


Beckett and Begrudgery: The Concept of Resentment in Samuel Beckett's *Molloy*

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Stephen Graf¹

Abstract

For many literary critics, Samuel Beckett was above the hurly burly of the quotidian. His work was strictly universal, existing on the plane of the abstract and philosophical, rather than dealing with specific human foibles, particularly those peculiar to his native Ireland. But in the era immediately following the Second World War, Beckett was not averse to exploring one of the most peculiar of the peculiarly Irish traits: begrudgery. A virulent combination of jealousy, spite, and festering resentment, begrudgery prevailed in epidemic proportions in the Ireland of Beckett's day. Beckett himself was not untouched by Irish begrudgery. His character Moran, the protagonist and narrator of the second book of Beckett's *Molloy*, exhibits all of the characteristics of Irish begrudgery. After establishing what begrudgery is, and tracing its philosophical and the sociological origins with an eye to Irish history, this study will culminate in a close reading of *Molloy*.

Keywords

begrudgery, resentment, Irish, sociology, postcolonial

Regarding the work of Nobel Prize winning author Samuel Beckett, scholar Sean Kennedy observed in 2010 that even though “Ireland has most often been read as a specter, a kind of afterthought or trace,” the time has come when “that the ghostly presence of Ireland may need to be more carefully accounted for” (p. 2). For many decades, Beckett scholarship for the most part tended to shy away from such an accounting for various reasons. Indeed, for many years there was some question as to what nationality Beckett should be considered.¹ And even when Beckett's nationality was not in question, many, such as Beckett's fellow Trinity College, Dublin graduate, Vivian Mercier (1977), insisted that calling Beckett “an Irish writer involves some semantic sleight of hand” (p. 21). As a result, Beckett was often consigned to a nationless universality, a “Nayman from Noland,” as Richard Ellmann (1988) referred to him in a lecture delivered in 1985, rather than being fully embraced as an Irish author.

A general reappraisal of Beckett's work that allowed for a consideration of Irish influence on character, setting, and theme, among other matters, began with Eoin O'Brien's *The Beckett Country: Samuel Beckett's Ireland* (1986), and continued in 1991 with John Harrington's landmark *The Irish Beckett*, in which Harrington succeeded in illustrating not only that much of Beckett's fiction was situated in Ireland, but that Beckett's prose also provided critical social commentary on it. However, as David Lloyd (2010) noted, the problem that repeatedly arises when trying to categorize Beckett's work in this way is that it “resists from the outset any reading that would seek to draw from the work a stable

cultural or political reference to Irish matter” (p. 35). It is a line of enquiry that nevertheless bears pursuing because the act of historically situating Beckett renders new readings of Beckett's work possible (McNaughton, 2010). The place of Ireland in Beckett's early fiction is secure, as *More Pricks Than Kicks* and *Watt* are clearly set in Ireland, while *Murphy* is the tale of Irish expatriates in London. In Beckett's (2009) later work, as Emilie Morin points out, Beckett exerted great “efforts to obscure and eliminate any traces of Irishness” (p. 136). The work from what can be considered Beckett's middle period, particularly the years immediately following the Second World War, is perhaps the most interesting in teasing out Irish aspects. It is problematic, nevertheless, given that most of it was originally written in French and was later translated to English by Beckett, sometimes with the help of others.

Critics like Kennedy have done a fine job of identifying relatively obscure Irish references, such as the Noel Lemass monument in *Mercier and Camier*² and the political ramifications it held for that work. Beckett's (1955) trilogy of novels, *Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, and *The Unnamable* contain a wealth of Irish references in both the English and the

¹Robert Morris University, Pittsburgh, PA, USA

Corresponding Author:

Stephen Graf, Adjunct English Instructor, Department of English Studies and Communication Skills, Robert Morris University, 607 Lockhart St., Pittsburgh, PA 15212, USA.
 Email: graf@rmu.edu



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original French versions. For instance, in Book 1 of *Molloy*, Molloy makes mention of “the usual Blarney” (p. 87), and Moran makes several direct references to the Irish in Book 2. Noting that they “recur in the French and English narratives,” Morin asserts that the use of Irish names like Molloy, Moran, Malone, Murphy, and Quin throughout Beckett’s (2009) oeuvre suggest “a dependence upon Ireland as a central source of meaning” (p. 61). What has not had a great deal of research devoted to it to date is how Irish sociological syndromes—particularly those that are not earmarked by some sort of Hiberno-English signal—come into play in Beckett’s work from this middle period. The dearth of sustained sociological readings can at least be partially explained by the widely shared attitude within Beckett critical circles that Beckett’s work exists in a territory of art that “lies beyond the frontier of sociological criticism” (Boxall, 2000, p. 208).

Beckett was not above commenting on sociological aspects of Ireland in the essays he authored in the 1930s such as “Recent Irish Poetry” and “Censorship in the Saorstat.” Beckett also remarked repeatedly on the character of the Irish people in his personal correspondence from that period,³ demonstrating, as Kennedy (2010) notes, “Perhaps Beckett did think little of ‘the Irish people,’ but this does not mean that he thought of them little” (p. 10). Beckett’s characterizations of the Irish people also found their way into his fiction of the middle period. A close reading of *Molloy* with an eye toward Irish characterizations reveals a vivid depiction of a sociological concept familiar to all Irish people of this period—begrudgery.

According to historian and former Republic of Ireland senator Joseph Lee (1989), begrudgery was “rampant” in Ireland in the 20th century (p. 647).⁴ Irish sociologist and former president of University College Dublin, Patrick Masterson, in his 1979 essay, “The Concept of Resentment,” describes begrudgery as a virulent combination of jealousy, spite, and festering resentment (pp. 157-158). Regarding jealousy, Ellmann’s (1959) biography of James Joyce notes that at the Trattoria Bonavia one day Joyce “allocated the seven deadly sins among the European nations.” The English sin was gluttony, the French—pride, “as for his own people, the Irish, their deadly sin was Envy, and he quoted the song of Brangäne in *Tristan und Isolde* as a perfect example of Celtic envy” (p. 393). As to spite, W. B. Yeats (1989), in his poem “The People,” originally published in 1919 in *The Wild Swans at Coole Park*, writes of having deeply imbibed of “the daily spite of his unmannerly town, where who has served most is most defamed” (p. 150). For Masterson (1979), the “distinctive feature of ‘the Begrudger’ is the feature of resentment” (p. 157). Irish resentment was the topic of Dr. Samuel Johnson’s famous quip: “the Irish are a fair people;—they never speak well of one another” (Main & Boswell, 1874, p. 229). In the 20th century, George Bernard Shaw’s (1907) remark in the 1906 Preface to *John Bull’s Other Island*, “if you put an Irishman on a spit you can

always get another Irishman to baste him” also captures the essence of Irish resentment (p. xxxvi).

