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The History Man on Television: Ideology and Mediated Embodiment

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Abstract: In early 1981, BBC2 presented a four-part adaptation of Malcolm Bradbury's novel *The History Man* published in 1975. Reviewers noted how television altered Bradbury's satiric critique of academic radicalism. An ironic, anti-subjectivist novel became a more disturbing humanist narrative that buttressed the neo-liberal critique of Marxism. This essay attempts to show how mediated embodiment translated the abstractions of language and ideology into something more existentially specific and politically damaging. It also seeks to demonstrate how changes in the cultural landscape during the 1970s unexpectedly transformed the meaning of Bradbury's satire when broadcast on television.

Keywords: Malcolm Bradbury, *The History Man*, academic radicalism, BBC2, mediated embodiment.

Short Title: History Man

A 'scholarship boy' born in 1932, Malcolm Bradbury frequently commented upon how his meritocratic generation embraced the progressive causes of the post-war Labour Party but balked at the disruptive egalitarianism of a younger generation who in the Sixties and early Seventies challenged authority, liquidated tradition, and levelled cultural hierarchies. (Bradbury 2006) A prolific writer and a 'liberal humanist' painfully alert to its ambivalences and limitations, Bradbury explored the genealogy of his convictions and the predicaments of its outmatched adherents. (Taylor) Like his close friend David Lodge with whom he was sometimes confused, he sought relevance in a rapidly changing academic profession without sacrificing the values that attracted him to it and sustained his not inconsiderable personal ambitions. Satire provided a cloak of protection. When performed deftly, humour disarmed its targets from pious

criticism and sold well among an expanding audience of educated professionals eager to read about themselves.

Published in 1975, *The History Man* proved more controversial than Bradbury's earlier novels. (Bradbury 1975, 2000) The work included portraits of ineffectual liberal academics that inhabited his earlier fiction, but its central character, Howard Kirk, encapsulated the provocative radicalism of the Sixties that Bradbury found increasingly alarming. He hoped that his narrative strategy of describing outward behaviour and eschewing his character's subjectivities might render his satiric critique of academic radicalism more palatable to the progressive colleagues whose allegiance he valued. Critics on the Left were not fooled and lambasted his efforts though the modest sales of the novel limited the political damage to their cause. In early 1981, however, the BBC2 presented a four-part adaptation of the novel that became a minor sensation. Explicit depictions of sexuality riveted the public's attention. More important, the television adaptation transformed an ironic, anti-subjectivist novel into a darker, more trenchant narrative. Early commentators noted this change but struggled to offer an explanation. The following essay makes two interrelated claims. First, it attempts to show how mediated embodiment translated the abstractions of language and ideology into something more existentially specific and politically damaging. Second it seeks to demonstrate how changes in the cultural landscape in just six years unexpectedly transformed the meaning of Bradbury's satire when broadcast on television. To borrow from Raymond Williams whose *Marxism and Literature* appeared shortly after Bradbury's novel, the politically emergent of the Sixties became unexpectedly more residual as new structures of feeling materialized. (Williams 1977)

As a title, *The History Man* deliberately embodied ambiguities. Bradbury absorbed Hayden White's contention that historical narratives borrow from the tropes of fiction to construct a usable past. (White) *The History Man* was a novel about such fictional constructions. It also concerned a radical sociologist, not an historian, whose presumed ideological grasp of underlying, powerful, and constantly evolving social structures diminished claims to individual agency, the intellectual armature of both bourgeois capitalism and liberal humanism. Bradbury disliked radical pretentiousness but decided not to associate himself with other scholarship boys whose meritocratic progressivism became politically reactionary when they opposed the democratization of British education. Bradbury's deep familiarity with the United States in the 1950s and 1960s provided him not only a subject for his comic fiction and a new field of study in Britain, but an appreciation of a comprehensive educational system that, for all its limitations, offered a future that might work. (Bradbury 1979) With characteristic ambivalence, Bradbury refused to be on the wrong side of history although he understood its costs for his own cultural allegiances.

Bradbury's repudiation of subjectivities in his novel solved a problem. David Lodge detailed the crisis of realist fiction in *The Novelist at the Crossroads*, published in 1971, a time when critical theory revolutionized literary study. (Lodge) Like sociology, the new theories favoured structure over agency, draining humanistic categories of their saliency. As he would demonstrate repeatedly, Bradbury grasped the absurdities of postmodern theory but he also understood its revolutionary potential. Like Modernists early in the century, the new theorists became an *avant garde* whose embrace of abstraction distinguished them from traditionalists bound to the text. The politics of theory remained ideologically egalitarian but its individual enactments in writing or the lecture hall demanded a level of intellectual mastery that created its

own hierarchies and exclusions. Bradbury sought to demonstrate in *The History Man* that he too could create a narrative that mirrored the contemporary distaste for conventional realism while simultaneously revealing the disabling weaknesses of postmodern assumptions.

