



Happy Days Play

Writers: [Samuel Beckett](#)


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▶ CONTEXT

Happy Days was Beckett’s next major theatrical success after *Waiting for Godot*. Like many of Beckett’s works produced after the second world war, *Happy Days* is a dark comedy concerned with the ways in which people survive - or don’t - in a callous, uncaring and uncomprehending world. Beckett’s four post-war plays ([Waiting for Godot](#), [Endgame](#), *Happy Days* and *Krapp’s Last Tape*) are the most enduring of his dramatic works, and are considered foundational texts of the Theatre of the Absurd. However, it bears noting that Beckett resisted that label, and rejected the idea of existential “absurdism” despite the undeniable similarities between that philosophy and his own.

Thematically, *Happy Days* is deeply concerned with time and memory: as the earth around Winnie slowly rises and tightens, her sense of self and her memories of herself are likewise buried. There is also an undercurrent of sexuality throughout Winnie’s monologues as she loses touch with her physical body, which may point to the desexualization that accompanies the loss of youth, or to the more existential notion that sex is responsible for the continuation of life, and therefore the continuation of suffering. However, Beckett told interviewers that there was also a distinctly feminist theme in *Happy Days*, saying that at its core the play was inspired by the suffering and expectations endured by modern women in Western society.

In Beckett’s characteristic style, the stage directions in *Happy Days* are many and specific, with the author describing even the minutiae of Winnie’s head movements and facial expressions from line to line. Although this may appear overbearing to some readers, the gestures that Beckett describes are symbolically important, and offer insight into not only what Winnie and Willie are experiencing personally, but the overarching themes of the piece. Beckett’s description of the set is no less specific, evoking the idea of a postcard: dimensionally flattened and surrealistically perfect.

By design, *Happy Days* resists easy interpretation, with Beckett remarking that to eliminate the doubt at the end of the play would ruin its power. However, it is up to each individual performer and director to make their own internal decisions about the symbolism of the play, and the motivations of the characters under their bizarre circumstances.

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