath of Life is here, Miss Claire. (Claire half turns, then stops.)

Claire: Look - and see - what you see.

Anthony: No one should see what you've not seen.

Claire: I can't see - until I know. (Anthony looks into the flower.)

Anthony: (agitated) Miss Claire!

Claire: It has come through?

Anthony: It has gone on.

Claire: Stronger?

Anthony: Stronger, surer.

Claire: And more fragile?

Anthony: And more fragile.

Claire: Look deep. No - turning back?

Anthony: (after a searching look) The form is set. (he steps back from it)

Claire: Then it is - out. (from where she stands she turns slowly to the plant) You weren't. You are.

Anthony: But come and see, Miss Claire.
Claire: It's so much more than - I'd see.

Harry: Well, I'm going to see. (looking into it) I never saw anything like that before! There seems something alive - inside this outer shell.

Dick: (he too looking in and he has an artist's manner of a hand up to make the light right) It's quite new in form. It - says something about form.

Harry: (cordially to Claire, who stands apart) So you've really put it over. Well, well, - congratulations. It's a good deal of novelty, I should say, and I've no doubt you'll have a considerable success with it - people always like something new. I'm mighty glad - after all your work, and I hope it will - set you up.

Claire: (low - and like a machine) Will you all - go away? (Anthony goes - into the other room.) (95-96)

Once Claire has seen her life’s work as successful, she knows that there is no turning back and that she must embrace the power of her own creation. She demands solitude from the hovering men, yet it is only the steadfast Anthony who follows her wishes and exits.

Harry, maintaining the traditional voice of the patriarchy, demands that she behave in the manner he has proscribed by saying, “Can't you take some pleasure in your work?” When this approach falls on deaf ears, he insists that she follow doctor’s orders, and adds, “[Dr.] Emmons says you need a good long rest -and I think he's right” (96).

In the next line, Tom perhaps seals his own fate in asking, “Can't this help you, Claire? Let this be release. This - breath of the uncaptured” (96). While he has masqueraded as a helpmate and confidant to Claire, Tom also ultimately wants Claire to calm down now and be happy. The use of the word “release” also signals that Claire has hit that “climax,” and must now, recede to a place where she can once again be managed.
Mirroring the seduction scene, Claire again speaks in a poetic structure, but instead of speaking in verse, the language of love, to Tom, she is speaking to her creation while the triumvirate of the “everyman” can only stand by in voyeuristic silence.

**Claire:** (and though speaking, she remains just as still)

Breath of the uncaptured?

You are a novelty.

Out?

You have been brought in.

A thousand years from now, when you are but a form too long repeated,

Perhaps the madness that gave you birth will burst again,

And from the prison that is you will leap pent queernesses

To make a form that hasn't been –

To make a person new.

And this we call creation, (very low, her head not coming up)

Go away! (96)

With Claire’s declaration of love for her new creation, Glaspell makes her strongest statement for the new, emerging feminist movement. Glaspell contends that even if the traditionalists are able to squelch the newborn movement, that perhaps it will give root to a new generation of empowered women. As time passes and feminism becomes codified, there will again be a rebirth of something new and different and that, from this, women can forever, even “a thousand years from now,” develop into new creations. In this manner Claire, as the Breath of Life, is representative of the preparatory steps of the feminist movement which will allow women to become the Mother Gods of their own existence.
The stage directions that follow this poetic sequence, firmly establish who each of the men are and that each is fixed, having reached, through the feminist lens, the pinnacle of his evolution:

(Tom goes; Harry hesitates, looking in anxiety at Claire. He starts to go, stops, looks at Dick, from him to Claire. But goes. A moment later Dick moves near Claire; stands uncertainly, then puts a hand upon her. She starts, only then knowing he is there.)

**Claire:** (a slight shrinking away, but not really reached) Um, um. (96-97)

Tom again, for the moment, appears to be on Claire’s side, exiting when asked. Harry, having exhausted every traditional argument available to him, also exits, but not before hesitating and pondering whether to avenge the adultery that has played out right in his own home. Dick, representing the sexual man, responds in the only manner in his repertoire, by physical contact with Claire. He too must finally exit when his only trick leaves Claire shirking away from him and uttering “Um.”

With this motley crew of men finally out of her way, Claire is now left to bond with her creation.

(Claire steps nearer her creation. She looks into what hasn't been. With her breath, and by a gentle moving of her hands, she fans it to fuller openness. As she does this Tom returns and from outside is looking in at her. Softly he opens the door and comes in. She does not know that he is there. In the way she looks at the flower he looks at her.) (97)

Again, Glaspell’s exacting stage directions provide insight. In the first line Claire steps “nearer” her creation foreshadowing the introduction of the hymn, and its significance, as well as
foreshadowing her final decision and the action that will take her there. The true character of Tom is also revealed. Throughout the play the audience has been led to believe that Tom is Claire’s one true love and ally, when in fact he is just another aspect of the traditional patriarchal male. Tom, looks at Claire in the way that she looks at the flower. The immediate implication is that he “loves” her as she “loves” the Breath of Life, however it is not love that he expresses, but a desire to lord over her as the creator of her world.

**Tom:** Claire, (she lifts her head) as you stood there, looking into the womb you breathed to life, you were beautiful to me beyond any other beauty. You were life and its reach and its anguish. I can't go away from you. I will never go away from you. It shall all be - as you wish. I can go with you where I could not go alone. If this is delusion, I want that delusion. It's more than any reality I could attain. (as she does not move) Speak to me.

**Claire:** You - are glad?

**Claire:** (from far) Speak to you? (pause) Do I know who you are?

**Tom:** I think you do. (97)

Claire does not recognize Tom within the framework he is presenting to her. Now Claire can fully see who Tom is, not a helpmate and confidant, but another man who can only define her in the context of his desire to control her.

**Claire:** Oh, yes. I love you. That's who you are. (waits again) But why are you something - very far away?

**Tom:** Come nearer.

**Claire:** Nearer? (feeling it with her voice) Nearer. But I think I am going – the other way.
**Tom:** No, Claire - come to me. Did you understand, dear? I am not going away.

**Claire:** You're not going away?

**Tom:** Not without you, Claire. And you and I will be together. Is that - what you wanted?

**Claire:** Wanted? (as if wanting is something that harks far back. But the word calls to her passion) Wanted! (a sob, hands out, she goes to him. But before his arms can take her, she steps back) Are you trying to pull me down into what I wanted? Are you here to make me stop? (97)

At this point Claire must make the final decision: Is she going nearer to God, or rather to being a “God” as ultimate creator, or is she going to go back to Tom, who professes love, but will use this love as a weapon of control? Tom, like everyone else in Claire’s life, cannot and will not understand her. Tom wants Claire to feel peace, to take her to moments of beauty, but Claire cannot help but see this “rest” and “peace” as death knells to her creative power. She replies, “What are you?” To which Tom replies, “I thought you knew Claire.” Claire drives home her point in answering, “I know what you pass for. But are you beauty?” Claire cannot trade “beauty” and creation for a false comfort with Tom. Claire responds, “Beauty is it. (she turns to Breath of Life, as if to learn it there, but turns away with a sob) If I cannot go to you now - I will always be alone. (Tom takes her in his arms. She is shaken, then comes to rest.)” (97).

Both Claire’s fear, and her reality, is the solitude she must encounter, and embrace, in order to be her true self. Tom responds, and in doing so firmly embraces the traditional and, by extension, ultimately places himself in harm’s way, saying, “Yes - rest. And then - come into joy” (98). Tom parrots the same arguments of Harry and Adelaide that have driven Claire to beg for solitude.
Claire: (her arms going round him) Oh, I would love those hours with you. I want them. I want you! (they kiss - but deep in her is sobbing) Reminiscence, (her hand feeling his arm as we touch what we would remember) Reminiscence. (with one of her swift changes steps back from him) How dare you pass for what you're not? We are tired, and so we think it's you. Stop with you. Don't get through - to what you're in the way of. Beauty is not something you say about beauty.

Tom: I say little about beauty, Claire.

Claire: Your life says it. By standing far off you pass for it. Smother it with a life that passes for it. But beauty - (getting it from the flower) Beauty is the humility breathed from the shame of succeeding. (98)

When Claire repeats “reminiscence, reminiscence,” she is reminding herself why she gave the scent of the traditional rose to Breath of Life in the first place. Claire, Breath of Life, and the emerging feminist movement, must all be aware of that place from which they have come in order to move forward and not regress.