The process was a struggle. Bradbury wrote draft after draft of the novel, saving them all for future scholars. These drafts, now housed at Indiana University where Bradbury taught in the 1950s, disclose how he laboured over virtually every paragraph, changing a word here, then redoing the sentence over that change. There are at least seven different versions of the opening paragraph to *The History Man*.ⁱ It was difficult to write a novel that described external behaviour without revealing its internal motivations, though he later maintained that Howard Kirk came closest to becoming a three-dimensional character. (Bradbury 1988) The novel dwells in the present tense not unlike the Kirks themselves who take ‘their messages from the prevailing air.’ (Bradbury 1975, 2000, 2) A scholarship boy but of a new generation, Kirk views education in his youth similarly as ‘an instrument, a virtuous one, for getting on, doing well, becoming even more respectable.’ (Bradbury 1975, 2000, 25) When he becomes a radical Marxist sociologist, he deploys it as revolutionary weapon to destroy the sexual repression and social privileges of the bourgeoisie. Kirk teaches at Watermouth, a fictionalized version of the new universities created after the Robbins Report. Modernistic in concrete and glass, Watermouth reflects the impersonality of its egalitarian hopes: its rooms ‘stark, simple, repetitious, each one an exemplary instance of all the others.’ (Bradbury 1975, 2000, 66) Undergraduates, like the faculty themselves, reject traditional elitism; ‘for Watermouth does not educate its students, it teaches its teachers.’ (Bradbury 1975, 2000, 136)

Bradbury’s studied depiction of flat characters fell well within the tradition of satirical caricature but it also exposed him to a technical problem of the Marxist art he imitated.

Sophisticated practitioners of dialectical materialism always understood the role of individual agency. The New Left in Britain that emerged after 1956 rejected accusations of historical determinism and figures such as E. P. Thompson borrowed their analytical categories from the earlier, more humanistic Marx. (Soper) But older and more hard-line traditions of Marxism remained suspicious of humanism in any form and sought an aesthetic that avoided bourgeois individualism and the comforts of agency. Eisenstein famously created films in which type replaced individual characterizations. Type offered an ideological perspective on character without delving into the subjectivities of psychology. (Goodwin 71) When famously the unnamed sailor breaks the plate in *Battleship Potemkin* he enacts the revolutionary moment among Russians in 1905 rather than express the frustrations of an oppressed individual washing the dishes of his superiors. In *The History Man* Bradbury wanted no reader to identify with any character and refused to provide a moral centre to the narrative. (Morace) Howard Kirk is a type that, as Bradbury's manuscripts reveal, drew from contemporary news stories that he clipped and saved.ⁱⁱ The liberal humanists of his novel such as Henry Beamish also prove to be examples of type: clumsy, dithering, ineffectual, and vulnerable to manipulation. As Bradbury later explained to John Haffenden, he wanted literature 'to estrange, but then to reacquaint.'
(Haffenden 56)

Bradbury's imitative narrative strategies impressed reviewers but deceived few about its satiric intentions. Ian Carter read it 'with increasing outrage and contempt' (Carter 13) and A. H Halsey, himself a distinguished scholarship boy, asserted that Bradbury undermined sociology as an academic discipline. (Halsey) He became associated with the reactionary intentions of the Black Papers, a plausible accusation he denied.ⁱⁱⁱ Commentators frequently noted Bradbury's equivocations and disarming admissions about his own liberal humanism, but they

underestimated the passion, even anger, that informed his defence of individual agency. Too young to fight in the Second World War, Bradbury still assimilated the repudiation of Fascism during the war and communist totalitarianism after it that enumerated the terrible human costs of asserting collective guilt and then enacting punishment on defenceless minorities. In a 1979 essay that he later revised, (Bradbury 1979) Bradbury explained why a painting by Goya, “A Dog Engulfed in Sand,” adorned the cover of the first edition of *The History Man*.

There are two dominant blocks of colour, distinct but intersecting; a fainter third panel rises on the right. But on the line where the two main panels meet, a flurried blob of grey paint reveals a figurative subject, hard to identify. It is one of Goya’s anguished heads, the head of a dog protruding from the lower colour plane. The body is absent, and we could think of it as hidden from us by the contours of rolling sand...The recognition transforms, humanizes and makes terrible the painting, removes it from abstraction...The construction remains abstract but loses its nature as abstract form; the abstraction surrounds, threatens and ironizes the living figure. (Bradbury 1988, 41)

To Bradbury the marginalization of literary realism by postmodern theory and the ascendancy of radical sociology as social criticism unwittingly reconstituted a *status quo ante* that legitimized collective guilt, a curse of authoritarianism. That Bradbury deployed a visual artefact to make his point anticipated what occurred when his written narrative became adapted for television early in 1981.

