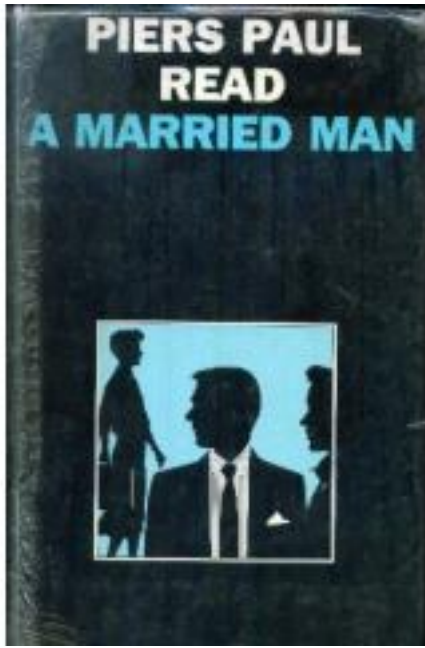


A Married Man



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著者:

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Read is a smoothly talented but terribly erratic novelist, and this very English domestic drama (circa 1973-74, years of British political crisis) shows him both at his quiet, observant best and melodramatic, contriving worst. The book begins beautifully - with a modest, engagingly detailed character study of busy barrister John Strickland: 40, married quite a bit above his class, somewhat overextended financially, a decent if unrapturous husband, a truly loving father. But John feels strangely uneasy, and when he encounters Tolstoy's despair-drenched "The Death of Ivan Ilych" in his father-in-law's country-house library, he's swamped with angst, guilty about his abandoned socialist principles, energized into flirting with the young niece of his best old chum. All this is persuasively handled, alive with rich atmosphere and credible nuances - as John seems by turn shallow, naive, sensitive; and you breathe a sign of relief when Read

handles John's would-be philandering without any of the middle-aged-affair clichés. (When John tries to move from lunch and kisses to hotel adultery, the girl turns out to be a tease who subjects him to a ghastly humiliation.) Unfortunately, however, the novel doesn't end there, but goes on to John's mounting social concern, his determined launch into Labour politics (a success), his wife's indifference: "He knew that the first half of his life had been wasted; that he had reached a turning point; that his wife blocked the way. . . ." So . . . enter odd, beautiful Paula, an intense heiress/social worker eager to be John's political helpmeet - also eventually his mistress, to John's ambivalent delight. And then, as if at a loss about how to proceed, Read blasts the book apart: John's wife is found murdered along with her lover (John's chum), and the letters she has left behind confront John with his lack of self-awareness ("he was not the person he thought he was") - a tired, murky epiphany. Plus: a solution to the murder that would do fine in a Ruth Rendell story but here simply points up the arbitrariness of Read's narrative. A disappointment, then - well-drawn characters in well-drawn settings, but all of them ultimately lost in a wayward tangle of themes and plot devices. (Kirkus Reviews)

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