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## ANTHONY BURGESS AND TEODOR PARNICKI AS AUTHORS OF HISTORICAL NOVELS OR ALTERNATIVE HISTORIOGRAPHIES

Teodor Parnicki and Anthony Burgess lived and wrote their historical novels in two different countries, Poland and Britain respectively, and not exactly in the same times. In spite of the fact that their cultural backgrounds separated them, they had surprisingly similar views and attitudes concerning the writing of the historical novel.

Neither Teodor Parnicki nor Anthony Burgess is commonly associated with traditional historiography. What is more, they even fail to be regarded as historical writers in the traditional meaning of the term. Anthony Burgess is commonly remembered for his novel *A Clockwork Orange* (1962), whose popularity was actually spurred by Stanley Kubrick's film. Due to the notoriety of this particular novel which presents a vision of the future where British cities are controlled by violent teenagers using a slang being a mixture of English and Russian, Anthony Burgess is predominantly perceived as an author of futuristic visions. (Other novels tackling the same subject matter would include *One Hand Clapping* [As Joseph Kell] (1961), *The Wanting Seed* (1962), or *1985* (1978)).

Contrary to the general approach to the author of *A Clockwork Orange* Anthony Burgess will be presented here as an author of historical novels, or historical metafiction, as he wrote several novels constituting biographies of historical figures, among others *Nothing Like the Sun: A History of Shakespeare's Love-Life* (1964), *Napoleon Symphony* (1974), or *A Dead Man in Deptford* – a biography of Christopher Marlowe (1993) as well as novels concerning recent history comprising such internationally prominent events as the First World War and the Second World War. The latter category would include *Earthly Powers* (1980) or *Any Old Iron* (1989).

Teodor Parnicki, on the other hand, is the author of *Aecjusz ostatni Rzymianin (Aecius, the Last of the Romans)*<sup>1</sup> (1937) – a novel which initiated

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<sup>1</sup> All English titles of Parnicki's novels are my translation as none of his works has been translated into English.

his great literary oeuvre in which he not only endeavoured to understand the meaning of the historical process, but also attempted to revitalise 'the historical novel' as a literary genre. *Srebrne orly* (*Silver Eagles*) (1944) remains his most widely-read novel; in this work he presented the process of constituting the Polish state under Boleslaw Chrobry. In his historical novels Parnicki showed an individual against the background of great history and he combined the traditional model of historical fiction with the perspective of psychological narration. The emphasis placed on inner experiences of his protagonists determines Parnicki's style. Moreover, Parnicki's oeuvre gains another dimension due to his use of the fantastic. Unrealistic motifs are juxtaposed with real or historical elements of narration. Because of these characteristics Parnicki contributed to the shaping of a new approach to historical writing, which undermines trust in factographic narratives dealing with history.<sup>2</sup> All these characteristics of Parnicki's style are to be found in Burgess's historical novels as well.

Due to the overwhelming popularity of the novel *A Clockwork Orange* Burgess is commonly perceived as an author of futuristic visions and fails to be seen as a possible historiographer. Teodor Parnicki, conversely, is indeed appreciated as a historical writer, though as an eccentric or unconventional one on account of the fact that instead of depicting "historical facts" he resorted to the technique of "historical fantasy" of "iffing" within a particular historical context.

The purpose of the present paper is to determine whether historical novelists such as Teodor Parnicki or Anthony Burgess can indeed be considered contemporary historiographers, as well as whether Parnicki and, later, Burgess practiced similar forms of historical writing in spite of their different geographic and cultural environments. It will also be my intention to find out if either of the two authors, similar as they may seem, fulfills the role of an alternative historiographer in a more convincing way.

If Burgess and Parnicki are to be presented here as authors who challenged the traditional form of the historical novel, it will be necessary to begin analysing their contributions to the genre by defining it. The genre of historical novel was popularised in the nineteenth century and Sir Walter Scott is generally regarded as the first writer to set its pattern in Britain. In Poland, it was Henryk Sienkiewicz (*nota bene* Scott's follower) who provided the paradigm of the historical novel. However, neither Anthony Burgess nor Teodor Parnicki faithfully imitates their great predecessors. On the contrary, they both depart from the set patterns radically, give new shapes to historical fiction and promote new approaches to history.