In a short review for the *TLS*, Hermoine Lee described how “something strange” happened when Bradbury’s coldly plotted characters in the novel become embodied by actors for television. The dialogue closely follows the novel and the episodic plot adapts well to television’s serial format. Yet, Bradbury’s detached narrative voice cannot be replicated on

screen. Human bodies ‘assume lives of their own.’ Sex becomes more prominent when bodies replace words. Characters attain ‘a dignity and pathos which it is not in the book’s interests to allow them.’ Even minor figures meant to be mocked acquire a ‘squalid pride.’ Bradbury’s carefully fabricated ‘anti-novel’ of ideas becomes richly inhabited and ‘a cold schematic novel about ideas becomes a warm story about bodies.’ (Lee)

A year later Philip Simpson expanded upon Lee’s insight in a remarkable essay for *Screen*. Alert to the ineffable differences between words and moving images, Simpson reiterates Bradbury’s strategies in the novel, emphasizing its anti-subjectivist refusal to identify with characters, its interplay between plot and contingency, and its unwillingness to provide a moral core to the narrative. Simpson also stresses the novel’s immediacy and its obsessive deployment of the present tense. Like Lee, he notes how the director of the television series, Robert Knights, vivified the sexual encounters from the novel altering their significance for the story and provoking controversy. Simpson also details how Knights’ opening credits and selection of music, including Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*, buttressed the theme of sexual pursuit. Simpson includes Knights’ reservations about the politics of the series and the director’s attempt to capture Bradbury’s characteristic ambivalences and evasions. Still, Simpson concedes that too many viewers ‘managed to appropriate both texts into an expose of *contemporary* British universities.’ (Simpson 25) He concludes his essay with reflections on the mysteries of mediated embodiment. ‘What follows then the characters of a highly stylized satire are re-presented as recognizable likenesses of men and women?’ (Simpson 29) Bradbury changed his own image of Howard Kirk when he watched Antony Sher’s performance and Simpson acknowledges his own transformed understanding of Anne Callendar when he witnessed Laura Davenport’s portrayal. ‘But questions about the visual representations of verbal style will need to be pursued a great

deal more before we are anywhere near a clear understanding of the adaptation of a novel for a visual medium.’ (Simpson 30)

Simpson’s characterization of television as a “visual medium” borrows from a powerful tradition of film analysis whose utility cannot be disputed. Yet the notion of television as ocular simplifies a complex relationship among its various participants, including characters within narratives and the audience absorbed in their behaviour. The scopic metaphor reinforces distance between individuals, the ‘I’ and the ‘Other.’ It elides the intense personal attachments generated by the temporal flow of moving images. Such attachments have prompted scholars to examine the role of emotion in cinema (Affron) and explore the complexities of how audiences identify with screen characters (Smith). The emergence of cognitive film criticism also unpack the logic of affective encounters. Carl Plantinga notes how the human face not only registered various emotions, but how such expression provoked what he called ‘character engagement’.

(Plantinga 244-5) These and many others works analyse the previously neglected affective impact of moving images on audiences.

A different metaphor of comprehension would also collapse such distance and might provide a useful alternative for interpreting mediated embodiment. (LeMahieu, 2011) Here the inter-subjective encounter becomes fundamentally *alimentative* and analogous to the relationship between food and the body. This metaphor stresses the persistence of need, connecting the recurring demand for biological sustenance with the Aristotelian notion of men and women as social animals. The alimentative metaphor also invokes taste, a sense that became redefined and expanded by the discourse on aesthetics in the eighteenth century. As applied to moving images, taste connotes various forms of social affiliation. Instrumental affiliations entail relationships of power and functionality. Agapic relationships offer friendship and love. The erotic fulfils

biological imperatives and flavours an extraordinary array of social encounters, including socially prohibited behaviours that challenge ethical norms, undermine hierarchies, and revolt against mortality.

If the affective metaphor of understanding becomes alimentative rather than visual, a different kind of interrogation might shape interpretation. As Giles Deleuze suggested in another context, the question shifts from ‘*what does a body mean?*’ to ‘*what can a body do?*’ A static, semiotic interpretation of meaning becomes subsumed within a more dynamic grasp of how bodies sustain each other within a social interaction. Such a question applies to both the unfolding interactions within the narrative itself and to the relationship between the characters on screen and the audience. A body becomes ‘a possible world’ that unleashes new social expectations, feelings, and experiences. (Rushton) Instrumental, agapic or erotic needs may be nourished or denied. Attention focusses upon the constantly shifting dynamics of social interaction on screen and how the audience becomes affected by them.

