

# Mariangela in Verga's *La caccia al lupo*: From Page to Stage<sup>1</sup>

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## La caccia al lupo: An Overview

The present investigation offers a systematic assessment of Giovanni Verga's *La caccia al lupo* from novella to play<sup>2</sup>. Through a close textual analysis, I will explore what happens when authorial intervention is withdrawn in the narrative and the author has largely to rely on the use of dialogue on stage, as well as examine why certain aspects of the novella are altered for its introduction into the theatrical adaptation. The narrative version was initially published in the journal *Le Grazie* in Catania on January 1<sup>st</sup> 1897, then republished in *Siciliana* in 1923, and now is part of the collection, *Novelle sparse*. The production (alongside the similar play, *La caccia alla volpe*) premièred at the Teatro Manzoni in Milan on November 15<sup>th</sup> 1901, and was staged by Virginia Reiter and Francesco Pasta. The same evening, both plays were performed at the Teatro Alfieri in Turin, this time by Tina Di Lorenzo and Flavio Andò.

The novella and play, set in Sicily, are based on the triangular relationship involving husband (Lollo), wife (who remains nameless in the novella but is called Mariangela in the play) and lover (Michelangelo in the novella and Bellamà in the play). In both versions, Lollo unexpectedly returns home early in order to prepare for a wolf hunt. In his dialogue, full of double meanings, the wolf is turned into a euphemism for his wife's lover and the lamb is used to represent her, subsequently turning the triangle into a metaphorical one involving

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<sup>2</sup> The novella will be quoted from Verga 1982: 451-456, and the page numbers will be cited in the main text with the following abbreviation: [*Tn* II]. The stage version will be cited from Verga, *Tutto il teatro* 1980: 129-142, and abbreviated to [*Tt*] in the main text.

hunter, lamb and wolf. As Lollo exits, he locks his wife indoors, and Michelangelo / Bellamà subsequently comes out of hiding. Both are aware that in the Sicilian unwritten code of honour it is the husband's role to kill the wife's lover. Whereas the novella closes during their confrontation, the play ends as Lollo re-enters the house, accompanied by two men, and catches his wife with her lover.

Even though the narrative and theatrical action develops in a similar way, this assessment will investigate whether the changes Verga introduces into the dramatic version cohere with his 'verist' poetics. According to Verga's 'verist' manifesto in the prelude to *L'amante di Gramigna* (1880), he removes «la mano dell'artista» (*Tn*: I, 192) from his works, allowing the characters to recount their stories in their own words (their «parole semplici» (*Tn*: I, 191)). Hence, instead of elaborating on the characters' thoughts and feelings, the 'veristi' break away from this Romantic trend by focussing on the characters' external actions («[i]l semplice fatto umano» (*Tn*: I, 191)) to infer their inner suffering – usually a logical train of actions which, inescapably, leads to tragedy. Indeed, in an interview with Ugo Ojetti in 1894, Verga maintains that «un pensiero può essere scritto, in tanto quanto può essere descritto, cioè in tanto quanto giunge a un atto, a una parola esterna: esso deve essere *esternato*» (*Ibid.*: 66). So whereas the Romantics elaborate on their characters' inner turmoil, building up to their tragedies, the 'veristi' avoid this kind of 'crescendo', as Verga boldly states: «sacrifichiamo volentieri l'effetto della catastrofe» (*Tn*: I, 191). From this, it will be interesting to explore whether these principles can be applied equally well when Verga transposes the narrative action to the stage.

