

O'Neill, Eugene (1888-1953)

Encyclopedia Article

O'Neill, Eugene (1888-1953) by Eugene O'Neill

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O'Neill, Eugene (1888-1953)

Four times the winner of a Pulitzer Prize and the Nobel laureate for literature in 1936, New York-born Eugene O'Neill is a towering, ground-breaking figure in American dramatic literature. The son of actor James O'Neill and a drug-addicted mother, he recorded his tormented upbringing in his dysfunctional family with lacerating honesty in his autobiographical play, *Long Day's Journey into Night*

Eugene O'Neill

(1940). The work allows for a *tour de force* of acting and is oft revived on both sides of the Atlantic and beyond. He ordered it withheld from production for 50 years but, in 1956, his widow released the play to Jose Quintero and it received its first staging in New York. O'Neill traveled the globe aboard tramp steamers and his experiences formed the basis for several of his plays. Many of them are extremely long—running typically four or five hours on stage—and tend to feature marathon monologues and profound themes touching on the human condition. A number have been filmed, but the only popular success among these was *Anna Christie* (1930), the film in which Greta Garbo first spoke on screen.

Further Reading:

Gelb, Arthur and Barbara. *O'Neill*. New York, Harper, 1962.

Sheaffer, Louis. *O'Neill, Son and Artist*. London, Elek Books, 1974.

Griffiths, Trevor R., and Carol Woddis. *Bloomsbury Theatre Guide*. London, Bloomsbury Publishing, 1988.