Melon Study Guide

Melon by Julian Barnes

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Introduction

Julian Barnes's short story □Melon□ is divided into three sections, covering three ages in the life of a British nobleman of the late eighteenth century: before, during, and after the French Revolution. Dividing his life into segments without explanation may be confusing for readers at first, but Barnes's precise imagery and thoroughness of detail make his story credible and compelling. Even readers who are unfamiliar with the time period in which this work is set can lose themselves in Barnes's lush rendering of a very specific life.

The characters of this story live lives of privilege; they have no idea where food comes from or what difficulties most people face just trying to provide basic sustenance for themselves and their families. Over the course of the story, the main character grows from a child of privilege to a prisoner of war, but he does not necessarily learn about humanity.

□Melon□ was published in Barnes's 1996 short story collection *Cross Channel*. The stories in this collection, like many of his other works, are concerned with the relationship between France and England, two countries separated by just a few miles of water whose histories have been intertwined.

Author Biography

Nationality 1: English

Birthdate: 1946

Julian Barnes was born in Leicester, England, on January 19, 1946. His parents were teachers. He attended Magdalen College, Oxford, earning a B.A. with honors in 1968. After college, he held a variety of freelance writing positions. He wrote entries for the *Oxford English Dictionary Supplement* in the early 1970s then became a reviewer for the *Times Literary Supplement*. In 1977, he became a contributing editor for the *New Review*. He has been a literary editor for the *New Statesman* and the *Sunday Times of London* and has been a television editor for the *New Statesman* and the *Observer*. From 1990 to 1995, he was the London correspondent for the *New Yorker*, writing a regular column. He was also a contributor to the *New York Review of Books*.

Barnes published his first novel, *Metroland*, in 1980, followed by *Before She Met Me* in 1982. At the same time, he began writing detective fiction, which he published under the pseudonym Dan Kavanagh, using his wife's maiden name. He had married Pat Kavanagh, a literary agent, in 1979. In 1984, he published *Flaubert's Parrot*, which established his international literary reputation. It was shortlisted for the Booker Prize and won the Geoffrey Farber Memorial Prize in England, and in France, it was awarded the Prix Medícis. He went on to write ten more novels, two under his pen name.

In 1996, Barnes changed the course of his writing, publishing his first collection of short stories, *Cross Channel*, which contains □Melon.□ He published essays frequently, including those collected in *Something to Declare: French Essays*, which dwell on his fascination with Britain's long relationship with France, a theme that is prevalent in *Cross Channel*. In fact, Barnes's work is so well accepted in France that he was made an Officier de l'Ordre des Artes et des Lettres. He has also won the Somerset Maugham Award and the E. M. Forster Award from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters. A collection published in 2004, *The Lemon Table*, centers on the theme of aging. He published *George and Arthur* in 2005, an historical tale in which Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the creator of Sherlock Holmes, plays a prominent role.

Plot Summary

First Section

The first section of □Melon□ is presented as a letter that a young British nobleman, Hamilton Lindsay, writes to his cousin Evelina, in 1774. Lindsay is traveling in Europe and is on his way to Rome with his tutor, Mr. Hawkins, when, at Evelina's suggestion, they change direction and stop at Montpelier, a city in the south of France (now spelled Montpellier). Lindsay makes observations about French food and French culture, noting, for instance, that the people of France seem to have no particular sport that they follow and that the women of the country strike him as homely: he says that pretty women are so rare that once, when one walked into an inn near Lyons where they were dining, everyone stood and applauded. Being a member of the nobility, he makes a distinction between those he refers to as □people of quality,□ who are even more pampered than they are in England, and commoners, whom he finds to be dirtier and more poorly mannered than the English people of the same, landless class.

His description of France ends with his praise for the melons that are grown in the southern French countryside. Unlike the melons grown in England, which need to be carefully cultivated, the melons of France grow abundantly and have a superior flavor. Lindsay reports that he has been eating these melons often.

Second Section

The second section of the story picks up in August 1789, the first year of the French Revolution, although that fact is not revealed for some time. Sir Hamilton Lindsay is no longer the narrator, though he is still the subject. He is an adult aristocrat, fattened, with his own estate to manage. He has been married to Evelina for ten years.

The narrative follows Sir Hamilton as he is traveling to Dover to join a team of cricket players who are scheduled to cross the English Channel to play a goodwill competition against a French team. The English team is comprised of both aristocrats and commoners, which cricket enthusiasts such as Sir Hamilton approve since it allows them to recruit the best players. But others of the nobility, particularly the wives of some of the nobles on the cricket team, feel that blurring the class lines by letting servants treat their masters as equals on the cricket field sets a confusing precedent.

Sir Hamilton and his assistant gardener, Samuel Dobson, travel to Chertsey on August 6, 1789, to join other members of the British team. Dobson is required to ride on top of the coach in the rain because Sir Hamilton feels that the wooden cricket bats are more likely to be damaged by the water than Dobson is. During the trip, Hamilton Lindsay reflects on Evelina's opposition to this trip: people in England know that there is trouble in France between ordinary citizens and the aristocracy. Still, Sir Hamilton is not afraid.

