

# GENE & AGGIE

A short play by Jo Morello

(Excerpted from *E.G.O.: THE PASSIONS OF EUGENE GLADSTONE O'NEILL*  
by Jo Morello)

## CAST OF CHARACTERS

Eugene O'Neill.....29. Tall, thin with very dark eyes, hair and mustache. A dissipated alcoholic with wit, charm and a sardonic sense of humor.

Jamie O'Neill.....39. Eugene's idolized older brother. Medium height, somewhat stocky, dark hair. A Broadway dandy, proud of his resonant voice and prowess with women. Debauched, wasted alcoholic with a cynical, bitter attitude.

Agnes Boulton.... 24. Attractive, dark, slender. Flirtatious or serious, as necessary.

## SETTING

The Golden Swan, a seedy bar known as “The Hell Hole” in Greenwich Village in 1917. Possibly a glass case along the back with a moth-eaten, stuffed swan, frozen in time among gilded wooden lily pads.

## SYNOPSIS

Eugene O'Neill, 29, and his wayward brother Jamie, 39, stumble into a Greenwich Village bar where they meet Agnes Boulton, 24. Agnes is a fairly successful freelance writer who has left her young daughter in New Jersey with her parents while she comes to New York, hoping to improve her financial situation. Eugene initially mistakes her for a previous lover who left him, but he is soon profoundly attracted to Agnes. He has just begun to achieve success as a playwright and tells Agnes his goal: to be America's greatest playwright. Within minutes of their meeting, he asks Agnes to marry him and help him reach his destiny. She is skeptical about his prospects, his commitment, and even her own desires. Undaunted and seeking to overcome her objections, he promises Agnes he'll step aside if she should ever meet someone she loves more—and extracts the same promise from her.

© by Jo Morello

[www.jomorello.com](http://www.jomorello.com)

[jo@jomorello.com](mailto:jo@jomorello.com) ▪ [jomorello@tampabay.rr.com](mailto:jomorello@tampabay.rr.com)

6620 Grand Point Avenue, University Park, FL 34201-2125  
Phone: 941-351-9688 ▪ Cell: 941-587-8290 ▪ Fax: 941-306-5042

**GENE & AGGIE**

(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 “12<sup>th</sup> Street Rag” or another ragtime song of the era. AGNES, 24, sits uneasily at a table, a drink before her, cigarette in hand. She moves self-consciously to the music as she glances toward the door.)

(GENE, 29, and JAMIE, 39, enter, inebriated and cold, each with a bottle. JAMIE wears a loud print jacket with a red carnation in its lapel and a bowler hat that is slightly cockeyed, as is he. A disheveled GENE wears a winter jacket over a dark blue seamen’s sweater that says “American Line” in large white letters.)

(THEY look around. GENE freezes.)

JAMIE

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

Wher--? ... Dead.

JAMIE

Sorry. You remind me of someone else. A dear friend of Gene’s. (*offers the carnation*) Accept this, please, with my apology.

AGNES  
Who are you?

JAMIE  
(*kisses her hand*) Jamie O'Neill, Broadway sport, actor, 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  
Do I know him?

AGNES  
Her. My friend Christine Ellman.

JAMIE  
You have good taste in friends. May I become one?

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

AGNES  
Agnes Boulton, Jamie. Who's Gene?

GENE  
I am. 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

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

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.

AGNES

Well, you're not exactly Christine.

GENE

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

Do you like poetry?

AGNES

Yours? Would I have seen it somewhere?

GENE

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

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

Wouldn't do you justice. But I'll write a poem just for you. 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. (*slurring*) I'll write like Ibsen, 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.

AGNES

So you're going to Europe.

GENE

Better. 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.