

**E.G.O.:**  
**The Passions of**  
**Eugene Gladstone O'Neill**

**A full-length play**  
**in two acts**  
**by Jo Morello**

6620 Grand Point Avenue  
University Park, FL 34201-2125  
941-351-9688 • M: 941-587-8290  
[www.jomorello.com](http://www.jomorello.com) • [jo@jomorello.com](mailto:jo@jomorello.com)

© by Jo Morello. All rights reserved.

**E. G. O.: THE PASSIONS OF  
EUGENE GLADSTONE O'NEILL**

**Running time: approx. 55-60 minutes for each act.**

**Synopsis**

E.G.O.: THE PASSIONS OF EUGENE GLADSTONE O'NEILL explores Eugene O'Neill's driving passions: for his second wife, Agnes, and his third wife, Carlotta, both fully expected to serve his ultimate passion--to be "an artist or nothing." The two women compete for O'Neill's attention and against his willingness to jettison anything—and anybody—that gets in his way.

The play begins with the first meeting between O'Neill and Agnes Boulton, when he proposes marriage and vows to become American's greatest playwright. With her strong support, he wins two Pulitzer Prizes and starts the play that will bring his third. As he gains fame, thrice-divorced actress Carlotta Monterey pursues him relentlessly. They have an affair in New York, which he confesses to Agnes upon his return to her in their Bermuda home. Even as he swears that the affair is over, he continues writing to Carlotta. When he returns to New York—without Agnes—to stage his plays, Carlotta again pursues him. He resists initially but soon succumbs and decides to leave Agnes but continues writing to her of his love. When suspicious Agnes arrives at his New York hotel, the the enraged Carlotta leaves O'Neill. Bereft and desperate, he goes to Agnes's room, where they have one last sexual fling.

Act II begins with the adulterous elopement to Europe of O'Neill and Carlotta, in a widely publicized scandal they hoped to keep secret. Agnes stalls their divorce, demanding a settlement to provide for her and their children, Shane and Oona. She also says their New York encounter resulted in her pregnancy. He denies responsibility. She claims a mistake in the due date. She insists the baby is his, but has an abortion.

After finally securing a divorce, O'Neill and Carlotta begin a tumultuous, 25-year marriage, moving from house to house as he seeks a "home." He writes despite a progressive, neurological disease that impairs him. Carlotta underwrites their luxurious life with money from a former lover and isolates O'Neill from friends and family. Bitterly jealous, at one point she hides his manuscripts. They fight often, she leaves and he despairs. While running from her one night, he falls in the snow and breaks a leg. She leaves him there to die. His doctor finds him in the morning and Carlotta is declared insane—but again they reunite.

As he loses his ability to write, O'Neill burns plays he can never finish and focuses on those that matter most. He declares that one, *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, is not to be published until 25 years after his death and never, ever staged. He is unable to write for the last ten years of his life.

Towards the end, Agnes returns as a hallucination. She warns him of the dangers he faces with Carlotta and encourages him to release *Long Day's Journey*. He refuses. He orders Carlotta to help him burn his manuscripts. She does, but begs him to release *Long Day's Journey*. Even on his deathbed he refuses. However, Carlotta inherits his copyrights. She struggles over whether to honor his dying wish or release the play. The hallucination of Agnes, though unseen by Carlotta, encourages her to share his masterpiece with the world.

## CAST OF CHARACTERS

2M, 2F; some doubling

Agnes Boulton..... 24-35. Eugene's second wife. Dark, slender. Attractive,  
Jamie O'Neill..... 39-42. Eugene's older brother. Stocky. Resonant voice.  
Gene (Eugene O'Neill)..... 29-65. Tall, thin, very dark eyes, hair, mustache. In later  
years, a cane.  
Carlotta Monterey..... 38-65. Eugene's third wife. Dark, glamorous. Head erect (eye  
problems). Strong voice, affected speech, proud carriage. In  
later years, a cane.

### Doubled roles

Reporter..... Any age. Seen from back. (May be doubled with Jamie.)  
Saxe Commins..... Four years younger than Eugene. About 5'8". Dark hair. Wears  
glasses when working. Modest, self-effacing although wide-  
brimmed, dark felt hats give a rakish look.  
Eugene O'Neill, Jr..... 36. Stocky build, resonant voice. Mustache, goatee. (May  
be doubled with Jamie.)