The cricket match between the English and French teams has been arranged by John Sackville, third Duke of Dorset. Ever since being appointed ambassador to France six years earlier, Dorset has returned every summer for the cricket season, but this year the political tensions have made his return impossible. To address the bad feelings between the French and the British aristocrats, Dorset has arranged a match on the Champs-Elysée. The British players are traveling to Dover at which point they will sail across the English Channel to France for the game.

As the band of British players approach Dover, they meet Dorset and his followers on the road. The cricket match is called off: a few days earlier, mobs of angry citizens forced the British ambassador to flee from his home in Paris and, presumably, looted the place. Dorset has escaped across the English Channel to England. He hopes that enough of the aristocrats he had arranged to play for the French team have managed to flee to England to enable him to arrange a match there.

Third Section

The events of this section take place years later. The French government has fallen. King Louis XVI and Queen Marie Antoinette have been incarcerated and then, in 1793, are beheaded. Many of the people who knew Sir Hamilton Lindsay through cricket have died fighting the French. Sir Hamilton himself has been a prisoner of the government established by Napoleon Bonaparte and has been held for years until he can be traded for a French officer held by the British, a General de Rauzan. Three years into his captivity, Lady Evelina Lindsay was allowed to join him, along with Dobson, who is now the majordomo of the household. Barnes also refers to Dobson as the □chief forager□ of the household, indicating that the government does not provide a decent standard of living for the Lindsays but that they must live on whatever can be scrounged.

Sir Hamilton and Lady Lindsay are allowed to walk about the town freely, followed by a French army guard. They attend the Catholic Church every Sunday afternoon, even though Sir Hamilton does not think of himself as a Catholic. The town was sacked by angry peasants during the revolution. They have taken out their anger at the Catholic Church, which supported the aristocracy, by forcing priests to either flee or marry; by dressing mules in religious vestments and parading them in the streets; and by using the Catholic Church for target practice with canons.

Sir Hamilton's mind is as devastated as the town. His thoughts continually turn to the line-up of the cricket team that gathered in Chertsey in 1789, intent on playing against the French, listing each member, each time forgetting the name of one of the players, which Lady Evelina gently supplies for him.

The story ends with their having dinner one Sunday after church service. While Sir Hamilton mutters about the cricket team, Lady Evelina tries to focus his attention on pleasant thoughts. While he talks incoherently about past events, about the people who are gone, and about his theory that the entire revolution might have been avoided had

the cricket game between the French and English nobles been played, she points out what a delicious melon they have with their meal.

Characters

William Bedster

Bedster appears in this story as an example of the flexibility of the English class system: at one time the butler to the Earl of Tankerville, Bedster is described as having been able to rise in society to become a publican, or tavern manager, in Chelsea.

Samuel Dobson

Dobson is the second under-gardener at Sir Hamilton Lindsay's estate. He is not a very good gardener, but Sir Hamilton hired him away from his previous employer because he is a good cricket player. When he travels with Sir Hamilton to Dover in August 1789 to participate in the match against the team of French nobles, he is required to ride outside the coach in the rain. Sir Hamilton's reasoning is that Dobson can survive the extreme weather better than the wooden cricket bats.

In the later years of Sir Hamilton's life, when Hamilton is mentally unstable and being held by the French government, Dobson is brought from England to live with him. The doctor caring for the nobleman thought □it might be advisable to send for the man Dobson, to whom the General made such frequent allusion that the doctor had at first taken him to be the patient's son.□ It is clear that Sir Hamilton places great importance on Dobson's participation in the game, which illustrates the way that cricket can be used to bridge class distinctions.

Dorset

In the story, John Sackville, the third Duke of Dorset, was appointed the ambassador from Great Britain to France in 1783. He is rumored to have been romantically involved with Marie Antoinette, the French queen, referred to here as Mrs. Bourbon after the family name of King Louis XVI. The way Dorset runs his home in Paris scandalizes several proper British matrons. Being an avid cricket enthusiast, he returns each year to England for the cricket season.

In 1789, the intensifying French Revolution makes it difficult for him to travel, so Dorset devises a new plan: in response to some slanderous remarks made against England by some French nobles, he arranges a cricket match between British and French teams to be played in Paris.

The players for the British team are on their way to Dover, the port from which they will sail to France, when they run into Dorset and his party, who have been put off their Parisian estate on August 8, 1789, in the midst of the French Revolution. Despite his brush with death and race to get out of the country, Dorset is still cheerful, ready to try to

arrange the same match in England with French nobles who, like him, have been driven from the country.

A few years after his return to England, Dorset is thrown into depression when he hears that the French royalty have been arrested. There are rumors that he gave his cricket bat to Mrs. Bourbon and that she kept it hidden in her closet until the palace was ransacked by revolutionaries. He locks himself in his room and never ventures outside again.

General du Rauzan

Du Rauzan is a French general who was captured by Sir John Stuart at Maida. He is being held by the English army, and so the French army is holding Sir Hamilton Lindsay as a bargaining piece for an exchange. The exchange, however, is on hold indefinitely. The problem seems to be that du Rauzan is not held in much favor by Napoleon, so there is no urgency to get him back.