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. analyses and presentations of Teodor Parnicki's oeuvre in such works as: Antoni Chojnacki, *Parnicki. W labiryncie historii*, Warszawa: PWN, 1975; Teresa Cieślukowska, *Pisarstwo Teodora Parnickiego*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Pax, 1965, or Małgorzata Czermińska, *Teodor Parnicki*, Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1974.

The following definition of the historical novel has been offered by Fry: "a novel set in a time prior to that available to the author's direct experience or one that makes significant use of a major historical event or bygone ethos." As Fry further maintains, historical novels are classically set "in a time of rapid change, with old ways succumbing to new ones against a background of warfare or other civil turmoil. Actual figures from history appear, generally in minor roles, and major historic events form an important part of background. The major characters and central plot are usually invented, but are subordinated to the commentary presented by the novel upon the larger social issues of the time." (Frye, Baker, Perkins 227). Historical novels may centre either on historical or on fictional characters, but they must represent an honest and reliable attempt to tell a story set in historical past as understood by the author's contemporaries, based on considerable research and extensive studies. All the distinctive features of the genre are reflected both in Burgess's and Parnicki's oeuvres. Nevertheless, considerable contrasts can be likewise detected.

Whereas both Scott and Sienkiewicz were masters of the historical novel which relied on adventure, Parnicki and Burgess can be said to have developed the "intellectual historical novel," which tackles the issues belonging to the realm of philosophy of history. Scott and Sienkiewicz constructed their novels around adventure, monumental battles, and fervent feelings which blossomed between romantic characters against the background of significant historical events. Parnicki and Burgess, however, rejected this model and such imagery. Although they occasionally included descriptions of nature, battle scenes, or archaized language in their novels, they concentrated much more on the spiritual and intellectual aspect of the life of the protagonists. More often than not the reader encounters in both Parnicki's and Burgess's works difficult philosophical questions, which perplexed people in long-gone epochs. As Wojciech Pawlik observes, Parnicki's protagonists are often thinkers, philosophers, or intellectuals, who relentlessly undertake philosophical, political or religious discussions (cf. Pawlik 2004). The same observation applies to Burgess's historical novels. Rather than concentrate on spectacular events, the two authors focus on erudite protagonists whose reflections, debates and deliberations introduce the reader into the world of ancient thought and preoccupations. For instance, both Parnicki and Burgess present in their historical novels religious doubts concerning the divinity of Christ, or the nature of God as understood by Muslims and by Christians – problems characteristic for the breaking points in the history of the Christian Church, which both the writers have depicted: Parnicki in *Srebrne orly* and Burgess in *A Dead Man in Deptford*.

Although Sienkiewicz did inspire Parnicki, the author of *Srebrne orly* greatly admired such historiographers as Ranke and Lamprecht. Especially

Ranke was an influential source of inspiration for Parnicki and, as Dorota Heck points out, it is to be found, for instance, in the openness of the author towards every, even minor, historical record and the phenomenon of 'ontologizing' history (cf. Heck, *Czy Parnicki...*). This phenomenon is characteristic of contemporary approach to historiography; following Foucault's call, history expands its realm onto more ordinary spheres of life and it gradually becomes a record of all human existence. Michael Foucault insisted that historians should see "beyond the battles, decrees, dynasties or assemblies" and that they ought to perceive "the outline of massive phenomena with a range of a hundred or many hundreds of years. History as practised today does not turn away from events; on the contrary, it is constantly enlarging their field, discovering new layers of them, shallower or deeper. It is constantly isolating new sets of them, in which they are sometimes numerous, dense and interchangeable, sometimes rare and decisive: from the almost daily variations in price to inflation over a hundred years." (Foucault 68). Indeed, Burgess "onthologized" history because he incorporated several unconventional spheres of life into his historical records, and Parnicki, too, was apt to scrutinise neglected areas of the past.