### Offstage voices

Oona O'Neill (as crying child, 18 months old)  
Ship's Bursar  
Shane O'Neill (as crying newborn)  
Radio Announcer  
Rocky Harry Hope Cora Director

## NOTES TO DIRECTOR

E.G.O. adheres closely to actual events in the life of Eugene O'Neill. Some scenes were fictionalized and actions were sometimes compressed but overall the story is true. It takes place from 1917 through 1953, before long-distance phone calls were common. The characters corresponded by letter, telegram or even through newspaper stories (as celebrities). The playwright has often presented their communications in the original forms, e.g., as letters or telegrams. The messages should be staged as interactive dialogues: when one character writes/speaks a letter, the recipient reacts in the moment.

Eugene O'Neill continued smoking almost to his dying day. He and Agnes may smoke cigarettes. Carlotta does not.

Eugene O'Neill was afflicted with familial tremor, a hereditary, progressive neurological condition that affects movements of the body but not thought processes. These tremors often occur with purposeful movement, such as trying to lift a cup or fork to the mouth. Ironically, its symptoms are eased by drinking alcohol. Although O'Neill's tremors manifested themselves occasionally even during his student days at Princeton, they did not significantly impair his ability to write until years later, probably in the early 1930s. Over the years his condition grew progressively worse, leaving him spastic and unable even to control a pencil or write for the last ten years of his life (1943-1953). Unable to create new plays even through dictation, his creativity was silenced, prematurely and tragically—and the world lost the possibility of many more plays from this talented artist.

## LIST OF SCENES WITH SET REQUIREMENTS

Because the action spans 36 years, and because O'Neill changed homes frequently, the action of the play occurs in a number of different locations. The playwright prefers a fluid approach to staging that could not easily be accomplished by realistic sets. Rather, the set for each scene could be suggested with pools of light and a few basic pieces of furniture (suggested below). At the director's discretion, projections may also be used.

### ACT I

- Scene 1.....Winter 1917. The Golden Swan, Greenwich Village (table & 2 chairs)  
Scene 2.....November 1919. The beach at Provincetown.  
Scene 3.....Summer 1920. Beach at Provincetown, MA (deck chair)  
Scene 4.....Summer 1926. Porch, a summer lodge in Maine (chair, perhaps a table)  
Scene 5.....November 1926. Spithead, the O'Neill home in Bermuda (table & chairs); porch in Maine (spotlight, chair)  
Scene 6.....Late August, 1927. Spithead (spotlight); ship's deck (spot & deck chair); Eugene's room, Hotel Wentworth, NYC porch (bed, desk, chair)  
Scene 7.....October 1927. Spithead (table & chairs)  
Scene 8.....December 1927. Spithead (spotlight); Eugene's NYC room (bed, desk, chair)  
Scene 9.....Late December. Eugene's NYC room (bed, desk, chair); Spithead (spotlight)  
Scene 10.....A few days later. Hotel Wentworth, NYC. Eugene's room (bed, desk, chair); Agnes's room, Hotel Wentworth, NYC (bed)

### ACT II

- Scene 1.....February 10, 1928. A ship's cabin. (porthole)  
Scene 2.....Spring 1928. Hotel room in France (desk or table); Spithead (spot).  
Scene 3.....February 1929. An American sidewalk (spot); a hotel room in France (desk or table)  
Scene 4.....July 1930. Le Plessis, the O'Neill chateau in France (furniture as desired; radio-phonograph)  
Scene 5.....August 1939. Tao House, the O'Neill home in California (table with typewriter, chairs, simulated player piano)  
Scene 6.....September 1940. Tao House (as in Scene 5)  
Scene 7.....Late 1945. The O'Neill bedroom, Barclay Hotel, NYC. (dresser with drawers, phonograph)  
Scene 8.....Late 1946. Backstage at the Martin Beck Theatre, NYC (2 chairs)  
Scene 9.....September 25, 1950. Living room of Tao House (as in Scene 5)  
Scene 10.....1950. O'Neill bedroom, Hotel Shelton, Boston (bed, window, table & chair, fireplace)  
Scene 11.....November 1953. O'Neill bedroom, Hotel Shelton, Boston (as in Scene 9)

**ACT I**

**SCENE 1**

(Winter 1917. The seedy Golden Swan, a favorite watering hole of Greenwich Village writers; also known as “The Hell Hole.”)

(An unseen player piano plays a ragtime song of the era. AGNES sits uneasily at a table, a drink before her, cigarette in hand. Her coat, hat and gloves are nearby. She moves self-consciously to the music as she watches the door.)

(GENE and JAMIE enter, inebriated and cold, each with a bottle. JAMIE wears a loud print jacket with a red flower in its lapel and a bowler hat that is slightly cockeyed, as is he. A disheveled GENE wears a winter jacket over a dark seamen’s sweater that says “American Line” in large white letters. THEY see AGNES.)

(GENE keeps refilling their glasses during the scene. By the end, HE is even more inebriated while SHE is tipsy.)

