

"Part Of A Long Story" Recalls Cape End O'Neill

Helen Bishop has enriched her review of Agnes Boulton and her life with Eugene O'Neill with a number of anecdotes culled from her own recollections and from those of Mary Heaton Vorse, Harry Kemp and others who played prominent roles in O'Neill's early days, which are recalled in the current book. These, we feel, add a most intimate touch to the story of Eugene O'Neill. —Ed.

By Helen Bishop

"Part of a Long Story," by Agnes Boulton, just published by Doubleday & Company, has created a great stir in Provincetown. Everywhere people are reading and talking about it, and no wonder. For the book captures the living, breathing atmosphere of the "old days" here, when the genius of the Provincetown Players first burst upon the world, and revolutionized the American theatre. The great and the near-great are alive in these pages, and most of all, of course, Eugene O'Neill, to whom Miss Boulton was married.

The book begins with Miss Boulton's meeting O'Neill in Greenwich Village. A writer herself, she became one of the group which centered about O'Neill, fell in love with him, and came to Provincetown with him several months later, where they were married. The book is described in the sub-title as "Eugene O'Neill as a young man in love," but it is much more the story of a young woman in love. Agnes Boulton's love for her husband shines from the pages, but the reader wonders if it were possible for O'Neill to have really loved any one. Certainly, it appears that he loved her as much as he was capable of loving, but the strange, tortured genius, of whom she has painted an extraordinary word portrait, was a "taker" and not a "giver".

Life among the writers and artists of the time in Greenwich Village; life in Provincetown, where the same group came to spend Summers, and frequently Winters, is in the book. And in all the comedies and tragedies, O'Neill is the star, against the background of the beginning of his writing which was to lead him to his place as America's foremost dramatist. We see him when he first has the idea and begins work on "Anna Christie"; we hear Agnes Boulton's cry of delight when she finishes reading the script of "The Moon of the Caribees"; and we hear O'Neill's jubilant an-

nouncement, "I've just written 'The curtain falls' as he finishes 'The Straw'. Some of the pages of "Part of a Long Story" reflect the happiness of the days when the O'Neills lived in the John Francis building at the East End, and at Peaked Hill, in the old life saving station which Mabel Dodge had previously owned and turned into a jewel of a house.

The Bad Days

Some of the pages, too, reflect the bad days when O'Neill was on one of his drinking bouts; and Miss Boulton is to be admired for the honesty and compassion with which she speaks of them. What compelled him to these bouts—what compels any one? No one yet has found the answer. Some one once said, "The thing that makes the writer is the thing that makes the alcoholic." The writer's life is a lonely one, shut up in a room with only his ideas and a pen or a typewriter. Certainly O'Neill was always a lonely man, by nature and by choice; and Miss Boulton, although obviously she had a hard time for part of the story, never complains. She emerges from this book as a remarkable woman, perceptive, generous minded, incapable of bitterness.

She writes beautifully, too—her descriptions of Provincetown—the harbor, the fog, the old elm trees sighing in the wind, radiant mornings at Peaked Hill—are very fine. And her vignettes of some of the people who were in their group—Mabel Dodge, Terry Carlin, Harry Kemp, Mary Heaton Vorse, Susan Glaspell and Jig Cook and many others—are delightful. The book ends with the birth of the O'Neill's son, Shane, and his parents' delight in him. Here, again is a telling word picture of Dr. Daniel H. Hiebert, who brought the baby into the world; "the calm, smiling face of young Dr. Daniel Hiebert, looking serene, as he moved about gently". And at the very end, here is Gene, himself. "He had pulled a chair beside the bed, and sitting there,

held my hand tightly in his, his face soft and tender, his eyes on the fuzzy black head of the baby beside me. 'It'll be us still, from now on' he said. 'Us—alone—but the three of us—' and he laughed, as a thought came to him. 'A sort of Holy Trinity, eh, Shane?' he said; and when he bent over to kiss me good night, he kissed the little black head, too, and I saw a real tenderness in his eyes."

The book has released a torrent of "remembrance of things past," and this week we talked to Mary Heaton Vorse and Harry Kemp who were among the closest friends of the O'Neill's. Mrs. Vorse had this revealing comment on O'Neill's drinking and that of some others at the time. "Almost everybody drank too much during Prohibition," she said, "but there was another side to it, so far as the old crowd is concerned. Everybody worked hard—even the drinkers were dedicated workers,

and Agnes Boulton's description of the strict working routine which Gene kept is completely accurate. It was kept by all of us, come rain or come shine." Of Terry Carlin, with whom O'Neill lived before his marriage to Agnes Boulton, Mrs. Vorse said; "He was a beautiful old man, a great conversationalist. He had been a tanner, and had been deprived of a patent by his employer who made a fortune out of it. From that day on, Terry determined never to work again for wages, and he never did."

Mabel Dodge, who first bought the Peaked Hill station, came from a wealthy Buffalo family. She was a writer, and married the late Maurice Sterne, the famous painter, some of whose work is now being exhibited at the Art Association and at the Shore Galleries. Mrs. Vorse tells a delightful story about them when they lived at Peaked Hill. "One day, Maurice and Mabel's son, John Evans, were caught in the undertow while they were swimming, and Mabel, distracted, rushed down to the beach in the flowing garments she always wore. The Coast Guardsmen went to the rescue, and among them was one man, who had been sleeping, who rushed out in his long underwear. When he saw Mabel, he turned around and ran back into the station. 'Damned if I'm going to let a female see me in my underwear,' he said."



AGNES and Eugene O'Neill sat for picture by Edward Steichen in New York in 1926.

"I remember we had just had some argument when this picture was taken and we were both rather tense. I had on

a very expensive dress which I didn't quite like that day, one of those blue things. Gene seemed to be worried. He had got involved in producing plays and it was taking hold of him and doing something to him I didn't like."