Such an analysis comes with its own limitations. It respects the existentially specificity of ‘warm bodies’ but quickly reaches cognitive boundaries when it seeks to describe them. How a particular actor ‘looks’ remains an elusive semiotic and the challenge becomes compounded when the aliments of a relationship require explanation.^{iv} The unfolding of an interaction on screen calls for an analysis of daunting granularity. Each spoken phrase and expressive gesture changes the dynamic between the characters and with the audience. Actors perform the subtle psychological nuances of their characters in ways that an audience might grasp intuitively without processing all the details, the gestalt of mediated embodiment. Yet these specificities disclose in all their ultimate mysteriousness what bodies mean and what they do in any television production. Under these criteria, a thorough analysis of the four-hour production of *The History*

Man would try the patience of any reader. Here a more selective approach will focus on two seminal relationships within the adaptation, each contributing to an understanding of how ideology becomes expressed and understood. In each of these cases, the script by Christopher Hampton follows Bradbury's novel with reasonable fidelity, although as in all adaptations plot compressions, chronological rearrangements, and changes in dialogue alter the story.^v

The relationship between Howard Kirk and his student, George Carmody, remains pivotal to both the novel and its television adaptation. In a crucial scene, drawn from Chapter Seven of the novel, Howard returns to his office where Carmody awaits his arrival. The novel reads:

He goes back to the Social Science Building; getting out of the lift, at the fifth floor, he can see distantly a figure waiting outside the door of his study. From this standpoint, Carmody looks like a creature at the end of a long historical corridor, back in dark time; Howard stands, in the brightness of the emancipating present, at the other. Carmody has shed his books; he carries only his shiny briefcase; he has a dejected, saddened look.

(Bradbury 1975, 2000, 146)

The notion of Carmody as an historically residual figure within a Marxist dialectic helps explain Kirk's antagonism towards him. Bradbury's drafts of the novel reveal how much attention he devoted to describing Howard's ideological views, jettisoning most of them in the final version in favour of a detailed description of Carmody's neat personal appearance in blazer, tie, and pressed flannels, 'a glimpse from another era; a kind of historical offense'. (Bradbury, *The History Man* 1975, 2000, 140) In the television adaptation, a point of view shot reveals a distant figure in the corridor, captures Howard's look of recognition when he realizes that it is George, and then tracks Howard closely from behind as Carmody suddenly looms before him, vaguely

threatening. (The History Man DVD) Yet, the camera cannot translate Carmody into ‘a creature at the end of long historical corridor, back in dark time.’ It discloses only a well-dressed young man, whose ‘historical offense’ may elude audience members who associate universities with deference and meritocracy. Kirk’s professed ideological distaste for the bourgeoisie cannot be conveyed univocally to an audience by an existentially specific embodiment of conventional respectability. Indeed, for an audience in the early 1980s, Kirk’s counter-cultural appearance may be more dated than Carmody’s, an artefact of fashion’s transient semiotics.

Once inside the office, the scene becomes much more poisonous, an encounter only partially relieved for the audience by Bradbury’s characteristic ironies. Here the struggle becomes one for survival: for George to remain a student at the university and for Howard not to be fired for ‘moral turpitude.’ Both the novel and the adaptation capture this tension. George asks ‘Can’t I exist as well?’ and later says ‘you’re destroying me.’ (Bradbury 1975, 2000, 148) Television accentuates this existential struggle, however, when non-verbal communication becomes a weapon of combat: what the body does to persist in its being. When he sits down, George places his briefcase on his knees, deploying it as kind of shield, while Howard crosses his legs and interlaces his fingers. As he listens to his student’s plea, Howard picks something off the bottom of his shoe, flicking it away dismissively, non-verbally revealing what he thinks of a relationship that he poisons. As George becomes more desperate, stifling a desire to cry, his voice goes into a different register when he says ‘I know more about you than you think.’ He also raises his nose slightly, as if encountering a bad smell. When he hypothesizes ‘what people outside universities would say if they knew the kind of things you do,’ he places his hands on his hips, a posture that affirms his superiority even as he pathetically fails to make his case. Howard, in turn, cannot maintain his composure. He raises his voice as he makes his points and

thrusts his fingers forward as he counts the reasons for George's failure. More important, in a significant departure from the novel, he grabs George and pushes him out of his office while shouting disapproval of such 'blackmail.' (The History Man DVD). These and other aesthetic choices by the director Robert Knights and the two actors deeply affect how the scene impacts the audience.

The scene also embodies complex modalities of affiliation, not only between George and Howard, but also how the audience regards the exchange. George acknowledges the fundamental asymmetry of power between student and professor but assumes that pedagogical instrumentalism would be tempered by agapic considerations. His words borrowed from the novel and embodiment within the televised scene create a more powerful rhetoric than the text alone. His request for fairness and tearful appeal to mercy carry more affective force when enacted before an audience who share his assumptions about power and responsibility. This empathy becomes reinforced when Howard complains about George's lack of 'human sympathy.' Howard's embodied intransigency also contains an unexpected erotic element not of sexual desire but of gendered stereotypes. Howard rejects George's 'artsy-fartsy' notion of sociology borrowed from Anglo-Catholic traditions that 'you import from English.' (The History Man DVD) This association of literary studies with effeminacy resonated with Bradbury's generation of scholarship boys who in their youth, as Richard Hoggart famously described, sat 'in the women's world.' (Hoggart 242) George is yet another liberal defeated by Howard's relentless instrumentalism and forceful masculinity when he physically ejects him from his office.

