

# Long day's journey into night character analysis essay



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

## Long Day's Journey into the Past:

### The character analysis of Mary

In the play *Long Days Journey into Night*, by Eugene O'Neill, the writer depicts a typical day of the Tyrone family, whose once-close family has deteriorated over the years for a number of reasons: Mary's drug addiction, Tyrone's alcoholism, Tyrone's stinginess, and the sons' pessimistic attitude toward future. In the play, all of the four characters are miserable about life, and they all remember the past and try to escape from reality by drinking alcohol or taking drugs. Among these four characters, Mary is a typical and special one; she is the most tragic character in the play. She used to be an innocent girl with beautiful dreams (to become a nun and a pianist) and a strong religious faith centered on the Virgin Mary. However, her marriage destroyed her dreams and weakened her faith. Her husband Tyrone fails to realize the promises he made to Mary, which makes her lose her faith in the marriage. The morphine addiction drags her down and makes her unconscious about whether she lives in the past or present. The title of the play is *A Long Days Journey into Night*, but Mary, as she keeps taking morphine, travels mentally back to the past when she has fewer problems and happier life. Thus, for Mary, it is actually a long days journey into the past.

In Act One, there are three points that are important to the developing of the character of Mary. One is that she realizes her beauty is fading away, and she is in the stages of decline; another is that she refuses to admit that there is a health problem with her and her son Edmund. Finally, there is the issue

of Marys specific idea of what a home is. At the beginning of the play, Tyrone and Jamie stare at Mary, and make her self-conscious (p27); they talk about her hair and remember the beautiful hair that Mary had when she was young. Mary realizes that she is getting old and she is very anxious about this, which is reflected when she asks people what is wrong with her hair several times. One of Marys central flaws is her refusal to admit that there is a problem with herself or Edmund. She lies to her family many times about being cured, and she blames them for suspecting her. Also, she does not accept the fact that Edmund has a serious health problem. We can see that Mary likes to escape from reality and from facts; she likes to live in a fantasy world and the morphine helps her do that. In the later part of Act One, Mary expresses her feelings about the home she lives in and she is very upset about the current situation of the family. She does not feel like her house is any kind of a home (p45); she believes that she has never actually had a home with Tyrone, because they have lived their lives with countless lies and empty promises. This is one of the expressions of Marys romantic vision of life that has been destroyed by the reality of the present situation. Unfortunately for her, Mary was never able to realize these concerns until late in life; she always goes along with her husband and her children with little comment. Thus, we see that communication in the family is flawed. This is also evident in Marys continued refusal to admit the truth, and in the mens refusal to tell her the truth. Therefore, the members of the family can easily start an argument or a fight, and fails to communicate what they feel and want until it is too late.

In Act Two, Mary continues to blame others including herself, and to complain about fate. She keeps mentioning the past to blame Tyrone for her addiction because he would only pay for a cheap doctor who uses drugs to cure her childbirth pain. When Tyrone interrupts and tells her to forget the past, Mary replies: Why? How can I? The past is the present, isn't it? It's the future too. We all try to lie out of that but life won't let us. (P90) She also blames herself that she broke her vow never to have another baby after Eugene, and she claimed that from the first day she could tell that Edmund was weak and fragile, as if God intended to punish her for what had happened to Eugene. This is probably why she does not admit Edmund's health problems. In Scene One of the Act Two, Mary tends to blame the problems of the family on fate. She first criticizes Jamie for his tendency to look for weaknesses in others, but then she changes directions and attributes the flaw to the way Jamie was raised, which is not his fault. (P63) Mary's fatalistic point of view is another flaw in her character, because she always uses this as an excuse and finds a way out. Likewise, she blames most of her problems on her failed dreams and disappointment, which limits her choice of actions. This fatalistic view is a barrier to solving her own problems and the conflicts of the family.

As time passes, in the Act Three, Mary continues to take morphine, which makes her even more miserable and unconscious. The more Mary uses morphine, the more she tends to travel back into past memories. At the beginning of Act Three, Mary has a conversation with Cathleen and she talks about her youth, her dreams and the love story between her and Tyrone. (P106/107) These memories are the only things that can make Mary happy

now. At this point, we can see why Mary uses morphine so much it allows her to leave the present and live in the world of the past, when she was young and beautiful. Aside from Mary's drug problem, however, it is important to talk about the men's alcoholism. The three men in the play all drink alcohol excessively, especially the sons. They hate and blame Mary's morphine addiction, but they themselves are no better in their abuse of alcohol. Jamie is always drunk at night, and so is Edmund who likes sea, which is a symbol of alcohol for him. They use wine to escape the reality just as Mary does with drugs, even though they think their choice is more acceptable. At the end of Act Three, Mary and Edmund have an argument based on Edmund's illness, which Mary still refuses to admit is serious. (P120/121) It is important to realize that Mary sees Edmund as a replacement of Eugene who died because of her carelessness. The fact that Edmund is dying, however, makes Mary afraid and anxious, because she thinks that Edmund may be God's way of punishing her. Therefore, their relationship is complex and filled with conflicts

In the last Act, all the characters' conflicts reach the climax, as does Mary's drug abuse. She can no longer even see the real world as she falls into a hallucinogenic state in which she thinks she is back in her convent. She plays her piano, acts like a nun, and holds her wedding gown. She ignores everyone else in the room and talks about the conversation she had with Mother Elizabeth who tells her that she should experience life out of the convent before choosing to become a nun. Mary says that she followed the advice, went home, met and fell in love with James Tyrone, and was so happy for a time. The play ends here. (P178/179)

Mary, as the most tragic character in the play, experiences an awful life with Tyrone and the children. The unpleasant facets of her personality and the flawed communication within the family make her life a mess. She even does not feel that she has a real home. She uses drugs to escape the reality of the present and to bring herself back to a time when her life was open and full of hope. What is worse, at the end of the play, other characters seem to overcome their conflicts between each other. Tyrone realizes his stinginess and wants to change. Jamie and Edmund also confess to each other. However, Mary is the only one who shows no sign of changing. Her drug problem is getting worse, and it is clear that she has already lost her faith in life. Her closing speech ends the play with the expectation that her situation will not get better, and she still has to take a long journey from the past back to the present