Although this pair of texts is one of Verga's less popular works, it has nonetheless been considered by several scholars, including Siro Ferrone (1972: 253-306), Anna Barsotti (1974: 139-148), Francesca Malara (2000: 107-160), and Marianne Fallon (2002: 81-98). None, however, has been devoted to the portrayal of the female protagonist – Lollo's wife, Mariangela. Whereas Romano Luperini briefly mentions that «[n]el bozzetto scenico [...] il personaggio [di Mariangela], appena abbozzato nel racconto, ha maggior rilievo e ne sono accentuati gli aspetti negativi» (1974: 117), this study aims to show exactly how this alteration comes about. Indeed, this analysis will attempt to challenge the critical view that women in the work of Verga are the 'weaker vessel'. Critics generally argue that Lollo «domina la scena perché padrone della situazione» (Oliva 1992: 36), and that Mariangela appears as a sexual object: «[l]'infedeltà della donna, comunque motivata [...] è la risposta [...] a una condizione femminile sentita come

schiavitù» (Malara 2000: 145). However, what I will endeavour to demonstrate is how, although Mariangela takes a subsidiary position in the triangle in which she is involved, she is the main catalyst of the narrative and theatrical plots. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, a catalyst is «a person or thing that precipitates an event»<sup>3</sup>, and it will be suggested here that Lollo is, in fact, the 'passive' character: it is Mariangela's act of adultery in both versions that precipitates his rage, sending him on a metaphorical wolf hunt, which ultimately causes the inevitable death of her lover.

Finally, the close reading of the changes from page to stage will shed light on Verga's evolving theatrical technique. *La caccia al lupo* is the last novella that Verga transposes to the stage. Overall, *Cavalleria rusticana* (1884) and *La Lupa* (1896), were received more positively than *In portineria* (1885) and *La caccia al lupo* (1901). As a result, by the time Verga staged *La caccia al lupo*, his career as a playwright was coming to an end. Despite this decline in popularity, I hope to show how *La caccia al lupo* was 'ahead of its time.' Indeed, what has been overlooked in recent scholarship is the experimental quality in *La caccia al lupo*. It will be argued here that Verga in this play is, in fact, treading on grounds which will later be developed by his successor, Luigi Pirandello, particularly through the portrayal of the 'different' character Verga introduces into his theatre: Mariangela.

## The (Anti-) Romantic Play?

Despite developing the events in the novella and play in a similar way, Verga introduces differences of emphasis and focus. Both versions begin with Lollo's unexpected return home and his wife's nervous response as she continues to hide her lover. In the narrative, this moment is recounted in a traditional way: «Lollo capitò all'improvviso a casa sua, come la mala nuova. Picchiò prima piano piano, sparse dall'uscio la faccetta inquieta, e infine si decise ad entrare» (Tn: II, 451). The narrative continues to describe the «vero tempo da lupi» (Tn: II, 451) and stresses the reaction of Lollo's wife to his unexpected arrival: «sua moglie, poveretta, cominciò a tremare come una foglia, ed ebbe appena il fiato di biasciare: - Che fu?... che avvenne?» (Tn: II, 451). Following the description, her affair is hinted at through the description of the bed «bell'è rifatto» (Tn: II, 451).

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<sup>3</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, <http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/catalyst?q=catalyst> (web last accessed 04/12/2012).

Similarly, the terminology used in the novella is also employed in the stage directions of the play. The stormy night is described as a «vero tempo da lupi» (*Tt*: 131) and as Lollo enters the house, this time holding a «fucile» (*Tt*: 131), the «povera donna» (*Tt*: 131) «comincia a tremare come una foglia, ed ha appena il fiato di balbettare – Che fu? Che avvenne?... » (*Tt*: 131). The bed is also described as «bell'e rifatto» (*Tt*: 131). However, unlike the novella, Mariangela's first sentence in the play is directly linked to the assumption that she is hiding her lover: «(tutta sossopra, ancora mezzo discinta, chiudendo in fretta l'uscio della cucina in fondo). Vengo!... Vengo!... Sono in letto... mi vesto...» (*Tt*: 131). Whereas her affair is only suggested in the opening of the narrative, her entrance on stage leaves no doubt among the audience that she is being unfaithful. It would seem that once the drama is transposed to the stage, Verga felt the need to be explicit about her adultery.

