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Malcolm Bradbury

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Malcolm Bradbury : The History Man: A Novel before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The History Man: A Novel:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Elegant sentences, iffy plotting. By Doug Wykstra Extremely well-written, but the story is slight and the satire undeveloped. But the satire that exists is incredibly sharp and funny, and surprisingly still relevant for our times. Not bad for a 40-year-old book poking fun at a very specific social phenomenon. 18 of 19 people found the following review helpful. Middle-Class Marxist By A Customer Bradbury exposes academic socialism by measuring it with its own values and dialectic. Howard Kirk, self-proclaimed revolutionary, is ridden to the core with the middle class values he campaigns against. The "History Man" of the title, he strives to avoid all change in his life despite his progressive stance. "The History Man" is biting satire of British university life, sparing no one, staff and students alike. The book is very funny, but there is nobody to like - just as the characters don't care what happens to each other, it is hard to care what happens to them. The humour is vicious, and if you've ever been part of an institution you won't stop laughing. 3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. A masterpiece of impossibly witty conversation By TChris I love novels that feature the kind of impossibly witty conversation that real people never have -- at least I'm not witty enough to have them and I don't know anyone who is. Maybe only the British have learned the art of witty conversation. Kingsley Amis and Malcolm Bradbury mastered the fictional witty conversation, which is one of the reasons I enjoy reading them. The History Man is a send-up of the conspicuously unconventional, studiously modern social science academic, newly imbued with the fashionably permissive attitudes of the 1960s. Set in the 1970s, The History Man is about life as performance, "self-made actors on

the social stage." To the extent that it skewers self-styled radicals who have since fallen out of fashion in academia, it retains its relevance in its skewering of academics who care more about themselves than their students. Howard Kirk teaches sociology at a progressive college. His wife Barbara is involved in a variety of activities. The couple is well known and liked, in part because of their spontaneous willingness to open themselves to everyone they encounter (although their spontaneity is carefully stage managed). Having achieved commercial success writing about "new" sex (what's new is that people are having a lot more of it with a greater variety of partners), Howard is enjoying the bourgeois benefits that he denounces. While condemning all forms of snobbery, Howard indulges in his own. His carefully cultivated image as a "free traveler through life" allows him to condemn colleagues who have put down roots, who are part of the establishment he seeks to destroy (but only if its destruction forms a foundation for his own success). He is also a confrontational rabble-rouser who manipulates others to assure that he can be confrontational without harming his job security. In fact, he bases his opinions not on reason or ideology, but on how much controversy the opinions will generate. Chicly radical in her own way, Barbara avoids employment by leading consciousness-raising sessions, organizing unions, and engaging in whimsical acts of community activism. Howard and Barbara love to talk, mostly about themselves. For example, when Howard criticizes one of his friends for having gone bourgeois, Barbara smugly reminds him that "they haven't had all our disadvantages." They also love to give parties that celebrate freedom (from "economic timidity, sexual fear, and prescriptive social norms"), although the parties really celebrate Howard and Barbara's ability to give a party that others will appreciate and admire. Some of the novel's best passages consist of characters dissecting each other with scalpels made of wit, peeling away their superficial exteriors to reveal their hollow cores. Howard's friend Henry is the novel's most likable character. As he ages, he has come to value only "attachment to other knowable people, and the gentleness of relationship." For holding beliefs that are sincere and sentimental, poor Henry is mocked by most of the other characters. Another likable character, Miss Callander, manages to see right through Howard but succumbs to his charm anyway. The novel's most insightful moment comes when a student whose politics are markedly different from Howard's gives him a polite verbal thrashing. The reader might or might not agree with the student, but he raises a good point about the possibility of a professor's political bias affecting the perception of a student's academic efforts. Howard's response, on the other hand, is petty, vindictive, and narrow-minded -- just like Howard. Howard wants to make his life interesting, an end he accomplishes by using deceit and guile and provocation and then stepping out of the way so he can enjoy the dramatic consequences before engaging in the academic version of gossip by discussing "interesting" problems with his analytical friends. The question in the reader's mind is whether all of Howard's disagreeable character traits will at some point backfire. I think most readers will root for that, while at the same time enjoying his roguish antics. Enjoying the witty conversations that pepper the novel, though, is the real reason to spend some time with Howard and his friends. Appended to the Open Road volume is a 1998 essay in which Bradbury discusses the novel and the rise and fall of sociology. Since that was my undergrad major (chosen because it was easy to get good grades without actually attending classes), I enjoyed his remarks.

Howard Kirk is the trendiest of radical tutors at a fashionable university. Timid Vice-Chancellors pale before his threats of disruption. Reactionary colleagues are crushed beneath his merciless Marxist logic. Women are drawn by his promiscuity. A self-appointed revolutionary hero, Howard always comes out on top.

From AudioFile Husband and wife radical poseurs wreak havoc in British academia during the '60s and '70s in this satirical novel first published in 1975. Novelist, critic, television dramatist and part-time professor Bradbury won the Royal Society of Literature's Heinemann Prize for it and adapted it into a TV series. On audiotape, narrator Paul Shelley gives it fine treatment, underplaying the humor and nicely vivifying the characters. Despite all the references to the European left, anyone trafficking among the American liberal intelligentsia of the period will recognize the symptoms and get a chuckle out of them. Y.R. AudioFile 2000, Portland, Maine-- Copyright AudioFile, Portland, Maine