

[TW described his new play, "Stair to the Roof" (1945), as "a rather promising idea about white collar workers" (*Journal*, February 12, 1940). "Portrait of a Madonna," related both to *Battle of Angels* and *A Streetcar Named Desire*, concerns the sexual-religious delusions of an aging southern spinster who is committed to a state asylum. The two short plays to be "bound" with "Portrait," first published in 1945, may have been "At Liberty" and "This Property is Condemned," which were published as companion pieces in 1941.

TW hoped to persuade Audrey Wood that *Battle of Angels* was more suitable for the Theatre Guild than the Group by virtue of its muted social content and commercial appeal. It was through her efforts that he received a scholarship to the Playwrights' Seminar at the New School, where John Gassner and Theresa Helburn became strongly attracted to the play and officially presented it to the Guild. Gassner later wrote that TW "participated only casually in the discussions [of the Seminar] and was self-absorbed. . . . He had a mind and a will of his own - he knew what he was after" (letter to David Staub, April 30, 1948, Southern Illinois). A fellow member of the Seminar was Arthur Miller.

The new "playwrights group" was apparently an attempt by Liebbling-Wood to produce the work of young dramatists associated with the agency. Wood planned to raise funds on the West Coast later in the month, but there is no evidence that the venture was ever realized.]

142. To William Saroyan

[Young Men's Christian Association]
5 W. 63rd Street, New York City
March 4, 1940
[TLSx, 1 p. Private Collection]

Dear William Saroyan:

I read your article in this evening's (March 4) World Telegram with a great deal of sympathy and so much absorption that I had to walk back three blocks from the bus. Last summer I hitch-hiked from L.A. to Frisco to see you and the Golden Gate Exposition. I missed you. But I believe you are now in N.Y. and so am I. The implication is obvious.

By way of introduction, I'm also a playwright and a short-story writer. The only thing of mine you are likely to have seen is a short-story that was in the Oct. issue of *STORY* which I believe was also your first publication. I've been reading you in there and your other publications for y'ars and y'ars and I won't annoy you with adjectives about your work. But I like it

a hell of a lot. Right now I'm living in New York on a Rockefeller Dram. fellowship and am more or less associated with the Group Theatre as I won their \$100. (second) award for Young Playwrights' last spring and they are holding (AND holding!) a couple of scripts of mine. What you said about the indifference to the works of young playwrights by companies that are sensitive enough to help them struck very close to home. I have written six long plays and about twenty short ones in the last three or four years and only in the middle-west have I found productions for them. - Enough of all that.

I have a friend who is writing a book about your work. We would both like to meet you, Bill, and I have some things I would particularly like to talk over with you.

Could you suggest a time for us to drop in if you are not averse to dissipating your time on strangers; I am shoving off for Acapulco, Mexico, mainly because I like the sound of it and have been almost everywhere else - being one of those migratory writers so articulate lately! - Leaving about the twentieth of the month when I get my next cheque so hope you can let me see you before then.

Cordially, Tenn. Wms.

[William Saroyan (1908-1981) had shown a flair for independence and publicity that was not lost upon TW. His long-running hit, *The Time of Your Life*, opened as a Theatre Guild production on October 25, 1939, and would soon be awarded the Pulitzer Prize, which he declined (see letter #159). His article in the *New York World-Telegram* coincided with TW's effort to bring *Battle of Angels* to the attention of the Theatre Guild. This "organization," Saroyan had written, "should be the medium of bringing out of obscurity the several new and valid dramatists this country is surely large enough to be expected to create inevitably every 10 years or so. . . . The idea is to get them to appear as little damaged and compromised by the disorder in the theatrical world as possible" (March 4, 1940).

The "friend" writing a book on Saroyan has not been identified and may have been a ploy to meet the rising celebrity. In any case TW did not meet Saroyan at this time.]