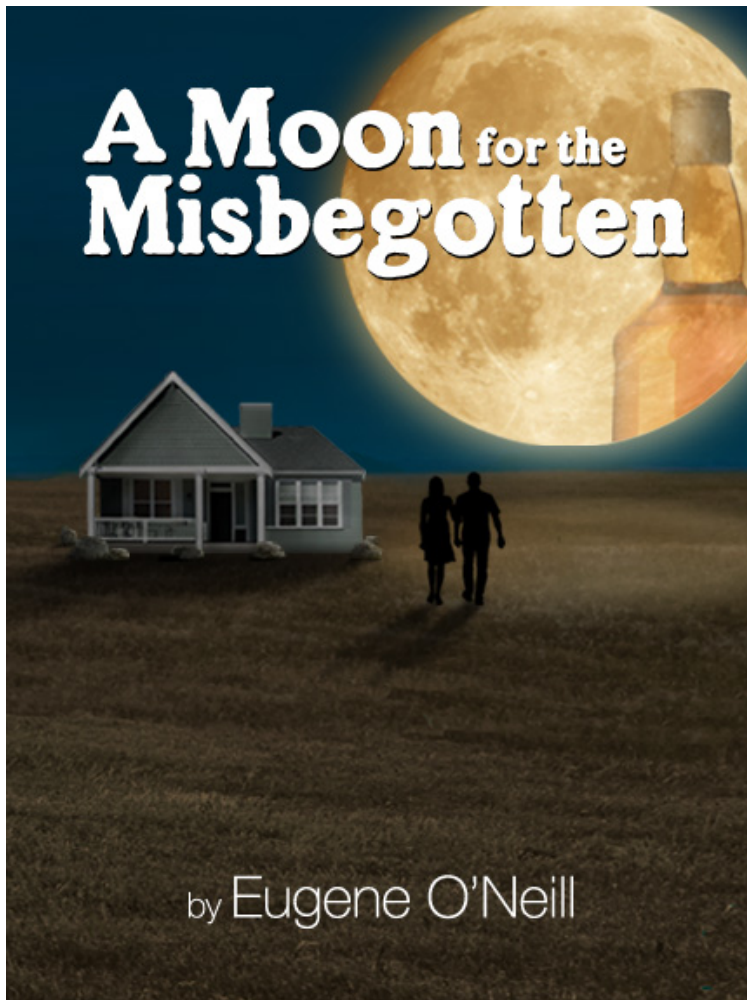


# Jewel Theatre Audience Guide

## Addendum: Josie Hogan Character Description



directed by Joy Carlin

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## JOSIE HOGAN

Josie Hogan, played by Diana Torres Koss, is the Irish-American daughter of Phil Hogan and sister of Mike Hogan. Her other two brothers are Thomas and John, who are offstage characters in the play. Josie is based on Christine Ell, a woman whom Eugene and his brother Jamie knew from the early 1900s, when they were denizens of Greenwich village's artsy scene.

Among the bars they all frequented was the Golden Swan, described below in an excerpt from *Ephemeral New York*. They were often joined there by Catholic activist Dorothy Day, mentioned later in this entry as another model for Josie. Several people he met at the Golden Swan, aka the "Hell Hole", were models for characters in *The Iceman Cometh*. Eugene also met his second wife, Agnes Boulton, there.

... a rough-and-tumble saloon ... Nicknamed the Hell Hole and the Bucket o' Blood, this seedy gathering place stood at this corner [Sixth Avenue and West Fourth Street ] in the early 1900s—when the West Village was a shabby mixed-race neighborhood of boarding houses and bars, not boutiques. Dingy and divey, the Golden Swan was run by an ex-prize fighter and attracted locals as well as artists drawn to the seedy side of life.



Painters John Sloan and Charles Demuth (that's his lively depiction of the bar's back room, above) captured it on canvas. Gangsters like the Hudson Dusters made it their hangout. [Eugene O'Neill is pictured in the left foreground in right profile.



Playwright and drunk Eugene O'Neill, left, who often had to be fished out of the Golden Swan for rehearsals at the nearby Provincetown Playhouse, set *The Iceman Cometh* there.

