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THE “SMALL WORLD” OF MALCOLM BRADBURY

Malcolm Bradbury's novel *The History Man* (1975) represents one of the most famous campus novels in English. His interest in the university setting started in the fifties with his first novel *Eating People is Wrong* (1959) and it was finalized with his most famous university novel *The History Man*. In this paper we will pay attention to Bradbury's satirical perspective on the university life.

Key words: campus novel, satire, humour, university.

Introduction

When the name of Malcolm Bradbury (1932-2000) is mentioned, one remembers his famous scholarly works on literary history, such as *The Modern American Novel* (1983), *The Modern British Novel* (1993), or the study of modern fiction called *No, Not Bloomsbury* (1997). Moreover, he was a university professor for more than three decades, which provides him with an excellent point of view on university issues. So, the famous historian of literature, university professor, and writer tells a story about a reformed university in England.

Our aim is to see the university life in the novel *The History Man* (1975) through the lens of “a writer in an age of challenged humanism” (Knapp 345: 1989), as Bradbury referred to himself. The title of the paper “small world” we borrowed from David Lodge's article “Lord of Misrule.” Lodge, a theoretician of literature and a novelist himself, implies that this novel should be put in historical context because its “small world of the university is a stage for the dramatization and examination of larger issues” (Lodge 2008, internet).

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The History Man is Bradbury's third novel. This novel grew from two previous university novels, *Eating People Is Wrong* (1959) and *Stepping Westward* (1965). These novels depicted various phases in transitional periods in higher education and trends in society in general. So the university settings in these novels is at the same the illustration of the social history of the decade: *Eating People Is Wrong* illustrates the fifties, *Stepping Westward* illustrates Europe's turning to America and its popular culture trends in the sixties, and *The History Man* is about the radical freethinking of the seventies. The image of the university is the reflection of the society due to the increased public interest in university life.

The final university novel, *The History Man*, became popular immediately and reviewers mainly emphasized its humorous aspect,¹ but the story within the story was a grim image of higher education and its social role. There is a catch in the title: the first impression would be that it is a novel about a historian, or some historical figure, but on the first pages we find out that it is about a professor of sociology at the fictional University of Watermouth. In a smart and humorous manner, *The History Man* questions issues of traditional values of history, culture, and education versus modern sociological interpretation through the prism of the university.

In his first novel, *Eating People Is Wrong*, apart from the humorous aspect, Bradbury tried to provide "the first realistic attempt to deal realistically with life at a red-brick University" (Shaw 1981: 62). It is the novel of the fifties. The second novel *Stepping Westward* (1965) deals with the English writer who visits a Middle-Western American University. It opens some political and national issues. The third and final university novel is *The History Man* about Howard Kirk, "a radical sociologist" (Bradbury 1977: 3). Bradbury explains the relation between sociology and history. It all started with the influential book in the fifties *The Sociological Imagination* by C. Wright Mills:

Mills proposes the 'sociological imagination' as a form of what we would call, in another hideous word culled from the wreckage, 'empowerment.' He was offering, in a sense, a form of

1 Reviewers mainly defined the novel as "the funniest," "extremely witty," "a ruthless satire," among others.

Marxism without a manifesto, a social critique in the form of a science, a view of history where history already is powered with a well-guided sense of where it's supposed to go.

Mills was right: his age had turned to the sociological viewpoint. It was the time of the embracing cultural analysis, the handy social textbook. Postwar society was different from pre-war, and required new reporting. In Britain, at this time, Richard Hoggart was publishing *The Uses of Literacy*, Raymond Williams' *The Long Revolution*, the New Left analyzing such forces of social change as youth culture, sport, pop music. (Bradbury, internet)

This new sociological reading of society, tradition, and historical values resulted in a sort of gap between so called social interpretations of society and history and culture. The leftist interpretation found in the university fertile soil. However, this novel, according to Stan Cohen, “says a great deal more about the state of British liberal intelligentsia than it does about the state of sociology” (Cohen 1977: 533). Bradbury said that the subject of the book was “the great radical dreams [that] swept through Western-Europe, through France, Britain, the United States” (Rácz, Bradbury 1990: 99).