Masterson (1979) relies heavily on Nietzsche’s theory of *ressentiment* in his description of begrudgery:

Thirst for revenge is a powerful source of *ressentiment* . . . envy is another source of *ressentiment* . . . this tension between desire and non-fulfillment only becomes envy properly speaking when it flames up into hatred against the owner until the latter is falsely considered to be the cause of our privation. (p. 158)⁵

In *The Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche (1887/2003) asserts that *ressentiment* is “experienced by creatures who, deprived as they are of the proper outlet of action, are forced to find their own compensation in an imaginary revenge” (p. 19; I:10). *Ressentiment* is very concerned with power and is a product of what Nietzsche (1887/2003) terms “the slave morality” that “says ‘no’ from the very outset to what is ‘outside itself,’ ‘different from itself,’ and ‘not itself’: and this ‘no’ is its creative deed” (p. 19; I:10). As with Nietzsche’s *ressentiment*, power was a driving force in Irish begrudgery, as well.

The attitudes that comprise begrudgery had existed in Ireland long before Henry II landed his army at Waterford in 1171, as evidenced by the fact that an entire section of the Brehon law⁶ is devoted to stipulating the type of penalty to be imposed for slander, verbal abuse, and the use of spells or incantations. Yet the long years of colonial oppression under which the Irish suffered powerlessly served to acerbate these conditions, acting like “a hot-house environment for the cultivation of the poisoned weed” (Lee, 1989, p. 647). This is because, as philosopher Max Scheler (1913/1994) observes in his 1913 study *Ressentiment*, “Revenge tends to be transformed into *ressentiment* the more it is directed against lasting situations which are felt to be ‘injurious’ but beyond one’s control—in other words the injury is experienced as a destiny” (p. 33). In a colonial situation, many injuries would typically occur beyond the aggrieved party’s control. Such grievances—being forced to sell one’s horse to any Englishman who wanted it for the cost of 5 pounds or less is one minor example—would, therefore, smack of destiny to the injured party. Thus, the frustration initially engendered by the original wrong would only be compounded within the victim(s) by the feeling of powerlessness.

When most of Ireland finally gained its independence, the begrudgery exacerbated by the colonial situation did not simply disappear, as Michael Jahn (1996) captures in his short story “A Couple of Acres and a Few Wee Beasts”:

“Nobody here likes John,” said the Irish policeman, with a mischievous smile. “He’s too rich, and the Irish are a very envious and suspicious race when it comes to persons of wealth. Such is the continued legacy of the British occupation.” (p. 564)

The reason for the “legacy” continuing is that the underlying elements that gave birth to Irish begrudgery remained,

even after there were no more British boots in the Free State. Ireland—as a small, island nation comprised of an extraordinarily insular society—offered only one escape: emigration. Émigrés who were forced to depart Ireland because of the Free State’s stagnant economy went on to achieve success overseas—in the United States or England, for instance—but did not inspire feelings of begrudgery among their former communities. Achievement out of country was perceived as far enough removed from the local situation that it did not represent a threat to anyone’s standing back home. As a result, success abroad was often, paradoxically, viewed with pride as a positive reflection on the village or county. Success at home, however, would “upset the assumptions about the natural order of things. The reactions were correspondingly more resentful in the steeper valleys of the squinting windows when the rare individual dared to rise above his allotted place” (Lee, 1989, p. 646). The smaller and more isolated the community was, the more pronounced its begrudgery tended to be.

As a character trait, begrudgery has certainly never been isolated to Ireland. Every nation contains begrudging individuals, and many countries have sizable pockets of them. It is the feeling that arises when the smaller fish begin to resent the slightly larger fish that dominate their tiny pond. In *Gifts and Poisons*, F. G. Bailey (1971) documented contemporary examples of what could be termed begrudgery in remote mountain villages in France, Italy, and Spain. What made Ireland unique was that Irish begrudgery, rather than only being tucked away in geographically secluded hamlets, existed as a national phenomenon. One was as apt to encounter it in Dublin as in the most distant fishing village in County Donegal.⁷ To be branded a begrudger was typically not considered a compliment, as Masterson (1979) notes: “In Ireland today one often hears people spoken of disparagingly as ‘begrudgers’” (p. 157). In fact, the stance playwright Brendan Behan (1959) takes toward begrudgers in his memoir *Borstal Boy* may have been reflective of the opinions of a large number of the Irish people: “‘The divil take the begrudgers,’ said I” (p. 268). Whether or not the “divil” eventually took them, begrudgers were very much a fact of life in 20th-century Ireland.

Beckett had firsthand experience with begrudgery. The 31-year-old writer returned to Dublin from Paris in November 1937 to testify on behalf of his deceased uncle, William “Boss” Sinclair, in his libel suit against Dr. Oliver St. John Gogarty,⁸ only to find his own character on trial.⁹ While addressing the jury, barrister for the defense, J. M. Fitzgerald, described Beckett as “that bawd and blasphemer from Paris” (“*Book Libel Suit*,” 1937, p. 2). Fitzgerald’s behavior can be attributed to a zealous attorney endeavoring to win a case for his client, but that does not explain why the *Irish Press* referred to Beckett in its summary of the trial as “that wretched creature” (“*Book Libel Suit*,” 1937, p. 2). One of the main functions of begrudgery, as Bailey (1971) observes in his essay “Gifts and Poisons,” is assuring that “no-one else

ever gets beyond the level of approved mediocrity” (p. 19). Beckett, an upper-middle-class Protestant who had left Ireland to pursue the bohemian life of a scholar and artist, was perceived, at least in the opinion of the writer and editor from the *Irish Press*, as having transgressed this unspoken rule. Susan Hutson (1971) explains this mechanism of begrudgery in her essay “Social Ranking in a French Alpine Community”: “People who set themselves up as superior are often criticized and their wealth or claims to prestige are rejected and belittled by according them a low moral status” (p. 59). Barrister Fitzgerald, assuming his Dublin jury would share such sentiments, played on this when he, for instance, purposely mispronounced “Proust” as *Prowst*, knowing Beckett would correct him (Knowlson, 1996, p. 257). Fitzgerald’s intention was to discredit Beckett, a key witness for the plaintiffs, in the eyes of the jury by showing Beckett to be someone who took on airs, thereby eliciting the resentment of the jury. Furthermore, labeling Beckett a degenerate had the effect of bringing him down to size both for the jury during the trial and for the Irish general reading public in the *Irish Press*’s article describing the trial.¹⁰

