The Cyclical Nature of History,

according to Anthony Burgess in the Light of the Augustinian–Pelagian Dichotomy of *The Wanting Seed*

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The interpretation of time has been a challenge to philosophers, writers, and common people alike since the dawn of mankind, more precisely, since the appearance of ancient, natural religions. This paper, after giving an overview of the various responses in the history of philosophy to the challenge of the concept of time since Augustine and Averroës, analyses the circular notion of history expounded in Anthony Burgess's 1962 novel, The Wanting Seed. *Linear time, the roots of which are found in both Antiquity and Judeo-Christian religious texts such as the Bible, is mainly the prerogative of "modern man," whilst circularity is more engraved in the (sub)conscious of natural religions, "primitive societies," as Mircea Eliade calls them. In Burgess's book the protagonist, a fictive teacher describes a view of history in cycles that change according to the anthropological aspects of the dominant ideology. The holders of power may either view their citizens optimistically as essentially good-willing and obedient, or through the lenses of Augustinian pessimism. The novel demonstrates through quick changes in the approaches of the governing groups how the lives of individuals are influenced by such changes, while the paper investigates how human freedom is impacted through a cyclical, hence deterministic view of history. The paper examines the central question whether the circular, paradoxical historical pattern described in* The Wanting Seed, *which deletes most opportunities for human freedom, free will and progress, can be called history at all.*

There are two basic metaphors we use when we want to describe the passage of time: we either speak of it as linear, the present constantly moving toward the future and fading into the past; or circular as we experience it in the recurrence of the cycles of nature, such as the seasons. Accordingly, human history can either be seen as linear or cyclical. Mircea Eliade (1907–1986) in *The Myth of the Eternal Return* emphasised that the cyclical notion of time is the more archaic one, and rituals enacting such circularities as the mythical beginnings of the cosmos (like new year rituals) are very significant. During these rituals, it is not only the individuals who are freed from sins and get a fresh start but the whole universe around them is supposed to be "born" again; hence, the ritual is like a full reboot. New year rituals are basically constantly erasing time itself. The periodical deletion of time is one of the most important attributes of cyclical temporal schemes: it makes it impossible to keep track of linear progress (Eliade 52–53). Whilst cyclical time was mainly the reigning temporal scheme in ancient civilizations it never fully disappeared from the collective subconscious and has been present in both philosophy and literature since then. As we will see, this periodical deletion echoes in a twisted, modern version in Anthony Burgess's novel, *The Wanting Seed* (1962, henceforth *TWS*) as well. In our paper we would like to investigate whether this cyclical temporal scheme can be considered history at all in the traditional sense of the word or if the idea of the constant and automatic recurrence of fixed phases eliminates the opportunities for humans to shape history.

Eliade emphasises that, in new year rituals, traditional societies express "their revolt against concrete, historical time, [and] their nostalgia for a periodical return to the mythical time of the beginning of things" (ix). He claims that the acceptance of linear, historical time is one of the causes of anxiety in modern individuals (as for an individual within this world linear time offers nothing but death in the long run). Humans' harmony with the cosmos and cosmic rhythms (Eliade xiii) is expressed in cyclical time, as opposed to the modern concept of the linearity of time embedded in the Enlightenment's notion of progress. "The interest in the 'irreversible' and the 'new' in history [attributes of linear time] is a recent discovery in the life of humanity. On the contrary, archaic humanity ... defended itself, to the utmost of its powers, against all the novelty and irreversibility which

history entails" (Eliade 48). The circular notion of time redeems humanity from the dangers of novelty and the horror of death: as in such a system catastrophe is never final, "death is always followed by resurrection" (Eliade 100) and nothing is irreversible. Nevertheless, if nothing is irreversible or final, human actions and decisions become relativised—if history keeps repeating itself in one way or another, our actions may not change the course of history; hence, freedom is an illusion. It is this conundrum that we propose to discuss with the help of Eliade and the twentieth-century English writer, Anthony Burgess.