It is in this moment that Claire begins to realize the full magnitude of the scene that will ultimately play out. She says to Tom, “When I have wanted you with all my wanting - why must I distrust you now? When I love you - with all of me, why do I know that only you are worth my hate?” Claire is awakening to the reality of what a life with Tom will lead to and that the life he is proposing is actually a regression. Claire continues, “(over the flower) Breath of Life - you here? Are you lonely - Breath of Life?” To which Tom responds, “Claire - hear me! Don't go where we can't go. As there you made a shell for life within, make for yourself a life in which to live. It must be so” (98). Tom begs Claire not to go where we can’t go. His aim is not to have a
life <i>with</i> her, but to have a life <i>of</i> her. Her response is, “I'm fighting for my chance. I don't know which chance…And only you have ever threatened me.” It is then that Tom securely demonstrates his “male dominance,” and a need to maintain it, when he responds, “And I will threaten you. I'm here to hold you from where I know you cannot go. You're trying what we can't do.” Tom resorts to physical violence and delivers the ultimate betrayal when he tells her that he will damn her in the name of love by keeping her from going where he knows she “cannot go.”

Tom finally reveals his true colors to Claire when he says, “…I will keep you - from fartherness - from harm. You are mine, and you will stay with me! (roughly) You hear me? You will stay with me!” (99). The one man she believes to be on her side has revealed himself as the Son of the Morning, the ultimate tempter, the snake in garden who insists that the fruit “of the tree was good [and her eyes] would be opened” (Gen. 3:6). But unlike the helpless Eve of the garden, Claire takes control of the snake and, consequently, her own destiny.

<b>Claire</b>:…(with fury) I will keep my life low -low - that I may never stop myself - or anyone - with the thought it's what / have. I'd rather be the steam rising from the manure than be a thing called beautiful! (with sight too clear) Now I know who you are. It is you puts out the breath of life. Image of beauty - <i>You fill the place - should be a gate</i>, (in agony) Oh, that it is you - fill the place - should be a gate! My darling! That it should be you who - (her hands moving on him) Let me tell you something. Never was loving strong as my loving of you! Do you know that? Oh, know that! Know it now! (her arms go around his neck) Hours with you - I'd give my life to have! That it should be you - (he would loosen her hands, for
he cannot breathe. But when she knows she is choking him, that knowledge is fire burning its way into the last passion) It is you. It is you. (99)

The stage direction “with sight too clear” is a direct reference to the meaning of Claire’s name, as well as serving as a reminder that Tom’s last name is Edgeworthy. Tom is only “worthy” of the Edge Vine, that will always creep back to the origin from which it came, never moving on to the new possibilities that lie ahead. It is also in this passage that Claire becomes fully aware that Tom is the greatest betrayer of all as she begins to choke him saying, “It is you,” which is reinforced in the stage direction. Claire must, literally, silence the patriarchal voice from her future. Claire must silence and kill Tom, not only for herself, but for the Breath of Life and all that it symbolizes. Realizing that Tom would have suffocated all of the potential and creativity in her, she literally squeezes the very life out of him exclaiming, “Breath of Life - my gift - to you!”

With this final act of self-preservation, Claire becomes the doppelgänger of her own existence. She is the ultimate giver and taker of life. In the final stage direction of the play, Claire’s destiny is accomplished: “(Anthony takes Reminiscence, the flower she was breeding for fragrance for Breath of Life - holds it out to her. But she has taken a step forward, past them all.)” (100). Claire the Mother God creator has not been forced backward, as was the Edge Vine to the rose’s point of origin, but has established a place for herself, for the Breath of Life, “past them all.”

The final moments of the play center on Claire singing Nearer, My God, To Thee as she surveys the scene of the murder. These final moments bring the history of the feminist movement, and Glaspell’s ultimate statement, completely into focus. Through her multi-faceted symbolism, from the character names to the specific characteristics of the various florae,
Glaspell presents in *The Verge* a microcosmic of the social, political and philosophical issues and divisions surrounding the First-Wave feminist movement in the United States. By presenting her characters as political archetypes, Glaspell reaches into the heart of the ideological chasm that certainly existed between the sexes at the turn of the century and, to some degree, continues on today. It is in the final chapter of this study that the depth of her symbolism and subtext become apparent through an examination of the power behind her politically-charged religious statement through her use of the hymn *Nearer, My God, To Thee.*
CHAPTER FOUR: GLASPELL’S USE OF A SACRED HYMN AS THE ULTIMATE FEMINIST STATEMENT

Glaspell’s final doppelgänger comes into play not as a recycling of anything found in The Tales of Hoffman, but as an incredibly powerful feminist statement which, in 1921, would have been seen as blasphemous in Christian theology had it been recognized as such at that time.

In order to fully understand the significance of Glaspell’s statement, there must first be a brief summary of the historical positioning and revolutionary nature of the hymn Nearer, My God, To Thee. I contend that this hymn is actually revolutionary in two ways: first in the musical form supported by its formation, content and composition by American composer Lowell Mason; and second in the lyrics by British poet, and radical feminist, Sarah Flower Adams. The Adams poem, which became the lyrics of the song, can be read as a modernist existential feminist statement, revolutionary in its approach and content. Through her thoughtful choice of this song/poem, Glaspell supports and gives framework to the content of The Verge. Just as The Tales of Hoffman is representative of the Romantic Movement as viewed through the patriarchal masculine lens, Nearer, My God, to Thee, as presented in The Verge, serves as the Modernist feminist counterpoint, when viewed through the feminine lens, and becomes a doppelgänger in and of itself.

The detailed examinations of the aspects of the Romantic Movement, covered previously, were necessary to fully comprehend the ground-breaking elements found with the musical construction of this hymn. An examination shows Lowell Mason, the composer of the music for the hymn, was innovative on several fronts. Mason was a very active participant in the New England Protestant revolution, which began in the 1700s with the “Great Awakening,” followed
in the early 19th Century by the “Second Great Awakening,” and, as such, sought to change the way music was used in the church setting. By stepping completely away from the ritualistic and ornamental music of the Catholic Church, which was largely defined by its grandiose design and complexity, as well as the aristocratic nature of European church music, Mason sought to simplify the form and harmony of American music in two areas: music for church worship, and the development of a new approach to secular music, particularly in the areas of teaching and philosophy. Mason’s ability to recognize the need for change and the ability to act upon those needs became foundational in his approach to both his life and his music.

As Carol A. Pemberton states in her preface to, Lowell Mason: His Life and Work:

[the life of Lowell Mason] …tells the story of an American family whose experiences parallel those of many others. From the time of Robert Mason, an English immigrant in 1628, through the present day, typical trends appear: from a rural to an urban life; from individual to corporate enterprises; from provincial interests to ever wider, more cosmopolitan ones; from a relatively simple to a highly complex life. Lowell Mason’s personal story is part of his adaptation to change. His success follows a typical pattern of American fact and fiction: a man of humble beginnings, meager formal education, and little contact with the famous figures of his time, he nevertheless rose to distinction in his chosen field, changing our cultural climate as a consequence. (x)

Lowell Mason (1792-1872) was born into a culturally rich environment in New England. The “Unitarian-Universalist” movement was challenging the fully entrenched protestant theology. According to Pemberton, the “parish church of which the [Mason’s] were a part, but a number of members…broke away and formed a second congregation [which was] Trinitarian in
theology” (6). The religious fervor and upheaval referred to here was much larger than it would first appear. This was not a small conflict between two congregations, but a reviver movement that continued to sweep the Eastern part of the United States.

Beginning in New England, the reviver movement that came to be called another ‘Great Awakening’ moved steadily south and west. This ‘awakening,’ like the major revivals of the 1700’s, spawned new Protestant sects and with them new musical practices and styles. Meanwhile in New England religious controversy continued, and with it, spirited debates over new types of church music and hymnody. Quickening cultural interest in New England around 1800 took other forms as well. Artists were beginning to find opportunities in America [some saying] that artists owe something to their country. (7)

In the early 1800’s, theatre and secular music were a British-run institution in America, which featured British plays, music and actors. These were also rowdy affairs and held a generally unsavory reputation in early Federal America, with the performance level of instrumental concerts ranging from “haphazard to outlandish” with the whole generally being dubbed as “abysmal.” There was a general lack of string players, though there were several “fiddle” players used for dance music. The “military band tradition” had been strong since the Revolutionary War, but no symphony orchestras were organized and functional, and professional musicians travelled around the country for employment opportunities (Broyles, Music of the Highest Class 19). On top of this lack of artistic organization, most serious musical training had to be undertaken in Europe, as there were no organized training schools for youth, with the results being that only wealthy children were given any musical training in actuality or appreciation. It was upon this haphazard American canvas that the religious and musical
revolution began.