Mr. Hawkins

In the first section of the story, Mr. Hawkins is tutor and companion to the young Hamilton Lindsay, on his trip through Europe. Hawkins is presented as a stern, unpleasant man, though that characterization might just be the perspective of a boy in his care.

Later, when the revolution is underway in France, Sir Hamilton invites Hawkins to join him in traveling to that country for a cricket match, but Hawkins says that he would rather remember France as the peaceful place it had been fifteen years earlier.

Mrs. Jack Heythrop

Mrs. Heythrop defends the traditional class structure. She disapproves of the way that Dorset has lived in Paris during his six years as ambassador to France, with gamblers and prostitutes coming and going freely from his house. She is also a source for the argument against letting commoners play on the same cricket teams as aristocrats, supporting racing as a good sport instead because all of the participants□owners, trainers, jockeys, and grooms□know their social place and stay separated.

Lady Evelina Lindsay

The first part of the story is presented as a letter from young Hamilton Lindsay to his cousin Evelina. She is explained as being the reason that he travels to France in the first place, as she is living in Nice and has encouraged him to see the country. He refers to her as a cultivated woman whom he greatly admires and wants to impress, feeling that she will tease him for his awkwardness as a letter writer.

Evelina does not appear in the second section of the story either, but she is mentioned. By this time, Hamilton Lindsay and she have been married for ten years. Sir Hamilton believes that she does not approve of his passion for cricket. When he leaves for France, which coincides with the start of social upheaval, she is crying and whispering instructions to Dobson, who is making the trip with her husband. Although he feels badly about her crying, particularly because she has never cried before when he has gone off to play cricket, he does not realize that she understands the perilous situation in France better than he does.

Lady Evelina is an important presence in the third section of the story. She and her husband are living in a French village under the guard of one of Napoleon's soldiers. Sir Hamilton's mind wavers between past and present events. Still, Lady Evelina has come to France to be with him and take care of him. She speaks to him as rationally as she can but also tries to pull his mind away from melancholia and toward more pleasant thoughts.

Sir Hamilton Lindsay

This story follows Sir Hamilton through three phases of his life, focusing on his relationship with France as a measure of his maturity.

In the first section, Hamilton Lindsay is a young man, traveling with his tutor and relating his impressions of the country to his cousin Evelina in a letter. Because he is young, he reports on issues, such as the suppression of religion, that are important causes of the coming French Revolution without recognizing their significance. Because he has only known a life of privilege, he does recognize the class distinctions between the aristocracy and the common people, but his observations about these distinctions lack depth. For instance, he tells the story of a coachman who whipped his horse and then was in turn whipped by his master, a story that ends with the coachman hugging the horse; Hamilton Lindsay admits in his letter, □I draw no lesson from this.□

In the second section of the story, Sir Hamilton is a jaded, callous aristocrat. He is married to Evelina, but his real passion is cricket. He treats his cricket bats better than he does his servants, although he is well aware that other aristocrats feel that he treats his servants too well because he treats Dobson, an assistant gardener, as an equal on the cricket field. Sir Hamilton is aware that there is political strife in France, but he does not take it seriously. He still believes in the class system and cannot even conceive of the idea that lower-class people might want to harm the aristocracy. He is so wound up in his passion for cricket that he and his friends are in the process of traveling to France for a cricket game when they find out that the some French aristocrats are just barely escaping the country with their lives and others have not been so lucky.

In the third section, Sir Hamilton is a broken man with a damaged mind. He has been a general in the war against France, and the war has ruined him. He is held as a prisoner of the new French government, though they do not think him much of a threat and have him watched by a guard as a token gesture. A doctor has advised that his wife and valet

should be allowed to come from England to be with him, to soothe his troubled mind. Much of the time, he does not make sense when he talks, blurring the past and the present, sometimes talking about people who have died as if they are still around and at other times showing himself to be well aware of his and his friends' situation. In between his periods of inchoate verbal wandering, he is still fixated on the cricket game that was called off by the revolution, feeling that if it had occurred, all of the social turmoil of the country might have been avoided.

John Sackville

See Dorset

Lumpy Stevens

Stevens, a gardener for the Earl of Tankerville, is a common man who has earned Sir Hamilton Lindsay's respect with his cricket prowess: once he won a bet for the earl by hitting a feather on the ground with a cricket ball one in four times. Later in his life, when his mind is snapped by the ravages of war, Sir Hamilton often refers to Stevens's feat, especially when he is considering the damage done to the Catholic Church by revolutionaries who have used it for target practice, musing that Stevens's aim was much, much better than theirs.

Themes

Aristocracy

□Melon□ focuses on a particular member of the English aristocracy, showing different facets of him over the course of years, highlighting the different perspectives that one can have as a member of the ruling class. When he is young, he is not the master of his world but instead is watched over by his tutor, Hawkins. Hawkins does not have control over his youthful employer, as might be expected of an older, experienced man: for instance, it is young Hamilton Lindsay who dictates the route of their trip, telling Hawkins where they are to go without asking his permission. At the same time, Lindsay is not autonomous but must rely on Hawkins's guidance, even if he does so begrudgingly. At this point of his life, he is trying to understand the social order by affecting a knowing tone that does not sound entirely convincing. He tells his cousin Evelina his views about □the people of quality□ and the □common people□ in France and how they compare to comparable social classes in England. Still, when he sees a man beat another man like a horse, it is so beyond his experience that he cannot explain it.