The linear concept of time became dominant with the Enlightenment, yet, as Eliade argues, the Judeo-Christian religions and worldview essentially support the linear notion of time as a certain *teleology*: the salvation of mankind is assumed in human history. Tamás Ungvári, upon discussing Eliade, adds that this modern, linear time sadly brought with itself the loss of transcendence in human life: the modern individual is left in a self-isolated bubble of nothing but immanence (168). The notion of the cyclical nature of time and history has been expounded by thinkers as diverse as Averroës, Joachim a Fiore, Giambattista Vico, Friedrich Nietzsche, or Oswald Spengler. Anthony Burgess seems to follow this trend, at least in the first chapters of *TWS,* where the protagonist Tristram Foxe, a teacher of history explicates the theory of political cycles, whereas the rest of the novel serves as an illustration of this theory. This 1962 dystopian novel, published the same year as *A Clockwork Orange,* is set in an overpopulated future England, where food shortages lead to chaos, and after a cannibalistic anarchic interval, the army restores order and also offers food. It turns out, however, that the food they provide is processed from the victims of battles—battles that are only fought to provide corpses for the food industry.

As the protagonist of *TWS* explains, in this future world, three phases of history follow each other: an Augustinian, a Pelagian, and an Interphase, after which the cycle repeats itself.[15] In the *Augustinian* phase anthropological pessimism prevails as those in power expect nothing of the people and

15 The Augustinian–Pelagian system also appears in *A Vision of Battlements,* a book written by Burgess in 1949 but only published in 1965. As Andrew Biswell argues, "the germ of [the] idea [was] outlined almost at random by a stranger in a Gibraltar drinking-den, and Burgess would make it his obsession and his hallmark in his later novels" (106).

exercise laissez-faire techniques. In the ensuing *Pelagian* phase the expectations towards everyday people grow, yet if these expectations are not met, only mild measures are taken—Pelagianism is also called "Indifferentism" in *TWS* (Burgess 100). But when such measures continue to prove insufficient, we move into a so-called *Interphase*, where the government becomes authoritarian and applies draconic measures. Yet as coercion is once again proven futile, the political system returns to an Augustinian phase. Or as Ákos Farkas summarises, the change of political cycles in *TWS*, "the bloodless liberal humanism of the Pelagian political regime of the 'Pelphase' of history is replaced by society's temporary relapse into the ritual-driven, cannibalistic atavism of the anarchic 'Interphase,' which in its turn heralds in the grimly authoritarian conservatism of the Augustinian 'Gusphase' in a kind of Viconian-Joycean circularity" (112).

Before we discuss Burgess's system in detail, we would like to offer a very brief overview of the theories that envision time and history in a cyclical mode. One of the first seminal thinkers to ponder on the cyclical nature of time was Muslim Andalusian Ibn Rushd (1126–1198), often Latinised as Averroës. Adrian Bardon and Heather Dyke write that

> [b]ased upon his reading of a passage in Aristotle's *Physics* (4.14 223 b 24–224 a 2), Averroës ... suggested that time is not necessarily linear but cyclical. The idea is that cosmic events ultimately reoccur in great cycles linked to the rotations of the heavens around the earth. Time, then, is just a way to measure and mark off this continuous and perpetual cyclical motion of the cosmos. Therefore, like the cosmic events it measures, time too is cyclical. (81)

Averroës claimed that cosmic events in the universe repeat in great cycles based on the rotation of the heavens around the Earth. His claims were of vital importance in an era where the most prominent discussion on time was simply to debate whether at some point there was a moment of divine intervention and the universe was created (so time has a beginning at some point), or the universe has been existing forever (so time is infinite). According to St. Augustine of Hippo (354–430), arguably the most

prominent thinker of his period in this particular matter, the universe was created at a certain point in time: before creation itself, there was no time either.[16] Most thinkers, including Augustine, approached solving the problem of a created versus an infinite universe by unapologetically rendering time linear in both cases; however, Averroës's argument is from a cyclical point of view, hence underlining the argument that the universe is eternal. If time is cyclical, there is no need to search for a beginning or an end. With cyclical time, all the problems vanish that may arise whilst viewing the universe and time in it as linear, unless, as Averroës says, there is some sort of "supertime" mapped over this circular universe, rising above and measuring the cycles themselves. But Averroës denies the existence of such supertime. For him, as Bardon and Dyke mention, "there is no God's eye view, as it were, of time" (82). As we will see in the case of *TWS*, there is a possibility to interpret the chronotope of the novel as an Averroësian one complete with a God's eye view (circular history, observed by history teacher and "beholder of linear time" Tristram Foxe).