In a letter written to biographer James Knowlson after Beckett’s death, his cousin Morris Sinclair acknowledged that Beckett’s attitude toward his native land changed after the trial and he could no longer suffer Dublin’s “oppression, jealousy, intrigue and gossip” (quoted in Knowlson, 1996, p. 253). The preponderance of such matters in Ireland—traits and actions that essentially encompass all of the facets of begrudgery—help to explain why Beckett would famously prefer “France in war to Ireland in peace” (Shenker, 1956, p. 2:3). Harrington (1991) suggests that there is a “likelihood that directions in later stages of his work may not be wholly irrelevant to an unusually spiteful local cultural code to which Beckett was an initiate and into which he was initiated” (p. 86). Although not specifically cited by Harrington, a syndrome like begrudgery was a major contributor to the “spiteful local cultural code” of 20th-century Ireland.

In Ireland, begrudgery existed in writing and academic circles just as it did in all walks of life. In fact, as Masterson (1979) points out, “literary critics and academics whose convictions are arrived at indirectly by criticism of others’ views are *ressentiment* prone” (p. 161). The reason for this is that in a closed system, such as an academic department or a writing circle, “Winners could flourish only at the expense of losers. Status depended not only on rising oneself but on preventing others from rising. For many, keeping the other fellow down offered the surest defense of their own position” (Lee, 1989, p. 646). Beckett would have had an opportunity to witness the begrudgery of Irish academia firsthand during his short stint as a lecturer at Trinity College, Dublin.¹¹ There was also the case of Beckett’s friend and mentor, the unorthodox and sometimes controversial Thomas Rudmose-Brown. In spite of having a very respectable publication history, Rudmose-Brown was kept a “second-class citizen,” as Knowlson puts it, within the Trinity faculty because the fellows refused to

elect him into their select circle. As a result, “Beckett spoke of Ruddy as a witty, disillusioned man” (Knowlson, 1996, p. 64). Rudmose-Brown would not have been the first Irishman—and certainly was not the last—who the effects of begrudgery left disillusioned.

It was the oppressive social atmosphere as much as the lack of opportunity that drove many Irish writers to live and work abroad. Shaw (1930) cited strictly professional motives for leaving: “Every Irishman who felt that his business in life was on the higher planes of the cultural professions felt . . . his first business was to get out of Ireland. I had the same feeling” (p. xxxiv). Yet that does not explain why Shaw chose not to set foot in Ireland again for another 30 years after his initial departure. Shaw attributes that to what he perceived as a toxic environment in Dublin wherein his “advances were resisted” with “the growls of resentful disgust” (Shaw, 1930, p. xlv). In *Inventing Ireland*, Declan Kiberd (1996) posits that Shaw “came to associate Dublin with poverty, failure and begrudgery” (p. 426). Had Shaw not emigrated, Hubert Butler (1996) has speculated that “No doubt his genius would have been suffocated or cruelly cramped” (p. 266). In this sense, Irish begrudgery—although it may not have had a positive effect on many people living in Ireland—did play a small but pivotal role in introducing authors like Shaw, Wilde, Joyce, and Beckett to the world.

It would be naïve to believe that Beckett was completely above resentment. His “ferocious attacks” on Irish Literary Revivalists in his 1934 essay “Recent Irish Poetry” and his personal correspondences from this era betray a certain amount of personal rancor (Morin, 2009, p. 13). Morin, in *Samuel Beckett (2009) and the Problem of Irishness*, describes “Recent Irish Poetry” as a “parody [of] that for which he displays resentment: not simply the parochialism of Irish letters, but the manner in which stylistic and thematic conventions hinder literary experiment” (p. 33). Furthermore, Morin asserts that Beckett’s (2009) “resentment towards the Dublin *literati* weighs heavily upon” his 1938 novel, *Murphy* (p. 45). So, although he may not have been a begrudger, the personal sentiments expressed in his private correspondences and those that found their way into his published prose indicate that Beckett was also not completely beyond resentment.

In spite of his apparent personal acquaintance with begrudgery, the word “begrudger” can only be found once in Beckett’s catalog, and that one occasion cannot be attributed to Beckett. The word occurs in the third act of Michael Brodsky’s 1995 English translation of *Eleuthéria*,¹² when Victor, addressing the Glazier as well as the audience, cries out, “Begrudgers!” (Beckett, 1995b, p. 159).¹³ It is Brodsky’s interpretation of Beckett’s French: “Jaloux!” (1995a, p. 144). The most direct English translation for *jaloux* is “jealous,” but the American Brodsky, himself a published author of fiction, explains the process his thinking went through in coming to *begrudgers*:

“*You are Jealous*”—I felt this would be a disservice, would be an easy way out, and would somehow castrate the compactness of the play. “*You’re jealous*” somehow dilutes the potency of “Jaloux!” It just becomes sort of banal . . . I felt “Jaloux” would be best translated as “Envious one.” As this is not very conversational—very stilted—I resorted to “Begrudger,” which by its very unwieldiness had, for me, a certain conversational flavor—a certain tang—i.e., the word in its unwieldiness seemed to embody the very sentiment it conveyed. (M. Brodsky, personal communication, February 23, 2012)

Owing to widespread dissatisfaction with Brodsky’s version of the play, Faber and Faber brought out an alternate translation 1 year later, this time by Barbara Wright, an English professional translator who specialized in French surrealist and existential writing. Wright chose to render the passage, “You’re jealous!” (Beckett, 1996, p. 145). Of course, there is no telling how Beckett would have decided to translate that particular line as it is well documented that Beckett’s second versions were not so much translations as recreations. The possibility exists that—as was frequently the case when Beckett translated himself—he would have fundamentally altered the line or struck it entirely.