Fifteen years later, Sir Hamilton, now an estate holder, has grown into a comfortable aristocrat. He is so secure with his servants that he does not feel the need to actively enforce the differences between the social classes; he is not worried about allowing them to play as equals to him on the cricket field. More significantly, he does not concern himself at all about politics, feeling that his hobby, cricket, is more important. His unshaken faith in his own entitlement makes him sure that his rank and privilege will remain constant.

By the end of the story, Sir Hamilton Lindsay is an example of the powerless, clueless aristocracy that the social revolutions of the late eighteenth century attempted to cast aside. He is kept from knowing how powerless he is by a new ruling class that still has some respect for his type. He is allowed to have his wife come and live with him in captivity and is told that he may be useful in a prisoner trade, justifying his existence. Because he has known mostly leisure for his whole life, his only point of reference is his favorite leisure activity, cricket.

Obsession

One reason that Sir Hamilton Lindsay cannot comprehend the political reality of the coming French Revolution is that he focuses obsessively on cricket. Because of this obsession, he fails to see the importance of the historic events occurring around him. He does not properly understand his wife's concern about his proposed trip into France at a time when mobs are rising up against the nobility, interpreting her objection as prompted by a dislike of his favorite sport. He does not note the evacuation of French aristocrats, but he does note that his friend, the Duke of Dorset, has missed the cricket

season for the first time in years. At the end of the story, as Sir Hamilton looks back on the events, he asserts the naïve belief that the whole revolution could have been avoided by a good cricket match.

To some extent, his final theory might be more than just the enthusiasm of a man with an obsession. While England has a class system at the time of this story, the ruling class's obsession with cricket overrides some of its more conservative members' commitment to hierarchy. On the cricket field, noblemen commingle with servants and come to recognize them as people. In a perfect world, such an obsession might have caused the French aristocracy to mix with the peasantry and have created a sense of familiarity between the two sides that may have prevented bloodshed.

Religion

During the French Revolution, religion came to signify the breach between the established Catholic Church, which had been the largest landowner in the country, and the self-determination available to ordinary people through Protestantism. In Sir Hamilton Lindsay's personal story, though, religion represents the status quo in a much more specific way. In his later years, after having witnessed brutal fighting between social classes, he becomes a regular churchgoer, even though, as Barnes explains, □he would as soon step inside a mosque or a synagogue as inside a papist shrine.□ The revolutionaries in this small French town have created an alliance between the Protestant aristocracy of England and the French Catholic peasantry: the same people who sacked the church and humiliated the priests are the ones who burned down the *hôtel* of the Duke of Dorset. In this case, the religious convictions of the commoners have been strong enough to overcome the revolutionaries and keep the church standing. Sir Hamilton relies on the same residual respect for authority to keep him in the villagers' good graces and to protect him from the revolutionaries' hostility. Though religion is a small, almost inconsequential matter to him and a symbol of the hated aristocracy to the revolutionaries, it is a source of potential change for the working people.

Revolution

Shielded by privilege and money from the harsh realities of the hungry working classes, Hamilton Lindsay is unaware of the bitter ferocity with which the French peasants are willing to revolt against the prevailing class system. Although he is aware that something is going on in France in August 1789, it does not seem like anything serious enough to interrupt the cricket game planned for the Champs-Élysées in Paris. He naively feels that a squad of eleven noblemen, armed with cricket bats, has nothing to fear by entering a country that is in the throes of violent social upheaval.

In fact, the French Revolution was the culmination of great frustration with the prevailing social order and, like other political revolutions, was exceedingly brutal. Violence was aimed indiscriminately against anyone who had benefited from the old social

order—nobles, aristocrats, landowners, and the clergy, most notably. Also like other revolutions, the change, long in the making, came suddenly. Social observers who were aware of the mood of the majority could see the change coming and could predict that government's efforts to suppress the revolution would only serve to make it more violent. However, powerful individuals denied being at risk for as long as they could. The Bourbons had been on the throne of France for nearly three hundred years; they could not see the mayhem of revolt coming.

In the last part of this story, Barnes shows an aspect of revolution that is seldom described: the rational side, once the rampant bloodshed has ended. The people of the French town where Sir Hamilton is held know that they have no grievance against him, an Englishman, and so they allow him to go about his days in peace. The new government of Napoleon Bonaparte even allows his wife and servant to join him in confinement. In this interlude, before Wellington's defeat of Bonaparte at Waterloo and the return of the Bourbons to the throne with Louis XVIII in 1814, the French people do not recognize the English as their enemy.

Style

Symbolism

Barnes conveys the significance of the story through the use of symbols. One of the most obvious symbols is the game of cricket. To Sir Hamilton, cricket represents a community of rich and poor, brought together by individual skills. Barnes uses the game as a means of revealing social assumptions. The privileged aristocrats enjoy the leisure activity. Sir Hamilton mulls over the various ways that he and his friends care for their cricket bats, while his gardener is forced to ride outside of their coach in the rain. Sir Hamilton could consider the real needs of the working poor around him, but nothing in his education or lifestyle encourages him to do so. He occupies himself with the game instead.