Averroës's idea may seem a little far-fetched with strange rotating heavens marked off as systems of inertia, but the idea of a perpetually existing cosmos is not an alien one even to modern quantum physics. For example, Stephen Hawking in *A Brief History of Time* describes the possibility that the universe is comparable to the shape of a globe, which has boundaries but is without a firm end or beginning point. There is no Big Bang, no Big Crunch, only a forever-moving construction like a *perpetuum mobile*. The way he arrives at this possibility is by calculating with a so-called "imaginary time," which, given its nature, "is really more basic, and what we call real is just an idea that we invent to help us describe what we think the universe is like" (158–159). Hence, circularity might be carved into the fabric of the universe more deeply than we think, and linearity may be a human idea to account for what the individual perceives reality to be.

16 "SEE, THERE ARE the heaven and the earth. They cry aloud that they were created; for they change and vary. Whereas anything which exists but was not created cannot have anything in it which was not there before, and this is just what is meant by change and variation. They cry aloud also that they did not create themselves: 'We exist because we were created; therefore, we did not exist before we were in existence, so as to be able to create ourselves'" (St. Augustine 254).

Yet, however intriguing the deep mysteries of the universe may be, we essentially live in a modern, linear, historical temporal reality, and, according to Eliade, this temporal reality has its earliest roots in Judaism and Christianity, more specifically in the Bible itself: Noah created his ark, Moses received the Law, Christ died at specific points in time. These events stand alone and are never repeated. History is slowly formed by individual events suffered through or overcome by individual beings and communities alike, recorded and remembered for their own lives and deeds, and separate from the fabric of the faceless masses. The chronological framework of Christianity and, thus, of European culture is essentially linear.

The first significant Christian thinker to contemplate the cyclical nature of history and the recurrence of patterns in history was the Cistercian abbot Joachim a Fiore (1135–1202, also known as Gioacchino da Fiore). In his Trinitarian scheme,

> history [is] divided into three stages (*status*) according to the [Holy] Trinity: the *status* of the Father, from Adam to Christ; the *status* of the Son, from Christ until about the abbot's own present time; and the *status* of the Holy Spirit ... . The third status was due to flower soon, within two generations of Joachim's own lifetime, as history fully entered the era of the Holy Spirit. (Whalen 91).

An important concept of Fiore's is that studying the patterns of the past provides templates and makes it possible to write the "history of the future" (Whalen 102). Fiore established three phases just like Burgess, yet in Fiore's system the phases are much longer. Certain elements of history recur, but Fiore's system has a teleology rather than a mere repetition, as in the case of the structure described in Burgess's novel.

Five hundred years after Fiore, historian Giambattista Vico (1668–1744) explained the appearance and decline of civilisations in terms of returns or *ricorsi*. According to Vico, all civilisations have a rude beginning, then passions are transformed into virtues and bestial nature is subordinated to the rule of law. The stages that civilisations go through are similar because Vico considers human nature constant across history (Little n.p.). As Timothy