The first person to link Beckett’s writing to the concept of begrudgery was Beckett’s close friend Con Leventhal (1965) in a 1963 lecture delivered at Trinity College, Dublin, entitled “The Beckett Hero.” In this speech, Leventhal described Beckett’s use of language as “a goad to the begrudgers” (p. 46). Who these begrudgers might be and toward what Beckett may have been prodding them are not made clear in the speech; Leventhal may have considered these matters to be self-evident to an Irish audience. Like many authors raised in Ireland, Beckett does engage with Irish begrudgery in his work. Although the word *begrudger* does not appear in anything penned by Beckett in English, at least one lucid portrayal of a begrudger does.

Moran, the protagonist and narrator of the second book of *Molloy* (1955),¹⁴ also emanates from “an unusually spiteful local cultural code.” Moran exhibits all of the characteristics of a prototypical Irish begrudger. To begin with, Moran is filled with an all-consuming and irrational spite and generalized resentment: “It’s a strange thing, I don’t like men and I don’t like animals. As for God, he is beginning to disgust me” (Beckett, 1955, p. 105). Throw in envy, which will be touched on later, and Beckett’s Moran emerges as a perfect example of Nietzsche’s “creature of *ressentiment*,” as Gilles Deleuze (1983) explains it in *Nietzsche and Philosophy*:

What is most striking in the man of *ressentiment* is not his nastiness but his disgusting malevolence, his capacity for disparagement. Nothing can resist it. He does not even respect his friends or even his enemies. He does not even respect misfortune or its causes. (p. 117)

Moran vividly embodies all of the qualities of the Nietzsche and Deleuze's creature of resentment, or the begrudger.

Early in his narrative, Moran boasts, "A man like me cannot forget" (Beckett, 1955, p. 122). Another distinguishing feature of begrudgery, as well as Nietzsche's creature of *ressentiment*, as Deleuze (1983) notes, is the "incapacity to forget anything" (p. 115). Thus, the creature of resentment, because of this "faculty of forgetting nothing," is able to carry a grudge ad infinitum (Deleuze, 1983, p. 115). This particular feature of Nietzsche's creature of *ressentiment*, as outlined by Deleuze, also formed part of the dilemma confronting Ireland as a nation. The Irish had trouble letting go of centuries-old animosities against the English, as Lloyd George was to discover when he negotiated with Eamonn de Valera over the composition of postrevolution Ireland. Following their initial meeting on July 14, 1921, George told his secretary, "I made no impression. I listened to a long lecture on the wrong done to Ireland . . . [by] Cromwell, and when[ever] I tried to bring him to the present day, back he went to Cromwell again" (MacDonagh, 1983, p. 1). This inability to let go seems to be exactly what Yeats (1937/1961) is alluding to when he writes of the Irish, "No people hate as we do in whom the past is always alive" (p. 519). Going back again to Cromwell, metaphorically speaking, was not a phenomenon that existed in the political stratum only; it translated down to the individual level in Ireland as well. The result was the Irish tendency, as historian F. S. L. Lyons (1973) puts it, to "sit by the turf-fire crooning over ancient and still unrectified grievances" (p. 597). The "unrectified grievances" being "crooned over" were not always ancient, nor were they always national, as is the case with Moran.

As a sociological or psychological phenomenon, begrudgery becomes reified in interpersonal relations. This can be seen early in *Molloy* when, after being forced to miss Sunday Mass so he can receive the Molloy mission, Moran encounters his neighbor, whom he describes disparagingly as a "free-thinker" (Beckett, 1955, p. 97).¹⁵ According to Moran, the neighbor "knew my habits, my Sunday habits I mean. Everyone knew them" (Beckett, 1955, p. 97). When the neighbor queries, "Well well . . . no worship today?" and then observes, "You look as though you had seen a ghost," the hypersensitive Moran retorts,

Worse than that, I said, you. I went in, at my back the dutifully hideous smile. I could see him running to his concubine with the news. You know that poor bastard Moran, you should have heard me, I had him leppin! Couldn't speak! (Beckett, 1955, p. 97)

The rancor of Moran's response seems to elevate far above any sarcasm or taunt that may have been embedded within the neighbor's observation. This is typical of the resentment nature, as Robert Solomon (1990), writing about Nietzsche's theory, has noted, "If resentment has a desire, it

is, typically, the total annihilation, prefaced by utter humiliation, of its target" (p. 279). In his exchange with the neighbor, Moran seems to be aiming for nothing short of the neighbor's complete destruction, metaphorically speaking. This attitude was not uncommon in Ireland in the mid-20th century, as Flann O'Brien (1993) had facetiously observed in his "Cruiskeen Lawn" column in the *Irish Times*: "What is important is food, money, and opportunities for the scoring off one's enemies" (p. 239). Throw in social standing, and these are the matters that appear most important to Moran, as well.

Moran's "concubine" comment is very reflective of the values prevailing in Ireland at that time in which

[a] rigorous sexual morality was felt to compensate for a more relaxed concept of other moralities . . . The morality of violence, the morality of perjury, the morality of deceit in commercial and legal transactions, all tended to be relegated in popular consciousness to reassuringly venial status in the hierarchy of moralities. (Lee, 1989, p. 645)

The profoundly conformist Moran also follows the Irish "hierarchy of moralities" whereby deceit and violence are whitewashed in his mind. Because he believes he follows his society's ethical code more stringently, Moran considers himself morally superior to his neighbor. The neighbor is thereby put in his place, so to speak, in Moran's mind.