JAMIE walks to AGNES. GENE watches closely from a dark corner.)

JAMIE

*(to Agnes)*What ho! Look who’s here!

AGNES

Who?

JAMIE

Ah, my beauteous damosel, don’t be coy. ... You’ve changed. Not so wild-looking anymore. A pretty Irish rose.

AGNES

How much have you had to drink?

JAMIE

Not enough. I got lost in the subway, looking for a big blonde with bad breath. ... Where's your old man?

AGNES

Where? ... Dead.

JAMIE

Sorry. You remind me of someone else. (*offers the flower*) Accept this, please, with my apology. And my poem:

“Filling with fragrance the winds that have caught thee.

Who art thou, pretty one? What is thy care?”

AGNES

Who are you?

JAMIE

(*kisses her hand*) Jamie O'Neill, Broadway sport, actor, poet, bar habitué, roué. Why is such a fair maiden all alone?

AGNES

Should I rent an escort?

JAMIE

No need. I'm free.

AGNES

I'm waiting for someone.

JAMIE

And here I am! Whoever you're waiting for, forget him.

AGNES

Her. My friend Christine.

JAMIE

Christine Ellman?

AGNES

You know her?

JAMIE

Sure. She's a regular too. A real peach. You have good taste in friends. May I become one?

(SHE takes the flower. THEY shake hands as GENE heads over.)

AGNES

Agnes Boulton, Jamie.

GENE

Hello, Christine's friend. New to New York?

AGNES

Fresh from New Jersey. It shows that much?

JAMIE

Agnes, my kid brother Gene. Gene, meet Agnes.

GENE

Eugene Gladstone O'Neill.

AGNES

E.G.O. .... Ego!

GENE

My friends call me Gene. Playwright. Poet. Drunk.

AGNES

Another poet? Do your parents speak in rhyme too? ... I'm Agnes Boulton. Writer, farmer, new girl in town.

GENE

That's why I haven't seen you before. I'm in here almost every day and--

AGNES

In *here* every day?

GENE

Best dive in Greenwich Village. Officially the Golden Swan, but we call it the Hell Hole

AGNES

Satan never had it so bad.

JAMIE

"Abandon hope, all ye who enter here."

AGNES

It does look pretty hopeless.

GENE

That's why Jamie's leaving. ... Aren't you, Jamie?

JAMIE

I am. Off to the Great White Way to find a Broadway Baby. (*opens the door to a windy blast, quickly closes it*) Brrr! It's a cold night out there. So cold that the iceman—

GENE

Nix on the iceman joke. There's a lady present.

JAMIE

Gene can tell you when he knows you better. Well, I'm off. ... What ho! Here's Christine.

AGNES

Finally. (*rises to leave*)

GENE

Please stay.

JAMIE

(*calls off*) Sorry, Christine. Agnes is busy. Shine your smiles on me. Let's have a roarin' good time.

(*Exiting, JAMIE emits his famous lion's roar.  
GENE pours AGNES a drink.*)

GENE

I'm afraid you're stuck with me. The quiet O'Neill brother. ... So you're the famous farmer's daughter. What brings you to New York?

AGNES

I got tired of milking cows.

GENE

That's udder nonsense!

AGNES

You're udderly ridiculous! ... I've been writing pulp fiction since high school. Doing well, but barely covering the mortgage. So while my parents run the farm, I hope to make more by writing here.

GENE

I write too, but not pulp. Poems, plays—

AGNES

You're a real writer! I just write for money, but you write for art. ... Would I have seen your plays or poems somewhere?

GENE

Maybe. I've been published here and there. ... Do you know Thompson's *The Hound of Heaven*? It's about a man trying to escape his God. One hundred eighty-three lines and I know every one. May I?

"I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;  
I fled Him, down the arches of the years;  
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways  
Of my own mind;  
And in the mist of tears I hid from Him"—

AGNES

I'd like to hear *your* poetry.

GENE

Maybe when you know me better.

AGNES

But if you've been published—

GENE

But if you don't like my writing, you might leave. And I don't want you to go.

AGNES

I won't leave. I promise. ... Just a few lines?

GENE

How's this?

"You laugh, your alluring eyes gleam.  
Hush, the weary earth is asleep.  
Kiss softly lest we awake from our dream."

AGNES

That's ... beautiful. Did you make it up just now?

GENE

I'm good, but not that good.

AGNES

You wrote it for someone else?

GENE

Only because I hadn't found you yet. Now that I have, I'll write a poem just for you, Aggie. And you can see my plays. *In the Zone* is touring on the Orpheum Circuit. Vaudeville.