Costelloe argues, "[s]ociety progresses towards perfection, but without reaching it ... , interrupted as it is by a break or return (*ricorso*) to a relatively more primitive condition. Out of this reversal, history begins its course anew, albeit from the irreversibly higher point to which it has already attained" (n.p.). Similar patterns were sought later as well. As Daniel Little argues, the effort "to derive a fixed series of stages as a tool of interpretation of the history of civilization is repeated throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; it finds expression in Hegel's philosophy, ... as well as Marx's materialist theory of the development of economic modes of production" (n.p.). The Enlightenment rejected religious notions concerning history but brought its own teleology in the form of the idea of progress. In the twentieth-century, both Oswald Spengler (1880–1936) and Arnold Toynbee (1889–1975) sought to interpret world history in terms of the rise and fall of civilisations. Despite their significant differences, they both "portrayed human history as a coherent process in which civilizations pass through specific stages" (Little n.p.) or cycles until they reach their climax and then stagnate or perish. These stages are sometimes likened to human life, like youth, maturity, and senescence, or the rounds of the seasons (spring/summer/autumn/winter). Even though Toynbee claimed that history cannot be predestined as its course is never independent of the free will of individuals, both of them argued for the existence of inevitable cycles and claimed that the modern West was repeating patterns already present in ancient Greek and Roman civilisations. The pattern set by Fiore in the twelfth century (and Averroës before him) proved to be irresistible; cyclical temporal structures suggest that studying the past provides templates for the future.

As far as cyclical time in modern philosophy is concerned, one cannot disregard Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) and his *Thus spoke Zarathustra* (1883), in which, 6,000 feet above man and history, a new time is reigning in a perpetual present which forever repeats in cycles. For Nietzsche, this circular repetition meant freedom. Just like in the case of the "primitive man," as Eliade and Ungvári argue, the repetition serves to take the terror of ends out of time, altogether abolishing concepts such as complete annihilation and perishing (in the minds of "primitive men," a memoryless, ahistorical "selfless self" survives after death and unites with a greater world spirit in forever circular time). However, as we will see, in the case of Burgess, this

repetition is not a means of salvation. On the contrary, the repetitive heaven of Nietzsche is turned into a transcendence-lacking dystopian hell in *TWS*.

Having looked at the most interesting cyclical patterns of meta-historians and philosophers, we go on to discuss Burgess's three phases in detail. In the futuristic world of *TWS*, there are no political parties, the opposing movements appear one after the other in a diachronical fashion, forming political eras or phases. The system of political change focuses on the anthropological notions of the elites. These notions are recurrently pushed to their extremes; either to extreme optimism or to extreme pessimism concerning the capabilities of humans, as if a pendulum was swinging back and forth.

Gusphase is named after the theologian, St. Augustine of Hippo, who claimed that original sin had depraved human nature to such an extent that it may not be restored without the intervention of divine grace. Mankind without divine redemption for Augustine is a mass doomed to damnation. He considered people to be incapable of good deeds out of their natural benevolence (Chadwick 217). In other words, as the secular followers of Augustine claim (those who do not trust in divine intervention), people are essentially selfish, material, and antisocial by nature, and there is no hope of making them change. According to Geoffrey Aggeler, this pessimistic conviction is typical of the philosophy of Thomas Hobbes: if we extract theology out of Augustine's anthropological notions, we are left with the Hobbesian philosophy of a perpetual "warre of every one against every one" as a natural state of affairs in human society (162). And indeed, it is the secular version of Augustine's philosophy that provides the basis for Burgess's Gusphase. The phase is Augustinian in as much as it refers to the source of anthropological pessimism in European thought—a kind of pessimism that strongly influenced early Protestantism. John Calvin taught in an Augustinian vein that original sin had thoroughly depraved human nature and, hence, human freedom is destroyed.

In Burgess's Gusphase, the proponents of political power use *laissez-faire* methods, as they expect nothing good from people. As Tristram (or perhaps Burgess disguised as Tristram) argues in *TWS*, "[i]f you expect the worst from a person, you can't ever be disappointed. Only the disappointed resort to violence. The pessimist ... takes a sort of gloomy pleasure in observing the depths to which human behaviour can sink" (11). This pessimism results

in the fact that no coercion is used, as changing people's ways to the better is considered hopeless. The result from the individual's point of view is somewhat paradoxically a fairly free and acceptable social structure without dictatorial attitudes: average people are faced with minimal expectations. In fact, some commentators disregard this fact and claim that the "repressive, bureaucratic or totalitarian state is seen as an Augustinian construct" (Biswell 105), whereas actually, most dystopias that describe quasi-totalitarian systems are set in the Interphase (see later), when rulers become disappointed. The political leaders of Gusphase sooner or later recognise that people whom they view as useless and incapable of any good are actually capable of benevolent actions. This recognition leads to another phase, in Burgess's terminology *Pelphase* or Pelagian phase.