As an Irish-style begrudger, it is no coincidence that Moran presents himself as a devout Roman Catholic. Irish author George Moore, himself a lapsed Catholic, associated Catholicism with resentment in turn of the century Ireland, asserting in a letter to British Prime Minister Herbert Henry Asquith's secretary Edward Marsh, "The only reason that the Irish would tolerate home rule would be if they were given permission to persecute someone, that is the Roman Catholic idea of liberty. It always will be" (quoted in Ellmann, 1959, pp. 418-419).¹⁶ Liam O'Flaherty (1932/1990), another Roman Catholic Irish writer, believed that what was driving the repressive social atmosphere in mid-20th-century Ireland was the "tyranny of the Irish [Roman Catholic] Church and its associate parasites, the upstart Irish bourgeoisie" (p. 140). Beckett would later launch a more blatant attack on the Catholic Church that never survived into print. The original manuscript of *Happy Days*, now referred to as the "Willie-Winnie Notes," contains several sustained, blistering assaults on the priests and religious observances of the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland.¹⁷ In these passages, Beckett denounces the effect of Church domination on the Irish people (Bair, 1978). Beckett's portrayal of the Catholic Moran, therefore, carries added weight as one of his most developed depictions of Irish Catholicism.

Nietzsche makes a direct connection between Christianity and resentment on a number of occasions. In fact, it was only in trying to describe Christianity's origins that Nietzsche (1895/1982) struck upon his concept of resentment:

On such utterly *false* soil, where everything natural, every natural value, every *reality* was opposed by the most profound instincts of the ruling class, *Christianity* grew up—a form of mortal enmity against reality that has never yet been surpassed. (pp. 598; 27)

As an upstanding Catholic, missing Sunday Mass renders Moran distraught. Granted, only 10 pages later he announces that God is “beginning to disgust” him, and his canonical questions later in the novel indicate Moran was never a true believer. But because society expects him to be a “good,” churchgoing man, he is slavishly devoted to maintaining that façade.

Moran’s moralizing can be regarded as a leveling process between himself and his neighbor. In this respect, the influence of Proust (1913/1981) can be detected as Moran is not unlike the narrator’s Great Aunt in *Remembrance of Things Past*: “Whenever she saw in others an advantage, however trivial, which she herself lacked, she would persuade herself that it was no advantage at all, but a drawback, and would pity so as not to envy them” (p. 24). The manner in which this leveling process works, as Hutson (1971) observed in her study of resentment in isolated mountain communities in France, is, “claims to superior status are rejected and annulled through the introduction of different ranking criteria by which the offending villager is brought down and, if possible, the status of the speaker raised” (p. 47). Begrudgery, in this sense, can be viewed as a tool for maintaining some sort of social equity or balance. Indeed, many Irish people view this aspect of begrudgery as having a positive social impact because it enforces a sense of egalitarianism, no matter how skewed. So when Moran senses a hint of condescension in his neighbor’s remarks, to draw the neighbor down while raising his own level, Moran rationalizes that his neighbor is morally inferior. Nietzsche (1878/1984) has observed of the resentment nature,

The craving for equality can be expressed either by the wish to draw all others down to one’s level (by belittling, excluding, tripping them up) or by the wish to draw oneself up with everyone else (by appreciating, helping, taking pleasure in others’ success. (pp. 177, 300)

For most of his book, Moran exclusively employs the first of Nietzsche’s leveling devices.

Many critics, Seamus Deane (1986), for instance, have taken Moran to be “the ‘French’ aspect of Beckett” (p. 191). As Bailey and Hutson’s research, as well as Proust’s Great Aunt, demonstrate, France certainly had its version of begrudgers. Beckett’s choice to use the Irish vernacular “lep-pin”¹⁸ in his English translation becomes important in reading Moran as an Irish begrudger. Beckett places other little markers in *Molloy* that point back to Ireland. For instance, in Book 2, the town names, like Ballyba, have a distinctly Irish ring to them. On the topic of names, one cannot help but wonder whether Beckett’s Moran might not be a nod to the

bombastic leader of the Irish-Ireland movement, D. P. Moran.¹⁹ Another manner in which the reader’s gaze is directed toward Ireland in Book 2 of *Molloy* is Moran’s mention of Irish stew: “A nourishing and economical dish, if a little indigestible. All honour to the land it has brought before the world” (Beckett, 1955, p. 98). Finally, one of the questions he poses during his journey home from the mission is, “What is one to think of the Irish oath sworn by the natives with the right hand on the relics of saints and the left on the virile member?” (Beckett, 1955, p. 167). All of this leads the reader to deduce that Moran—at least in Beckett’s English language version of the novel—is, if nothing else, patterned after an Irishman.

Furthermore, Moran’s begrudgery stems from frustrations similar to the conditions that spawned Irish begrudgery. He is trapped in a job with no hope for advancement. He is envious of the fact that his messenger, Gaber, whose position he considers to be his subordinate to his, nevertheless is better compensated than him. Most important, he feels himself a victim with regard to the death of his wife and the necessity of raising his child on his own. Jacques, his son, becomes a convenient target for Moran’s recriminations: “I boiled with anger at the thought of him who had shackled me thus. If he had desired my failure he could not have devised a better means to do it” (Beckett, 1955, p. 125). Like a true begrudger, Moran cannot simply accept what he cannot control and try to make the best of it; he has to assign blame.

Moran’s relationships with his son and his neighbor are characteristic of Moran’s tendency to scapegoat. According to Nietzsche (2003), the man of resentment refuses to ever accept culpability because he “believes his feeling bad and his ill-constitution will be easier to bear if he can find someone to make *responsible* for it” (p. 243; 14[29], emphasis in original). If problems arise, the creature of resentment’s immediate response will be to, as Deleuze (1983) explains, “turn misfortune into something mediocre, he must recriminate and distribute blame” (p. 117). Moran admits he cannot simply regard “myself as solely responsible for my wretched existence” (Beckett, 1955, p. 107). Like the typical creature of resentment, Moran must find someone else to blame—Jacques, Gaber, and the mysterious chief of his organization, Youdi—for the problems that he experiences. According to Deleuze (1983), the creature of resentment wants “others to be evil, he needs others to be evil in order to be able to consider himself good” (p. 119). It is not fate Moran curses for the overall state of his life, but rather people; that is the quintessential attitude of begrudgery.

