Eugene Gladstone O'Neill (October 16, 1888 – November 27, 1953) was an American playwright and Nobel laureate in Literature. His poetically titled plays were among the first to introduce into American drama techniques of realism earlier associated with Russian playwright Anton Chekhov, Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen, and Swedish playwright August Strindberg. His plays were among the first to include speeches in American vernacular and involve characters on the fringes of society, where they struggle to maintain their hopes and aspirations, but ultimately slide into disillusionment and despair. O'Neill wrote only one well-known comedy (Ah, Wilderness!), [1][2] Nearly all of his other plays involve some degree of tragedy and personal pessimism.
Early years

O'Neill was born in a Broadway hotel room in Longacre Square (now Times Square), in the Barrett Hotel. The site is now a Starbucks (1500 Broadway, Northeast corner of 43rd & Broadway); a commemorative plaque is posted on the outside wall with the inscription: "Eugene O'Neill, October 16, 1888 ~ November 27, 1953 America's greatest playwright was born on this site then called Barrett Hotel, Presented by Circle in the Square."[3]

He was the son of Irish immigrant actor James O'Neill and Mary Ellen Quinlan. Because of his father's profession, O'Neill was sent to a Catholic boarding school where he found his only solace in books. O'Neill spent his summers in New London, Connecticut. After being suspended from Princeton University, he spent several years at sea, during which he suffered from depression and alcoholism. O'Neill's parents and elder brother Jamie (who drank himself to death at the age of 45) died within three years of one another, not long after he had begun to make his mark in the theater. Despite his depression he had a deep love for the sea, and it became a prominent theme in many of his plays, several of which are set onboard ships like the ones that he worked on.

Career
O'Neill's first play, *Bound East for Cardiff*, premiered at this theatre on a wharf in Provincetown, Massachusetts. After his experience in 1912–13 at a sanatorium where he was recovering from tuberculosis, he decided to devote himself full-time to writing plays (the events immediately prior to going to the sanatorium are dramatized in his masterpiece, *Long Day's Journey into Night*). O'Neill had previously been employed by the *New London Telegraph*, writing poetry as well as reporting.

During the 1910s O'Neill was a regular on the Greenwich Village literary scene, where he also befriended many radicals, most notably Communist Labor Party founder John Reed. O'Neill also had a brief romantic relationship with Reed's wife, writer Louise Bryant. O'Neill was portrayed by Jack Nicholson in the 1981 film *Reds* about the life of John Reed.

His involvement with the Provincetown Players began in mid-1916. O'Neill is said to have arrived for the summer in Provincetown with "a trunk full of plays." Susan Glaspell describes what was probably the first ever reading of *Bound East for Cardiff* which took place in the living room of Glaspell and her husband George Cram Cook’s home on Commercial Street, adjacent to the wharf (pictured) that was used by the Players for their theater. Glaspell writes in *The Road to the Temple*, "So Gene took *Bound East for Cardiff* out of his trunk, and Freddie Burt read it to us, Gene staying out in the dining-room while reading went on. He was not left alone in the dining-room when the reading had finished."[4] The Provincetown Players performed many of O'Neill's early works in their theaters both in Provincetown and on MacDougal Street in Greenwich Village. Some of these early plays began downtown and then moved to Broadway.

O'Neill's first published play, *Beyond the Horizon*, opened on Broadway in 1920 to great acclaim, and was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Drama. His first major hit was *The Emperor Jones*, which ran on Broadway in 1920 and obliquely commented on the U.S. occupation of Haiti that was a topic of debate in that year's presidential election. His best-known plays include *Anna Christie* (Pulitzer Prize 1922), *Desire Under the Elms* (1924), *Strange Interlude* (Pulitzer Prize 1928), *Mourning Becomes Electra* (1931), and his only well-known comedy, *Ah, Wilderness!* a wistful re-imagining of his youth as he wished it had been. In 1936 he received the Nobel Prize for Literature. After a ten-year pause, O'Neill's now-renowned play *The Iceman Cometh* was produced in 1946. The following year's *A Moon for the Misbegotten* failed, and did not gain recognition as being among his best works until decades later.