Though offensive, characterizing Eugene a drunk in the article was, sadly, accurate at the time. Gene was able to stop drinking and stay sober from 1933 until his death. From 1913 to 1933, when he was drinking, he wrote over 40 plays, some of which are unremarkable, but many, such as *Anna Christie*, *The Emperor Jones*, and *Mourning becomes Electra*, are considered classics of the American canon.

Back to Josie: in *Final Acts: The Creation of Three Late O'Neill Plays* (1985), Judith E. Barlow describes Christine Ell as "the model for Josie Hogan", who "approximated the physical dimensions of Josie, although she was not quite as large [Note: this is disputed by Laura Shea in her book *A Moon for the Misbegotten on the American Stage: A History of the Major Productions* (2008), who claims Ell was six feet tall. See p. 4 of this document]. She was a warm, impulsive, motherly woman with whom Jamie had a brief affair a few years before his died". Though he was called Jamie by his brother and their friends and family, Christine called him Jim.

Travis Bogard calls Christine Ell "a free, lusty, great-bodied woman". Like Abbie Putnam in *Desire Under the Elms*, Cybel in *The Great God Brown* and Sara Melody in *A Touch of the Poet*, Josie has the physical attributes of the ideal O'Neill woman: large, firm breasts, a slender waist and voluptuous hips and thighs. She was a prostitute in Denver when Emma Goldman's lecture tour stopped there. Inspired by Goldman's message of the obligation society has towards women who are forced by circumstance to choose between a life of poverty and one of degradation, Christine followed her back to New York. (Beth Gates Warren, *Artful Lives: Edward Weston, Margrethe Mather, and the Bohemians of Los Angeles*, 2011). She also wholeheartedly embraced Goldman's philosophies of anarchy, socialism and free love. In her new home, according to Christine Stansell in her book *American Moderns: Bohemian New York and the Creation of a New Century*, Ell "became a cook for Greenwich Village restaurants, a bit player in the Provincetown Theater, and a principal in free-love intrigues". She was a close friend of Agnes Boulton,



Eugene's second wife, having grown up in New Jersey near her family. Agnes first met Gene while she was looking for Christine, who was then the cook at Polly Halladay's restaurant above the theater's original Greenwich Village location at 139 Macdougall Street. According to Agnes, Christine "had a hard life growing up ... but she survived to become a beloved fixture in Village society". The character of Anna Christie was likely based on her when she was a prostitute in Denver, and she would become the model for O'Neill's Earth Mother character in his play *The Great God Brown*. Christine and Agnes both appeared in the paintings of the artists who were part of the group, including Charles Demuth, George Bellows, William and Marguerite Zorach, Edward Fisk, Marsden Hartley and Charles Ellis.

Eugene joined the Provincetown Players for their second season in the summer of 1916 on Lewis Wharf in Provincetown, Massachusetts. The town had become a popular summer draw for artists, writers and other bohemian residents of Greenwich Village seeking a respite from the stifling heat of the crowded city. The Players moved their operation to the Village in the fall of that year. The following year, they moved down the block to 133 Macdougall Street and opened their 1918-19 season with a new name, The Provincetown Playhouse. Christine opened a club exclusively for the theatre troupe, called Christine's, that soon became "a popular meeting place for local artists and artisans," per Robert Károly Sarlós' *Jig Cook and the Provincetown Players: Theatre in Ferment* (1982).



Christine Ell, center, holding court at her establishment, in a 1919 watercolor, "Interior with Group of People around Red-Headed Woman," by Charles Demuth

Sarlós describes the club-restaurant:

Christine's was a place where the Players could retreat in solitude, or mingle

with nonmembers; there images and philosophies were tested and argued. Aside from providing a congenial atmosphere and renown home-cooked meals, the “earth mother” Christine herself contributed greatly to the attraction of the club. She dispensed unsolicited solace and chastisement, and became the heroine of countless stories, some convivial, others hair-raising. Except for opening-night parties, when Jig [George Cram Cook, founding member of the original Provincetown Players] presided over the punchbowl, Christine remained the dominant personality here. Agnes Boulton remembered that, “the glory of her hair, skin, body and spirit and the no less warming and wise sound of her laughter was the magnet that drew to her tables less vital and more frustrated souls.

