



Ambasáid na hÉireann
Embassy of Ireland

Irish Studies Guest Lecture Series 2025

Assoc. Prof. Julie Bates (Trinity College, Dublin)

'Nothing is funnier than unhappiness': Samuel Beckett's Marriage Portrait

Wednesday, 29 October 2025, 10.15-11.45 (Filozofski fakultet u Rijeci, F-139)



Štefka Drolc as Winnie in *Happy Days*, Križank, Ljubljana, October 1964 (photograph by Vlastja Simončič)

This lecture will consider the tragicomic marriage portrait of Beckett's play *Happy Days* (1961). The play features a woman buried in a mound of earth up to her waist in Act 1 and to her neck in Act 2. While her husband reads the newspaper and largely ignores her, Winnie keeps herself company. To avoid recognising the horror of her situation she focuses her attention on the objects beside her, and uses these to tell stories. There is a biographical context to the play. Beckett married his long-term partner Suzanne Déchevaux-Dumesnil in a secret ceremony in the English seaside town of Folkestone in 1961. They had been together since 1938. The marriage was motivated in part by the increasing seriousness of Beckett's relationship with the BBC producer Barbara Bray, who had moved to Paris to be closer to him. Beckett maintained a relationship with Bray and a series of flings with other women until his death in 1989, soon after Déchevaux-Dumesnil. British law required Beckett to stay in Folkestone for two weeks before the wedding. He spent much of that time in his hotel room working on a draft of *Happy Days*.

Julie Bates is Associate Professor in Irish Writing in the School of English at Trinity College Dublin. She is a board member of the Samuel Beckett Society and the journal *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui*, and books editor for *the Irish University Review*. Her publications include the book *Beckett's Art of Salvage* (Cambridge University Press, 2017) and essays on Beckett, contemporary Irish writing, the artist Louise Bourgeois, and the writer and artist Erica Van Horn. Her current book project is the first substantial study of Van Horn's work, an internationally recognised book artist who has been living and working since the 1990s behind a farm in rural Tipperary.

This guest lecture is kindly sponsored by the Embassies of Ireland in Croatia and Slovenia.