He was also part of the modern movement to revive the classical heroic mask from ancient Greek theatre and Japanese No theatre in some of his plays, such as *The Great God Brown* and *Lazarus Laughed*.[7]

O'Neill was very interested in the Faust theme, especially in the 1920s.[8]

**Family life**

O'Neill was married to Kathleen Jenkins from October 2, 1909 to 1912, during which time they had one son, Eugene O'Neill, Jr. (1910–1950). In 1917, O'Neill met Agnes Boulton, a successful writer of commercial fiction, and they married on April 12, 1918. The years of their marriage—during which the couple had two children, Shane and Oona—are described vividly in her 1958 memoir *Part of a Long Story*. They divorced in 1929, after O'Neill abandoned Boulton and the children for the actress Carlotta Monterey (born San Francisco, California, December 28, 1888; died Westwood, New Jersey, November 18, 1970). O'Neill and Carlotta married less than a month after he officially divorced his previous wife.[9]

O'Neill in the mid-1930s.

He received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1936.

In 1929, O'Neill and Monterey moved to the Loire Valley in central France, where they lived in the Château du Plessis in Saint-Antoine-du-Rocher, Indre-et-Loire. During the early 1930s they returned to the United States and lived in Sea Island, Georgia, at a house called Casa Genotta. He moved to Danville, California in 1937 and lived there until 1944. His house there, Tao House, is today the Eugene O'Neill National Historic Site.
In their first years together, Monterey organized O'Neill's life, enabling him to devote himself to writing. She later became addicted to potassium bromide, and the marriage deteriorated, resulting in a number of separations. O'Neill needed her, and she needed him. Although they separated several times, they never divorced. Actress Carlotta Monterey in Plymouth Theatre production of O'Neill's The Hairy Ape, 1922. Monterey later became the playwright's third wife. In 1943, O'Neill disowned his daughter Oona for marrying the English actor, director and producer Charlie Chaplin when she was 18 and Chaplin was 54. He never saw Oona again. He also had distant relationships with his sons, Eugene, Jr., a Yale classicist who suffered from alcoholism and committed suicide in 1950 at the age of 40, and Shane O'Neill, a heroin addict who also committed suicide.

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<tr>
<th>Child</th>
<th>Date of birth</th>
<th>Date of death</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<tr>
<td>Eugene O'Neill, Jr</td>
<td>1910</td>
<td>1950</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Shane O'Neill</td>
<td>1918</td>
<td>1977</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oona O'Neill</td>
<td>14/05/1925</td>
<td>27/09/1991</td>
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**Illness and death**

Grave of Eugene O'Neill

O'Neill died in Room 401 of the Sheraton Hotel on Bay State Road in Boston, on November 27, 1953, at the age of 65. As he was dying, he, in a barely audible whisper, spoke his last words: "I knew it. I knew it. Born in a hotel room, and God damn it, died in a hotel room." The building would later become the Shelton Hall dormitory at Boston University. There is an urban legend perpetuated by students that O'Neill's spirit haunts the room and dormitory. A revised analysis of his autopsy report shows that, contrary to the previous diagnosis, he did not have Parkinson's disease, but a late-onset cerebellar cortical atrophy.
Dr. Harry Kozol, the lead prosecuting expert of the Patty Hearst trial, treated O'Neill during these last years of ailment. He also was present for the death and announced the fact to the public.\[12\]

He is interred in the Forest Hills Cemetery in Boston's Jamaica Plain neighborhood.

Although his written instructions had stipulated that it not be made public until 25 years after his death, in 1956 Carlotta arranged for his autobiographical masterpiece Long Day's Journey Into Night to be published, and produced on stage to tremendous critical acclaim and won the Pulitzer Prize in 1957. This last play is widely considered to be his finest. Other posthumously-published works include A Touch of the Poet (1958) and More Stately Mansions (1967).


Museums and collections

O'Neill's home in New London, Monte Cristo Cottage, was made a National Historic Landmark in 1971. His home in Danville, California, near San Francisco, was preserved as the Eugene O'Neill National Historic Site in 1976. Connecticut College maintains the Louis Sheaffer Collection, consisting of material collected by the O'Neill biographer. The principal collection of O'Neill papers is at Yale University. The Eugene O'Neill Theater Center in Waterford, Connecticut fosters the development of new plays under his name.