In fact, as well as alluding to Mariangela's affair more explicitly in the dramatic version, Verga employs the use of dialogue on stage to elaborate on her reaction to her husband's early return. In both versions Mariangela performs the role of the archetypal 'good wife' by preparing her husband some bread to eat, some wine to drink and a pipe to smoke. While in the novella she then pushes him to tell her what he is looking for in a concise way: «– Ma che volete fare? Parlate almeno!» (*Tn*: II, 452), the use of dialogue introduced on stage enables Verga to develop Mariangela's reaction to the unexpected arrival more fully: «Ditemi che cercate?» (*Tt*: 132); «Vedete, qui non c'è niente» (*Tt*: 132); «(quasi perdendo la testa, buttandoglisi dinanzi colle braccia protese, pallida come un cencio). Ma che cercate?... Non me lo potete dire?» (*Tt*: 132); «(tutta tremante). Ditemi che vi abbisogna... Vi servo io... Non sono vostra moglie?» (*Tt*: 132).

Moreover, once Mariangela relies on dialogue on stage, she is also able to use the tones of her voice to emphasize her fear of being caught with her lover. In the novella, Mariangela acts suspiciously when Lollo asks her whether she has seen Bellamà, responding in a short and hesitant way: «- No... no... - balbettò sua moglie, che fu ad un pelo di lasciarsi cader di mano la grazia di Dio» (*Tn*: II, 452). In the play, on the other hand, her fragmented speech and the stage directions depict her reaction in an exaggerated way: «(si lascia cadere la roba di mano, mentre sta servendo, e balbetta). No... Perchè... Non s'è visto...» (*Tt*: 133). Even though the use of suspension marks and choice of words in both versions trigger the reader of the novella and the audience of the play to associate this man with her lover, it is the added importance weighed on the use of dialogue and body language in the dramatic version which conveys her affair more openly on stage.

A further example of this tendency to overstate the events occurs when Mariangela continues her act as a 'good wife' this time by falling to the ground and removing her husband's drenched shoes. In the novella it is simply narrated that «la povera donna smarrivasi sempre più, e a un tratto si buttò ginocchioni per slacciargli le ciocie fradice» (*Tn*: II, 452). Likewise, the stage directions in the theatrical adaptation describe how «la povera donna si smarrisce sempre più, e a un tratto gli cade ginocchioni dinanzi, per slacciargli le ciocie fradicie. Egli la respinge col piede, borbottando» (*Tt*: 133). However, instead of simply removing his shoes as she does in the narrative, she explains why it is that she is doing so: «Voglio asciugarvi i piedi... Siete tutto bagnato...» (*Tt*: 133). Even though it is understandable that Mariangela should verbalize her emotions on stage for the benefit of the audience, this does not account for why she is so overt and explicit. Indeed, whereas the novella avoids exaggerated dialogues of this sort, the style of language adopted on stage appears to move in the direction of a melodrama.

The same melodramatic effect is employed further on in the play when Lollo invites her to join him for some wine and she refuses, stating: «Ho lo stomaco chiuso per cent'anni» (*Tt*: 134). Later, as her husband continues to provoke her by speaking about Bellamà, Mariangela, in the stage directions, «[s]i butta ginocchioni ai suoi piedi e cerca d'afferrargli la mano» (*Tt*: 138), stating: «Lasciatevi baciare la mano... come Gesù misericordioso!» (*Tt*: 138) – two rhetorical statements which are not included in the novella.

Moreover, once the novella is transposed to the stage, it would seem that Verga also felt the need to add suspense to the drama. Although the novella and play are designed to highlight the female protagonist's fear of being caught with her lover, it is the stage version that creates a sort of crescendo leading up to this moment. After Lollo questions her about Michelangelo / Bellamà, whereas Lollo in the narrative proceeds to describe his hunt – bringing in an actual lamb to tempt the wolf (an aspect inevitably overlooked in the dramatic version) – on stage a noise is heard from the kitchen, which Mariangela attempts to disguise: «(più morta che viva). Saranno le galline... che le ho chiuse in cucina... pel temporale che faceva...» (*Tt*: 134).