Another important influence was exerted on Parnicki by the literary output of a Russian emigration writer Mark Aleksandrowitsh Aldanow (or Landau), who created sensational political-historical novels in which politics was depicted in a fashion abusing any philosophical sophistication. Readers were likely to be left with the impression that Machiavellian games were relentlessly played by cunning and ruthless characters. This vision of politics and history was initially shared by Parnicki. Similarly, Burgess showed history as created "behind closed doors" by Machiavellian schemers, which is clearly evidenced in *A Dead Man in Deptford*. The paradoxical certainty that not all 'facts' should be trusted stigmatised both Burgess's and Parnicki's novels whose protagonists are suspicious and so their relationships with political or religious institutions are distrustful. Both writers were deeply interested in the mechanisms of grand politics. While in the historical novel as practiced by Scott or Sienkiewicz a battle constituted the climax and the long-anticipated moment in the novel, both Parnicki and Burgess view history as created and determined in quiet cabinets or offices. Wars and battles fail to assume the character of the most crucial elements determining the course of history. History appears to be made behind the veneer, during discussions and private meetings. If the plans and plots of the protagonists fail to become reality, historians have no means to prove that such attempts could not have taken place. Speculating is an aspect of the historiographic process and both Parnicki and Burgess speculate about different aspects of history.

As a consequence, the 'background' situations depicted in Parnicki's prose can have twofold meaning. First of all "background" designates

philosophical frames for the history, and, secondly, it comprises events, which are excluded from traditional history books, but are considered by Parnicki as 'potential historical truths'. If the latter meaning is taken into consideration, it might be claimed that background both in Parnicki's and Burgess's texts results from the process of speculation or 'gap-filling'. This idea is spurred by the observation made by Hayden White that historiographers, unlike chroniclers, fill in the gaps left empty first by human memory and, as a consequence, by historical records. In fact, "both groups of utterances: fictional and historical, function with the same illocutionary effect, which implies that they are closely related." (Kasztenna). Nevertheless, historians or historiographers cannot be equated with chroniclers who merely write down dates and accompanying events in a chronological order. Once a sentence is made out of such dry data, the data are interpreted and included into a broader story. Thus, both historiographers and historical novelists interpret history and emplot it into a coherent story. It is only the literary mode that differentiates them.

Parnicki's and Burgess's approach to history is characterised by their attempt to convey some historical truth, at the same time they offer their speculations and while speculating they do not concentrate on great politics, but on protagonists' thoughts and deliberations. Therefore, in Parnicki's and Burgess's novels politics is not shown as a factor determining all history. In *Srebrne orly* Tymoteusz explains to the Pope that his ancestors deserted the Pope not on account of political reasons but on account of economic matters related to beer trading. In his *Little Wilson and Big God* (1987), Burgess challenges historians and their opinions. He offers his own interpretations of events aiming at deminishing the significance of political motivations in favour of more down-to-earth incentives. Burgess thus implies that political considerations do not prove as important for ordinary people as politicians and historians would like to believe: "When the troops of Gibraltar went in July 1945 to the polling booths [...] the vote was almost totally for labour. Some historians have seen the Labour victory as a triumph for ABCA and the British Way and Purpose: not so. There was nothing political in it [...]. The men wanted to get home, and Churchill wanted them to stay put. As simple as that." (Burgess 2002, 317).

Yet, is not all life pervaded by politics? Both Parnicki and Burgess have shown that the understanding of the political nature of reality should be extended. While the two authors insist that politics does not concern merely battles and treaties but also secretive and undocumented discussions and plots, they also believe that not all historical events are dictated by calculated reasoning, which can be re-created via the process of logical deduction, and that, quite often, people's motives are unpredictable and objectively unexplainable. In *Srebrne orly* the decision that it will not be the Emperor, but

the Pope who will nominate Bishops, was taken as a consequence of Otto's pettiness and temporary whim, it was not a serious political decision. In Burgess's *Any Old Iron*, on the other hand, Reginald's decision to liberate a Soviet prisoner is not dictated by his willingness to fight with the Soviet regime, but by the fact that the imprisoned woman used to be his mistress. Therefore, looking for cause and effect relations between all past events is a futile effort since human motives can never be deduced with absolute certainty.

Whereas both writers disclosed the dark side of political life, they simultaneously glorified the a-political and a-historical life, which Burgess referred to in his *Any Old Iron* as the reality of 'eating and loving'. Parnicki and Burgess did not see war as an effective solution to global conflicts and they de-romanticised it in their novels. Whereas Parnicki, after the Bible, encouraged to "re-forge swords into ploughshares" (Parnicki 1975, 104 [my translation]), Burgess made a similar call in one of his novels: "What is history but slashing the innocent with a sword? What we have to do is get out of it and down to the things that matter. I mean food mostly. Food's what matters, people will always eat and always have done when history's kindly permitted them to. Melt the sword down and make knives and forks out of it." (Burgess 1989, 56).

