

Journey of a Lifetime

RIC BURNS ON PLAYWRIGHT EUGENE O'NEILL

Champagne toasts are in order for the magisterial “Eugene O’Neill: A Documentary Film,” directed by **Ric Burns** and co-written with O’Neill biographers **Arthur** and **Barbara Gelb**. As part of the *American Experience* series, it will be shown on PBS in March.

O’Neill, America’s first great playwright, won four Pulitzers and a Nobel Prize. Writing at a ferocious pace, he revolutionized Broadway starting in 1920, ultimately completing 49 plays—among them *Anna Christie*, *The Iceman Cometh*, and *Ah, Wilderness!*

An obsessed, tormented man, he caroused in bars and went off to sea. After coming close to death, he began to write and never stopped writing or insisting that he wouldn’t sell out. He ultimately eliminated everyone he regarded as irrelevant to his work—he left his first two wives and rejected his children.

This is more than a biography—the documentary segues back and forth in time, with passages from his work brought memorably to life by **Al Pacino**, **Vanessa Redgrave**, and **Christopher Plummer**. And there are amazing comments from **Tony Kushner**, **John Guare**, and **Sidney Lumet**, especially about O’Neill’s last years, when, haunted and sick, he shut himself off and wrote plays that are considered masterpieces—among them *Long Day’s Journey into Night*.
—PATRICIA BOSWORTH

PROLIFIC
PLAYWRIGHT

Eugene, Shane,
and Agnes O’Neill
on Cape Cod,
August 20, 1922.