Work

See also: Category:Plays by Eugene O'Neill

Full-length plays

- *Bread and Butter*, 1914
- *Servitude*, 1914
- *The Personal Equation*, 1915
- *Now I Ask You*, 1916
- *Beyond the Horizon*, 1918 - Pulitzer Prize, 1920
- *The Straw*, 1919
- *Chris Christophersen*, 1919
- *Gold*, 1920
- *Anna Christie*, 1920 - Pulitzer Prize, 1922
- *The Emperor Jones*, 1920
- *Dif'rent*, 1921
- *The First Man*, 1922
- *The Hairy Ape*, 1922
- *The Fountain*, 1923
- *Marco Millions*, 1923–25
- *All God's Chillun Got Wings*, 1924
- *Welded*, 1924
- *Desire Under the Elms*, 1925
- *Lazarus Laughed*, 1925–26
- *The Great God Brown*, 1926
- *Strange Interlude*, 1928 - Pulitzer Prize
- *Dynamo*, 1929
- *Mourning Becomes Electra*, 1931
- *Ah, Wilderness!*, 1933
- *Days Without End*, 1933
- *The Iceman Cometh*, written 1939, published 1940, first performed 1946
- *Hughie*, written 1941, first performed 1959
- *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, written 1941, first performed 1956 - Pulitzer Prize 1957
- *A Moon for the Misbegotten*, written 1941–1943, first performed 1947
- *A Touch of the Poet*, completed in 1942, first performed 1958
- *More Stately Mansions*, second draft found in O'Neill's papers, first performed 1967

One-act plays

The Glencairn Plays, all of which feature characters on the fictional ship Glencairn -- filmed together as The Long Voyage Home:

- *Bound East for Cardiff*, 1914
- *In The Zone*, 1917
- *The Long Voyage Home*, 1917
- *Moon of the Caribbees*, 1918

Other one-act plays include:

- *A Wife for a Life*, 1913
- *The Web*, 1913
- *Thirst*, 1913
- *Recklessness*, 1913
- *Warnings*, 1913
- *Fog*, 1914
- *Abortion*, 1914
- *The Movie Man: A Comedy*, 1914\[13\]
- *The Sniper*, 1915
- *Before Breakfast*, 1916
- *Ile*, 1917
- *The Rope*, 1918
- *Shell Shock*, 1918
- *The Dreamy Kid*, 1918
- *Where the Cross Is Made*, 1918
- *Exorcism* 1919 [14]

Other works

...
The Last Will and Testament of An Extremely Distinguished Dog, 1940. Written to comfort Carlotta as their “child” Blemie was approaching his death in December 1940.[5]

See also

- The Eugene O'Neill Award

References

2. ^ Eugene O'Neill Foundation newsletter: "*Now I Ask You*, along with *The Movie Man*, ... is the only surviving comedy from O'Neill's early years.”
13. ^ Title as in original typescript and title page of Modern Library edition

Further reading


External links

- Eugene O'Neill official website
- Casa Genotta official website
- Eugene O'Neill at Find a Grave
- Eugene O'Neill at the Internet Broadway Database
- Eugene O'Neill at the Internet Off-Broadway Database
- Eugene O'Neill at the Internet Movie Database
- Eugene O'Neill at the Notable Names Database
- Eugene O'Neill Autobiography at the Nobel Foundation
Eugene O'Neill set out to create meaningful drama in America at a time when the barriers against it were significant. Although outstanding dramatists were getting productions throughout Europe, American dramatists were locked into standard commercial practices by the monopolistic forces controlling the theater. As a result, by the time of O'Neill's first production (1916), the American theater was a quarter century behind European theater. Twenty years later, when O'Neill received Eugene Gladstone O'Neill (October 16, 1888 - November 27, 1953) was a Nobel Prize-winning American playwright. O'Neill was born in a Broadway (New York City) hotel room in Longacre Square (now Times Square), the son of Irish immigrant actor James O'Neill and Mary Ellen (Quinlan). Eugene O'Neill (1888-1953). Photo by Alice Boughton (1867-1943). Courtesy Wikimedia Commons. Eugene O'Neill. Born. Eugene Gladstone O'Neill October 16, 1888 (1888-Template:MONTHNUMBER-16) New York City, U.S. Died. Eugene O'Neill's life was intimately connected to New London, Connecticut. His father was an Irish-born stage actor named James O'Neill, who had grown up in impoverished circumstances. O'Neill briefly found employment during this period as a writer for the New London Telegraph, dabbling in playwriting from time to time. It wasn't, however, until his experience at Gaylord Farms Sanatorium (where he was recovering from tuberculosis) that he experienced an epiphany and devoted his life to writing plays.