What happened to the university?

This novel for sure may be regarded as a university fiction. Of course, within the genre there are stylistic and thematic differences. The *conditio sine qua non* for the university fiction is the “familiarity with the university background” (Shaw 1981: 45). In general, university fiction relies upon a university setting, students, and professors. The best known novelistic settings of that period were the most famous English universities – Oxford and Cambridge. Accordingly, the setting was often labelled as “Oxbridge,” usually referring to “the romanticized academic novels of the early nineteenth century” (Womack 2005: 326). Patricia Shaw defines this novelistic interest in universities as a “genre” called the “university novel,” indicating the term's inadequacy, since it was related to the Oxford setting till the period after 1945 (Shaw 1981: 44). After the Second World War, the university novel became the campus novel: romantic became satirical.

From the 19th century till today, the university fiction has been related to certain social changes, which have affected higher education. One of the first was admittance of women to universities. The second would be the “increasing public’s interest in the business of higher education” (Womack 2005: 327). The third would be the so called “1944 Education Act,”² which meant the expansion of higher education, and the fourth would be liberalization of the university in the 1970s. These huge changes in the university system resulted in different attitudes. After 1944, the universities in Great Britain were not elitist intellectual institutions. All of the sudden, the universities grew in the industrial cities (Leicester, Birmingham, Manchester, etc.). Since the universities got the mass of new students, there was a need for new academic staff. The new, red-brick universities resided on inept academicians and confused students. Although the situation was serious, the authors mainly showed it in a humorous manner. The absolute beginner of this humorous, satirical genre was Kingsley Amis with his novel *Lucky Jim* (1954). In the same decade, Bradbury appears with his *Eating People Is Wrong* (1959). Some of the famous intellectuals were concerned about the future of higher education. The most famous example is W. Somerset Maugham’s statement expressed in his review of *Lucky Jim*:

I am told that today rather more than 60 per cent of the men who go to university go on a Government grant. This is a new class that has entered upon the scene. It is the white-collar proletariat. They do not go to university to acquire culture but to get a job, and when they have got one, scamp it. They have no manners and are woefully unable to deal with any social predicament. Their idea of a celebration is to go to a public house

2 “The Education Act required students to pursue their secondary education to at least the age of 15, while also creating a system of free secondary education consisting of distinct kinds of school, largely “grammar” and “secondary modern” schools. During the decades that followed, the Education Act accomplished its intended goal of producing a greater quantity of college-bound working-class students. Accommodating this influx of grammar-school students likewise necessitated the wholesale expansion of the British university system and resulted in the construction of an assortment of provincial redbrick institutions and new universities across Great Britain” (Womack 2005: 331).

and drink six beers. They are mean, malicious and envious. They are scum. They will in due course leave the university. Some will doubtless sink back, perhaps with relief, into the modest class from which they emerged; some will take to drink, some to crime, and go to prison. Others will become schoolmasters and form the young, or journalists and mould public opinion. A few will go into Parliament, become Cabinet Ministers and rule the country. I look upon myself as fortunate that I shall not live to see it. (W. Somerset Maugham 1955: 4)

The shock, which *Lucky Jim* provoked in the fifties, is benign in comparison to *The History Man* from the seventies. The changes of the concept of the university were rapid. From the sixties on, Lodge and Bradbury were university professors and they were part of the new university complexes built “on landscaped sites at the edge of cathedral cities and county towns” (Lodge 2008, internet). That is the scenery where the story of Howard Kirk happened. The new university campuses became the parallel world, in which “[s]tudents herded together and suddenly removed from parental control, were ripe for ideological awakening and sexual experiment, which sometimes turned into indoctrination and exploitation by their teachers” (Lodge 2008, internet).