In answer to the anti-British and European artistic sentiment and as a part of a new nationalistic artistic surge, new musical societies appeared seeking to improve the artistic presence within communities. By the 1840s concert circuits promoted settlement of professional musicians within cities. Soon Boston, New York and Philadelphia became centers of artistic growth, each “establishing its first successful symphony orchestra” (Broyles, *Music of the Highest Class* 22). Among its activities, the famous Boston Handel and Hayden Society, which still exists today, began an exceptional church choir. This was a real accomplishment since “the group consisted of about fifty singers [with an accompaniment consisting of] flute, bassoon, and cello because there was no organ in the church at that time. . . . [and] in all Boston no more than fifty pianos could have been found: and even fewer organs existed there at the time” (Pemberton 17). Through religious and musical reforms a relationship between these cultural entities grew exponentially and Lowell Mason was at the forefront of the movement.

The roots of Mason’s musical “revolution” began in the early 1800s. Ironically, Mason moved to Savannah, Georgia at as a young man at the encouragement of his father, who was afraid that if Mason stayed in New England he would pursue music as a vocation. In 1812, Mason made the journey South to pursue “something practical.” Upon his arrival, he joined the Independent Presbyterian Church, starting a “lifelong devotion to his church” (Pemberton 15). Mason soon rose to prominence in his church as he was appointed the superintendent of the newly organized Sunday school, established for all children regardless of their denomination. The first Negro Sunday school in North America was organized within this same church in 1826, through the initiative of Mason, again showing his penchant for enacting radical change when needed. This Sunday school began to provide a broader education beyond religious study.
When first established, there were no public schools in Savannah, so reading and spelling accompanied religious and moral instruction to all children, including the destitute and disenfranchised. According to Pemberton,

records of the Sunday school confirm Superintendent Mason’s methodical, imaginative and tireless pursuit of success…It has been stated that Mason’s soul was in this work his whole life…and…at a meeting held under its auspices…his tune for Bishop Heber’s grand missionary hymn was first used [in 1824]. (17)

Though, by all accounts, Mason had no intention of becoming a professional musician during his years in Savannah, music became a serious avocation and a means of additional financial support. He studied, composed and arranged music, became the church organist, compiled and published one of his first hymn collections, and wrote his first musical compositions. Mason hired Frederick L. Abel to be his private tutor in Savannah in order to advance his musical abilities. Abel was a highly skilled German musician and the nephew of Carl Frederick Abel, a noted composer who had studied under Bach. Under Abel’s foundational tutelage, Mason began to compose hymns and anthems which he later published. During this time Mason also began to compile a music anthology, a book published in 1822 under the “sponsorship of the Boston Handel and Hayden Society” (Pemberton 26). Mason continued to act as musical director and Sunday school superintendent for the Independent Presbyterian Church until he left to form a new church in 1827.

During these years Mason’s reputation as a church musician of note began to grow. The choir was presenting public concerts of works by the European Masters, but with new arrangements by Mason himself. Newspapers began to review the performances with much acclaim. Unbeknownst to most, but with a mind towards improvement of his church music,
Mason had begun to organize “singing schools” for members of his community in Savannah. These had become very popular and the added instruction was complimenting his work as musical director for the church. It was during this time that Mason began to form a new concept for church music.

To explore and summarize Mason’s ideas, I will be quoting from Martha Dennis Burns’ article “The Power of Music Enhanced by the Word: Lowell Mason and the Transformation of Sacred Singing in Lyman Beecher’s New England” from the text *New England Music: The Public Sphere, 1600-1900*, edited by Peter Benes. According to Burns, “Mason had been waging a successful campaign for the reform of church music in New England since 1826, when he travelled to Boston from Savannah […] and delivered his Address on Church Music in the vestry of Lyman Beecher’s Hanover Street Church.” Burns continues by stating that Mason’s address was so popular, he was invited to move back to Boston and become the “rotating music director” for four different congregations, among them Lyman Beecher’s (139). This is very significant and speaks to the vast congregational influence made through one man’s musical approach. Both Beecher and Mason were to benefit from this union. Beecher, also new to his congregation and to the area that year, needed to “make his mark” on his new parishioners, as did Mason, so Beecher was open to new ways of increasing the power of his services. Mason stepped in to do just that. His musical and religious philosophy was relatively simple, but had monumental consequences eventually changing the character and practice of religious music throughout the United States.

Mason, with Beecher’s blessing, wanted to “move sacred singing from a marginal place in the service to a central one and to give unaccustomed religious authority to performers of church music” (Benes 139). Mason’s views on music were directly opposed to those being
exercised in European churches where there was a long and continual history of an “association between rhetoric and logic” (Benes 139). Mason saw music as a way to touch the members of the congregation emotionally, thus influencing them towards new spiritual depth and awareness, while also granting religious power and prestige to the musical performer. As related by Burns,

… according to Mason, ‘God intended music to be a handmaid to devotion…In its proper role, music should form a partnership with the minister’s sermon….the value of music to religion [is found] in the its remarkable ability to influence emotions…Through the medium of music, truth is presented to the heart in the most forcible manner…the purpose being to enliven feelings of devotion. An effective sermon would move the heart and enforce divine truth, but music would deepen the impression and quicken the emotions the sermon had already kindled. (140)

It had been widely accepted that oratory had been shifting toward containing emotional collateral starting in the 1740s with the sermons of George Whitfield, who developed a style of oral delivery meant to stir an emotional reaction from the American Protestant parishioner hoping to lead them to deeper religious conviction and/or conversion. This “evangelical approach to preaching accompanied a modified understanding of [the term] ‘conversion.’ Conversion would come less through gradual preparation for faith, as the Puritans had believed, but more through a sudden transformation of the spirit, an event which a powerful sermon could help promote” (Benes 141). With this shift in focal point toward more emotional elocution in content begging a more monumental reaction, the focus became one solely of religious persuasion. Burns explains,

It was through changes to the role of the sermon, not through music, that the
emotions became a central focus of Protestant religious practice. By claiming symmetry of purpose between sacred music and the evangelical sermon, Mason accorded new and explicit meaning to the emotional power of music. Music became, like the sermon, a vehicle for advancing evangelical ends, a means for animating the religious affection, a means for promoting conversion. (143)

This concept is extremely important to this study when examining where and how Mason’s hymn *Nearer, My God, to Thee*, is placed and used within *The Verge*. If conversion through emotional persuasion is the goal, I contend that Glaspell uses the hymn to do exactly that, however not in the way in which it was originally conceived which I will explore further in this chapter.

However this concept only explains half of Mason’s new ideology. The second half of his ideology centered on the poetry being sung as lyrics. As Burn states, intermittently quoting Mason, “Although Mason argued the importance of music, he also made clear its subordinate role in relation to poetry. ‘Music should always be lost,’ he maintained, ‘in the sentiment and the words…the meaning of a song was located in its words’ Because God was its audience, poetry, in this sense, was similar to prayer…Lyrics should inspire the assembly with an awareness of God and ‘fill the soul with emotion towards him.’ In this regard, poetry was comparable to a sermon.” But, as Mason further stipulated, “However commanding the potential of words, all good lyric poetry…required the assistance of music in order to produce its full effect” (144). Therefore, according to Mason, music and lyrics must go hand-in-hand to reach the full potential for persuasion and conversion.

To realize this concept, Mason developed a pedagogical and compositional course of action to bring about this major reform and attain the desired emotional effect. According to
Pemberton (and many other sources), Mason’s philosophy rested upon six primary points. His first point was that church music must be simple, chaste, correct, and free of ostentation. (Pemberton 40). In Mason’s now famous address of 1826, as quoted in Pemberton, he stated his ideal.

One of the most important characteristics of a good psalm (or hymn) tune is simplicity…with respect to both melody and harmony, as shall render the design intelligible, and the execution easy. Solemnity is no less important…correct harmony is undoubtedly important…Let there be …simple, easy, and solemn tunes selected for…worship. (40)

An examination of the musical structure of the hymn *Nearer, My God, to Thee*, included in Appendix B of this study, clearly demonstrates the simplicity which Mason extols. Examining the hymn, in comparison to the Barcarolle written in Romantic European tradition, it is easy to identify the revolutionary simplicity of structure, harmony, texture, rhythm and vocal range. The hymn also utilizes the feminine cadence encountered in Offenbach’s Barcarolle, and, as in the opera, the feminine cadence is used as a point of ambiguity in which the music remains unresolved, putting the listener in an unsettled place in which they are grasping for the conclusion. In his second point Mason states that the text, must be handled with as much care as the music; each must enhance the other (Pemberton 40).