Melons, too, are given special attention in this story, so that readers can hardly avoid pondering their possible symbolic significance. They appear in the first section as a local delicacy, a natural wonder that represents the best of southern rural France. Their sweetness is so remarkable that even a young nobleman who is trying to affect a cool attitude raves about them. In the story's last segment, Lady Evelina tries to keep Sir Hamilton from slipping into depression by urging him to focus on the wonderful melons they have with their lunch. He finds himself unable to concentrate, though: for him, the melons resemble such things as the cannonballs that have been used to smash the Catholic Church (representing the wanton violence that escalated throughout the revolution) and, of course, cricket balls (representing, for Sir Hamilton, humanity's potential for excellence). The connection is in the layered meanings: the wealthy aristocrats ate melon and played cricket while other human beings starved; the revolution hurled at them in response, changing their personal worlds permanently, though not permanently removing upper classes from power.

Epistolary Fiction

Barnes establishes the character of Hamilton Lindsay by having him speak for himself in the first section of the story. Given the type of person he is, it is effective to have him express himself in a letter. A work of fiction that is presented as if it is a letter written by one character to another is called □epistolary.□

There are several reasons why the epistolary style works well for this character. For one thing, he is literate and thus has the means to record his thoughts and ideas effectively. For another, as a gentleman, he would use this formal form of communication. Finally, as an apparently historical document, the letter comes to the reader as an artifact of that era, a way of seeing the aristocratic lifestyle prior to the revolution and the attitudes that incited lower classes.

Later in the story, Barnes drops the epistolary form with its first person point of view and adopts the third person to describe Sir Hamilton's mind. This shift gives readers some distance from the character, enabling them to see the level to which he falls, against the backdrop of massive social and political change.

Historical Context

The Reign of Louis XVI

The first part of this story takes place around the year 1774, or roughly the time when Louis XVI ascended to the throne. For more than a century before Louis XVI's reign, France had suffered under the rule of the self-indulgent monarchy. Wars and poor management of the country's wealth had burdened the population with increasing debt. Those in power□the nobles and the clergy□benefited from the status quo, and so they worked to suppress any measures to make the system more fair. Heavy taxes were imposed upon the peasantry, with attempts to revise the tax codes, such as increasing taxes on property owners, defeated by aristocrats. Religious worship other than in the Catholic Church was severely punished, such as the episode young Hamilton Lindsay describes in □Melon,□ in his letter to his cousin, about seeing a Protestant minister hanged in the marketplace for the crime of conducting religious services.

By 1788, the country was bankrupt. Louis XVI, who was not a strong king, was forced to take some step to address the social inequality that made life miserable for the majority of the population. He convened the Estates-General in 1789 for the first time since 1614. This group consisted of the clergy (First Estate), the nobility (Second Estate), and the bourgeoisie (Third Estate). Though the Third Estate included commoners in theory, they were in practice excluded.

The Revolution

The Estates-General convened in May 1789. After fighting off challenges to structure and methods to be used, the body eventually decided to vote themselves a National Assembly, answerable not to the ruling establishment but to the people. They agreed to remain in session until France had a new constitution. The king reacted by locking them out of the hall where they met and then restructuring his ministry on July 11.

Violence broke out in Paris three days later, when angry mobs forced their way into the Bastille prison. They only released seven prisoners, but the symbolic act of defiance against the established regime ignited the passions that had been seething for so long. The mob went on to take the city hall and kill several government officials, including the mayor of Paris.

After this, the king and his followers backed down, and tensions subsided for a few weeks. The spirit of revolution began, though, and violence broke out in various places throughout the country. On August 4, 1789, the old political order collapsed when the National Assembly declared an end to feudalism: those who had been in power, such as clergymen, and certain politicians, lost their standing and were forced to flee for their lives (the story specifies August 8 as the day that the Duke of Dorset abandoned his embassy and headed back to England). Louis XVI, his family, and his supporters, were

held under arrest at Tuileries Palace. They lived there for two years, escaping in June 1791 by dressing in peasants' clothes, but they were recaptured before they could reach Varennes. Their attempt to escape made it clear that, despite their proclamations, they opposed the revolution. In January 1793, Louis XVI, was executed; his wife, Marie Antoinette, a regal woman who openly disdained the common people, was beheaded before a cheering crowd on October 16 of that year, her body thrown into an unmarked grave.

The French Republic

In 1793, the other monarchies of Europe, fearing that the revolutionary spirit that overran the French government would spread, opposed the new order in France. The new government went to war against Great Britain, the United Netherlands, Austria, and Spain, losing in each. To keep up military strength, conscription laws required military duty of hundreds of thousands of Frenchmen: this, along with the rejection of the Catholic clergy, fueled the counter-revolutionary spirit.

The government responded in June 1793 with actions so repressively brutal that they came to be known as the Reign of Terror. New laws were passed to punish those who opposed the centralized government, and tribunals were convened across the country with the power to sentence insurgents to death. People were as likely to be executed for suspicion of crimes as for actual treason. The government that had fought against the injustices of the old feudal system was only able to stay in power by its own injustices.