The “Small World” of Red Brick and Concrete and Glass

This Bradbury novel is often labelled as a campus novel. The campus novel genre or academic satire genre was popular in the UK and the USA in the fifties. The aim of the British government was to occupy the youth with studying since there were no jobs for them. That resulted in huge changes in higher education: everyone could enter the university, regardless of their previous knowledge and hard work, and almost everyone could become a university professor. These new colours of the universities were funny and serious at the same time, so “someone had to do something with it,” as Kingsley Amis said when he visited the senior room at the University of Leicester, where his good friend Philip Larkin worked as a librarian. The result was the academic comedy of manners, or campus novel *Lucky Jim*:

I looked round a couple of times and said to myself, ‘Christ, somebody ought to do something with this.’ Not that it was awful—well, only a bit; it was strange and sort of developed, a whole mode of existence no one had got at from the outside, sort of like the SS in 1940. (Jacobs 1995: 143)

This “whole mode of existence no one had got at from the outside” is the best definition of the “small world” of the university. It is closed, funny, weird, cynical, and hypocritical, and it is different in each of the campus novels. There is a similar scene of the University meeting in Bradbury’s novel:

‘May I point out, Mr Chairperson, that of the persons in this room you are addressing as “gentlemen”, seven are women?’ says Melissa Todoroff. ‘May I suggest the formulation “Can we come to order, persons?” or perhaps “Can we come to order, colleagues?”’ ‘Doesn’t the phrase itself suggest we’re somehow normally in a state of disorder?’ asks Roger Fundy. ‘Can I ask whether under Standing Orders of Senate we are bound to terminate this meeting in three and a half hours? And, if so, whether the Chairman thinks an agenda of thirty-four items can be seriously discussed under those limitations, especially since my colleagues will presumably want to take tea?’ (Bradbury 1977: 154)

This is just a part of the whole. The meeting scene is in a form of complex, almost a chapter long multi-dialogic form. Everyone who has experienced the departmental or university meeting finds this chapter very familiar and realistic. In this scene one can notice “pedantry, time-wasting and petty power-mongering of many meetings” (Lippitt 2005: 87). The meeting is long and exhausting, but first of all, it is futile and senseless. It indicates the satirical aspect of both professors and the higher education within the integrated university system. In this excerpt we cast a glance upon the professors. They are a relevant segment of the campus novel form and the main protagonists of this novel.

In this novel the academic setting at the “red-brick” universities became the setting at the “concrete and glass” universities. Such a university is the fictional University of Watermouth: “That bright place of glinting glass and high towers” (Bradbury 1977: 57). Ironically, even in

that bright place of science and academism, there is rain: “It rains on the shopping precinct, as the Kirks do their early-morning shopping; it rains on the terrace, as they unload the wine and the glasses, the bread, the cheese, the sausages; it rains even on the University of Watermouth” (Bradbury 1977:57). This refined example of cynical satire Tory Young picked out as an illustrative example for the use of trope and schemes in literature (Young 2008: 65-66). From the other side, such detailed description of the university campus captured the attention of numerous reviewers. A majority of them indicated the importance of the university buildings as a “still expanding dream in white concrete glass, and architectural free form” (Bradbury 1977: 3). These were designed by fictional Finnish architect Jop Kaakinen. Bradbury paid particular attention to the description of the campus interior and exterior. The modern and monumental campus was originally housed in an Elizabethan mansion. This ironic travesty implies the radical change of values in the intellectual, cultural, and academic milieu. It is interesting to say that this was the topic of the architectural paper by Jonathan Hill, in which he explains how “red-brick” universities were replaced by the “plate-glass” universities, as described in the novel *The History Man* (Hill 2012: 6).

The network of the university of the seventies is based on paradoxes: big buildings, but with small university minds, and the old Elizabethan cosiness replaced by modern architectonic megastructures. The first thing one can notice is how the social scene at the universities in society in general was changed in just twenty years. Drinking, misbehaviour, fights among the professors were replaced with anarchical freedom, wild parties, promiscuity, and drugs. If Jim Dixon was anti-hero, what one can say for Howard Kirk or for any character from the novel *The History Man*?