To add to the discussion of these two points discussed above, Mason also contended that the musical material chosen for services must be well within the boundaries and abilities of the musical performer chosen for such material, whether it be the congregation, soloists, or a choir (Pemberton 40). No spiritual edification would be available to the performer, or the audience member, if the material was poorly executed and technically beyond the abilities of the
performers to accomplish properly. All would be concentrating on the poor execution instead of on the words or the music containing the intended spiritual message. Burns addresses the weight given this issue by stating,

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\text{Fuging tunes [the basis for church music in Europe]…were composed ‘without the least reference to the significance of the words…Could any person be benefitted with listening, when twenty or thirty individuals were disputing on four or five different subjects at the same time? Mason’s most far reaching reforms entailed changes to ideas about music performance, changes which accorded unprecedented religious influence to person’s who practiced music…Just as singing compared to the sermon, so did musicians compare to the minister. Both were spiritual agents, who by exercising their art, promoted the salvation of others. (146)}
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The concept of inclusion was Mason’s next primary point of interest, and insistence, as he stated that congregational singing must be promoted (Pemberton 40). This concept, though standard today, was new and somewhat shocking in the mid 1800s. Professional musicians were supposed to sing and play for services, and were paid well for doing so. The notion of uneducated and inexperienced, let alone untalented, individuals being invited or expected to sing in the service, was surprising. As Mason believed and stated, “Every Christian is, or aught to be, deeply interested in congregational singing” (Pemberton 41).

This element speaks directly to the concept, and paradigm shift, concerning edification. In Europe, historically, there had always been a focus on the praising of God for God. People were to raise their voices to God in supplication as a matter of course. God was then to hear them and, if pleased, answer their prayers. With the rise of humanism and individualism in
America extending to areas of worship, the question of who was being edified came to the forefront. Since the “singer” or musical performer was now equated with the “preacher,” the focus became the intellectual, spiritual and moral edification of the singer. If the members of the congregation participated and sang, each would then be lifted by the message as well as the messenger. All participants would be edified and spiritually fed by the experience, thus by extension, all would be a part of the converting power of the emotional content of the music. This was unprecedented in its scope. People could participate and raise the bar in their own moral education and enlightenment. Beyond the emotional aspects, congregational singing also became a way of teaching religious concepts to the members. The songs became mini-sermons for the parishioners that could be memorized easily and repeated throughout the day and week as needed. Melodies tend to stay with an individual and thus could be recalled easily. The learning and singing of the hymn then would support the message and the emotion that had been spoken from the pulpit.

Mason continued his points with the importance of instrumentation, stating that capable choirs and judiciously used instruments, particularly the organ, are indispensible aids to the services (Pemberton 41). Mason maintained that great church music was “impossible” without the support of instrumentation. Though a capella choirs were used at times, most often out of necessity if no instruments or musician were available, there can be no question that trained instrumental musicians supporting the singing of an untrained congregation would help hold the congregation together and support the emotional content of the music being performed.

As an educator and musician, Mason’s next point is both understandable and expected within the context of his beliefs. His manifesto states, “A solid music education for all children is the only means of genuine reform in church music.” Mason is solely credited for bringing
music education into the public school system as part of the accepted standard curriculum in the United States. He believed strongly that without a standard of musical instruction no lasting benefit would be gleaned. Pemberton quotes him as stating,

A thorough and permanent reformation in church music…cannot be effected but by a gradual process. Children must be taught music as they are taught to read. Until something of this kind is done, it is vain to expect any great and lasting improvement. (41)

In Mason’s view, Americans simply would not be able to compete with European musicians on any level until a system was set up to educate each child, regardless of wealth or social status. With every child receiving this education, all churches would benefit from this needed instruction, and all children would have a basic foundation of musical knowledge and appreciation.

If taken out of context, Mason’s final declaration would seem to muddy the waters he has navigated to this point, when he states, “Musicianship per se is subordinate to facilitating worship” (Pemberton 40-42). According to many sources, Mason stressed this principle repeatedly, and included all musicians, singers, instrumentalists, soloists and ensemble musicians, in this statement. This last “primary point” would seem, at first glance, to be at odds with Mason’s previous declarations. Since he strove for good musicianship and a higher level of training which would, in turn, edify his congregation, why would he include this caveat? To clarify, Pemberton quotes Mason in his address concerning church music in 1826,

Mere musical talent will no more enable a man to play than to sing church music appropriately…Execution…is probably not more important to the organist, than studied elocution is to the preacher…A minister must…be able to speak
acceptably…and if he is eloquent so much the better. So it is with the organist; he must be able to play in a plain and appropriate style…if he be a more finished performer, it is all the better, provided he possess the other more important qualifications. (42)

It seems these “more important qualifications” have to do with the character of the performer. Burns quotes Mason as stating,

Singers must recognize the responsibility of their station in leading and greatly influencing the devotion of others. They should always feel as if the devotions of the congregation…depend wholly upon them and that they should not forget the important influence their performances may have upon the other exercises of public worship….Mason’s criteria for choosing his choir members reveals his convictions that] the character of the performer [far outweighed] the quality of the performance…Choirs should be made up of devout persons…serious religious persons whose character is respected…Every choir should maintain a prevailing influence of piety…Singers must look on their role in the choir as a service, rather than a means of displaying their skills.(148-149)

Burns elaborates that in Mason’s view, “to be a pious performer, properly trained in the skills associated with elocution, was, in turn, to have an influence over one’s audience nearly comparable to the minister’s” (149). Again, Mason gives unprecedented authority, and now, religious responsibility, to the musician.

This musical ideology spread rapidly throughout American congregations regardless of denomination. European congregations also took notice and enacted Mason’s principles. Within several years, the face of musical education, both secular and religious, was changed forever.
While just as instrumental to the hymn and central to this study, Sarah Flower Adams, the lyricist of the *Nearer, My God, to Thee*, is certainly not as well known. Not being male, in a decidedly patriarchal society, Adams and her work have just recently begun to be analyzed and appreciated, primarily by feminist academics and theologians. Though *Nearer, My God, to Thee* is recognized as one of the most popular hymns of all time, Adams is rarely given the credit she deserves as the lyricist. It is truly ironic that Mason lectured repeatedly on the balance of import between the words and the music and that the lyrics of any hymn are equal to a sermon, yet this hymn is referred to repeatedly as merely Mason’s work. It is also ironic that the religious paradigm shift from simply praising God to the focus on the edification of the individual or the “praiser” referred to above, is found within the lyrics of the piece and not the music. Mason is heralded as revolutionary for his time, yet Sarah Flower Adam is not acknowledged or given credit in any way for her approach which was also revolutionary. Contemporaries, Mason and Flowers had much in common: both had their works published, both moved in very important circles, and both were radical individuals. The uncommon link, and one that obviously served as a detriment to Flowers, was their genders.

Researching Adams has been a challenge, since so little has been written about her. According to all accounts, Adams was a “radical” feminist. Born on February 22, 1805 to Benjamin and Eliza Flower, Adams seemed destined for a radical stance. Her father, editor and owner of *The Cambridge Intelligencer* and later of *The Political Review* (both extremely liberal radical publications) went to prison for criticizing the policies of the Bishop of Llandaff. She had originally aspired to become an actress, and succeeded to the point of playing Lady Macbeth in 1837; however, poor health cut her acting career short. According to the Christian History Institute, Adams made an agreement with her soon-to-be husband, William Bridges Adams, that
she “should do no housework.” More telling than anything else is her membership in the 
Independent Church (Unitarian) congregation of William Johnson Fox, a highly controversial, 
progressive preacher. Adams contributed thirteen hymns to Fox’s *Hymns and Anthems* text, one 
of which is *Nearer, My God, to Thee*.

Adams moved in very prestigious literary circles. She was close friends with Percy 
Bysshe Shelley, as well as Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning. There is record of Adams 
having met, through her connections with Fox and the Unitarian ministry, William Wordsworth, 
Charles Dickens, Leigh Hunt, Harriet Martinau and many other “celebrities of her time” (Poem 
Hunter 1). Adams was also a strong social reformer who contributed to the first illustrated 
government report on Children in the Mines. She published several dramatic poems, magazine 
articles, newspaper columns, and wrote a catechism and selections of hymns for children. 
Adams is identified as belonging to a “school of poetry” known as the Spasmodics, which 
focused on “spontaneous emotion and morbid thoughts” (Christian History Institute1). 
However, she is best known for her devotional poetry, used by hymnists in every denomination. 
Adams’ poetry, as seen even today, crossed many “boundaries” of specific ideologies and has 
been accepted and embraced by many faiths.