In 1799, General Napoleon Bonaparte, the commander of the army and one of the most brilliant military strategists the country had ever known, staged a coup, taking control of the French government, seizing control of the legislature, and having himself appointed First Consul. Later, after suppressing a coup against him by the Bourbons, the relatives of Louis XVI, Napoleon crowned himself emperor of France, a position that he held until he was forced to abdicate in 1815. Louis XVIII, the brother of the former Louis XVI, took the throne after the fall of Napoleon.

Critical Overview

Julian Barnes has been long considered one of England's finest novelists, and his reputation grew to international acclaim with the 1993 publication of his breakout novel, *Flaubert's Parrot*. Still, as of 2006, he had not established much of a reputation as a short story writer. *Cross Channel*, the book that contains □Melon,□ was his first collection of short stories, published at a time when his reputation as a fiction writer was already well established. Reviews of the stories were mixed, but generally positive. Barbara Hoffert, writing in the *Library Journal*, refers to Barnes's □typically luminous, literate, restrained prose,□ noting, □Throughout, Barnes exhibits a wonderful sense of time and place and an exactitude of detail.□ She recommends it for most library collections. A brief review in the *Virginia Quarterly Review* expresses the opinion that Barnes proved with *Flaubert's Parrot* that he is the rightful heir to Russian novelist Vladimir Nabokov. The review states of *Cross Channel*: □This smart collection of stories only adds to his patrimony. Barnes's prose is always a delight to read, not only for the imagination and simplicity of the tale, but for the sheer lyricism and intelligence of the page. This writer, clearly, is a master.□ The *New Yorker*, one of the most influential of American publications, praised Barnes in a light-hearted way, noting, □In his first collection of stories Barnes again proves that there will always be an England.□

Though Barnes has published short stories infrequently, his reputation as a short story writer did continue with the publication of his next collection, *The Lemon Table*, in 2004. The *San Francisco Chronicle* called that collection □stunning,□ assessing it in much the same manner that *Cross Channel* had been portrayed. □Playful, angry, wry or humorous,□ the reviewer notes, □his tone is right on. Everywhere he ventures, Barnes is sure-footed: Each word, each tone, each nuance of phrase is just right.□

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1

Critical Essay #1

Kelly teaches creative writing and literature at two colleges in Illinois. In this essay, Kelly explains that the life of the story's protagonist, Hamilton Lindsay, is organized backwards, slipping increasingly away from maturity.

Julian Barnes's short story □Melon□ has many political implications. It is the tale of an English nobleman's encounters with French culture at three distinct times in his life, giving readers his view of that country before, during, and after what is arguably the most significant event of the country's history, the revolution that transformed it from a monarchy to a republic. Still, this history lesson might have less impact if it were not attached to the personal story of a credible protagonist. Barnes makes his readers think, as they piece together the dates and places mentioned in the story into a recognizable timetable that corresponds with the French Revolution. But putting too much emphasis on the external events, the researchable aspect of the story, can distract readers from an important part of its design. The French Revolution adds highlights to the story of Hamilton Lindsay, the protagonist of □Melon,□ but it should not be allowed to eclipse the story entirely: without a basic structure that can stand on its own without historical events, this story would be less meaningful.

The primary story, told in three distinct segments, concerns how Hamilton Lindsay, a man of leisure, seems to age backwards, going from maturity when he is young, through a decidedly adolescent middle age, and ending up his final years in infancy. Barnes makes this a story that could happen to anyone, really, regardless of their historic period or social class. It helps that Lindsay is a member of the upper classes, of course, because that gives him the luxury of focusing on frivolous matters that a lower-class working person could not afford.

In the first phase of the story, Hamilton Lindsay is probably a teenage boy or young man. He is too young to travel on his own and tours the continent with his tutor, Mr. Hawkins, whom he criticizes for treating him like □some feeble-minded boy.□ It also becomes clear that this trip□originally intended for Italy and rerouted at Lindsay's discretion□is meant to be educational, a grand tour of Europe intended to broaden his knowledge of culture and history. Hamilton is not yet considered mature enough to act independently.

Even so, he is mature enough to write a letter to his cousin Eveline, giving a detailed account of his trip that includes acute observations and even some sharp reflection on himself, indicating that he is smart enough to know what is lacking in his own education. Of course, he has some childish ways about him, but he also has an eagerness to look at the world and learn from experience. His tone with his cousin has the sort of sniping, faux-angry flirtatiousness that might be expected of a boy but that balances nicely with his formal closing, including regards to her parents and an appropriately expressed desire to see her again.

In the first section, Hamilton Lindsay clearly knows his limitations. He may complain that his chaperone holds old-fashioned ideas, but he is smart enough to evolve, to change his assessment of French customs when he can see that he has been wrong: □I have come to a warmer understanding about such things,□ he explains about the local oddities of dog barbers and open-air lemonade stands. It is made clear throughout his letter that he is willing to see things anew. At this stage in his life, certain outside experience can change him. Unaware of the degree to which privilege blinds him to the realities of the working classes, he nonetheless is perceptive and recognizes cultural differences.