The novel clearly delineates the ideological differences between student and professor. George believes in 'individualism, not collectivism.' He claims that 'the superstructure is a

damned site more important than the substructure' and that 'culture's a value, not an inert descriptive term.' (Bradbury 1975, 2000, 148) He exhibits a knowledge of both Marxism and Classical Liberalism that buttresses his argument about politically-biased grading. Yet the televised scene changes the nature of the ideological dispute. Bradbury's comic ironies become heightened and emotionally more devastating within a scene of personal humiliation. When Howard angrily asserts his 'intellectual freedom' against George's pleas for understanding, he demonstrates how easily a principle of liberal ideology can be twisted by its adversaries, one of Bradbury's laments about tolerance. Social class provides an even more affecting example. 'You know you don't like me,' George moans. 'I don't hold the right opinions. I don't come from the right background or the right school. I don't look right for you, so you persecute me. I'm your victim in that class.' (The History Man DVD) By highlighting his social origins, educational affiliation, and physical appearance, George embodies on screen the consequences of Howard's reversal of hierarchies. Class privilege becomes socially disqualifying but does not disappear. It becomes transferred to another social class that asserts its own superiority of origin, education, and appearance only with a different accent. As Barbara Kirk remarked earlier, some people 'haven't had all our disadvantages.' (The History Man DVD)

The exchange between George and Howard during the second episode of *The History Man* lasts only a few minutes, but it vivifies how mediated embodiment privileges liberal ideology at the expense of Marxism. To Howard, George represents a decadent social class too long in power. He is a type of a residual bourgeoisie destined for extinction within the dialectic of history. To a BBC2 audience, however, he is an existentially specific individual far more than the abstract representative of a doomed social class. Collective guilt becomes harder to sustain when its victim stands before you. Even more than Goya's static painting of 'A Dog

Engulfed in Sand,' George's body enacts in real time the human consequences of ideological condemnation. His existence cannot be sustained in its being by a teacher whose instrumentalism lacks empathy and whose abstractions rationalize cruelty.

Howard's relationships with women provide another point of contrast between the novel and the television series. Bradbury published the novel in 1975 and set it three years earlier, about the time he began composition. During the 1970s the rapid rise of second-wave feminism altered the ideological landscape, transforming how both men and women evaluated the sexual revolution and the Sixties generally. Sexual liberation became less emancipating when judged solely by the Male Gaze. By the time the television adaptation appeared in 1981, identity politics began to displace male-dominated Marxist radicalism in Britain as the emancipatory narrative on the Left. As Brian Harrison observed recently, 'women had moved into a virtuous cycle whereby greater self-confidence prompted greater achievement, which advanced self-confidence still further.' (Harrison 239) This cultural shift affected how Howard's sexual adventures and manipulations would be regarded when portrayed on screen. His sex with a student, for example, now became less about overcoming repressive taboos and more about an abuse of power, exactly as George claimed. Howard's Marxist ideology masked something far less idealistic. As one reviewer noted, '*The History Man* was able to make Kirk more vulpine, self-centred, and self-righteous than one could ever have imagined for oneself simply from reading the book.' (Dunkley)

Disturbing to the reviewers of the novel, Howard's seduction of Annie Callendar became even more controversial when adapted for television. Clever and self-possessed, the young instructor of English proves Howard's intellectual equal during the first three episodes, shrewdly defending her humanistic approach to literature and deflecting his sexual advances. Her

capitulation in an extended scene of complex emotional dynamics begins when Howard bounds up the hill to her Victorian flat, a location that she jealously guarded. (The History Man DVD) Here once again an aesthetic choice by Robert Knights affects how the scene impacts the audience. The non-diegetic music of *Don Giovanni*, a motif in the television series, plays in the background as he arrives, when it emanates diegetically from Annie's wireless, an aural gag that links high culture with immediate danger. The incorporation of Mozart into the series connects Howard to a cultural tradition of seducers that his Marxist ideology would reject, quite aside from its assumptions about the BBC2 audience. Yet, the notion of erotic affiliation permeates the encounter. Partially shielded by the outside door, Annie blocks Howard's entry into her sanctuary. Howard shivers, reinforcing his claim to be cold, and deploying his body as a supplicant in need of shelter. After he gains entry, his countenance reveals an ephemeral glimpse of satisfaction having breached Annie's external defences. Once inside, they resume their clever repartee about narratives that provided both text and sub-text to their earlier, erotically-charged interactions. She claims that stories make her 'very thirsty' and goes into the kitchen to prepare tea while Howard furtively grooms himself in the mirror, an embodied detail missing from the novel. (The History Man DVD) The notion of physical sustenance as a preparatory occasion for sex characterized their earlier dinner at a restaurant, where Annie 'relished the scampi' but refused to bring Howard back to her flat. The satisfaction of one bodily aliment need not lead to another.