The conventions of the theatre continue to enable Verga to increase the dramatic tension when Lollo explains how he is going to trap the wolf. In both versions a gust of wind suddenly blows out the lamp which frightens his wife. In the narrative she exclaims «- Santa Barbara! Santa Barbara!... Aspettate... Cerco gli zolfanelli... Dove siete?» (*Tn*: II, 454). The same occurs in the play: «Una ventata soffia sul lume e lo spegne [...] (strillando, per maggior confusione, e

brancolando verso l'uscio in fondo). Santa Barbara! Santa Barbara!... Aspettate... Cerco gli zolfanelli... Dove siete» (*Tt*: 136). Even though her reaction is identical in the two versions, it is the spectators of the play who are presented with a more threatening image as they watch Mariangela alone, centre stage, in complete darkness beside her angry husband holding a rifle. Again, it is this more exaggerated image of Lollo on stage which supports the notion that as soon as Verga adapts the novella into a play, he seems to transform his narrative into a sort of a *pièce bien faite*, despite claiming to sacrifice «l'effetto della catastrofe» (*Tn*: I, 191). However, it could be argued that Verga felt the need to 'add more drama' to his stage version in order to satisfy his audience's expectations. As Verga puts it to Ojetti, he is no longer writing for «un lettore ideale come avviene nel romanzo, ma per un pubblico radunato a farla così da dover pensare a una media di intelligenza e di gusto, a un *average reader*, come dicono gli inglesi» (70-71).

So as the above analysis has illustrated, whereas the reader of the novella can infer Mariangela's feelings through an account of her external actions provided by narrator, once the narrator is withdrawn on stage, Mariangela now needs to convey her sense of fear for herself, which she does mainly through her dialogue and use of body language. Verga thus extends her dialogues on stage and emphasizes in the stage direction how the lead actress should externalise her emotions. However, by developing Mariangela's responses on stage, Verga risks overstating the action and, as a result, seems to (inadvertently?) turn his play into a melodrama – contradicting his own 'verist' principles. Verga may therefore claim to base his works, composed of «parole semplici» (*Tn*: I, 191), on «[i]l semplice fatto umano» (*Tn*: I, 191), placing importance on his characters' exterior behaviour to suggest their moods and dispositions, but once he shifts *La caccia al lupo* from the narrative genre to the theatrical, this new choice of genre (and audience) makes his poetics more challenging to 'translate'.

## Or the Experimental Play?

Although Verga appears to steer the first part of the play into the direction of a melodrama, it would seem that as the action develops, he shows signs of experimenting with a 'different' kind of drama where what is seen on the outside does not necessarily correspond with what is concealed in the inside. This 'new' tendency is conveyed in particular through his characterization of Mariangela. Indeed, despite

appearing as the most defenceless character, she eventually reveals herself as the strongest protagonist. To build up to this moment, Verga chooses to portray her as a vulnerable woman at the outset – constantly referring to her as a «poveretta» (*Tn*: II, 451 and *Tn*: II, 455), «la povera donna» (*Tn*: II, 452 and *Tn*: II, 455), «la povera moglie» (repeated twice in *Tn*: II, 454), and «la povera donna» (*Tt*: 131) – so that the contrast is more startling at the end, above all in the drama.

This so-called 'poor woman' in both versions is nonetheless a somewhat cunning one. As she continues to ask Lollo what he is looking for, she exposes a different, sexual side to her personality. Indeed, she uses her feline-like sensuality as a way of luring him into telling her the truth. The narrator describes how: «gli si strusciava addosso, proprio come una gatta, col seno palpitante, e il sorriso pallido in bocca» (*Tn*: II, 454), and similarly in the stage directions: «gli si struscia addosso, proprio come una gatta, col seno palpitante, e il sorriso pallido in bocca» (*Tt*: 135). However, unlike in the novella, Mariangela continues to exploit her sexuality later in the theatrical plot in order to prevent her husband from locking her in the house: «(stringendosi a lui, carezzevole). Non mi lasciate!... Non mi lasciate così!... Ho paura!... Venite a letto piuttosto... con questo freddo!... sentite?... (*Tt*: 137)».