This phase has been named after Pelagius, the monk who was a native of Britain and the first British writer we know of (Chadwick 447). He probably died in 418 AD and was one of the major adversaries of St. Augustine in the theological debate over the role of divine grace. As opposed to Augustine, Pelagius claimed that man is created with a good nature and is capable of good deeds even without divine intervention, as original sin has not completely depraved humankind. As Chadwick argues, "Pelagius begins from the proposition that in humanity there exists the possibility of free choice, and therefore by the constitution of human nature sin is not inevitable" (448). He looked at sin more as a bad habit which is hard but not impossible to break. Augustine and Pelagius agree that there is a tendency to evil in humans, but not in the power and scope of this tendency. The consequences of this fifth-century theological debate in anthropological thought are complex and far-reaching. In political philosophy, Pelagianism means the optimistic view that humans and their interactions may develop and reach a more perfected stage. Tristram in *TWS* finds Pelagianism at the roots of leftist political ideologies, namely liberalism, socialism, and communism, but the adherents of political anarchism may also be listed as Pelagian.

As Tristram claims,

> [a] government functioning in the Pelagian phase commits itself to the belief that man is perfectible, that perfection can be achieved by his own efforts, and that the journey towards

> perfection is along a straight road. ... The citizens of a community want to co-operate with their rulers, and so there is no real need to have devices of coercion, sanctions, which will force them to co-operate. (Burgess, *TWS* 17)

Laws are there as guides, and transgressions are punished with small fines if punished at all, as rulers believe that citizens want to be good anyways; there is no need of coercive measures. "No happier form of existence can be envisaged" (Burgess, *TWS* 18), yet sooner or later disappointment destroys the dream and leads to the *Interphase*.

Disappointment, in this case, means the rulers recognise that people are not as good as they had assumed. "It becomes necessary to try and force citizens into goodness" (Burgess, *TWS* 19). The beginning of the so-called interphase is usually chaotic and brutal. Pelagians consider people good, so there is no need for coercion, while Augustinians do not use coercion because people are considered to be irredeemably bad; therefore, coercion is useless. In the Interphase, however, people are no longer considered good, but capable of goodness; thus, coercion to good behaviour becomes the primary function of the state. This is the condition for most dictatorships, fictional or political. Yet as Tristram argues "the interphase cannot ... last forever [because] the governors become shocked at their own excesses ... and a kind of philosophical pessimism supervenes. In other words, we drift into the Augustinian phase. ... The wheel has come a full cycle" (Burgess, *TWS* 23).

Having acquainted ourselves with the details of Burgess's cycles of political change, let us now take a closer look at the character of Tristram, his relationship to the fictive universe around him, and how he and this universe align with the aforementioned philosophical ideas on cyclical time and history. *TWS* includes a narrative where the cycles described by Tristram in the first chapters follow each other in an accelerated fashion, the so-called "historical" cycles (as we will argue later on, the question arises whether we can still call these phases historical at all) repeat in a mind-bogglingly rapid manner. The cycles in the narrative do not come hundreds of years apart, instead they swiftly fluctuate within a single individual's lifespan. As Tristram says to a cellmate in prison: "the Interphase is coming to an end. The shortest on record. The State's reached the limit of despair"