Adams did not live a long life. She died of tuberculosis at the age of 43. Her hymn, 
*Nearer, My God, to Thee*, is one of the most popular hymns ever written, and has been set to 
several different pieces of music, Lowell Mason’s being one of the most popular. The poem, as 
Adams wrote it, (another verse, written by J. C. Bickerstaff was added at a later date) is as 
follows:
Nearer, my God, To Thee

Nearer to Thee!

E’en though it be a cross

That raiseth me:

Still all my song shall be

Nearer, My God!, to Thee,

Nearer to Thee.

Though, like the wanderer,

The sun gone down

Darkness be over me

My rest a stone.

Yet in my dreams I’d be

Nearer, my god to Thee,

Nearer to Thee.

Then let the way appear

Steps unto Heaven;

All that Thou sendest me

In mercy given;

Angels to beckon me

Nearer, my God, to Thee

Nearer to Thee.
Then with my waking thoughts
Bright with Thy praise,
Out of my stony griefs
Bethel I’ll raise;
So by my woes to be
Nearer, my god to Thee
Nearer to Thee.
Or if on joyful wing,
Cleaving the sky,
Sun, moon, and stars forgot,
Upward I fly:
Still all my song shall be,
Nearer, my God, to Thee,
Nearer to Thee. (Adams 1)

The placement and importance of this hymn within The Verge cannot be overstated. I will analyze the actual words of this hymn as I address its use throughout the script, and in so doing unveil the many religious statements in the script which support my premise: that Glaspell creates a compellingly and powerful religious viewpoint, as a precursor to the social and existential feminist perspective of the late twentieth century.

At the very beginning of the play the Edge Vine is described, as having the form of a cross, “if you happened to think it that way” (58), there are constant religious references and discussions at crucial times throughout the text. For example, near the end of Act One, when Harry criticizes Claire’s word usage when discussing her lack of affection for her very
conservative and conventional daughter Elizabeth, Claire says she is being “nailed to the cross of words…with brass tacks” (76). Elizabeth feels very strongly that Claire’s act of creating new things is wrong and should be left to God. When confronted with this opinion Claire says,

Claire: The hymn-singing ancestors are tuning up….we will now sing Nearer
My God to Thee: Nearer to...

Elizabeth: (laughingly breaking in) Well, I don’t care. Of course you can make fun of me, but something does tell me this is wrong. To do what—what—

Dick: What God did?

Elizabeth: Well—yes. Unless you do it to make them better—to do it just to do it—that doesn’t seem right to me.

Claire: (roughly) …Because you’re young and of a gayer world, you think I can’t see them—those old men? (77)

I contend that the “old men” Claire is referring to, are the religious patriarchal ancestors who have controlled women since the story of Adam and Eve. Women were the cause of “the fall” in every traditional Christian religion, and throughout history the patriarchal hierarchies of most churches have used religion to keep women “in their place.” If one is raised to believe they are “lesser than,” they tend to live up to, or in this case down to, that expectation. Claire will have none of it. She refuses the subjugation by these “old men” to control her potentials. The burden of that yoke is finally lifted as Claire, after having destroyed the Edge Vine responds, “…O-h how good I feel! Light! (a movement as if she could fly) Read me something, Tom dear. Or say something pleasant—about God. But be very careful what you say about him! I have a feeling—he’s not far off. Curtain [Act I]” (77-78).

At this point in the script, Claire is approaching a critical point in her evolution. She is
questioning the concept of “God.” The Christian God, and the creator of all life, is omniscient and omnipotent, as well as ubiquitous in Claire’s thoughts. This God, through a radical feminist lens, can also be seen as the ultimate suppressor of his creation: women. Does this Christian God love his sons more than he loves his daughters? For Glaspell, it would seem so. The subjugation of women on all fronts, as presented in *The Verge,* leaves nothing as “sacred territory.”

As the play continues, the discussion of a “woman’s place” and “a woman’s role” through the eyes of patriarchal Christianity comes clearly into focus. Claire’s sister Adelaide, who serves the epitome of the stereotypical, conventional, and pious Christian woman, appears on the scene. Adelaide makes it very clear that Claire is not living up to the family and societal expectations. Adelaide says, speaking to Claire, “That is where I am out of patience with you Claire. You are really a particularly intelligent and competent person, and it’s time for you to call a halt to this nonsense and be the woman you were meant to be!” (79) Claire responds by questioning Adelaide’s perception of Christian values, and exposes the subjugation, through mental damnation, that forms in women a warped concept of the feminine “self” as proscribed and propagated by the traditional masculine, Christian patriarchy that presents this brand of subjugation as love and care. Adelaide tries to use the same tactic with Claire, by manipulating her sister through the use, and abuse, of the term “love.” When the sisterly form of “love” does not work on Claire, Adelaide begins to pull Claire’s genealogical history into the argument. Somehow Claire is supposed to live up to what her ancestors expect of her. Claire points out that Adelaide is “imprisoned” in her Christian ideology, and is refusing to think for herself. Adelaide argues that to be truly fulfilled, one must fulfill the needs of her family “from morning ‘till night” with “no time to think of [herself]” (80). When Adelaide states that Claire is
“imprisoned” in her tower, Claire counters by pointing out that Adelaide is “imprisoned” in her Christian ideology, and is refusing to think for herself.

We see again that Claire is a very different woman who does not buy into the established traditional Christian framework. Does this mean she must sever ties with the God that created her? A short time later another discussion of the hymn *Nearer, My God, To Thee* occurs:

**Claire**: Adelaide came here to lock me in. Well, she can’t do it.

**Adelaide**: I wish you’d come and hear one of Mr. Morley’s sermons, Claire. You’re very old-fashioned if you think sermons are what they used to be.

**Claire**: (with interest) And do they still sing ‘Nearer, My God, to Thee’?

**Adelaide**: They do, and a noble old hymn it is. It would do you no harm at all to sing it.

**Claire**: (eagerly) Sing it to me Adelaide. I’d like to hear you sing it.

**Adelaide**: It would be a sacrilege to sing it to you in this mood.

**Claire**: (falling back) Oh, I don’t know. I’m not sure God would agree with you. That would be one on you wouldn’t it?!

**Adelaide**: It’s easy to feel one’s self set apart!

**Claire**: No, it isn’t.

**Adelaide**: (beginning anew) It’s a new age, Claire. Spiritual values—

**Claire**: Spiritual values! (in her brooding way) So you have pulled that up! (81)

Again, Claire’s ideas regarding the Christian God are revealed as not just nontraditional, but as against tradition. She clearly rejects the ideas presented, and represented, by Adelaide. Yet Claire has not rejected the idea of God. She has a need and desire for the existence of God as the ultimate creator.
As the play nears its end, Claire captures a glimpse of the eternal nature of creation. As she looks into the heart of her Breath of Life she is in awe as she contemplates the magnitude of the act of creation in general and, specifically, of her creation. Claire says:

Breath of the uncaptured?
You are a novelty.
Out?
You have been brought in.
A thousand years from now, when you are just a form too long repeated,
Perhaps the madness that gave you birth will burst again,
And from the prison that is you will leap pent queernesses
To make a form that hasn’t been—
To make a person new.
And this we call creation (96)

Tom has watches Claire in this transfixed state and tells her he will never leave her, saying, “Claire. As you stood there, looking into the womb you breathed to life, you were beautiful to me beyond any other beauty. You were life and its reach and its anguish. I can’t go away from you. I will never go away from you…” He beckons Claire to come nearer. Claire says in response to his pleas, “Nearer? (feeling it with her voice) Nearer. But I think I am going—*the other way*” (emphasis added). Tom continues, “No, Claire—come to me” (96). Claire recognizes the trap in Tom’s petition. Tom will pull her back into the realm of the traditional and the staid. She knows what she must do. Claire says:

I am fighting for my chance…(is drawn into the other chance, to Breath of Life.
Looks into as if to look through to the uncaptured. And through this life just
caught come the truth she chants.)

I’ve wallowed at a course man’s feet,

I’m sprayed with dreams we’ve not yet come to.

I’ve gone so low that words can’t get there,

I’ve never pulled the mantle of my fears around me
And called it loneliness—And called it God.
Only with life that waits have I kept faith.

