

## 213. To William Saroyan

"In Transit"

Nov. 29, 1941

[AL, 4 pp. Todd Collection]

Dear Saroyan -

I am in transit and have no typewriter at my disposal so I will try to write largely and plainly enough to be read. - Many, many thanks for your letter. I did not expect it and appreciated it vastly. Your remarks about the theatre are correct. Your mistake is in assuming that every one of us new writers has your own rather prodigious energy that will enable him not only to write living stuff but blow, knock, blast, or scratch a hole in "the opposition" that will permit him to enter with his product. You have accomplished the impossible - the impossible for anyone else. I do not think I can do it.

I have the alternative of writing what I prefer to write - and keeping it in my suitcase, or writing what the theatre seems to accept regardless of how little I like it. Well, I can't do the second - and my suitcase is getting terribly crowded. (A bleak situation). - Not with little neglected masterpieces, I know - but nevertheless with living material that ought to see the light - short stories, plays - long and short. "Interesting but not suitable".

Undoubtedly our artistic climate is going to change through the world situation. People are going to realize to their amazement that stupidity is no longer profitable, even the little people are going to learn (bitterly) the necessity of thinking.

I think there is going to be a vast hunger for life after all this death - and for light after all this eclipse -

People will want to read, see, feel the living truth and they will revolt against the sing-song Mother Goose book of lies that are being fed to them.

P.S. I am writing this on a bicycle trip along the west coast of Florida. If Hume Cronyn decides to put on some 1-acts of mine I will return to New York. I am living on \$50. a month from these 1-acts!

[In answering TW's recent letter (see letter #211), William Saroyan commiserated over the failure of *Battle of Angels* and berated the show-shop mentality of Broadway: "If you want the truth, as I see it, there is no one in the American the-

atre who knows how to do anything other than the ordinary, banal, commercial and shabby—which makes writing plays a hopeless activity, unless one is one's self ready to put them on" (November 23, 1941; qtd. in Leverich). Saroyan had personally financed *The Beautiful People*, whose New York run was brief (64 performances) and unprofitable.]

214. *To Audrey Wood*

[St. Petersburg, Florida]  
[ca. December 5, 1941]  
[ALS, 2 pp. HRC]

Dear Audrey -

I feel like the backside of a donkey! - Got here with the flu, a raging fever & racking cough and it had not occurred to my supercharged intellect that I knew nobody here to cash a cheque for me. Consequence - I went to bed on the beach & probably would have perished but for the timely intervention of some friends from Calif. met by chance.

Well, I am going back to New Orleans - much too expensive here and too cold for swimming and I am too weak from the flu to camp out.

I am going back and tie myself down to one of the long plays and get it out, good, bad, or probably indifferent, within the next few weeks or bust - probably bust. - I feel like old King Lear, howling damnation on the moors! Only, alas, I have no daughters to curse. Only myself - and The Fool. -

10.

[TW left Clayton after Thanksgiving and reached St. Petersburg by December 4. His return to New Orleans coincided with the bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, "Our fin du monde," as he would later term it.

See letter #216 for a more candid description of the "friends from Calif."

The "long play" to which TW committed himself in his final weeks in New Orleans was *Stairs to the Roof*. His recent contact with William Saroyan may have been decisive. The play has the same eccentric quality that he admired in *Jim Dandy* (see letters #210 and #211), and it shares with Saroyan the vision of a world "plunging toward destruction" but still alive with "infinite possibilities" (*Stairs*) of spirit.]