Laura Shea, in *A Moon for the Misbegotten on the American Stage: A History of the Major Productions* (2008), expands on the information above, contradicting some of it, and offers an additional model for Josie:

Josie Hogan comes from a variety of sources as well as from O'Neill's imagination. Her maternal instincts are based in part on O'Neill's governess and surrogate mother, Sarah Sandy. Aspects of Josie's physical and emotional life come from Christine Ell, whom O'Neil met in Greenwich Village. Having previous run the Oaks, a restaurant in Provincetown, Ell, a talented cook, had taken over the restaurant of Louis Halladay, a former roommate of O'Neill's, when Halliday was sent to jail for failing to secure a liquor license. Ell was the illegitimate daughter of a Danish serving girl and a German army officer. When she and her family came to America, she was placed in service by her mother and step-father, then forced into factory work when she was still a child. Seduced by her step-father, a laborer named Lockhaven, Ell left home when she was 14. Her early life would've destroyed a lesser mortal, but by 1915, she was a fixture of the Greenwich Village scene frequented by O'Neill.

Described by her friend Agnes Boulton as “tall and voluptuous, with the ugliest face ever seen on a woman ... and the most gorgeous, the most wonderful pile of red-gold hair, too heavy and too alive to stay properly on her head“. Ell was a sometime artists model. At nearly six feet tall, she fell deeply the differences in her physical stature from the fashionable women of her day, convinced that she was unattractive. A talented mimic—the Germanic Theodore Dreiser was a specialty—she played the clown to distract from her physical features. Despite having a husband, Louis B. Ell, whom she loved, Ell engaged in a lively social life, including extramarital affairs with the two O'Neill brothers. In both her size and her generosity of spirit, she served as a model for Josie Hogan.

Dorothy Day also shared an intense friendship with O'Neil during this time, though their relationship was not a sexual one. Before she founded the Catholic Workers Movement, she spent evenings drinking with O'Neill at a

bar called the Golden Swan, nicknamed the “Hell Hole” and located at the corner of Sixth Avenue and Fourth Street. She enjoyed listening to O’Neill recite poetry, most notably Francis Thompson’s “The Hound of Heaven,” which he knew by heart. Day described to her biographer, William Miller, putting a drunken O’Neill in her bed and holding him until he could sleep, while deflecting his sodden offers to end her virginity. According to O’Neill biographer Stephen Black, ‘Miller believed that Dorothy told him the story to let him know that she considered herself the model for Josie Hogan in *A Moon for the Misbegotten*, the woman who holds Jim Tyrone in her arms all night to chase away his devils’.