In one of Bradbury's characteristic ironies, Annie the literary humanist defends narrative 'structure' against the 'lax' contingencies of Howard's stories of 'sexual heroism.' One such tale involves Howard and his student, Miss Phee, an encounter that Annie inadvertently witnessed. In the televised scene Howard sits more in shadow as Annie bathes in light. Howard claims that

Miss Phee initiated sex that evening, implying with studied empathy that she demanded attention. ‘So you laid her down and gave her some,’ Annie interjects, continuing the repartee that shields her from Howard’s sexual interest. ‘Actually,’ Howard replies casting his eyes downward. ‘I wanted something altogether different.’ Then looking directly at her: ‘*You*’ A reaction shot reveals Annie’s stunned, softened response. An unexpected promise of agapic affiliation prepares the way for the erotic. (The History Man DVD)

Howard wants Annie to see the situation ‘humanly’ from his perspective, a plea whose obvious irony Annie notes. The ‘essence’ of his story complete, Howard sits back, tea cup in hand, and crosses his leg. Like a tutor to a student, Annie asks ‘if I may criticize?’ She notes the ‘fine feeling’ of the story but points out its limitations, including the regularity of their liaisons. Casting her eyes downward and fondling one of her Victorian curios, she also mentions Howard’s affair with Flora Beniform, a colleague. Howard disputes the rebuttal and, as in the novel, says ‘that if I did grade Miss Phee for her performance it wouldn’t be As and Bs.’ (Bradbury 1975, 2000, 226) On television, Howard virtually sings the line, creepily underscoring the young woman’s sexual inadequacies. Annie notes drily how narrative interpretation depends upon *point d’appui*, a response that prompts Howard’s rage as he leans forward from his chair. Annie quotes Henry James about fiction, prompting Howard turn his head away in disgust, not unlike George earlier. Howard reiterates the threat he faces, rises from his chair, and turns his back on Annie in frustration. Annie wonders what Howard wants of ‘Carmody or of me’ and informs him that George has an appointment with Vice-Chancellor. ‘Has he?’ Howard asks with quiet pathos and concern. (The History Man DVD)

Again the tone shifts and softens as Annie asks him sympathetically whether his livelihood might be threatened. George now positions himself nearer to Annie, as he leans

against her couch. Gazing downward, Annie admits almost tearfully that she returned to her flat because she was so worried 'about the both of you.' Howard wonders why she would be worried about a 'blackmailer and a fascist.' Turning her head towards Howard and slightly raising her voice, Annie now makes clear that George is not a fascist but 'a silly frightened boy...fighting for his life.' A heated exchange once again shifts the relationship, leaving Annie disgusted by Howard's point of view. Her best efforts finished, she lifts the tea service from the table when suddenly Howard violently swats it from her hand. Annie holds on to the tray as the tea set scatters loudly to the floor. This action, entirely missing from the novel and presumably inserted by Knights, prompts Annie to resume sitting, a frightened expression on her face as she, like George before her, confronts the intimidating power of male violence. (The History Man DVD)

Howard now leans towards her menacingly, batting the empty tray from her hand in a second act of force. He furiously accuses her of informing George about Howard's affair with Miss Phee, an accusation that later in the series he admits to be false. Another angry exchange ensues as Annie begins to lose her composure. An extreme close-up of Howard's face accompanies his demand to know 'whose side you're on.' Crying with her head turning in anguish, Annie says that 'she just wants to be fair.' Again in extreme close-up, Howard grabs her face with both hands and using his forefinger for emphasis, says slowly and with great emphasis that 'there's no such thing as fair.' He predicts a grim life ahead for her, and then sensing an opening, rises from the couch, and with a sweeping hand gesture, asks her to 'just look at this room'. 'What's wrong with it?' she replies, her body stiffening and in a voice resembling that of a child. George seizes his advantage. 'It's a hiding place, somewhere you can escape from life, sexuality, love. Somewhere you'll dry up and wither and hate and grudge.' As a violin softly plays non-diegetically, a close-up of Annie reveals sorrow. Tears fall from her

eyes as Howard continues to forecast her bleak future. The camera staying on her in close-up, Annie says slowly and with pitiful emphasis, 'I don't want this..... I can't bear this'. She then turns her head upward and looks up at him expectedly. The scene fades to a darkened bedroom, a temporal ellipsis indicating an accomplished deed. (The History Man DVD)

