

# The Tennessee Williams Annual Review

## Introduction to *Il Cane Incantato della Divina Costiera*

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*Il Cane Incantato della Divina Costiera* can be found in two manuscripts of the Tennessee Williams collection of the HRHRC at the University of Texas in Austin. The first ms.—Ms. (Williams, T.) Works / The rose tattoo: [unsorted pages of incomplete drafts] T. and Tccms. [c. 409 pp.] with A. emendations on c. 197 pp./n.d.—is a composite file which contains an incomplete fragment entitled “*A Tender Scene* (1-act sketch from which ‘The Rose Tattoo’ derived).” The second ms.—Ms. (Williams, T.) Works / The rose tattoo / *Il canne incantato delle divina costiera* (one-act sketch) / Tms. with A. revisions [16 pp.] / n.d. / Basis for *The Rose Tattoo*—is a complete text of the one-act, with “*A Tender Scene*” crossed out and the “*Il Cane . . .*” title written above in Williams’s own handwriting.

¶12 As usual, Williams got his Italian wrong. Confusing it with Spanish, he misspelled it as “*Il Canne Incantade delle Divina Costiere*,” and mistranslated it as “The Dog Enchanted by the Divine View.” This suggests that it was a phrase that he overheard and only partially understood, so its relevance to the play is slight. In the text, the suitor, Paul Mangiacavallo, is described as “exactly like a big and excessively friendly dog” who gazes fixedly at Clara, presumably his “divine view.”

¶13 Actually, the Italian means “The Enchanted Dog of the Divine Coastline.” The “divine coastline” is the bay of Naples (as later in *The Milktrain Doesn’t Stop Here Anymore*), and the “enchanted dog” is probably Cerberus, the guardian of Hades or Avernus, whom Orpheus enchanted when he descended to the underworld in search of his wife, Eurydice. There was a Lake of Avernus near the Greek city of Baia in the north of the Bay of Naples which was reputed to be the mouth of hell.<sup>1</sup>

¶14 The one-act has many anticipations of the later play, though the names Paul and Clara are probably derived from D.H. Lawrence’s *Sons and Lovers* (without in any way resembling the novel’s characters). The setting is a gaudily decorated shot-gun cottage “on the gulf-coast of Mississippi”; Clara is “a plump widow of Italian extraction,” a seamstress (though little is made of this) with a fifteen-year old daughter named Rose who is out on her first date; and Paul, surnamed “Mangiacavallo” (as in *Tattoo*), has an “engagingly clownish” face, sweats in the hot weather, and offers a gift of chocolates whose freshness is in question. The song *Come le rose* is sung softly behind Clara’s memory of her dead husband (the manner of whose death is not specified); and there are prying neighbours, one of whom is referred to in a deleted reference as the “strega” (or witch)—though there is no other attempt to suggest Italian dialect or accent in the one-act. A marauding cat anticipates *Tattoo*’s intrusive goat; a middle-aged voyeur who spies on Rose getting dressed foreshadows Alvaro’s encounter with the half-naked girl at the end of *Tattoo*; and the details of a smashed goldfish bowl and an electric player-piano which runs amok occur also in early drafts of the full-length play.

¶15 Both mss. specifically claim that this is “A 1-act sketch from which ‘The Rose Tattoo’ derived”; but some of the details, such as the name “Mangiacavallo” (applied to the suitor) and the deleted term “strega,” suggest that it may possibly have been spun off (or revised) while Williams was already working on drafts of the full-length

play.<sup>[2]</sup> This would be quite consistent with his very fluid, improvisatory mode of composition. Alternatively, they may be early details that he returned to later. Either possibility is consistent with his manner of work.<sup>[3]</sup>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Alternatively, though less probably, the Italian may refer to Sirius, the dog-star. One of the titles considered for early drafts of *Tattoo* was “The Dog of Orion.”

<sup>2</sup> See: “A Provisional Stemma for Drafts, Alternatives, and Revisions of Tennessee Williams’s *The Rose Tattoo* (1951),” *Modern Drama* 40.2 (1997): 279-94.

<sup>3</sup> This research was funded by grants from the Bibliographical Society of America and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

Read *Il Cane Incantato della Divina Costiera*