Characters created by the two writers are multi-dimensional and vivid figures. Like in traditional historical novels, in Parnicki's and Burgess's novels, historic personages feature alongside invented ones, but they do not resemble flat figures from history books but instead constitute vivid characters. Parnicki formulated a notion that historical fiction must treat its characters as, above all, people and then as people who are under specific influences exerted by circumstances they find themselves in. The psychological portrait of Otto III in *Srebrne orly*, for example, is fairly unconventional: the emperor is presented as a spoilt, audacious, and whimsical teenager who evinces symptoms of derangement. Similar understanding of the role of characters of historical fiction is to be detected in Burgess's oeuvre. Burgess also takes his historical protagonists off the pedestal and presents them as fallible men. For example, in *Napoleon Symphony* Napoleon Bonaparte is presented as a jealous, superstitious, and ridiculous man; his well-known gesture, with which he is so frequently portrayed, is depicted as preposterous, since it does not denote a self-conscious leader, but an uncertain lover: "he took the portrait from his inside pocket and gave it a quiet smiling smack, as to sanctify, by particular application, the beatings of lust. [...] Having restored the portrait to its nest he kept his hand on it." (Burgess 1974, 18).

I propose to view historical novelists as alternative historiographers since both (to use Hayden White's term) 'emplot events into histories'. Hayden White has proven that historiography is written according to the same rules

that govern literary genres. When writing histories chroniclers must set some pattern onto the story that they are relating; merely the fact of organising events into a series with a beginning and an end is contaminated with subjectivity. Historiographers are never innocent; they always leave their mark on the apparently objective or scientific work (White 1–41). If historiographers are equated with writers of literature, authors of historical novels may then be perceived as historiographers because they convey knowledge concerning the past via a literary account of it.

It would be interesting to determine which of the two historical novelists – Parnicki or Burgess – was closer to a traditional historiographer, even taking into consideration the approach to historiography after White or Iggers which moves any historian or historiographer closer to any writer of literature.<sup>3</sup> The question arising at this point is: how do the two writers compare in this respect. Which of them is closer to the traditional historiographer?

However, the relations of a literary account with what is more readily recognised as historiography may vary: they may be more or less intense, for instance, since the publication of Hayden White's *Metahistory* the concept of historiography has become problematised, Parnicki, however, "tackled issues more rudimentary than those singled out by White. The author makes his narrator face the opposition between written and oral tradition of story telling, so that relativity of both content and tools of historical testimony are juxtaposed with the unity of human personality formed via dialogue." (cf. Heck, *Od baśni...*). Historiography mimes scientific or academic discourse, although contemporary theorists might go as far as to see it as yet another form of story telling. Stories, though, can be told in different form and therefore a novel cannot be rejected as a form of emplotting the past.

The utilisation of dialogue, focus on psychological portraiture as well as unreliable narrators might constitute chief factors which differentiate novelistic historiography from genuine historiography. Indeed, academic discourse employed by historians in their works renders their stories and suppositions more reliable than the same theories presented by a historical novelist within dialogue. Moreover, in his historical novels Parnicki created unreliable narrators, who cannot guarantee objective and verbatim representation of past events. For instance, the narrator of *Srebrne orły* is not omniscient since he looks at the events from the point of view of Aron – initially a young monk, subsequently the Abbot of Tyniec Monastery – who more

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<sup>3</sup> New understanding of history and historical writing is presented in Hayden White's *Metahistory* as well as in Georg G. Iggers's *Historiography in the Twentieth Century. From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge*, Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2005.

often than not overhears snatchets of conversations, or eavesdrops. Sometimes he listens to verbal exchanges in languages that he does not have good command of. Thus, his observations cannot be considered reliable. Parnicki himself included certain passages into his novels which prove that he did not consider historiography to guarantee an objective and reliable source of knowledge about the past. History is rendered via interpretative historiography, thus, there is always more than one possible presentation/interpretation of any event:

[...] obviously, Sylvester II's favourite, who was so close to Otto III during all his pre-mortal exile, could not omit to notice certain errors and oversights in what Dytmar was writing about the last year of Otto's ruling – yet, while reading he was unable to hinder his tears of agitation or even jealousy. If he, Aron, could write like this! – It became evident to him that it was not necessary to know everything to write convincingly – he muttered to himself from time to time, turning the pages of the fourth volume of Dytmar's chronicle. (Parnicki 1975, 414. [my translation])

Unreliable narrators are also characteristic of Burgess's novels as he frequently utilised first person narration which is *per se* less reliable than third person narration. Moreover, Burgess's narrators more often than not warn the reader against trusting them and present certain objections towards the capacity of their memory. For example, Kenneth Toomey, the narrator of the novel *Earthly Powers* observes: "In two ways my memory was not to be trusted: I was an old man, I was a writer. Writers in time transfer the mendacity of their craft to the areas of their lives" (Burgess, 2001, 45).