This moment-by-moment description, itself frustratingly imprecise, seeks to convey the complex emotional dialectic of a seminal encounter in the television series. Although the dialogue follows the novel with reasonable fidelity, aesthetically interpreted mediated embodiment contributes immeasurably to the affective dynamics of words on a page, a process addressed in literature by reader-response criticism. Each moment in time creates its own dynamic, not only between the characters but also with the audience. All the familiar categories of film criticism affect this dynamic, including lighting, sound, camera angle, and the choices of actors. Semiotics remains essential to understanding this dialectic although the essence of the interaction remains social and relational as well as visual. Here the alimentative metaphor proves useful. Both characters struggle to persist in their being, though their strategies shift as the scene progresses. Each plays off the moves of the other like players in a chess game as the modalities of their relationship change, sometimes rapidly. The instrumental infuses Howard's pleas for agapic understanding and become far more sinister when he resorts to violence. His manipulation of Annie's insecurities creates a kind of poison when he deploys the erotic instrumentally as a form of power and domination. Far more than in the novel, the scene becomes a rape.

The hermeneutics of the scene depends upon absorbed norms and biases of its audience. Here the politics of gender complicates Bradbury's satiric ideological target. For many men of his generation Howard Kirk embodies characteristics reminiscent of a disruptive theatrical

character from the 1950s. Like Jimmy Porter from *Look Back in Anger*, Howard Kirk is a rebel, only this time with a cause. Like Jimmy, his brashness cuts through the pretensions of humanistic culture and social respectability. Like Jimmy, his sexuality and masculine vitality overcomes the scruples of respectable but repressed women like Alison and Helena in Osborne's play. Howard's unveiling of a bleak future for Annie if she remains unchanged resembles Jimmy's calls for existential authenticity near the end of *Look Back in Anger*. Howard Kirk is what might have happened to Jimmy Porter had he lived through of the Sixties and its addling idealism in the decade that followed. By the early 1980s, such enactments of masculine sexual desire and domination became dated, even grotesque. The feminist interpretation of *Look Back in Anger* emphasized its misogyny rather than its male vitality. (Sierz) Like Jimmy Porter, the 'history man' was being relegated to a discredited past.

For more conventional political reasons, the television production sparked intense partisanship. The Right praised its exposure of Left-wing hypocrisy. Writing in the *Evening Standard*, Mark Wilder asked 'why did it take so long to humble these hollow men?' (Wilder) The *Financial Times* titled its review 'The "Left" Exposes Itself.' (Dunkley) Critics on the Left could not contain their contempt for the series. Terrance Hawkes, for example, linked the production to the McCabe affair at Cambridge and noted that 'Bradbury's trendy sub-Freudian "Oedipus in Boots" presented a handy model of the horrors mass education is said to have wrought in British universities.' (Hawkes) Yet the most biting critique of Bradbury appeared two years later, when Peter Widdowson published 'The Anti-History Men' in *Critical Quarterly*. Widdowson focuses his analysis on the novels of both Bradbury and Lodge, chronicling their shared 'progressive' humanism that champions disinterested tolerance and rejects politicizing culture. Bradbury in particular harbours illusions about his own neutrality.

What Bradbury fails to see—because of his fear of the threat to liberalism from the left—is that his denial of politics *is* a politics; that his reaffirmation of the old elitist liberal culturalism is just as much a part of capitalism as Mrs. Thatcher’s monetarism; that individualism is the central tenet of both capitalist economics and liberal humanism; that bourgeois liberalism *is* the ideology of capitalism; that it is *that* ideology (and ‘realism’ is complicit with it) which obscures the real social relations of the notional ‘free individual’s’ life; that late twentieth-century capitalistic society and culture is exposing the contradictions more and more sharply; and that even a liberalism of despair helps to disguise them. (Widdowson 12)

Widdowson especially regrets how the television series ‘magnified’ the ‘novel’s damaging effects.’ (Widdowson 20) Like other reviewers of the BBC production, he notes how it stripped the novel of its ‘post-modernist disguise’ disclosing its ‘real animus towards the radical left.’

Widdowson particularly despises a ‘nasty slur’ in the final episode. (Widdowson 21) As the last scene fades to black before the credits roll, the television adaptation adds a super: ‘Howard Kirk is now a Professor of Sociology at the University of Dewsbury. In the 1979 General Election he voted Conservative.’ (The History Man DVD)

In both the novel and the television series, Kirk’s pursuit of his own self-interest, his professed belief in ‘intellectual freedom,’ the publication of his book on privacy, and his fierce ambition to succeed professionally make the ‘nasty slur’ less ironic than intended. More important, the transformed political context between the novel’s publication in 1975 and the BBC production in 1981 provides a temporal dimensionality to the relationship between ideology and mediated embodiment. As Widdowson correctly asserts, *The History Man* on television reinforced Thatcher’s assault on the radical Left, not only at the universities but in

politics generally. (Widdowson) Even though Bradbury detested monetarism and the Thatcherite enthusiasm for consumerism, his satiric portrait of Howard Kirk helped discredit a traditional ideological alternative to possessive individualism. Bradbury's disarming admissions about the fatal weaknesses of his own political allegiances--revealed in interviews and personified in his fictional characters--masks the effectiveness of liberal humanist anger when aroused. (Ziegler and Bigsby) Bradbury was one of many figures in the 1970s who defended 'apolitical culturalism' against its critics. (LeMahieu 2015)