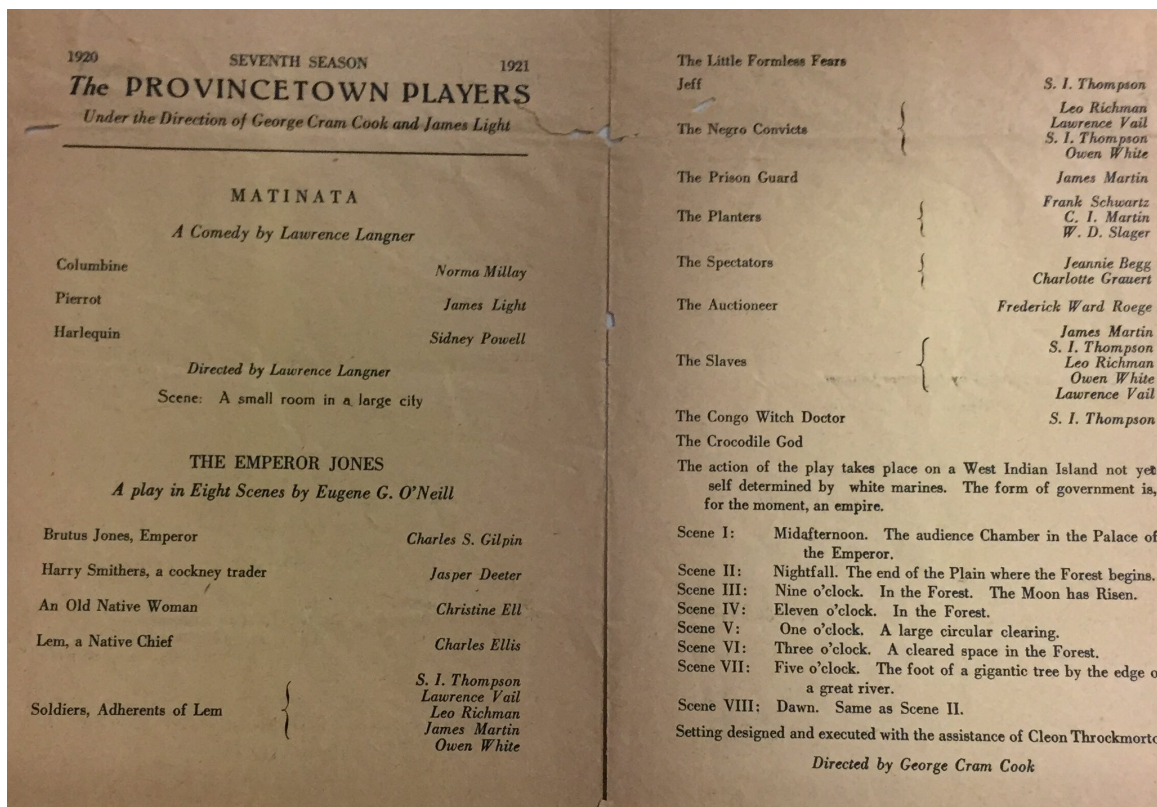
Christine, her husband Louis, who was the company’s carpenter, and Gene were among the core of the Players for their second season in NY (1917-18). Below is a photograph of a Charles Ellis painting depicting some of that group.



A photograph of a painting by Charles Ellis showing, from bottom left to right: James Light, Charles (“Hutch”) Collins, Christine Ell, “Jig” Cook, and O’Neill

Among other roles for the Provincetown Players, Christine was “An Old Native Woman” in O’Neill’s *Emperor Jones*, as seen in the page spread below. The play ran for 204 performances at the Provincetown Playhouse from November 1, 1920 through April 1921.





Original program for *Emperor Jones*. Christine Ell is listed in the lower half of the left page, in the cast for *Emperor Jones*, the third name down in the right column

Louis Scheaffer, in *O'Neill: Son and Playwright* (1968), expands on Shea's description (p. 4 of this document) of Christine's "accurate and devastating" impressions of personalities in the Village, adding, "A few years later Charlie Chaplin was to be among the admirers of her impromptu performing". Chaplin would cast her as "Louise, a Maid" in his 1947 film *Monsieur Verdoux*, seen below:



The film was made 30 years after Christine first met the O'Neill brothers, and her famous red hair has gone white.

Not only does Josie represent O'Neill's Earth Mother ideal, she is regarded by some scholars of O'Neill as a fictional representative of the playwright. Virginia Floyd, in *The Plays of Eugene O'Neill: A New Assessment* (1987), calls her "the author's persona". Travis Bogard, in *Contour in Time: The Plays of Eugene O'Neill*, calls *A Moon for the Misbegotten* "an act of love, supplying through its romantic fiction a blessing for a damned soul". O'Neill gives this blessing to Jamie through the character of Josie. John Henry Raleigh echoes Bogard, writing in *The Plays of Eugene O'Neill* (1985) that Josie's "benediction" for Jim in the final scenes of the play is O'Neill's also. Judith Barlow agrees, citing a passage from *Moon* that Eugene deleted from the final script where he talks about his brother's attitude towards him, saying " ... he knows what I'm up against, and that there's only one answer. He knows it's hopeless. He can't help wishing I were dead, too—for my sake". Barlow ascribes the same reaction to Josie, who "compassionately hopes that her suffering lover will soon find the death he seeks". She writes "In a sense, Josie Hogan, not Edmund Tyrone, is the last self-portrait O'Neill put on stage ... As with *Journey*, the process of composing *Moon* seems to have led O'Neill to a new sympathy for a character based on a member of his family. Through Josie Hogan, the playwright gave Jim Tyrone the unqualified pardon he could never offer Jamie O'Neill".



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