If in spite of the reservations shortly mentioned above, the novel, and the historical novel in particular, is accepted here as an alternative form of historiography since both genuine historiography and the historical novel are predominantly aimed at presenting knowledge about the past, Parnicki's oeuvre is even more challenging since it often joins the manner of writing chronicles with 'sensational elements' and certain aspects of 'historical fiction' (alternative history). The reader of Parnicki's novels finds himself/herself in the maze of facts and fictions (or rather possible or hypothetical events, whose occurrence cannot be either proven or rejected as unhistorical). Thus, Parnicki's writing is often referred to as 'historical fantasy', 'historical fiction', or even 'historical Science Fiction'. If I propose to see the writer as an alternative historiographer who merely uses a literary mode to 'emplot the past', the standpoint of literary critics who see Parnicki as an author of 'historical SF' denies the potential historiographic value of his works because SF is undoubtedly a genre far removed from academic historiography.

Wojciech Jamroziak, for instance, appreciates Teodor Parnicki not on account of innovative approach to historiography but rather due to estab-

lishing what Jamroziak sees as a new literary genre: "I merely wish to indicate that Parnicki's novels belong to the genre of "possible fantasy" or SF, that they have a significant inner consistency and logic that should eventually earn this author a rightful recognition, and that the notion of "historical SF" should be introduced into the theory and history of literature." (cf. Jamroziak). I would like to question the term "historical SF" employed by Jamroziak in reference to Parnicki's historical novel as there is no 'science' in Parnicki's prose; the author of *Srebrne orly* fails to use imagery characteristic of the genre (the term "historical SF," however, will be employed as legitimate later in the present article in reference to an episode in one of Burgess's novels). Jamroziak's term, moreover, appears to be dubious on account of the fact that history is not a science; its status as such has long been challenged. It would be better to call Parnicki's experiment of mixing real and imagined elements "historical speculation" or "historical if-ing" (a term coined by Jamroziak as well).

Indeed, in his novels, and among others in *Srebrne orly*, Parnicki seems to be interested not only in facts, but also, and even more so, in possibilities. To what actually occurred is added what could have been – in this case the possibility of a Slavic Hegemony in tenth-century Christian Europe. Interestingly enough, Parnicki's concept was later discussed by historians and it was acknowledged that such a possibility had indeed existed.

Likewise, Anthony Burgess occasionally indulges in speculations concerning the life of Christopher Marlowe. In his biographical-historical novel *A Dead Man in Deptford* Burgess speculates and ventures a hypothesis that Marlowe was Queen Elizabeth I's spy. This hypothesis is also taken into consideration and debated by historians.

In *Historia w literaturę przekuwana (History Re-forged into Literature)* (1973) Parnicki expressed his belief that historical truth is cognisable (cf. *Historia w literaturę przekuwana*, 380–382). Parnicki also implies that a mystification might turn out to be the truth and he dealt with the question of contemporary application of diverse versions of the past (Thomas 24).

As suggested earlier in this paper, novelists resemble historians and historiographers because they often resort to speculation. It must be emphasized, though, that if a historical novel is to constitute an alternative form of historiography, there should be certain limits set to the aforesaid tool of speculation and it ought to be governed by certain rules; hypotheses or theories cannot take the form of a farfetched mystification or shrewd confabulation, lest they become historical fantasy.