If identity politics eroded Kirk's male authority, neo-liberalism broke the arc of dialectical materialism. In the late 1970s, prescient observers on the Left such as Eric Hobsbawm and Stuart Hall explained the diminishing appeal of Marxism. In *The Forward March of Labour Halted?* Hobsbawm offered a sophisticated multi-causal argument for labour's decline. Britain was becoming a service economy gradually transforming the class system beyond recognition. An increasingly sectarian labour movement abandoned its ideals of class solidarity. Socialism lost its moral saliency when workers destructively fought among themselves for selfish, materialist goals. (Hobsbawm) Stuart Hall showed how Mrs. Thatcher capitalized on the Labour Party's divisions and created an authoritarian populism that combined 'the resonant themes of organic Toryism—nation, family, duty, authority, standards, traditionalism---with the aggressive themes of a revived neo-liberalism—self-interest, competitive individualism, anti-statism.' (Hall 48) Not unlike Malcolm Bradbury, Hobsbawm and Hall felt compelled to point out the limitations of the politics that they supported. By the early 1980s, Marxism was losing the future and its 'history men' were themselves becoming history.

The adaptation of Bradbury's novel for television in 1981 unexpectedly revealed this change. Some reviewers noticed that how dated the lived-world of *The History Man* appeared, though set in a period less than a decade old. What began as a contemporary production became a 'costume drama,' a cultural phenomenon that became especially prominent in Britain during the 1970s. *The Six Wives of Henry VIII, Upstairs, Downstairs* and a score of other productions became commodities that the BBC sold internationally at considerable profit and that the Left disparaged as 'heritage drama.' (LeMahieu 1990) Now the recent period of Left ascendancy was itself becoming a form of heritage as counter-cultural fashions became either appropriated by opportunistic capitalists or abandoned altogether. Bradbury wrote his satire to protest the displacement of his liberal humanism. As Widdowson's affirmed, Marxist priorities became endangered by a convergence between Bradbury's moral values and Mrs. Thatcher's neo-liberal agenda for higher education.

This temporal dimension of mediated embodiment discloses a limitation of any ideology that claims to transcend history and buttresses the postmodern suspicion of grand narratives. What can bodies do? They reveal a historical moment. We all live in a 'costume drama:' immersion in an ongoing-present masks recognition of it. As Raymond Williams observed presciently in 'Drama in a Dramatized Society,' 'actions of a kind and scale that attract dramatic comparisons are being played out in ways that leave us continually uncertain whether we are spectators or participants.' (Williams 1989, 9) Mediated embodiment also discloses a lived world whose uncanniness intensifies as time passes and conditions change. Raphael Samuel argued in *Theatres of Memory* that costume dramas may emphasize individual agency but they do not necessarily create false consciousness or bad faith. (Samuel) For all its satiric excesses, *The History Man* on screen dramatized a recent past whose immediacy in 1981 reinforced its

strangeness. Fashions changed and, as the final caption indicated, Howard Kirk evidently changed with them. What sustained relationships in one period no longer provided sustenance in another. Notions of collective guilt could not exculpate the abuse of authority. Sexual liberation could not excuse misogyny and male violence. An unholy alliance of Thatcherism and second-wave feminism gave Bradbury's liberal humanism new life.

Notes

ⁱ Bradbury, M. MSS, Folders 1, 2, 3. Lilly Library Manuscript Collections. Indiana University, Bloomington, IN.

ⁱⁱ Bradbury, M. MSS III, Box 26. Lilly Library Manuscript Collections. Indiana University, Bloomington, IN.

ⁱⁱⁱ Letter to Miss Riechers, 28 April 1977. Bradbury, M. MSS II, Box 3. Lilly Library Manuscripts Collections, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN. The same box contains an undated letter from Bradbury's father, a former railway clerk, that confides: 'I have always encouraged you since you took up University life but never realized what a hazardous profession it was.'

^{iv} Antony Sher was flattered to be offered the role of Howard Kirk by Robert Knights but doubted whether he was 'sexy' enough for the part. He later learned that Christopher Hampton initially had the same doubts. (Scher 148-49)

^v For the TV script and variants, see Bradbury, M. MSS III, Box 26. Lilly Library Manuscripts Collections, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN. Hampton later recalled that he was 'very faithful to the book.' He considered *The History Man* 'the only totally satisfactory television project I've been involved in.' (Hampton 70-71)

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