(with effort raising her eyes to [Tom])

And only you have ever threatened me. (99)

With those words on her lips, Claire begins her final attack on Tom until she has choked the life out of him. She proclaims many times that this is her “Gift” (99). When the others arrive to see what has happened, they discover Tom’s body. They are, of course, horrified and approach Claire. Claire quietly says:

Out.

(As if feeling her way)

Nearer,

(Her voice now feeling the way to it)

Nearer—

(Her voice almost upon it)

--my God,

(falling upon it with surprise.)

to Thee,

(Breathing it)
Nearer—to—Thee,

E’en though it be—

(a slight turn of the head toward the dead man she loves—a mechanical turn just as far the other way.)

a cross

That

(her head going down.)

raises me;

(her head slowly coming up—singing it.)

Still, all my song shall be,

Nearer, my—

(Slowly the curtain begins to shut her out. The last word heard is the final Nearer—a faint breath from far.) Curtain (100-101)

There are many who might read this and say that Claire, by singing this hymn, is trying to find her way closer to the Christian God as a supplicant asking forgiveness for the ultimate sin. Is she kneeling at the feet of the consummate patriarchal figure in repentance? I contend that Claire is not asking for forgiveness from this God. Through the use of this hymn Glaspell is elevating Claire, a female, to be equal in God’s eyes. She is holding herself to be equal with God and His “only begotten Son.” Claire is standing as a symbol of worth (and savior) as a daughter of this same God. Claire, and her creator, Glaspell, are challenging the very nature of the superior patriarchal deity’s position.

In fact, in examining the stage directions carefully, Claire’s movement of the sign of the cross at the end of the play is done with her head. Claire makes this sacred sign by moving her
head, rather than her hands. Claire also makes one other important change in this ritual motion: she moves her head from side to side, then looks down and ends with her face facing forward, not up looking to the heavens, or down in supplication, but straight ahead as a sign of equality. Claire has put herself on an equal plane with God. Through this action, Claire’s intellectual center is claiming itself to be the missing part of the godhead. This movement is not made in supplication, but in defiance to the established patriarchal order. Claire, in her destruction of the Edge Vine, which had grown in the form of a cross, has also symbolically killed the need for “the cross” in her own life. She has no “cross to bear.” She can move beyond the mental and spiritual limitations it imparts on her. The first verse of the hymn states the traditional stance clearly;

Nearer, My God to Thee,
Nearer to Thee!
E’en though it be a cross
That raiseth me…
Though like a wanderer,
The sun gone down
Darkness be over me,
My rest a stone…

The cross did not “raise” Claire, but rather held her down and “in her place.” She was in darkness, heavy of heart and wandering through the wilderness of life. Yet, she has a glimpse that she is getting nearer: “Yet in my dreams I’d be, Nearer, my God to Thee.” Claire is seeing the possibility of the divine in herself, which is not connected to the masculine manifestation of “God.”
Claire has proven herself the Creator of a new Life. Similar to the view stated in Adams’ poem, Claire has experienced the lowest depths and the highest pinnacle. She has suffered her “Gethsemane.” Isn’t the male Christ, the Son of God, described in the New Testament as having gone through these very same trials to make him the savior of Mankind? Could Claire be claiming to be the savior of Womankind by creating the Breath of Life? God created Man in a “garden.” Did not Claire create her new life within the same environment? A new way of thinking was needed and a new God had to be discovered. Consider portions of the next few verses of the hymn;

Then let the way appear
Steps unto heaven…
Angels to beckon me
Nearer, my God to Thee…
…Out of my stony griefs
Bethel I’ll raise
So by my woes to be
Nearer, my God to Thee

The way did “appear” to Claire in the form of a new “Bethel” (church or sanctuary) she will raise, one which places a woman as the center of deity. Just as Christ, all woes she has suffered will serve to bring her closer to her destination. Claire does not need to be closer to God in feeling or in spirituality, but in proximity. She is coming for Him, not to be a part of his greater picture, but to take her rightful place beside, or even become the replacement for, the patriarchal Godhead.
Or if on joyful wing,
Cleaving the sky,
Sun, Moon and stars forgot,
Upward I fly:
…Nearer, My God, to Thee,
Nearer to Thee.

Claire has also discovered the final irony: to hold the power of creation and life, that one with such power must also deal with the equal power of destruction and death. Claire fulfills this destiny. Just as God allowed the sacrifice of his son, early in the play Claire reveals the loss of her young son who’s name was David, which means beloved (Behind the Name 1 ), or as stated in the King James version of the Bible “a man after his [God’s] own heart” (1 Sam. 13:14) She speaks of her son David only once. She describes how on his last night on earth he spoke to Claire and told her he had seen the “morning star…Brighter, stranger…[and asked] what is there—beyond the stars?” (87). Claire reveals, immediately following this passage, that she is not sorry her son has died because David was too good for this world – just as Christ, as the son of God, was also believed to be. Just as God allowed his son to be sacrificed for the redemption of mankind, Claire also sees the death of her son as being necessary. Claire then states how much Tom reminds her of David. Claire later kills the man that reminds her of her only son. She has completed her mission: to be equal with the Christian God.

Just as God’s Son Christ is described as the “Gift” to the world, Claire offers her own “gift” to her new feminist world through Tom’s death (representing the male of the species). Claire has created, and destroyed, life with no masculine intervention. This act then becomes the final shadow-self. Claire is the doppelgänger of the Christian God: a co-equal partner holding
the ultimate power of the creation of life, as well as the power of final destruction and death.

Claire is then, at last, spiritually set free.
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

For contemporary audiences, who watch murder and mayhem unfold daily on their televisions both in the guise of fact and fiction, Susan Glaspell’s *The Verge* may seem relatively tame. Claire may appear, as she did to audiences in the early 1900s, as just another madwoman in the attic. However, through a careful study of the context in which the play was presented and of the skillful positioning of metaphor and symbolism within the play, it becomes abundantly clear that Glaspell was a skillful playwright and a dedicated member of the first wave feminist movement in America.

Art, in all of its forms, had been entrenched in the Romantic period, which was steeped in the philosophical exploration of the principles of individualism, emotion, freedom, the supernatural and fantastic. Nationalism ran rampant throughout the arts under the banner of Romanticism. The emotional realm of instinct and feelings verses intellect had been a predominant philosophical theme for the Romantics in general and for Hoffman specifically.

It was against this backdrop that Glaspell found herself aligned with some of the most revolutionary voices of the day. Fueled by their communal desire for social change, Glaspell and her contemporaries were questioning the status quo that had so long purported that “a woman’s place was in the home,” as they intellectualized over the radical theories of Freud and Jung. With a decidedly socialist bent, Glaspell and friends made their mark on the exploding Modernist movement through the power of the written word, finally translating their politics onto the stage of the Provincetown Players.

Although no substantial proof can be found that Glaspell attended Offenbach’s *The Tales of Hoffman*, it is probable that she did, given her patronage of the arts during her travels. It is so very important to remember that young Glaspell would have been viewing this opera as an
American citizen without even the right to vote, a “privilege” that would not be afforded to women in this country until 1920. What Glaspell would have seen in the opera house that evening was yet another example of the patriarchal rule that had defined women for centuries.

As the curtain rose, Glaspell could have immediately determined, through the character of Hoffman, that the ever-familiar story would once again be played out on stage. The misogynistic *The Tales of Hoffman* would prove a telling example of the patriarchal voice declaring man’s historical construction of woman; woman as doll, as seductress, as artist, and finally, as the betrayer of men. Woman, yet again, would be portrayed, as she certainly had been since Eve bit the apple, as the ultimate downfall of man and “mankind.” Like most of the plays and operas Glaspell had seen in her life, there would be no representation whatsoever of the female perspective in Offenbach’s work, and the women portrayed in the work would be merely stereotypes of woman as defined by a restrictive and male-dominated culture.

If Offenbach’s opera is, indeed, an example of the Romantic period, which she and her contemporaries were struggling so valiantly against, why does she position the very recognizable music from this opera in *The Verge*? What purpose does Glaspell hope to serve by connecting these two seemingly distant theatrical works? I contend that *The Verge* is Glaspell’s clear and unwavering answer to Offenbach and, by extension, the patriarchal dictates of her day. Glaspell uses Offenbach’s music, specifically the Barcarolle, because of its historically misogynistic outlook, in order to make a personal statement about the new wave feminist movement.