It was Burgess's technique to present suppositions concerning 'undocumented historical facts' within 'historically documented frames', however, he never presented as historical any events which would be purely hypothetical

on account of the fact that there existed evidence contradicting them. His hypotheses always played the role of "gap-fillers," as is the case with his insinuations concerning Marlowe's involvement in spying. Parnicki, conversely, developed a different idea of a new historical novel and evolved towards what is in my opinion inappropriately called "historical Science Fiction," which notion he explained in the introduction to his novel *I u możliwych dziwny* (*Strange Even Among the Mighty*) (1964): writing historical SF ought to have as its starting point a fully conscious attempt of the author to stand against indubitable historical truth, e.g. in a novel which would be based on a consciously fantastic assumption (of the "what would have happened if" type) that the Roman emperor Julian had not died (as he really did) during the war with Persia in the year 363, but lived and ruled for the next 20 or 25 years (cf. Introduction to *I u możliwych dziwny* – [my translation]). Although it is part of every historian's job to venture suppositions and forward hypotheses, those are always framed by untrespassable limits of historical (so scientifically objective) acceptability. In this respect Burgess is a more reliable historiographer as he works within the aforesaid limits, whereas Parnicki extended history's rightful claim to coining hypotheses onto areas trespassing the historiographer's domain. The author of *Srebrne orły* described his method thus: "Out of the edifice of history I take one brick impressed with history's reliable seal; in its place, I put another; and consider all the consequences of this operation. [...] I should remind you that this iffing was the subject of rhetoric lessons in ancient times, lessons not only about logical, but also historical and dialectic reasoning. A pupil had to submit corrections to and various alternatives of the past utilizing his knowledge" (*Ibidem* – [my translation]). Presenting his new vision of writing about history, Parnicki refers to the ancient school of dialectic as if endeavouring to convince the readers that his new method should be considered scientific and reliable. Nevertheless, Parnicki's 'iffing' cannot be perceived as a scholarly approach to writing about the past because it extends the tool of speculation onto the realm of imagination and fantasy.

The previously mentioned example of Burgess's employing the mode and pattern of "historical Science Fiction" to a higher degree and more literally than Parnicki did in any of his novels is to be found in the episode within *Enderby's Dark Lady* (1984) where two literary historians – Swenson and Paley – travel in time and arrive in Elizabethan London. Whereas in the case of Parnicki's oeuvre the employment of the term 'Science Fiction' might seem farfetched, its utilisation appears to be appropriate in the case of Burgess, whose imagery includes such distinctive features of the genre as the use of a time machine. Having the time machine at his disposal Swenson wonders: "Why go back to the past when you can go to the future?" and his fellow time-traveller responds: "We have to check up on history. [...]"

I have to know whether William Shakespeare really wrote those plays.” (Burgess 2002, 616). Paley’s response clearly implies that historiography is not to be trusted and that certain written records fail to provide factual data. Only direct return to the past can guarantee absolute confirmation of our knowledge of history. And so, Paley puts on a costume and prepares for landing.

It is the year 1595, but no more precise date is available. The historian has “checked his Elizabethan vowels” (*Ibidem*, 618) and commences to wander through the city, wondering if this is indeed the place he knows via written records of the past: “Could the stars, as the Elizabethans themselves believed, modify history? Could this Elizabethan London, because it looked up at stars unknown on true Earth be identical with that other one which was known only from books.” (*Ibidem*, 619). It is revealed that Poley landed in some ‘virtual reality’ and the reader cannot be sure if it is an actual time travel into the ‘real past’ or a travel into a past devised by present-day people: “it was not a question of past and future, it was a matter of other words existing now. The now-past was completed, the now-future was completed.” (*Ibidem*, 624). Eventually, Poley manages to find Shakespeare, or the ‘now-past’ recreation of him: “His heart sank in depression totally untinged by fear to see standing before him a fictional character called ‘William Shakespeare’, an actor acting the part. Why couldn’t he get in touch with the *Ding an sich* [...]” (*Ibidem*, 627). Again, Poley expresses all historians’ complaint that they are denied direct access to their subject of study. The past is known only through written records which preserve human memory because time is not a cycle which can lead any researcher to a particular moment in the past. The past can merely be re-created and it cannot be returned to.