(Burgess, *TWS* 120). Appropriating this fluctuation to the ideas of Mircea Eliade on past-abolishing new year rituals, we can claim that each time we shift from Gusphase to Pelphase to Interphase, essentially a "new era" starts. Years, months, days, and other attributes of physical time are deeply rooted in our physical relationship with the Earth, the sun, and the moon; yet, however practical and observation-based such units of measurement are, they are rooted in human convention and could be easily overwritten by other, more fitting concepts, should the need arise (such an attempt was the so-called French Republican calendar or French Revolutionary calendar, used between 1793 and 1805). In the case of *TWS*, years can simply be overwritten by phases, and each "new year" is marked off by stepping into one of the three phases. Hence, the fictional world of *TWS* is much closer to the universe of Eliade's "primitive men" than the modern, linearly-thinking ones. At the start of each new cycle, the previous one is abolished with all its principles and parameters. It is like turning a new page, except the new page always contains one of the three repeating ideas. But what does this mean for history, when most thinkers agree that history is "free" and forever-changing?[17] It is nature in which "there is nothing new under the sun"; yet, strictly speaking, this is also the case with history in *TWS*, as the "new" cycles are always one out of three repeating phases. Ungvári and Eliade both argue that history has a role to carve out individualism, meaning that the unreproducible human self is manifested through historical recollection, starting with, as we stated earlier, the historicised recollections within the Bible. For the modern European mind, history entails the appreciation of the irreversibility of events, and most importantly, it is not strictly repetitive and is marked off as linear.

In *TWS*, whatever the individual decides, the cycles inevitably follow each other; the structural change overwhelms personal agency. This parallels Spengler's understanding of history, who claims that "[s]ince the momentum of these huge historic cycles is so great, the implication is that nothing can be done to stop them. Once you recognise you are in a particular phase of a cycle, there is no point in behaving as if you were somewhere else" (Magee n.p.). In *TWS*, history behaves in an automatic fashion, as progress

17 "Hegel regards history as an intelligible process moving towards a specific condition—the realisation of human freedom" (Little n.p.).

is replaced by repetition. Tristram argues that, "[i]n this modern world, the circle had become an emblem of the static, the limited globe, the prison" (Burgess, *TWS* 13–14). This corresponds to the structural view of history expounded by the protagonist of another book by Burgess, *1985*. "You can't fight history. ... And who makes history? Movements. Trends. Elans. Processes. Not who, what" (Burgess, *1985* 407). The consequence of the structural view of history is that human freedom, in the long run and in a larger scope, is an illusion. Whatever we do may not alter history, individual acts only have relevance on an individual level. As the adventures of Tristram in *TWS* reflect, according to Burgess, this does not eliminate the responsibility of the individual for his or her own life, as personal life is not completely dependent upon political circumstances. Yet, the anxiety Mircea Eliade referred to concerning linear, historical time also appears in Burgess's cyclical version where the feeling of inevitability is the chief cause of anxiety. The notion of inevitability corresponds to Eliade's notion of history as well. "It is becoming more and more doubtful ... if modern man can make history. ... For history either makes itself ... or it tends to be made by an increasingly smaller number of men. ... Modern man's boasted freedom to make history is illusory for nearly the whole of the human race" (Eliade 156).

In this system of perfect repetition, we can witness all the attributes of the circular universe of "primitive men" re-appear: individualism disappears and events lose their irreversible significance (these are uplifting experiences for the "primitive men," yet major causes of anxiety for the modern one). In fact, events are reduced to either nothingness or what Eliade, based on Brahmanic texts, classifies as events helping the individual to reconnect with "sacred time": such events are mating, eating, fighting, and working). The difference between the primitive circular universe and Burgess's circular universe is that in ancient times these events were held as sacred and did mean to bring the individual back to that transcendental, holy time that can be shared with both ancestors and gods, while in *TWS*, these rituals are twisted, disfigured, mutilated, and made vile and repulsive. The consummation of food in *TWS* equals the consummation of each other, war is just a means to reduce the population, and sex is considered dangerous and is frowned upon as it may be linked to fertility. The dystopian person cannot even find solace in "sacred" rituals, the traditional immersion in sacred

time, because all transcendence is taken out of these rituals—only a perpetually repeating profane circularity remains, a perfect dystopic temporal hell, which is the complete opposite of Nietzsche's temporal utopia.