When Claire hears the Barcarolle being sung on the phonograph, she is about to be seduced into a relationship with Tom that will silence her own voice and kill her uniqueness. As the music grows louder and louder, the patriarchal voice is getting louder and louder along with it, causing Claire’s own feminine voice to recede into the background, unable to be heard. She
almost succumbs to its power, but in an act of vehemence screams, “If you don’t stop that music, I’ll kill myself!” (90). Claire has full knowledge that if she listens to the seduction of the ever-controlling male voice, she will cease to be able to hear her own song. It also interesting to note that Claire is willing to take her own life rather than allow the men in her life, or rather the male patriarchal confines in which she lives, to take her life, literally or figuratively, from her.

In my view, *The Verge* explores that missing feminist voice. Just as the women in *The Tales of Hoffman* are seemingly disparate personalities, but are in actuality different sides of the opera singer Stella, so too Claire, in *The Verge*, shows different sides of her fragmented identity, as represented by her connections and interactions with the men in her life. Claire is both the mirror and continuation of the male constructed Stella. In the feminist construction of Claire the symbolic result of this patriarchal smothering and control of the female persona becomes clear. Like the women in *The Tales of Hoffman*, Claire is continually acted upon until she finally transcends. Claire exists in answer to this historical misogynic view of woman.

There can be little question that the musical compositions used and referenced throughout *The Verge* were not chosen randomly. Glaspell uses these specific musical works to support her chosen social themes and to show us the result of prolonged subjectivity and oppression by the culturally created confines of a domineering social patriarchal structure, as well as a suppressive male dominant religious hierarchy. This viewpoint is only strengthened when the significance of the hymn *Nearer, my God, to Thee* is taken into account, not only as a clear message within the play, but in the context of a changing religious and political landscape. It is no coincidence that the lyricist of the piece, who was never given due credit for her role in this anthem of religious reform, was also firmly rooted in the cause of women’s rights.

In the end, when viewed through the masculine lens, Glaspell’s Claire becomes the
ultimate betrayer, not to be trusted and perceived to be insane. Certainly, contemporary audiences still wallowing in the dictates of patriarchy could well see her as just another housewife who “snapped,” as are commonly paraded in primetime entertainments. However, when examined through feminist eyes, Claire is a champion of the female experience. Glaspell’s daring protagonist is finally physically, mentally, intellectually, spiritually, and creatively free from all patriarchal influence and control. Claire is able to break free of all labels and traditions to rise above and beyond the patriarchal social construct, to claim to her own potentialities as the feminist Godhead, finally able to claim her legacy as one who is all knowing, all seeing, and all feeling.
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Much information here was gleaned from interviews with Dr. James Moore of Howard University. I am grateful for his generosity in sharing his vast knowledge of music and operatic history.

Italy

The emergence of Gioacchino Rossini (1792-1868), Vincenzo Bellini (1801-35), and Gaetano Donizetti (1797-1848) was essential to the formation of an Italian national style in opera. Their operas today constitute what is known as the “Bel Canto” (beautiful singing) style of opera and are characterized by thin plot lines, with sparse and somewhat simplistic orchestral accompaniment under grand, flowing, and beautiful melodies which provide a showcase for the beauty and potential of the human voice. They include both opera seria (serious opera) and opera buffa (comic opera). The Bel Canto operas are “number operas”; that is, one number begins, ends, and is followed by another number, sometimes interspersed with recitative (a stylized recitation on given pitches) sections which are used to advance the plot. Numbers strewn together constitute scenes, and scenes put together form the acts of the opera. The form most used by these composers to construct their numbers is called the “cavatina-cabaletta” form: usually a slow, melodic section (cavatina) followed by a fast, sometimes furious section (cabaletta), which ends with a cadenza in which the singer is allowed to improvise for a bit to display vocal and artistic proficiency. Both Donizetti and Rossini wrote operas in both Italian and French, being periodically commissioned to compose an opera for the theatres in Paris.
Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1902) produced his first operas clearly in the Bel Canto style, though his genius was apparent from the very beginning. As his talents developed over time, and beginning with the operas of his middle period (around 1850), he began to compose operas with all the musical brilliance of his predecessors, but with a desire to better and more fully serve the dramatic flow of the libretti. Therefore, beginning with Rigoletto (1851), he began using the dramatic situation to dictate his musical style. If the situation called for the well-used cavatina-cabaletta form, he used it. However, unlike his contemporaries in Italy, if it called for something different than the well-used cavatina-cabaletta form, he created it. It (Rigoletto) is still a number opera, but the signs are clear, especially in Rigoletto’s first-act monologue Pari siamo, that Verdi is definitely moving toward full-scene writing instead of adhering to strict number writing. He gradually develops this concept until it is fully realized in his final works, Otello (1887) and Falstaff (1893). These are true music dramas, utilizing fully the musical/orchestral/harmonic language of the time, along with incomparable scene writing to produce seamless Acts full of the emotional developments and dramatic situations worthy of the Shakespeare plays upon which they are based.

Italian opera in the late 19th Century saw the rise of Verismo (realism) beginning with Pietro Mascagni’s (1863-1945) Cavalleria Rusticana (1890), and Ruggiero Leoncavallo’s (1857-1919) Pagliacci (1892), and culminating with the operas of Giacomo Puccini (1858-1924), all of which took opera into the 20th Century where the exoticism of such works as Madama Butterfly (1904), La Fanciulla del West (1910), and Turandot (1926) can also be found.

As James Anderson states in his text The Complete Dictionary of Opera and Operetta, operas in the Verismo style were different than those that came before in a few important areas. First, the libretti were set in a relatively modern time (around 1890). Next, the characters were
all believable, modern, everyday people. Lastly, the dramatic situations were highly emotionally charged and tragic in their outcomes, and, in some cases, based upon real people and events as in the case of Pagliacci (430). This has special significance to this dissertation in the fact that Offenbach chose a real historical figure upon which to base his final opera, namely E. T. A. Hoffmann, and Offenbach’s opera, although it pre-dates Verismo by a decade and a half, contains elements of this realistic style.

In the most general terms, 19th Century Italian opera can be characterized by the preeminence of the voice and the use of it for lyric/dramatic ends, and the increasing exploration of utilizing the elements of opera to develop and portray individual emotion, situation, and drama.

Germany

While in Italy the voice, the music, and the drama of the situation became paramount, in Germany during the 19th Century, opera took quite a different path. Having its foundation in the German operas of Mozart (he wrote many Italian operas as well), especially Die Zauberflöte (1791) and Beethoven’s Fidelio (1805, rev. 1815), and E. T. A. Hoffmann’s Undine (1816), German opera began to explore hero worship, a return to nature, idealism, fantasy, and folk themes, all elements of the German Romantic movement. These elements are clearly seen in Carl Maria von Weber’s (1786-1826) Der Freischütz (1821), Euryanthe (1823), and Oberon (1826); Ludwig Spohr’s (1754-1859) Faust (1816), Zemire und Azor (1819), and Jessonda (1823); and Heinrich Marschner’s (1795-1861) Der Vampyr (1828), and Hans Heiling (1833).

Richard Wagner (1813-1883) was influenced by all these former works and by all that was happening in musical Europe, and, in his early attempts at composition, explored different
styles of opera writing. In Die Feen (1833), Der Hochzeit (1836), and Rienzi (1837), Wagner experimented with the different styles which were in use at the time; in fact, there is much evidence that shows that with these first works he attempted to write operas in the Italian, German, and French styles respectively. It wasn’t until Der Fliegende Holländer (1843) that he found his true voice and began to develop his own distinct musical writing style. He continued to expand upon this style in his next two operas, Tannhäuser (1845) and Lohengrin (1848). He turned to medieval Germanic lore for his source material and wrote all of his own libretti, thus maintaining total control over the creative process.

While continuing to develop his unique musical style in the rest of his operas up to and including his final opera Parsifal (1882), Wagner began using the leitmotif; a short musical (melodic, harmonic, or simply rhythmic) phrase attached to a certain character, thing, or even situation or idea. It is a similar concept to the use of a musical theme in Italian opera (the curse theme in Verdi’s Rigoletto, Aida’s theme in Aida, or the kiss theme in Otello as a few examples), however Wagner took it to great extremes, using the leitmotif not simply for reference to the person or thing, but as a dramatic tool to enhance the changes that the person or thing or situation experienced. For a clear example, the leitmotif which is attached to Siegmund’s sword in the first act of Die Walküre (1856) is the outline of a major chord, starting at the top note, going down an octave and outlining the chord until coming back to the same note, all in a particular, recognizable rhythm. When the sword breaks in Act two, the leitmotif is changed to a minor chord and a diminished seventh chord on the last note of it sounds in the remainder of the orchestra. The theme is recognizable, but it has changed, as the sword has changed. In Der Ring des Niebelungen (1854-1874), there are dozens of leitmotifs used literally hundreds of times throughout the five-opera work. Many of the leitmotifs cannot be easily heard, and their effect is
largely subliminal in nature, but Wagner used them as a compositional tool to achieve what he called “continuous melody”. All of his operas are “through-composed,” meaning that there are no set numbers as in Italian opera, no recitatives, and no break in the flow of the drama.