As James Olney points out, writers never write about the past; they always produce representations of the past:

The record that memory reconstructs is no doubt [...] “unfaithful” to the past, but this infidelity seems at most a very minor sin if one considers memory not as an orderly summoning up of something dead – a sort of Final Judgement on past events – but as a creative figuration of the living present and a summary reconstruction of how the present came to be that which it is and that which it represents itself as being. Memory, even ideally, is not something that begins in the far-distant past and that then follows a course to the present. The past is past; we do not exist in the past any longer and so cannot exercise memory or any other function from within it. But why should this essential fact about memory bother us? Why should we not take memory for what it richly is – a function of present consciousness – rather than worrying about what it is not and cannot be? (Olney 49)

Hence, historiography is not different from any other form of writing. Theoretically, it represents the past and it is intended as an objective representation of the past provided from a distance. However, it is impossible to grasp the past; it is actually “a summary reconstruction of how the present came to be that which it is and that which it represents itself as

being." Writing from within the past is impossible, therefore, whether an author writes about past events or events which have just occurred, he is still recording his *present* vision of those events.

The science-fiction adventure of the literary historian comes to an ironic end when the playwright takes the plays that Paley brought from the 'now-present' and copies them as his genuine works. The Muse inspiring Shakespeare proves to be a scholar from the poet's 'now-future' visiting him in his 'now-present', which for Paley constitutes the 'now-past'. All historians' attempts to grasp the un-interpreted or 'past *an sich*' turn out to be utterly futile even in a science-fiction story, which permits the most unbelievable things to become reality. Yet it can never become reality for historians to harness the past.

The present article deals with two historical writers viewed as alternative historiographers. Since the time when Hayden White undermined the conviction that history constitutes a field of science and that historiography is capable of rendering objective facts concerning the past, the status of historiography has become dubious. Historiographers, and historical writers likewise, attempt to present the past to the best of their knowledge. Whereas it might be claimed that historiographers and historians focus on facts which consist of dates, names and events, historical writers also want to present some deeper truth about the long-gone epochs which is hidden in the philosophy of that time, people's attitudes, daily problems and joys.

A historical writer can feel free to present his hypotheses and to depict the past reality from the perspective that he considers suitable and appropriate. Historians, on the other hand, who formulate similar speculations do not put them into fictional dialogues and narratives and, as a result, their "iffing" seems more academic and scholarly. Nevertheless, the process is the same although it relies on a different literary mode.

The two writers, Teodor Parnicki and Anthony Burgess, wrote their historical novels in different times, as well as diverse cultural and geographical settings. However, they were both under the influence of their prominent predecessors: Henryk Sienkiewicz and Walter Scott, respectively. In spite of unquestionable indebtedness to the classic shape of the genre, both writers undermined its established pattern. Both Parnicki and Burgess managed to present new perspectives and approach history from an innovative viewpoint. Therefore, it is justifiable to regard both of them as modern historiographers using an alternative form of emplotment – the historical novel, Burgess trying to solve certain mysteries unconfirmed by historical records and Parnicki endeavouring to formulate alternative histories of "what could have happened if..."

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## Anthony Burgess i Teodor Parnicki jako autorzy powieści historycznej czy alternatywnej historiografii

Anthony Burgess pozostaje w oczach polskich czytelników przede wszystkim autorem słynnej *Mechanicznej pomarańczy*, pisał on jednak także znakomite powieści historyczne, biograficzne oraz autobiograficzne, natomiast Teodor Parnicki jest autorem przede wszystkim powieści historycznych. W swym piśmarstwie historycznym obaj autorzy w dużej mierze czerpali ze wzorów i „szablonów” stworzonych przez ich wybitnych poprzedników: Waltera Scotta oraz Henryka Sienkiewicza. Tym niemniej, każdy z nich stworzył swój własny styl piśmarstwa historycznego, który jest alternatywą dla przygodowej powieści historycznej.

Celem niniejszego artykułu jest, po pierwsze, wskazanie owej innowacyjności zarówno Burgessa, jak i Parnickiego w podejściu do gatunku powieści historycznej oraz odnalezienie cech wspólnych łączących ich piśmarstwo historyczne. Po drugie, biorąc pod uwagę zmieniające się podejście do historii jako nauki oraz do historiografii, obaj piśmarze są tutaj przedstawiani nie tylko jako literaci, lecz przede wszystkim jako kronikarze bądź „alternatywni dziejopisarze”, którzy w swoich powieściach usiłują zawrzeć prawdę o przeszłości, jak również własne hipotezy i supozycje dotyczące białych plam na mapie historii. Dlatego też celem artykułu jest również wskazanie, który z „alternatywnych dziejopisarzy” spełnia tradycyjną rolę kronikarza-akademika bardziej przekonująco.