What further differentiates the short story from the play is Mariangela's reaction when she realizes that she cannot use her body to manipulate her husband. In the novella she demands to know the cause of his rage: «– Ma che avete infine? Parlate!» (*Tn*: II, 455), while in the play she continues to distract him by performing a further role, only this time that of the servant wife – a role which is not developed in the novella: «(timidamente). Voi siete il padrone... (Accennando col capo) Il mio padrone siete!...» (*Tt*: 135).

These extra scenes and dialogues are included in the theatrical adaptation in order to expose her varying personas and thereby to enhance the audience's understanding of her. Interestingly, whereas the previous characters that Verga transposes to the stage tended to remain the same throughout the narrative and theatrical plots (Santa / Santuzza is a betrayed woman in *Cavalleria rusticana*, Målia is a broken-hearted and poorly girl in *Il canarino del n. 15* and *In portineria*, and La Lupa is portrayed as a she-wolf throughout *La Lupa*), Mariangela in this pair of texts, particularly in the theatrical adaptation, is a 'different' character with various sides to her personality.

Moreover, while the feelings the above characters have for their lovers are undoubtedly clear, Mariangela's feelings for Michelangelo/Bellamà are more ambiguous, particularly in the play where it is left it is unclear whether she was aware of her lover's involvement with

another married woman – an area which is omitted in the closing of the novella. At the end of both versions, the reader of the novella and the audience of the play are led up to the episode where Lollo traps his wife in the house. In the narrative, Lollo simply leaves his home in order to meet the other hunters, informing his wife: «Ho già avvisato Zango e Buonocore» (Tn: II, 453), without clarifying who exactly these two men are and why «[c]i hanno il loro interesse pure» (Tn: II, 453). On stage, however, the men are called Musarra and his son Neli, and as Lollo exits, he reveals why they are keen to assist him in the hunt: «Sai, il figlio Musarra, che chiamano il matto perchè sua moglie gli è fuggita con Bellamà, quello che fa il gallo colle donne altrui...» (Tt: 137). What is striking about this passage is how Lollo suggests Mariangela's awareness of Bellamà's affair with Neli Musarra's wife. Her body language and tone of voice leave the audience wondering whether she is lying or not:

Lollo: [...] Lo sai anche tu.

Mariangela: (*confusa balbettando*). Io?... (Tt: 137)

Lollo continues to inform the audience of the antecedent events, outlining how Bellamà seduced Neli's wife and then abandoned her in the streets. He ends his dialogue by referring to the pain Bellamà has caused Neli when, in reality, the audience is made to understand that he is actually talking about his own suffering: «Ah Gesù! Avere una donna ch'è tutto per un pover'uomo [...] vedersi poi cambiare pel primo che la vuole!» (Tt: 137).

Once Lollo leaves, Michelangelo / Bellamà comes out of hiding. This episode is crucial in continuing to reveal the different sides to Mariangela's personality. Unlike in the novella, once he comes out of hiding, she is initially portrayed as being playful and affectionate towards her lover (whose first name is Mariano), «(abbracciandolo, piangendo). Mariano! Mariano mio! Non ho che te al mondo!» (Tt: 140). What is significant about her line here, however, is how earlier in the plot, in order to distract her husband from the hunt, she utters virtually the same words to him: «che non ho altro al mondo!...» (Tt: 135).

As well as being portrayed as an affectionate lover, Mariangela is also portrayed as an angry lover. Even though in the novella she reproaches Michelangelo for all the trouble their affair has caused («– Doveva cogliermi un accidente, quando mi siete venuto fra i piedi!» (Tn: II, 456)), by introducing his involvement with Compare Neli's wife

into the play through Lollo's dialogue, Verga gives Mariangela more motivation for anger. At first, she mentions that her husband is in the company of Neli and his father Musarra and this inevitably makes Bellamà fear for his life: «(facendo sforzi disperati per arrivare al tetto). Si è messo d'accordo coi Musarra perchè ce l'hanno con me anche loro!» (Tt: 140). She then berates him about his involvement with Neli's wife: «Lo so! A causa della moglie di compare Neli Musarra... scomunicato che siete!» (Tt: 140-141), which leads to a confrontation:

Mariangela: [...]. M'avete rovinata come la moglie di Musarra, scellerato!