The same cannot be said of Lindsay in middle age. In the second section of the story, when he is most likely in his thirties, Hamilton Lindsay, now titled, is no longer interested in exploring strange lands, different cultures, unfamiliar foods, or the relative differences between nationalities. His attention is so narrowly focused on the game of cricket that he can dismiss the distant rumblings of the French Revolution; the sort of issue pressing on his mind is whether butter, ham fat, or urine might be best for curing the wood of a cricket bat. Thus focused on entertainment and game, he is slow to realize that the French peasantry is capable of violence against the country's aristocracy. When he senses this threat, he locates it away from himself, among the French, and with denial well rooted in noble privilege, he assumes the political and social upheaval in a neighboring country has nothing to do with him: the only adjustment he makes in light of the news of difficulty in France is to consider a new venue for the match that was scheduled for Paris.

As an adult, Hamilton Lindsay focuses on playing a game. He has the attention span and ego of a child. Affluence has indulged him and blinded him to the wider world. He was born into the world he now enjoys, one that has existed with little alteration for generations. Its origins are medieval; its system is feudal. If it is unfair, the ones favored by it would be the last to notice. The upper classes, people of Sir Hamilton's social circle, have the luxury to live for the day, not to think about what tomorrow brings, since all the tomorrows they have known provided for all their needs and desires and then some. In this section of the story, which takes place in England, France is described through John Sackville, the third Duke of Dorset, who, as Great Britain's ambassador, is placed as close to the revolution's epicenter of French ruling groups as an Englishman can be. Lindsay views the revolution through Dorset's description. But the trouble can be put out of mind; upon his return to England, Dorset immediately directs his attention to rearranging cricket matches. Leisure is a mindset and over time generates blind spots.

In the last section, Hamilton Lindsay is a prisoner in France, circumstances which should bring about a sense of one's own mortality that would turn a person's thoughts toward the serious. The town in which he lives is burned out: the church has been damaged, and food is scarce. People he knows have died. Still, it is cricket that consumes Sir Hamilton's thoughts. Unlike his middle-aged self, though, he does not live in the present plan for the game. Now, he lives in the past, struggling to keep clear about his all-star cricket team. Mentally unstable, Sir Hamilton cannot list the members of his team correctly, even though the same eleven names have been with him for,

perhaps, decades. His wife attempts to distract him from morbid thoughts of his fallen station by directing his attention to a sweet melon, but he is not able to remain in touch with reality for any length of time. He has the mind of a child, frustrated at times because he can at times recognize his limitations but cannot master them.

It is no coincidence that □Melon□ crosses a time when the world is undergoing an unprecedented growth spurt with the story of one individual who is devolving from maturity to infancy. The shielded, privileged lifestyle that enabled a man to concentrate on a game throughout his adult life was bound to fall someday in the face of a massive shift in political thinking. Against a distant backdrop of the French Revolution, Barnes creates a representative of an endangered specie in Sir Hamilton Lindsay: a man so addled by privilege that his entire life is a backward slide toward an infantilized state. This story is about a person, not an age: unlike many stories, though, it is tempting to read □Melon□ as a history lesson, rather than a lesson about the workings of the mind.

Source: David Kelly, Critical Essay on □Melon,□ in *Short Stories for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2007.

Adaptations

Barnes's official web site at http://www.julianbarnes.com offers biographical information, background about his many books, interviews, links, and more.

Topics for Further Study

Make a poster showing the kinds of clothing gentlemen of the late 1700s wore while playing cricket. If you cannot find any sources showing the exact outfits for cricket, then show what would be considered casual clothes of the time.

Research the ways that Napoleon spent his time when he was held in exile at St. Helena, a situation that parallels Sir Hamilton Lindsay's at the end of this story. Write a short story in which melons from the south of France lead Napoleon to a realization about his life.

The first section of this story is presented as a letter from young Hamilton Lindsay to his cousin. Find an old letter that someone wrote to you and analyze it, pointing out things that you did not know when the letter was first sent and how they are hinted at within it. Write an essay on your conclusions.

Barnes hints at an affair between the Duke of Dorset and the queen of France, Marie Antoinette. Read a biography of Marie Antoinette and write an explanation that either takes the position that her reputation has been slandered or that the story captures the sort of person she actually was.

Sir Hamilton Lindsay agrees that nobles and commoners ought to play together on the cricket field. Find a movie that shows people in contemporary times crossing class lines, perhaps in order to engage in sports, and write a comparison that shows how much and how little that story has in common with this one. The movie, *Chariots of Fire*, may be one possible choice for a recent film.

Compare and Contrast

1780s: A young aristocrat can travel with his entourage across France, knowing that the peasants will not dare interfere with someone of his social class.

Today: Wealthy people travel with security details, knowing that the possibility of kidnapping is a threat.

1780s: Cricket is the craze among the British aristocracy. Though the game has historical roots dating back to the 1300s, the organization of teams and leagues in the second half of the eighteenth century propels the game to become Britain's national pastime.

Today: Soccer, a game that is played by people of all social classes around the world, has more popularity, though Britons still recognize cricket as connected to their national identity.