This relates directly to the fact that resentment “is an emotion distinguished, first of all, by its concern and involvement with *power*” (Solomon, 1990, p. 278, emphasis in original). It is Moran’s inability to personally control his destiny and his impotence in the face of life’s obstacles that drive his resentment because “powerlessness against men, *not* powerlessness against nature, is what engenders the most desperate bitterness against existence” (Nietzsche,

1887/2003, p. 119; 5[71:9]). As the novel unfolds, it becomes apparent that Moran views himself as nothing more than a pawn in his own story—constantly acted upon but incapable of truly independent action. In a moment of rare introspection early in his narrative, Moran admits, “I was a contrivance” (Beckett, 1955, p. 114). He experiences his life and his mission to find Molloy as a *destiny*, describing his work in terms of “discharging faithfully and ably a revolting function” (Beckett, 1955, p. 114). His inability to in any way alter this destiny fills him with an irrational animosity, as he reveals in a narrative aside, about halfway into his story:

I am still obeying orders, if you like, but no longer out of fear. No, I am still afraid, but simply from force of habit. And the voice I listen to needs no Gaber to make it heard. For it is within me and exhorts me to continue to the end . . . and patiently fulfill in all its bitterness my calamitous part, as it was my will, when I had a will, that others should. And this with hatred in my heart, and scorn, of my master and his design. (Beckett, 1955, pp. 131-32)

Like the typical begrudger, Moran sees his life as being controlled by others who are either hostile toward, or, at best, indifferent to his fate. This prompts Moran to become consumed with spite and resentment.

Not every Irishman suffered from—or fell victim to—begrudgery, as Masterson (1979) points out: “When this type of value-experience dominates a whole society, the system of free competition will be its guiding ethos. Not everyone animated by this form of value experience will succumb to *ressentiment*” (p. 160). However, enough of the Irish suffered from it to inspire Lee to write in 1989: “These qualities are now perceived to be so central to the Irish way of life that the Irish have devised their own word to describe the resultant personality type, the begrudger” (pp. 645-646). By contrast, the French, Spanish, and Italians, whose mountain villages were the topics of Bailey’s *Gifts and Poisons*, have not devised a term to describe this specific personality type.²⁰ The long-term ramification of begrudgery on a society, as Masterson (1979) notes, is that “*ressentiment* can come to determine a whole moral outlook by perverting the rules of preference of a culture until what is ‘good’ appears ‘evil’ and vice versa” (p. 162). In Nietzschean terms, it can bring about a revaluation of values. In such a society, a young man making a long journey home in an effort to perform his civic duty by testifying in a trial can be described by the press as a “wretched creature.”

Returning to Leventhal’s notion of Beckett producing a “goad to the begrudgers,” as noted earlier, the question this phrase demands is as follows: Toward or into what is Beckett goading begrudgers? Beckett’s language, to which Leventhal was referring, may simply be goading the begrudgers to become outraged by indirectly imparting a message similar to what Behan (1959) conveys in a more blunt, albeit cruder, fashion in *Borstal Boy*: “fugh the begrudgers” (p. 58). In the case of Moran, however, Beckett’s prodding seems to be in a

more constructive direction. What comes to mind is Molloy’s “pensum one day got by heart and long forgotten” mentioned in Book 1 (Beckett, 1955, p. 32). The pensum²¹ Moran has to serve is a long and grueling one, resulting in a fundamental change in his character.

Moran’s pensum begins after Jacques has abandoned him in the woods where Moran resigns himself to being “dispossessed of self” (Beckett, 1955, p. 149). This leads to his encounter with an unidentified agent whose face, Moran acknowledges, “I regret to say vaguely resembled my own” (Beckett, 1955, p. 150). In spite of their many shared qualities, Moran conceives an immediate disdain for the agent. Moran’s begrudging nature may well be at the root of this antipathy because, as Walter Kaufmann (1974), writing about Nietzsche’s theory of resentment, explains, “those who are dissatisfied with themselves project their dissatisfaction upon the world” (p. 282). A man of resentment will see his own faults magnified in others around him because, as Albert Camus (1991), also commenting on Nietzsche’s theory of resentment, notes, “resentment is always resentment against oneself” (pp. 17-18). Therefore, Moran’s contempt for the agent can be read as a projection of his own self-loathing. At some point in the action, Moran blacks out. When he recovers his senses, he discovers the agent murdered and disfigured to the point that “He no longer resembled me” (Beckett, 1955, p. 151). In this way, Moran succeeds in eradicating by proxy all traces of his former self, providing himself with the catharsis necessary to spark the personal changes that are to come.

Change does not immediately follow the death of the agent. First, Jacques returns and father and son have a final, decisive squabble. This leads to Jacques’ departure and Moran’s “great inward metamorphoses,” followed by the “furies and treacheries” of the long journey home (Beckett, 1955, pp. 163, 166). The entire process, according to Moran’s accounting, takes nearly a year and the Moran readers see at the end of the book he is a very different character from the Moran in the beginning. Masterson (1979) describes the begrudger as having “no conscious sense of lying, of value falsification” (p. 164). What makes the syndrome so circular and pernicious is that the begrudger is not even aware that he is a begrudger, and therefore can feel fully justified in condemning others for their begrudgery. By the conclusion of the novel, however, Moran is able to see himself as he is. No longer prey to self-deluding begrudgery, Moran is able to accept responsibility for the state of his life, discard his petty resentments, and face life’s larger questions: “Does this mean I am freer now than I was? I do not know. I shall learn it” (Beckett, 1955, p. 176). All of the changes and privations he undergoes in completing his pensum allow Moran to discover in the end, as Beckett (1931) put it in *Proust*, “the meaning of the word: ‘defunctus’” (p. 93).²²

Likewise for the real-life Irish begrudgers, change would not be easy. Begrudgery can, as Masterson (1979) notes, “engender, firstly, an involuntary emotion-laden falsification

of world view; secondly, a transvaluation of values so that what is good can appear evil and vice versa, and thirdly, a radical subjectivization of the whole notion of value” (p. 168). Reversing such a process after it has been completely internalized and perpetuated over generations—particularly on a national level—would entail an exceedingly lengthy and arduous undertaking. It was highly unlikely that such a wide-scale change in thinking, assuming people would even *desire* to change their way of thinking, could be brought to fruition within one lifetime. So the individual defunctus that Moran sacrificed so much to achieve seemed well out of reach of nonfictional Irish begrudgers as a group. That may help explain why Beckett—especially after the Sinclair–Gogarty trial—seemed to share the sentiment that Irish nationalist member of Parliament (MP) Charles Stewart Parnell expressed to English statesman John Morley (a statement which the youthful Beckett felt important enough to transcribe into a notebook on January 18, 1928): “Ireland . . . a very good place to live out of”. In a 1956 interview with Israel Shenker for the *New York Times*, Beckett cited as factors in his departure “theocracy, censorship of books, that kind of thing” (p. 147). Although he did not mention it by name, begrudgery fits neatly into the category of “that kind of thing.”

