

someone else, who in turn despised her. Strange story of a beautiful Mexican girl who somehow didn't fit into modern life, took to marijuana, lost her mind, and wandered into the Mojave desert with a little Pekinese dog. It [is] a book like *Human Bondage*, but with humor and wistfulness. I have to have it ready by October next year, which means the writing has to be finished by July.

We are going home for Christmas, and after that our plans are to move somewhere in a place where it is quiet and inexpensive: possibly Monterey.

Love to everyone,
Johnnie

Awfully good review in December *Scribner's* by John Chamberlain, considered best American critic.

*In January 1939, as Carey McWilliams recalls (Education, 76-77), the newly elected governor Olson named him as head of California's Division of Immigration and Housing, "a unique agency [with] authority to inquire into the welfare of alien immigrants, inspect farm labor camps, and concern itself with some forms of rural housing." McWilliams was chosen on the basis of the activist work which was to lead to his *Factories in the Field*, an exposé of the conditions of migrant farm workers, published in July 1939.*

*Fante wrote a brief article on his friend Saroyan for Louis Adamic's magazine *Common Ground* in 1941.*

[TO WILLIAM SAROYAN]

3313 Temple St.,
Los Angeles (new address)
[undated; c. January 1939]

Dear Tiger Saroyan, Wildcat Willie the Wow:

Joyce and I and a whole slew of people will be in Frisco Friday night around 8:30 at the Empire Hotel, wherever that is, and Joyce and I look forward with great eagerness to seeing you again.

Seems Carey McWilliams has just been appointed new Commissioner of Housing and Immigration, a very sweet and interesting job having to do with migratory workers, etc., and we plan to get together at the Empire Hotel, where he is staying, and whence he shall arrive from Sacramento

sometime Thursday. You know Carey, Bill. I took you up to his office that time we went downtown in LA. He knows you, your writings, likes you, etc. You might look him up if you like before we arrive at either the hotel or the office of Housing and Immigration in the State Bldg. In fact, be a good idea: you could get drunk.

Anyway we, Joyce and I, want very much to see you Friday night around ate-thirty (8:30) at Empire Hotel. I've written Joe Jackson, telling him I would get in touch with him through you; but I'm writing you now because you told me you no longer had a phone. How come you don't have a phone, you, one of the wealthiest authors on the Pacific Coast, wealthier than the Norrises, the Dobies, the Steinbecks? How come? What do you do with your money? You can explain the whole thing when we meet, and please don't fail us, Willie. We want you.

Johnnie

The Atlantic Monthly review that Fante mentions to his mother in the next letter and that he calls "wonderfully satisfying" in a later letter of November 23 to his cousin was by Ellery Sedgwick. It describes Fante's writing as "a kind of poetry [which] breathes in life from a whirligig American existence, far greater than its aggregate members, far wider in scope than any church door," and concludes as follows: "Ask the Dust realizes to the full the quiz-zical wonder inherent in Saroyan's fragmentary writings, and recognizes the cruelty of man's lot besides. Fante strikes home as surely as Halper in *The Foundry*, or Swinnerton in *Nocturne*, to use two divergent analogues. The love of Camilla for Sammy and her disintegration when it is not accepted would start tears from a stone. Fante must have lived this out at some time. And now that he has written his *Werther*, let us hope fervently he can go on to another *Faust*." (On Sedgwick's claim that Fante lived it out, Joyce Fante comments, "No he didn't.")

The collaboration with Lynn Root and Frank Fenton that he mentions being on the point of selling to M.G.M. was in fact made (from a screenplay not by Fante himself but by S. J. and Laura Perlman) into a movie, *The Golden Fleecing*, released in 1940.

On his statement to his mother that "Joyce and I have been going to mass regularly," Joyce Fante comments simply, "Not true."