1780s: Local delicacies, such as melons, strawberries, or oranges, are only enjoyed by people with the means to travel to exotic places.

Today: Modern methods of refrigeration and transportation make it possible for people in developed countries to enjoy fruits and vegetables that are not indigenous.

1780s: The idea of democracy is new to Western culture, with revolutions in the United States and France replacing monarchies with governments run by the citizens.

Today: The fledgling democracies of the Middle East are in the same early stages that the Western democracies were in during the 1790s.

1790s: Sir Hamilton Lindsay's trip by horse-drawn coach across England to Dover, where he will depart for France, takes three days.

Today: Sir Hamilton could leave his estate in the early morning and, traveling by airplane, be at de Gaulle Airport in Paris before noon.

What Do I Read Next?

Barnes wrote the introduction to a collection of essays called *Paris and Elsewhere: Selected Writings*, by fellow Englishman Richard Cobb. The first essay in the book, "Experiences of an Anglo-French Historian," speaks of the kind of research one would do to write a story like "Melon." This collection was first published by the *New York Review of Books* in 1998.

Most critics agree that Barnes's greatest novel is *Flaubert's Parrot* (1984), which chronicles the travels of a British doctor who follows the life of Gustav Flaubert, author of *Madame Bovary*, in order to determine if a stuffed parrot he has obtained was actually once owned by the famous French novelist.

Christopher Hibbert's historical narrative *The Days of the French Revolution* covers the time from the meeting of the Estates-General in 1789 to Napoleon's triumphant conquest of the country ten years later. It was first published in 1990 and is available as of 2006 from Harper Perennial.

Barnes's essay collection *Something to Declare: Essays about France* covers a range of topics, from Flaubert and Baudelaire to the Tour de France (the subject of two essays: "Tour de France 1907" and "Tour de France 2000"). His insights are enlightening, and his writing is always clear and delightful.

Martin Amis is another London novelist, whose career has paralleled that of Barnes. Amis focuses on subjects that are more contemporary and more politically charged. A good example of his work is the novel *Time's Arrow*, concerning a doctor who participated in torture at a Nazi concentration camp, looking back over his life. The book was first published in 1991 and is as of 2006 available from Vintage.

Barnes discussed the publication of *Cross Channel*, as well as other aspects of the writing life, with Kate Kellaway, in an interview, "The Great Fromage Matures." It was published in the London *Observer Review* on January 7, 1996.

Further Study

Binton, Craig, *The Anatomy of Revolution*, Vintage, 1965.

Binton's book, considered a classic in its field, explores the American, French, and Russian Revolutions, explaining their similar structural patterns.

Guignery, Vanessa, *The Fiction of Julian Barnes*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.

Guignery has written extensively about Barnes and here gives a comprehensive overview of criticism on Barnes's works.

Kempton, Adrian, "A Barnes Eye View of France," in *Franco-British Studies*, Vol. 2, Autumn 1996, pp. 92-101.

Basically reviewing *Cross Channel*, Kempton focuses on the importance of French themes throughout the book.

Moseley, Merritt, *Understanding Julian Barnes*, University of South Carolina Press, 1997.

Though this book touches on only a few of the stories from *Cross Channel*, it offers extensive explication of Barnes's fiction dating from the time that this story was published.

Pateman, Matthew, *Julian Barnes*, Northcote House, 2002.

Pateman's focus is on Barnes's novels, but his analysis gives a good understanding of the writer.

Sesto, Bruce, "Julian Barnes and Postmodernist Fiction," in *Language, History, and Metanarrative in the Fiction of Julian Barnes*, Peter Lang, 2001.

This book focuses primarily on Barnes's novels, but Sesto's introduction offers a good way for readers to place Barnes in a literary context.

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Barnes, Julian, □Melon,□ in *Cross Channel*, Vintage Books, 1996, pp. 65-87.

Hoffert, Barbara, Review of *Cross Channel*, in *Library Journal*, March 15, 1996, p. 98.

Review of *Cross Channel*, in *New Yorker*, December 16, 1996, p. 109.

Review of *Cross Channel*, in *Virginia Quarterly Review*, Vol. 73, No. 4, Autumn 1996, p. 132.

Review of *The Lemon Table*, in *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 25, 2004, Sunday Final Edition, p. M2.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Short Stories for Students (SSfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's"For Students" Literature line, SSfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on "classic" novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of SSfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of SSfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of "classic" novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members—educational professionals— helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in SSfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed—for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man–the character is listed as "The Narrator" and alphabetized as "Narrator." If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. • Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name "Jean Louise Finch" would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname "Scout Finch."
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by SSfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an “at-a-glance” comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author’s time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

SSfS includes “The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,” a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children’s Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Short Stories for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Short Stories for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Short Stories for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from SSfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

“Night.” Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234–35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from SSfS (usually the first piece under the “Criticism” subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on “Winesburg, Ohio.” Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335–39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of SSfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. “Margaret Atwood’s “The Handmaid’s Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,” Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9–16; excerpted and reprinted in Short Stories for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133–36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of SSfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. “Richard Wright: “Wearing the Mask,” in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69–83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59–61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Short Stories for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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