Andrew Gibson observed of Beckett in 2010, “The Irish detail in Beckett’s work has doubtless been repeatedly underestimated” (p. 179). In what was an unspoken, and sometimes spoken, critical orthodoxy, Beckett critics did overlook or underestimate Irish details in Beckett’s work for decades. Recent criticism, such as Kennedy’s pointing out Irish historical references in Beckett’s writing and Morin’s observation of the “Irish flavour” Beckett (2009) added to his English texts through the translation of colloquialisms (p. 76), has led the way to new readings of Beckett’s work. But Beckett’s use of Irish details in his English texts is not limited to his language or to historical references; Beckett also makes use of sociological aspects of the Irish character, such as begrudgery, that might escape the notice of a non-Irish audience. In a call to have the “two spaces” of Beckett’s writing—Ireland and Europe—“considered together,” Kennedy (2010) observes that “when Beckett left Ireland in 1937 he certainly did not leave Ireland behind” (p. 7). Ireland continued to influence Beckett’s writing long after he permanently relocated to France, not only in setting but also in characterizations. As Morin has demonstrated, even while Beckett’s writing “continues to dislocate linguistic and cultural boundaries, it remains informed by the social and political events of its time” (Morin, 2009, p. 2). It also remained informed by the sociology of its time. Begrudgery was a major element of Irish sociology in that era, and it surfaces in Beckett’s depiction of Moran. Although the Irish people may not have achieved a final defunctus from begrudgery in Beckett’s lifetime, Beckett’s character Moran at least does so.

Even today, begrudgery is still alive and well in Ireland. It would have been reasonable to expect the Celtic Tiger

economic revival that occurred between 1995 and 2000 to have finally laid begrudgery to rest, but according to *The Proceedings of the Academy of Entrepreneurship* conference, which took place in Maui, Hawaii in October 1997, that was not yet the case. The report concluded that Ireland at that time did not offer a “hospitable climate toward entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurial venturing is not a prestigious or popular pursuit, neither financially nor socially rewarding. A successful venture invites ‘begrudgery’—the unhappy situation of one’s peers resenting one’s success” (p. 25). Furthermore, politician John Hume (1997),²³ discussing the growing socioeconomic divide between the east and west of both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland in *A New Ireland: Politics, Peace and Reconciliation*, remarked, “For those in the west, there is nothing to be gained from indulging in begrudgery at the expense of the east” (p. 151). It may be true, as Lee (1989) asserts, that begrudgery “is a direct inheritance from, not a perversion of, traditional Ireland” (p. 647).²⁴ Yet even if “Traditional Ireland was consumed with envy” as Lee insists (1989, p. 647), it does not appear that begrudgery increased to its modern intensity of feeling and pervasiveness in Ireland until the collapse of the Gaelic system in the 17th century.²⁵ But just as begrudgery did not magically disappear with the creation of the Irish Free State in 1922, it would have been unrealistic to expect economic growth—which was by no means experienced equally by all residents of the Republic of Ireland—to act as a panacea for begrudgery.

In spite of its long history and documented prevalence in Ireland, there is a surprising dearth of academic work on Irish begrudgery. Begrudgery is a concept that demands further study—both from a sociological and from a literary perspective. From a sociological perspective, the involvement of begrudgery in the downfall of Parnell in the late 19th century is one topic that immediately comes to mind. Further literary studies could prove equally fruitful because, as Moore observes in his 1886 novel *A Drama in Muslin*,

The history of a nation as often lies hidden in social wrongs and domestic griefs as in the story of revolution, and if it be for the historian to narrate the one, it is for the novelist to dissect and explain the other. (pp. 203-204)

If the job of dissecting and explaining the “social wrongs and domestic griefs” of Ireland falls to its novelists, it is the responsibility of literary critics to “dissect and explain” the work of these novelists. Certainly, begrudgery is a topic that merits a bit more dissection and explanation.

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Notes

1. As John Harrington (1991) points out in *The Irish Beckett* (pp. 1-2), an example of the confusion Beckett's nationality engendered can be seen in the *New York Times* article covering Beckett's receipt of the Nobel Prize for Literature (in "Beckett Wins Nobel for Literature," 1969):

It was not immediately clear whether Mr. Beckett should be regarded as an Irish or a French winner, although Nobel officials recognize the country of work and residence. Mr. Beckett has lived in Paris since 1937, and has written mostly in French. (p. 3)

2. Kennedy does this in his 2005 essay "Cultural Memory in *Mercier and Camier*: The Fate of Noel Lemass. In M. Buning, M. Engelberts, S. Houppermans, D. Van Hulle, D. de Ruyter (Eds.), *Historicising Beckett/Issues of Performance* (pp. 117-131). Samuel Beckett Today 15. Amsterdam: Rodopi.
3. One famous example of this is Beckett's letter to Thomas MacGreevy dated January 31, 1938 in which Beckett (2009) speaks of

my chronic inability to understand as member of any proposition a phrase like "the Irish people," or to imagine that it ever gave a fart in the corduroys for any form of art whatsoever, whether before the Union or after, or that it was ever capable of any thought or act other than the rudimentary thoughts and acts belted into it by the priests and by the demagogues in service of the priests.