But in this hellish chronotope, there is one character who rises above the chaos, at least figuratively: Tristram, a history teacher. In the Averroësian circular universe, he is the missing God's eye view: he is the beholder of linear time. Hence, one of the most important attributes of his character is his profession itself. This may not be the most appealing, awe-striking, or "dramatic" profession one could imagine for a protagonist, but in Burgess's cyclical dystopia, he could not have found a more pertinent position for Tristram. While linear time is constrained within the boundaries of the hellish circularity of Gusphase, Pelphase, and Interphase, Tristram does his best to guard the essence of history and linear time itself in multiple ways.

First, strictly from a narrative point of view, he undergoes a journey in a linear story going from A to B; in a metatextual argument, we can claim that him being the protagonist of a novel that has a beginning and an end in itself drives our attention more towards linearity than circularity. Within the fictive domain of the novel itself, one of the most important ways in which he tries to grasp linearity is by chronicling the events around him and recording the changes in the world and history. Friedrich Schelling (1775–1854) called the historian a "backwards-looking prophet"[18] and insofar as backwards and forwards have any meaning left in Burgess's dystopic world, Tristram is such a person. He fulfils the need poets fulfilled in Eliade's "primitive" societies: to record the passage of time in stories and to carve out some sort of individuum from the faceless stream of time.

Another issue by which linear time is guarded is the nature of Tristram's quest. Whilst discussing the Bible, Ungvári argues that recording or keeping track of a family line also serves as a means to stay in touch with the linearity of time (79), and alas, Tristram's quest is to reunite with his wife, and his most painful but cherished memory is linked to his deceased son. Hence, Tristram is even subconsciously clutching at straws of historical, linear time in a circular hell.

18 "Der Historiker ist ein rückwärts gekehrter Prophet" ("Athenäum Fragmente," no. 80, *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe*. Ed. Hans Eichner, vol. 2. Munich and Vienna: Schönigh, 1967. 176.).

Yet, the struggle and suffering of Tristram, however shocking at times (like eating human flesh without knowing it), eventually feels like an unglorified, impersonal, and inevitable but almost unbearably futile and traumatic string of actions. This is very typical of dystopias, and, if we were inclined to make parallels between Eliade's "cyclical time of primitive societies" and Burgess's modern dystopia, here we need to establish a striking difference. Whereas in primitive societies, suffering was viewed as necessary and endurable (since at every new year, one could cleanse themselves of sin), and with the arrival of Judaism and Christianity, this suffering was even further glorified, in the case of dystopias, suffering is totally devaluated. The individual necessarily has to suffer immeasurable traumas; yet, the futility and vileness of these acts scream through the pages, and we are always left with the haunting feeling that all this suffering was for nothing. In Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* or Burgess's *TWS*, suffering is unbearable and further corrodes the otherwise fragile individuality. Time is an empty skeleton pushed by some invisible power structure to crush what little is left of our human character. Tristram in *TWS* is an individual, whose essence and every ounce of being is meant to make us believe that there is such a thing as modern, linear, historical time; yet, the whole universe around him seems to have forgotten it. He is a lonesome hero from a dying breed: someone who still remembers and is able to construct linear narratives from this remembrance.

Burgess's cycle focuses on the anthropological background of political ideologies and, although in this respect it may be used for the analysis of political phenomena, the system describes the political structures of literary works (particularly dystopias) even more aptly than it does non-fictive political reality. As a demonstration of this point, let us finish with a brief analysis of some literary examples. Amongst Burgess's dystopias, in *A Clockwork Orange* (1962) attempts are depicted to change the lenient Pelagian phase and to move into the Interphase: the police force is increased, they become more brutal, and generally the law is enforced more strictly. Yet, the conversion is not straightforward, as the instalment of the Lodovico technique is reconsidered due to public outrage. It seems that the individual (or small groups) may still have some influence on the course of history despite the inevitability of structural changes. In the narrative of *1985*, the state is also

in the later stage of Pelphase: deviance is dealt with benevolently; yet, if transgressors (such as Bev, the protagonist) do not show signs of change, they are severely punished, which is a symptom that the rulers no longer have a deep belief in the goodness of mankind. *1985* focuses on the shortcomings and contradictions of the realisation of the Pelagian theories. But the Augustinian–Pelagian system is applicable to works of other writers as well. Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* also describes a Pelphase, with the difference that rulers may believe in the "goodness" (or rather aptness) of citizens, because they have been formed that way through hypnopaedia; this is the reason why no drastic measures are needed to keep them obedient. A good test of the situation of political power is how infringements are dealt with. In *Brave New World*, one may be safely late for a meeting, say Orgyporgy, whereas in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, this results in more serious consequences. In this dystopia we are in an Interphase (which seems to last forever) and as the rulers do not consider party members good or capable of goodness, coercion is a significant aspect of the system.