Wagner wanted to change the way opera was perceived and appreciated by the public. In the early 19th Century, the opera was experienced as a social gathering place, where business could be conducted and social status affirmed, all accompanied by the opera playing in the background. The attendees would pause when an aria began and listen, but were largely uninterested in the plots. Wagner disliked this situation and wanted people to be engaged and actually changed for the better after seeing and experiencing one of his works, so he inserted and used some of the leading philosophies of the day in his libretti. The philosophies of Kant, Hegel, and especially Schopenhauer are clearly evident in his works.

German Romantic Opera blossomed and flowered with the operas of Wagner, and his innovations were many. In composition he stretched the limits of tonality beyond where they had been, an example being the Tristan chord, in Tristan und Isolde (1859). His orchestrations were innovative in that he used the orchestra as an element of the drama, not simply as an accompaniment for the voice, and he actually invented a number of instruments to produce the kinds of sounds he desired, of which the Wagner Tuba is an example. In building his theatre at Bayreuth, which was completed in 1876, he was able to introduce numerous theatrical innovations, many of which influenced the concept of theatre to such a degree that our modern theatre experience is greatly affected by them even today. He set out to create a place in which opera would exist as the Gesamtkunstwerk (total work of art) he thought it should be, and through his innovations he succeeded in large measure.
France

After the French Revolution in 1789, spectacular and melodramatic operas became popular through the works of Luigi Cherubini (1760-1842), Etienne Méhul (1763-1817, incidentally the first composer to be called a ‘romantic composer’), Jean François Lesueur (1760-1837), and Gasparo Spontini (1774-1851). Most of these composers employed plot lines which involved some sort of rescue, and which were highly suggestive of the political climate of the time (Cairns 220). With the arrival of Rossini in Paris in 1824, French Grand Opéra as a style unto itself began to be established, and with Daniel François Esprit Auber’s (1782-1871) *La Muette de Portici* (1828), Rossini’s *Guillaume Tell* (1829), Giacomo Meyerbeer’s (1791-1864) *Robert le Diable* (1831), and Jacques Halevy’s (1799-1862) *La Juive* (1835), this movement grew into an international phenomenon (Parker).

French Grand Opéra typically featured historical subjects with thinly veiled references to contemporary issues, religious themes and violent passions. They usually were five-act spectacles, which included arias, duets, trios, grand choruses, and full-scale ballets. Meyerbeer was the undisputed king of French Grand Opéra and composed them into the 1860s, culminating in *L’Africaine* (1865) which was produced posthumously. Another notable example of this genre is Hector Berlioz’s (1803-69) masterpiece *Les Troyens* (1856-8) which has been called by many critics to be the greatest opera ever written.

In addition to Grand Opéra, which was usually produced on stage at the Paris Opera, another genre arose, the *Opéra Comique*, which was distinguished from the former by the insertion of spoken dialogue in between the musical numbers. Deriving its name from the theatre in which it was produced, the *Opéra Comique* theatre in Paris, and despite its name, Opéra Comique was a more serious lyric opera without the pageantry and spectacle of French
Grand Opéra and an important precursor of the later Opéra Lyrique, of which *Les Contes d’Hoffmann* is a representative example. Important composers of Opéra Comique in the middle to late 19th Century were Ambroise Thomas (1811-96), Charles Gounod (1818-93), Georges Bizet (1838-75), and Jules Massenet (1842-1912). Gounod’s *Faust* (1859) and Bizet’s *Carmen* (1875) were both composed as Opéra Comique and, as such, were originally written with spoken dialogue in between musical numbers. It was a common practice, as in the case of these most famous and popular French Operas of the 19th Century, to later write music for the spoken dialogue sections, thus completing fully sung-through works.

In the middle of the 19th Century, as an antidote to the increasingly serious and ambitious pretensions of both the Opéra Comique and Grand Opéra, there was a perceived need for short, lighthearted satirical operatic-style works. There were various attempts at filling this need, but the particular success of Jacques Offenbach and his company at the Théâtre des Bouffes-Parisiens in the 1850s was important. This success led to the offering of two or three satirical one-act pieces, and that eventually led to the extension of the format into works of a more extended duration, and thus the *Opéra Bouffe* was born as a separately recognizable form of full-length entertainment. The popularity of these *Opéras Bouffes* was enormous; the “improbable plots and the wit and sparkle of the productions, composed not only by Offenbach himself but also by men such as Adam, Emile Jonas and Delibes, made them the rage of Paris. Within a couple of years Offenbach was able to tour not only in France but abroad (Lamb, Operetta). Offenbach continued to compose shorter, one-act works, but his most enduring masterpieces were longer works of two acts or more. His first two-act Opéra Bouffe was the mythological satire *Orphée aux enfers* (1858), and its great popularity increased Offenbach’s reputation at home and abroad. By the mid 1860s, the genre had been fully developed, and Offenbach
produced *La belle Hélène* (1864), *La vie parisienne* (1866), and *La Grande-Duchesse de Gérolstein* (1867), all satirizing the Paris of Napoleon III. The typical Opéra Bouffe called for a full cast, chorus, an orchestra of up to 30 pieces, and musical scores comprising up to 30 numbers, which included fully realized opening numbers and finales. These characteristics distinguished Opéra Bouffe not only from contemporary vaudeville but also, in its satirical wit and popular appeal, from the Opéra Comique and Grand Opéra. After the civil war of 1870-71 and the fall of the Second Empire, the popularity of Offenbach and his operettas began to wane in France, but the genre was taken up by those in other countries, most notably by Johann Strauss in Austria and Gilbert and Sullivan in Great Britain.
APPENDIX B: MUSICAL STRUCTURE OF *NEARER, MY GOD, TO THEE*

Words by Sarah Flower Adams

Nearer My God To Thee

Music by Lowell Mason

Note feminine cadence on last measure

Note feminine cadence on last measure

Implies suspended feminine cadence
16. Entr'acte and Barcarolle
Moderato

Bellone nuit, ô nuit d'amour, Sou-
Joyous night, oh night of love, Your-

Nuit plus douce
Starry heavens

que le jour, ô bel le nuit d'amour!
high above, Oh joyous night of love!

Le temps fuit et sans retour. Em-po-to nos ten-dres-ses!
Time is fleet and bears away the passions that possess us,
Loin de cet heu-reux sé-jour, Le temps fuit sans re-tour. Zé-
Far from this en-chant-ed shore, Re-turn-ing nev-er-more. En-

phirs em-bras-sés, Ver-sez-nous vos ca-res-ses, Zé-
joy-while you may Your be-loved ca-res-ses, Be-

Zé-phirs em-bras-sés, Ver-sez-nous, En-joy-while you may, while you may,

phirs em-bras-sés, Don-néz-nous vos bai-sers, For the dawn of day Speeds the mo-ment a-way,

Ver-sez-nous vos ca-res-ses, vos bai-sers. Ver-
En-joy your Love's ca-res-ses while you may Ere the
vos baisers, vos baisers. Ah!
far away, far away. Ah!

nous, veux-nous vos baisers.
dawn Speeds these moments away!

Bel-le nuit, ô nuit d'amour, Souris à nos ivresses,
Joy-ous night, oh night of love, Your mystic shadows bless us!

Ah!

Bel-le nuit, ô nuit d'amour, Souris à nos ivresses,
Joy-ous night, oh night of love, Your mystic shadows bless us!

SOPRANO

(bouches fermées) (humming)

Ah!

Ah!

TENOR

(bouches fermées) (humming)

Ah!

Ah!

BASS

Ah!

Ah!
Nuit plus douce que le jour, ô belle nuit d'amour!
Star-ry heav-ens high a-bove, joy-ous night of love!

ah!

Ah!

ah!

Ah!

Ah!

Ah!

Ah!

Ah!

Ah!

Ah!

Ah!

Ah!

Ah!

Ah!

Ah!

Ah!

Ah!
Vressses. Nuit d'amour, ô nuit d'amour! Ah!

Of. Nuit d'amour.

Vressses. Ô belle nuit d'amour!

Ah! Ah!

Ah! Ah!

Ah! Ah!

Ah! Ah!

Ah! Ah!

Ah! Ah!

Ah! Ah!

Ah! Ah!