4. For example, see *Angela's Ashes*, Frank McCourt's (1996) memoir describing his childhood in Limerick spanning the early 1930s to the mid-1940s, in which several characters are accused of being "begrudgers" (pp. 145-160).
5. "Ressentiment" is a powerful form of resentment or enmity. *Ressentiment* is literally the French language term for the English "resentment." Søren Kierkegaard first introduced *ressentiment* as a psychological/philosophical term (Poole, 1993). Nietzsche later expanded on the concept independent from Kierkegaard's earlier work. Walter Kaufmann (2000) asserts that Nietzsche adopted the term primarily because "the German language lacks any close equivalent to the French term" (p. 441). Masterson uses *ressentiment* interchangeably with *begrudgery* because the two conditions are nearly identical in both their root causes and in their manifestations. I will be following Masterson's lead in this respect.
6. Brehon (from the ancient Gaelic word *brethrem* meaning "a judge") law, the native Irish judiciary system, existed in its fully developed form prior to the 9th century (Nicholls, 1972, p. 44). According to *The Book of Aicill*, the composition of which dates to the 3rd and 7th centuries A.D., "The five crimes of man [that] cause no happiness," include "Crime of foot, crime of hand, crime of eye, crime of mouth, crime of tongue" (O'Mahoney & Richey, 1873, p. 95). Satire and verbal assault fell under the category "crimes of the tongue," and these two forms of injury were considered to be equivalent to stealing cattle or violating another man's wife, as the ancient laws did not discriminate between civil and criminal offenses (Connolly, 1998, p. 320).
7. Shaw (1930) actually insisted that the components of *begrudgery* were stronger in Dublin than elsewhere in Ireland because

of "a certain flippant futile derision and belittlement" that was "peculiar to Dublin" (p. xxxiii).

8. Sinclair, a successful businessman, sued Gogarty for what he felt was a libelous depiction of himself, his brother, and grandfather in Gogarty's *As I Was Going Down Sackville Street* (Knowlson, 1997) in a case of what may well have been a literary manifestation of *begrudgery* on Gogarty's part with regard to the well-to-do Sinclairs.
9. The strategy of the defense was to show that Beckett was not an impartial witness and to discredit him in the eyes of the jury. To accomplish the latter, the defense tried to establish guilt by association with the supposedly pornographic Marcel Proust (Beckett had written a monograph on Proust). The defense also tried to demonstrate that Beckett's banned collection of stories, *More Pricks Than Kicks*, was both lewd (knowing the title alone would suffice to prove this for most of the jury) and blasphemous. Beckett was actually forced to read passages from the book that the defense labeled blasphemous. The defense counsel completed its attack on Beckett asking whether he would describe himself as "A Christian, a Jew, or an atheist" to which Beckett replied, "None of these" (Knowlson, 1997, p. 258).
10. For further information on Beckett's part in the trial, see Deirdre Bair's *Samuel Beckett* and Ulick O'Connor's *Oliver St. John Gogarty*.
11. *Begrudgery* within academia is by no means limited to Ireland, but rather is endemic to the profession. The point of this passage is to illuminate a manner in which Beckett may have encountered *begrudgery* and to demonstrate that *begrudgery* was not limited to the uneducated or to members of the lower socioeconomic classes in Ireland.
12. *Eleutheria* was written in 1947, the same year Beckett wrote the original French version of *Molloy*.
13. For a complete history of *Eleutheria*, please see Graf (2014).
14. This is the publication date of Beckett's English translation that was completed in 1951. The original French version—completed in 1947 and published in 1951—will not be the focus of this essay as this argument applies strictly to Beckett's English language version of *Molloy*.
15. Freethinkers were generally frowned upon by the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland at that time according to Anthony Cronin (1989) in *No Laughing Matter: The Life and Times of Flann O'Brien*: "There were regular condemnations of non-existent Communists and almost equally invisible free thinkers by the bishops, whose Lenten Pastorals, sometimes occupying two whole pages, were reprinted in full in the newspapers" (p. 157).
16. The letter this rant is excerpted from was written at Ezra Pound's instigation regarding the possibility of British Parliamentary Pension for Joyce (Ellmann, 1959).
17. Beckett first tackled the concept of hypocritical Christian piety in the poem "Ootfish," a 19-line poem published in *transition* 27 (April-May 1938), but this attack was not aimed specifically at Roman Catholics, but all Christians.
18. Beckett earlier employed this term in a letter to MacGreevy (dated "25/3/36") describing some Italian books that he had procured as "lepping fresh from Florence". The entire phrase "lepping fresh" is Dublin slang for freshly caught fish (FN6; Fehsenfeld & Overbeck, 2009, p. 326). "Leppin," it should be apparent from the context, is a phonetic rendition of the Irish pronunciation of the English word *leaping*.

19. Interestingly, in *The Philosophy of Irish Ireland*, Moran (1905) condemns Irish resentment and begrudgery, lamenting that “in Ireland there is no criticism, only abuse” (p. 3).
20. American hip-hop culture has developed a word in the past two decades to describe a similar personality type—“haters.” But this is a term that is not mainstream and is used only by limited segments of American society.
21. The idea of a *pensum* derives from public school parlance and is a form of chastisement that must be completed such as detention, physical labor, or the mindless copying out of passages from books (Ackerly & Gontarski, 2004). Beckett first introduced the concept of the pensum into his writing at the conclusion of his study *Proust*.
22. *Defunctus* is the completion of the ascribed punishment of a pensum (Ackerly & Gontarski, 2004).
23. Born in Derry, Hume is one of the most important figures in the recent political history of Northern Ireland. A founding member of the Social Democratic and Labour Party and a former member of Parliament from Northern Ireland, Hume was corecipient of the 1998 Nobel Peace Prize with David Trimble, former leader of the Ulster Unionist Party.
24. This is a specific area where more research is needed, as Nina Witoszek and Patrick Sheeran (1991), in their essay “The Tradition of Vernacular Hatred,” call into question Lee’s assumptions:

How does he know? No substantiation for the traditional roots of begrudgery is offered apart from a brief review of its more recent manifestations. If there is a tradition of begrudgery, is it uniquely Irish? How far back does it stretch? What are its sustaining sources? (p. 13)

25. Please see Stephen Graf’s “The Birth of Begrudgery: A Study of Resentment in 18th and 19th Century Irish Literature” for a full discussion of this.

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Author Biography

Stephen Graf studied at Trinity College, Dublin and the University of Newcastle upon Tyne, and currently teaches at Robert Morris University in Pittsburgh. He has published work on Beckett in *The Beckett Circle* and *The New England Theatre Journal*.