Having acquainted ourselves with the details of Burgess's fictive universe and cycles of political change, in the last part of the paper we would like to focus on some problems these cycles of political change pose. First of all, it is not clear whether it is only the rulers' ideology that changes or citizens' behaviour, as well, reflects the state's attitudes. The theory, as Tristram expounds it, does not reflect on the temporal aspects—we do not learn how fast the wheel usually turns. *TWS* describes a fictional historical period where changes are extremely fast—one single generation experiences all three phases. Although the personalities of the main characters hardly change during these times, a great deal of adaptation can be experienced in their behaviour. In the Pelphase, lenience is allowed but discipline quickly becomes armylike in the Interphase. People feel that they are under surveillance, and this changes their attitudes. In the novel, as the phases follow each other very quickly, the long-term consequences cannot be observed; but since there is an interaction between expectations and one's behaviour, we may assume that, if a phase lasts longer and if generations grow up under the same circumstances, behaviour effects the deeper structure of one's personality (unless one assumes, in agreement with Giambattista Vico, human nature to be unchanging). This also entails that the longer one

phase lasts, the more chances there are that time retains some sense of linearity, as opposed to completely gaining a "primitive" circularity. Yet, this new cirularity is a "modern primitive one" that can no longer be separated by the binary distinction of sacred and profane time, only maybe by that of the *damned* and the profane.

One of the basic concepts of Burgess's theory of the cyclical nature of political change is *goodness* that he considers an intrinsic feature of humans; yet, the meaning of this broad concept depends very much on the circumstances. The rulers essentially consider good that which is in accordance with their interests. In the overpopulated world *TWS* describes, bearing children is seen as a harmful act, whereas homosexuality as an unproductive way of sexuality is propagated and rewarded, and so is castration. Perhaps this last example makes it obvious that in this system good is what the state considers good, and the same applies to sin. Morality becomes dependent on power structures.

In conclusion, we can argue that, in Burgess's system, binary oppositions of Augustinian and Pelagian worldviews usually appear in their extremes and ignore mankind's complexities, the fact that man is good and bad at the same time. As Robert Taubman argued, Burgess was "a tough-minded Augustinian himself ... but an Augustinian with a sense of fun" (qtd. in Biswell 268). And as Andrew Biswell argues, the "Augustine/Pelagius distinction might be thought of as the engine which drives Burgess's mature imagination; it gave him a set of home-made theological spectacles with which to view history and politics" (106). This idiosyncratic view of history with a very limited human agency that appears in *TWS* poses the metaphysical question whether we can still call it history. Whether Burgess intentionally played on this theme or not, in *TWS*, he managed to create a fictive universe which in itself is a blissful contradiction, a true human paradox: everything in the story shifts the universe back to "primitive" circular time, but it does so not by travelling to the past but by travelling to the future, keeping "modern man" as its hero, and putting this modern human being in a quasi-historical context. *TWS* unravels what is left of humanity, once both the spirituality and the linearity of time is taken out of the life of an individual, hence, even possibly giving us the recipe or scheme for the perfect dystopian chronotope. Burgess and Tristram talk about history, but this history is an enigma. It is hellish, it is paradoxical, and it is circular. In *TWS*, not less than the questions

of the essence of history itself and what it means to mankind are at stake. The question it really puts forward is whether history has a teleology towards which it could head in a linear or spiral fashion, as it appears in Fiore's system, or it keeps recirculating, as implied in Anthony Burgess's fiction.

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