Bellamà: Adesso mi rinfacci la moglie di Musarra? Quando mi correvi dietro per farmela lasciare, no!

Mariangela: Io vi correvo dietro, scomunicato?

Bellamà: Tu, sfacciata! Ti mettevi sulla porta, e mi ridevi!... Con un marito che non te lo meritavi, e lo cambiavi pel primo che passava! (Tt: 141).

What emerges from these passages is the suggestion that Mariangela pursued Bellamà despite knowing about this affair. Indeed, earlier on in the theatrical plot Lollo also implies that Mariangela was already aware of Bellamà's involvement with Neli's wife. Mariangela, however, denies all the accusations, leaving the spectators to make up their own minds.

Significantly, it is the closing of the play, as opposed to the novella, which emphasizes a side of Mariangela's personality which continues to set her apart from Verga's characters. Whereas in the short story Lollo never returns home once he has locked up his wife, in the play, he does come back, but in the company of the angry Neli and Musarra. What is particularly striking about the last scene on stage is Mariangela's reaction to her husband's return. As she is caught with her lover, she pretends that Bellamà has broken into the house while she was undressing: «(al marito che appare sulla soglia, guardingo, e col fucile spianato). Aiuto! C'è un uomo! Lì dentro!... Mentre stavo spogliandomi!...» (Tt: 141). Whereas the reader of the novella is left wondering what will happen to the lovers when Lollo returns, the audience of the play 'knows' that Mariangela exploits her play-acting in order to try to save her own life. Throughout the theatrical action Verga has exposed various aspects of Mariangela's personality and it is this final act which encapsulates the essence of her character.

Although Mariangela's survival is a possibility and not a certainty, she is nonetheless bold enough to protect herself by

manipulating the circumstances to her benefit. Mariangela effectively takes advantage of Lollo's rage by inciting him to kill Bellamà, ultimately turning Lollo into a means of obtaining 'her' ends. Even though in both versions she has been compared to the lamb in the allegorical triangle, what is striking here is how the lamb uses the hunter as a means of destroying her potential predator. Indeed, it could be argued that in this triangular relationship it is no longer the husband who takes revenge on his wife's lover, as exemplified in *Cavalleria rusticana*, but the wife who attempts to take vengeance on her lover by using her husband as a tool.

What continues to make Mariangela stand apart from Verga's characters is how her final actions are based upon her ability to 'think for herself'. While Nanni in both versions of *La Lupa*, Jeli in *Jeli il pastore*, and the protagonist in *Pentolaccia* (each published in *Vita dei campi*) end the triangular relationship in which they are involved through instinct – Nanni kills Gnà Pina in a passionate rage, Jeli impulsively slits Don Alfonoso's throat «proprio come un capretto» (*Tn*: I, 161), and similarly Pentolaccia kills Don Liborio «come un bue» (*Tn*: I, 213) – Mariangela's attempt at survival is devised through her capacity to think: she calculates a way out of the trap by purposely putting on a pretence before leaving her lover to perish.

Indeed, by the time Verga came to write *La caccia al lupo*, it seems as if he had gone beyond portraying the basic nature of human relationships (such as the women's uncontrollable desire for their lovers, portrayed above all in *La Lupa*, and the men's spontaneous violent acts of revenge against their rivals) and chosen to focus on the rational, rather contrived, aspect of relationships. Luigi Russo actually maintains that in this play «sono intellettualmente tipizzate le passioni del mondo rusticano» (1995: 190).

In fact, both the reader of the novella and the audience of the play are presented with a more problematic triangular relationship. In both versions of *La caccia al lupo* all three protagonists are trying to deceive each other. Lollo's vengeance has been disguised by what appears to be a wolf hunt. Mariangela pretends not to understand the implications of the hunt when in reality she is very much aware that he has discovered the truth about her adultery and intends to kill her lover. In the novella she tells Michelangelo: «È certo! È certo che sapeva!» (*Tn*: II, 456), and, similarly, on stage: «Mio marito sa tutto!... È venuto apposta, per sorprenderci!» (*Tt*: 139). As for the lover, he gives the impression that he has no intention of being faithful to her, particularly in the stage version where his involvement with other women is revealed.