Howard Kirk is unspeakably realistic. That is probably because the novel was based on Bradbury’s own university experience: “He was an entirely familiar figure on every modern campus – if, like me, you happened to teach in one of those bright concrete-and-glass new universities that sprang up over the Sixties in Britain, and right across Europe and the USA” (Bradbury, internet). He is the naturalistic picture of the modern university Dorian Gray, mildly introduced in the first chapter:

Howard is a sociologist, a radical sociologist, a small, bright, intense, active man, of whom you are likely to have heard,

for he is much heard of. He is on television a good deal, and has written two well-known and disturbing books, urging new mores, a new deal for man; he has had a busy, literary summer, and a third book is on its way. He also writes articles in the papers, and he lectures at the local new university, a still expanding dream in white concrete, glass, and architectural free form, spreading on a hillside just to the west of, and just outside, the south-western sea-coast town in which they live. (Bradbury 1977: 3)

According to the words of author Howard Kirk, he is “the more duplicitous, cunning and radical hero-villain of *The History Man*” (Bradbury, internet). Howard is married to Barbara and they have two children. Children and family are completely in the second plan: “They have produced, by prophylaxis, two children, bright, modern creatures, both now of school age, of whom they are reasonably fond” (Bradbury 1977: 4). Both Barbara and Howard are promiscuous and they live in a sort of free marriage: “They are experimental people, intimates with change and liberation and history, and they are always busy and always going” (Bradbury 1977: 4). Howard wants radical freedom, so he calls his students by their Christian names and he is called by them the same way. He is also sexually involved with his female students and colleagues. His great belief in liberty and human rights is tested when he confronts one of the students, George Carmody, who “had the reputation of being appalling” (Bradbury 1977: 130). Howard is, however, “eternally on the side of the students against the fascistic institution that paid his salary, and always against those who were over thirty, even if he was himself 35” (Bradbury, internet). George believed that Howard’s assessment system was not proper. Here appears the new hypocritical face of the “student protector.” Howard feels uneasiness when George was reading his paper because he was “a glimpse from another era; a kind of historical offense” (Bradbury 1977: 131). The problem occurred because George was over-prepared:

‘You asked me to look at Mill, Marx and Weber, and make a report,’ says Carmody. ‘I asked you to go away and read their works, over the vacation,’ says Howard, ‘and then to make a spontaneous verbal statement to this class, summing up your

impressions. I didn't ask you to produce a written paper, and then sit here with your head hanging over it, presenting formalized and finished thoughts. What kind of group experience is that?

This is a typical campus novel motif: a bad professor confronts devoted students and finds them dangerous. As one may guess, the other students from the group were far below Carmody's intellectual level, and one of them was moody Felicity Phee, Howard's occasional lover. The incident with George Carmody involved other professors such as Miss Annie Callendar, who was defending George. She openly despised Howard and at the end she became his lover. Some critics argued whether this moral pathos was inevitable. Miss Callendar was righteous, defending the principle and she simply submitted herself to the man she did not respect. It simply buried the expectations of the reader. There is no happy ending in this university story. It ends with the bitter taste of moral corruption in the "small world" of the university. Howard wins the war and stays at the university without being sanctioned for his unprofessional behaviour. Kenneth Womack's definition of the satiric academic fiction seems appropriate: "This anti-ethos, which I describe as a 'pejorative poetics'" (Womack 2005: 329).

Bradbury masterfully recounts *his* story. The beginning of the novel reminds one of student compositions on the topic of summer holidays: "Now it is autumn again; the people are all coming back. The recess of summer is over, when holidays are taken, newspapers shrink, history itself seems momentarily to falter and stop" (Bradbury 1977: 1). Such is the beginning of the final chapter: "And now it is the winter again; the people, having come back, are going away again. The autumn, in which the passions rise, the tensions mount, the strikes accumulate, the newspapers fill with disaster, is over" (Bradbury 1977: 215). In between, as the plot progresses, the novel is abundant with live dialogues. Patricia Shaw points out Bradbury's "superb ear for dialogue" (Shaw 1981: 62) as his particular quality. These dialogues are sometimes intellectual, like Howard's with Miss Callendar, and sometimes silly and funny, like those with his sociology students, who never heard of Hegel apart from the campus building under the same name. The only thing they know about Hegel is that its roof leaks.

