

Winnie's dramatic story in happy days by samuel beckett

Literature



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Samuel Beckett's play, "Happy Days," portrays a woman, Winnie, buried in the ground, first up to her waist, then up to her neck, determined to live out her meaningful life. Although her situation is hopeless because she has no idea how she got there, Winnie trusts that her life is meaningful and truly believes that there is nothing she can do to change it. Consequently, Winnie focuses on trivial details to pass each day. Beckett definitely succeeds in making this character's life dramatic by consuming her life with habits and rituals. Winnie's life is focused around certain details that help her cope with her anxiety of existence.

Beckett shows that internally Winnie is afraid of what cannot be predicted or controlled and therefore has her resort to trifles. Winnie's dramatic story is centered on a famous quote from Beckett's first published play, "Waiting for Godot," in "Habit is the great deadener." Although this play is a comedy, there is a deeper side of the characters as well. It is funny in the aspect that both Winnie and Willie live in some strange universe unfamiliar to the readers and that they lead essentially meaningless lives, somehow surviving the passage of time, lack of connection with each other, and purposeless existence.

As the play goes on, however, the reader starts to sense that Winnie has a fear deep inside of her about what is to come. She even starts mumbling a half forgotten prayer at the beginning of Act One where the reader only picks up, "World without end Amen" (752). Winnie blatantly prays for a world that has infinite life so she will not have to see the face of death. As the play develops, it is revealed that Winnie tries to avoid confronting the reality of her situation, Willie's ignorance towards her, and the inevitability of death.

<https://assignbuster.com/winnies-dramatic-story-in-happy-days-by-samuel-beckett/>

It is almost as if Winnie is in denial about her life but does not yet recognize it. She, however, repeats, "...can't complain - no no - musn't complain much to be thankful for" (753) and " No better, no worse, no change, no pain" (753) as if she really is in pain and absolutely refuses to believe it because she merely trusts that she leads a meaningful life. Perhaps an evident way Beckett portrays Winnie's dramatic story is through the variation of the phrase " this will have been a happy day" that she repeats throughout the play. Winnie proclaims this only after Willie acknowledges her existence. Each time Willie ignores her, Winnie's conversation becomes futile and she starts to get the feeling that her hopes are false because she spends the majority of her day telling stories and yearning for her husband's response. Her " happy days" seem to be when she experiences human interaction. Winnie understands that she talks a lot but she simply talks in hopes to generate some sort of human response. Winnie is overdramatic when Willie even utters a tiny word and proclaims that it is truly a happy day for her, once again renewing her hopes of a happy life.

She seems to be a typical dramatic romantic woman who is desperate to keep her relationship with her husband alive. Winnie even admits, " I am not merely talking to myself, that is in the wilderness, a thing I could never bear to do - for any life of time" (756). She understands that speaking aloud to no audience is simply just internal thought and is fearful for that day when she will have nobody to talk to. Winnie repeats " simply gaze before me with compressed lips" (756) throughout the play portraying her fear that one day she will have to resort to staring into space in internal thought only.

Optimistic Winnie, however, assures herself that she will always have her black bag to resort to when words fail. Seeking to fill the hours of the day, Winnie chooses to reminisce about the past, speak in "old style" language, and carry out various rituals. Her black bag is the source of her rituals and it seems to be all that she really has, considering Willie hardly ever acknowledges her. Winnie starts and ends her day by the sound of a bell, quickly moving to the minute details like brushing her teeth, combing her hair, polishing her glasses, and putting on lipstick.

Habit is Winnie's sole consolation in her thought of a threatening universe winding down and eventually burning out. She insists on constructing activities to pass the time and to provide a sustaining illusion of meaning. Every action taken is in hopes to diminish her loneliness. Her rituals, repetitive in nature, erase Winnie's distinction between past, present, and future. It is almost as if she has no free will and her habits consume her entire life on an almost superstitious level. Winnie must complete every ritual each day in order to feel whole.

In the beginning of the play, the reader picks up on Winnie's compulsiveness when she dramatically proclaims, "My hair! Did I brush and comb my hair" (756)? It seems as if superstition creeps in and Winnie cannot continue her day if she does not fully complete her rituals. Winnie bases her future on her next ritual. All of her available sources for optimism, however, are being used up in her black bag so she must work harder and harder to stay positive. Winnie lives in a static world believing that such an existence with no change will fend off death.

Beckett's quote, "Habit is the great deadener," suggests otherwise, contradicting Winnie's only beliefs. Winnie focuses so much on the miniscule details and following a routine that the objects start to control her, causing her to lose self control and actually driving her closer to death with such static routines. The ritual Winnie looks most forward to is singing her song at the end of the day. It excites her to sing it but she quickly becomes saddened at the end, once again exemplifying her dramatic story.

The song perhaps gives her a sense of hope for life in the beginning, but Winnie realizes that it is not true in her own relationship, quickly becomes distraught, and must accept the fact that life will return to normal with her habits and rituals the next day. By the end of the play, Winnie is buried up to her neck in the ground but still refuses to admit the absurdity of her situation, constantly assuring herself that each day is a happy day, even if she is on the verge of tears.

Winnie relies solely on habits and rituals to protect herself from what she cannot predict. She does not realize, however, that consuming her life with these rituals is actually bringing her closer to death. Beckett even symbolizes this through the fact that Winnie is buried up to her neck by the end of the play, taking away her ability to complete all of her rituals, and making the statement clear that death is near. Beckett succeeds in making Winnie's story dramatic through her specific rituals and exemplifying his idea that, "Habit is the great deadener."