What is more, in the passage from short story to play, Verga is able to strengthen the element of pretence mainly through the use of stage directions. Before Lollo exits to prepare for the hunt, it is stressed in the stage directions that Mariangela is putting on a performance of her own: «fingendo di stare a vedere attentamente per nascondere la sua inquietudine» (*Tt*: 134). In fact, this element of play-acting within the drama has led critics such as Paolo Mario Sipala to conclude that «i personaggi sono partecipi di una finzione; recitano due volte, tra loro e per il pubblico. Se non temessimo di scomodare una formula pirandelliana, potremo dire che fanno *Teatro nel teatro*» (1985: 45). Sipala, however, does not point out how Mariangela is perhaps the most talented ‘actor’, particularly at the end of the ‘play-within-a-play’ when she exploits her multifaceted nature by performing the role of the offended wife. From this, it would seem that by the time Verga adapted *La caccia al lupo* into a play, he starts to develop his use of stage directions in his dramatic works – in this case, in order to allude to the duplicity of drama: how the characters behave on the surface and their true intentions hidden underneath, strengthened by Mariangela, the most skilful ‘performer’.

There are also several critics who have associated the characters’ play-acting with the topic of the mask. Romano Luperini maintains that «i personaggi [...] recitano tutti una parte, portano tutti una maschera o si sforzano sino all’ultimo di portarla» (1974: 115). Gino Tellini, in fact, considers the stage adaptation a kind of conclusion to Verga’s ‘rustic’ plays and hence, a kind of opening to a new type of theatre where the characters disguise themselves with their various masks, concluding that «i tre personaggi del classico triangolo si attengono ognuno ad un falso repertorio di gesti e di parole: dietro non è dato intravedere che i segni di una medesima ferina disumanità» (1980: 488). Both of these critics, however, neglect to emphasize how Mariangela is the character with the greatest number of masks. Indeed, what has mainly come to light in this analysis is how, in the passage from short story to stage, she is exposed as the biggest game-player in the triangle. Although this aspect is conveyed in the narrative through the role of the narrator, it is the means of the theatre which draws attention to the multiple sides to her personality: she alters her ‘masks’ from being the meek woman, to the sexual lover, to the offended wife, and lastly, to the cold avenger.

## The 'Pre-Pirandellian' Protagonist and Play

To conclude, although the general view among critics is that in the work of Verga, «non c'è posto per l'autonomia femminile» (Madrignani 2007: 69), it has been argued here that Mariangela is, in fact, the key catalyst in *La caccia al lupo*, whose ability to think for herself enables her to break away from women's traditional representation as emotion and instinct, and to reveal herself to be more autonomous than meets the eye – pulling the strings for her benefit.

Moreover, the close reading has shed light on how Mariangela is crucial in indicating the 'new' direction in which Verga's theatre appears to be moving towards. Although Verga risks turning the first part of the play into a melodrama, he nevertheless exploits the conventions of the theatre in order to take the original action one step further on stage, particularly at the end. Through the additional use of dialogue, body language and stage directions, Verga is able to develop the different sides of Mariangela's personality, and the different levels of reality: how she behaves on the 'exterior', and her true intentions in the 'interior' – no longer the kind of character whose actions are logically consistent with her feelings. This duplicity gives the impression that Mariangela is putting on a performance, thus turning the play into a kind of 'play-within-a-play'. Indeed, it has been argued here that Mariangela is the main 'performer' of the play with the most numbers of 'masks' – a concept through which Verga seems to anticipate what will later become known as 'Pirandellismo'. As a result of this 'Pre-Pirandellian' tendency, it could be argued that audiences were perhaps unprepared for such a play 'ahead of its time', and subsequently, this could explain why it is that Verga prematurely ended the phase in which he transposed novelle onto the stage, 'before his time'.

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