The Small World with Big Consequences

Numerous reviewers described this book as funny and hilarious, but it is more what some called a “ruthless satire” of the liberal intellectual fashion of the sixties and seventies. That ruthless satire opens the door of the “big world” with all its questionable issues at the turn of the century. The issue of history in general lurks throughout the novel. The title is taken from the words of Miss Callendar, when she ironically called Howard “the history man” because he was explaining his own vision of history and his own life style as a sort of history:

You see, I’m a stranger, and I have to find out what you’re all up to’ ‘Did you?’ asks Howard. ‘I’m not sure,’ says Miss Callendar, ‘I think you’re very interesting characters, but I haven’t discovered the plot.’ ‘Oh, that’s simple,’ says Howard, ‘it’s the plot of history.’ ‘Oh, of course,’ says Miss Callendar, ‘you’re a history man’. (Bradbury 1977: 106)

Bradbury explained later: “Yet the subject he taught wasn’t history at all, but something vastly more ‘trendy’ (as everyone said then). Howard taught Sociology. And sociology was the most fashionable, radical, and popular of all subjects in the academic canon of the day” (Bradbury, internet).

Howard believed in history, “progressive history,” and where it was inevitably leading us. As he said: “all you need to know is a little Marx, a little Freud, and a little social history” (Bradbury 1977: 22). This is a typical reader’s digest filtration of the notions of science and academism: pick out a bit of this or a bit of that and you have made a research and became a scholar. One may conclude, as Henry Ford once did, that “history is bunk,” or as did W. H. Auden: “History to the defeated may say ‘Alas,’ but cannot help nor pardon.” And if something has no history, will it ever have a future?

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“MALI SVIJET” MALKOLMA BREDBERIJA

Sažetak

Čovjek za pamćenje Malkolma Bredberija jedan je od najpoznatijih romana akademske satire. Malkolm Bredberi je upamćen kao univerzitetski profesor i historičar književnosti, scenarista i pisac. Sintagma „mali svijet“ iz naslova ovog članka preuzeta je iz jedne studije Dejvida Lodža. „Mali svijet označava mikrokosmos univerziteta koji su se našli pred izazovima novog humanizma i neoliberalizma. Engleski pisci druge polovine dvadesetog vijeka, Kingsli Ejmis, Malkolm Bredberi i Dejvid Lodž uvidjeli su naličje ekspanzije univerziteta u nekadašnjim industrijskim gradovima. Tako je, pedesetih godina prošlog vijeka, nastao roman akademske satire ili kampus roman. Roman *Čovjek za pamćenje* objavljen je 1975. godine. Za razliku od romana iz pedesetih godina prošlog vijeka, u ovome su univerziteti od crvene cigle zamijenjeni univerzitetima od betona i stakla. Nije slučajno stavljen akcenat na građevinske materijale: crvena cigla označavala je bivše fabrike u industrijskim gradovima koje su reformom obrazovanja pretvorene u univerzitete koji će biti dostupni svima, to jest univerziteti više neće biti samo privilegija elite. Dekadenciju takvih univerziteta uočili su Ejmis, krajem četrdesetih i Bredberi pedesetih godina. Sedamdesetih godina, kada je nastao ovaj roman, Bredberi je bio iskusan profesor i književnik. Uočio je tada jednu novu promjenu u akademskom svijetu, a to je pseudo-liberalizaciju univerziteta koju je u ovoj gorkoj satiri oštro kritikovao. Njegov čovjek za pamćenje, profesor sociologije, primjer je pseudo-liberalnog, licemjernog nastavnika tipičnog za ondašnje univerzitete od betona i stakla. U ovom radu ukazali smo na najuočljivije primjere Bredberijeve akademske satire usmjerene na nove naučnike i njihove istraživačke „kompilacije“.

Ključne riječi: kampus roman, satira, humor, univerzitet.