AGNES

It must be wonderful.

GENE

Can't possibly be. Too many people like it.

AGNES

But to have your play produced—

GENE

I grew up in the theatre. My old man is the Count of Monte Cristo.

AGNES

The great actor James O'Neill?

(HE gives HER news clips from his pocket.)

AGNES

The *Boston Post*, last August. "Many people will remember James O'Neil, who played *Monte Cristo*. His son—Eugene O'Neil--" You really *are* his son!

GENE

Someday he'll be remembered as my father. When I bury the bombast that passes for theatre in America. Replace it with the kind of theatre where truth can live. I'll write like Ibsen, (*slurring*) like Stringberg.

AGNES

*Stringberg?*

GENE

*Strindberg*. A Swedish playwright. And the Norwegian, Ibsen. You know *Hedda Gabler*?

AGNES

You're teasing. First Stringberg, now a gobbler. A turkey. Isn't that what you call a bad play?

GENE

G-A-B-L-E-R. Not gobble, gobble, gobble. *Hedda Gabler*. A play by Ibsen. I saw it done here by the Abbey Players, from Ireland. I'll bring that kind of theatre here. Real people. Real problems.

AGNES

Nobody wants to see a play about problems.

GENE

They will if it's done right.

AGNES

You really think audiences want that? And you're the one to do it?

GENE

Maybe the only one. (*hands her another clip*) This critic thinks so.

AGNES

(*reads*) "Eugene O'Neill, who knocked about the world in cargo ships and saw life 'in the raw-'" How raw?

GENE

Raw. Keep reading.

AGNES

"... has written some little plays which have made a very deep impression." What are your plays about?

GENE

Life. The sea. Man's relationship to God.

AGNES

In that order?

GENE

Sometimes all at once. (*takes another clip*) And it works. (*reads*) From *The Boston-Post*. "Provincetown Players have put on two plays by Eugene O'Neil, a young dramatist . . . who is going to be heard from..."

AGNES

You really are a playwright and a poet. Possibly—and I hope I'm wrong—a drunk. But I can tell you're more than that.

GENE

(*shows sweater*) An able-bodied seaman. And a wage slave to my art. I just got seventy-five dollars each for three one-act plays, a two-hundred dollar advance, seventy a week in royalties—

AGNES

I'm more interested in who you are.

GENE

How much do you get for your stories?

AGNES

Is money what matters?

GENE

How much?

I've been at it for years.

AGNES

How much?

GENE

Oh, fifty. . . a hundred. For a novelette, maybe one fifty.

AGNES

That's pretty good, especially for a woman.

GENE

For a wom—!

AGNES

You make more than I do.

GENE

And that upsets you.

AGNES

Not at all. Actually, I think we should get married.

GENE

Stop right there.

AGNES

I've always wanted to be a kept man.

GENE

You look pretty UN-kempt to me.

AGNES

That's just on the surface. Inside, I'm a complete mess.

GENE

Maybe not. You could be a dark poet and understander of everything. . . . You've been staring at me all night. What do you see?

AGNES

Your great eyes that half the time are looking at something that I can't see.

GENE

You're an odd man, Gene O'Neill.

AGNES

You've only seen the tip of my—  
GENE

Ego?  
AGNES

Talent.  
GENE

Are you this charming sober?  
AGNES

Stick around and find out.  
GENE

How long would I have to wait?  
AGNES

GENE  
Agnes, if your "old man" is dead, how can he be running the farm?

AGNES  
My *husband* is dead. My father and mother run the farm. And care for my little girl, Barbara. I'm the breadwinner.

GENE  
You're a mother? And a woman writer?

AGNES  
Will you stop that? It's nineteen seventeen, for pete's sake!

GENE  
All right. But you're a farmer too.

AGNES  
Only part-time. But you're a sailor.

GENE  
Seaman. Only part-time. But you're a widow.

AGNES  
Sadly, full-time. And you're a virgin.

GENE  
Only part-time. But you're a mother. With a child.

AGNES  
Yes. Mothers usually have children.

GENE  
I want you all to myself.

AGNES  
What?

GENE  
I need you. I can become America's greatest playwright with your help.

AGNES  
How could I help?

GENE  
You know. Cook. Clean. Keep house—

AGNES  
You have a house?

GENE  
I will. I've never had a real home. It's what I want most. After marrying you and becoming a great artist.

AGNES  
So I'm to cook, clean—

GENE  
... and love me, of course.

AGNES  
I have to go.

GENE  
Give me a chance, Aggie. Please?

AGNES  
I don't know why I'm still here.

GENE  
I'm irresistible. C'mon. Lemme be your kid.

AGNES  
I already have a child.