

## “This is not Shakespeare!”

*Graham Holderness*

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—Bendor Grosvenor, *Art History News*, Apr 1 2016

In 1964, as his contribution to the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare’s birth, Anthony Burgess published his novel *Nothing Like the Sun*, a fictional biography of Shakespeare. Its plot derives from the known historical facts about Shakespeare’s life and work: his Stratford social and family context; his parentage, marriage, and children; his success as a poet and playwright; his connection with the Earl of Southampton; his participation in the business side of the London theatres; his death in Stratford in 1616. *Nothing Like the Sun* is also nothing like Shakespeare, or rather, it is more “not Shakespeare” than it is “Shakespeare.” Although the novel is, by definition, clearly fiction, Burgess insisted it was underpinned by extensive scholarly knowledge of Shakespeare’s life and works. In an essay on biography, he wrote: “I had been reading pretty widely, ever since my student days, in books about Shakespeare, in Elizabethan

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documents, in scholarly background history. I had taken a lot of notes feverishly, making a chronological table which related the known facts of Shakespearean biography to the wider events of the time" ("Genesis and Headache," 31). But a novel cannot be made merely out of a set of facts. So Burgess used invention, speculation, imagination, fantasy, and a highly speculative biographical interpretation of Shakespeare's own works to fill out a fictional life for him. He did this partly by providing answers to some of the questions thrown up by the facts. Why are there two names in the records of Shakespeare's marriage? Why did a seventeenth-century anecdote claim that Shakespeare had been "a schoolmaster in the country"? How did Shakespeare find his way from Stratford-upon-Avon to London, and enter the theatre as a professional writer? Burgess weaves stories to account for the problems in the documentary record, in much the same way as Shakespeare's biographers do; the facts do not make sense, or at least hold very little interest, unless they are elaborated and embroidered.

The main source for the story of Shakespeare's life in *Nothing Like the Sun* is, however, Shakespeare's own writing—his plays and poems, especially the Sonnets, which do of course appear to tell a story about the poet's love affairs, first with the "fair friend," then with the "dark lady." In the novel, Shakespeare has a full-blown affair with the Earl of Southampton and is infected with syphilis by the "Dark Lady," who is a black woman from Malaya, named Fatimah. Shakespeare encounters her first in a Bristol brothel, and then later as a London lady. On a visit home to Stratford, Shakespeare finds that his wife is having an affair with his brother. In this scenario, much of Shakespeare's work becomes autobiographical: the "fair friend" and "dark lady" of the Sonnets are identified; all the emotions in the Sonnets—lust and love, both heterosexual and homosexual, sexual disgust, jealousy—are explained; and even the story of sexual betrayal in *Hamlet* becomes Shakespeare's own story (as it is in James Joyce's *Ulysses*). Of course, there is no real historical or biographical evidence for any of this. But it makes good fiction, although it clearly stands accused of being "not Shakespeare."

Burgess is doing two things here. He is writing a historical novel about Shakespeare's life, though it is one that is full of invention, speculation, and imagination, as well as historical fact. In other words, it is a historical novel. He is also writing a Shakespeare biography, but from the inside out: searching out the inner truth of experience that can attempt to explain the documentary facts.

In 1970, Burgess published an illustrated biography, *Shakespeare*, that simply inverted the novel, working from the outside in, foregrounding documentary and historical records and pushing interpretation into the same fictional territory as that explored in the novel. In one sense, Burgess's literary biography and his novel mirror one another, since in *Shakespeare* the life illustrates the plays and poems, while in *Nothing Like the Sun* the plays and poems illuminate the life. Burgess distinguished between the two texts by calling the novel "deliberate invention," by contrast with the "painfully amassed factuality" of the biography. In my view, there is little difference. But then, "deliberate invention" has always been the business of Shakespeare biography, though its practitioners often deny it, and claim the authority of historical record. By starting with factual fiction, and moving on to fictionalized fact, Burgess offered a serious challenge to the Shakespeare biography enterprise, though it has remained largely ignored or dismissed, at least until recently. The book has now been reprinted by The Folio Society, with a Preface by Stanley Wells, who describes it as the product of the "creative interaction between the imagination of a major novelist and the life and work of the greatest poetic dramatist," an interaction that makes Burgess's book "one of the finest Shakespeare biographies."<sup>1</sup>

Between the novel and the biography there lies another work, this time one that was never published or performed. In early 1968, Burgess flew to Hollywood to discuss what he hoped would be a film script for his first major motion picture. *Nothing Like the Sun* had been noticed in Hollywood, and the new project was to be a life of Shakespeare that would also be a film musical. From its inception, the work had two titles, *Will!*, the title Burgess preferred, and the title preferred by Hollywood, *The Bawdy Bard*: "1960s Hollywood was riding a wave of very successful British musicals, such as *My Fair Lady* and *Camelot*, and historical blockbusters like *A Lion in Winter* and *A Man for All Seasons*. Warner Brothers Seven Arts was eager to create a similar success with Burgess's Shakespeare film," which was to be a major studio project involving investment of millions of dollars (Smith 34). Burgess wrote some twenty songs (both music and lyrics) that were recorded with full orchestration by Warner Brothers.

The film was to be directed by Joseph L. Mankiewicz, who had directed the classic *All about Eve*, *Julius Caesar* with Marlon Brando, as well as the brilliant film version of *Guys and Dolls*. Mankiewicz needed a big, successful movie after the flop of *Cleopatra*. He had "already made

some casting decisions—Maggie Smith as Anne, her husband Robert Stephens as Will, James Mason as Philip Henslowe, Peter Ustinov as Ben Jonson, Jessica Tandy as Queen Elizabeth. No decision was made about the Dark Lady, although Burgess somewhat facetiously suggested Diana Ross” (*You’ve Had Your Time*, 157, 144, cited by Smith, 38).

Burgess’s doubts about the screenplay and the project in general were reinforced by a growing sense he had that the film would never be made. “Desperately trying to finish the script, I yet knew that it was not going to reach the screen” (*You’ve Had Your Time*, 190). His premonition proved correct: Warner Brothers was being sold, and even though studio executives supported the project, “all existing enterprises were scrapped when the new regime started,” as Burgess explained in an interview (*Conversations*, 54). In 1969, Burgess contracted to write the “brief biography of Shakespeare which should be sumptuously illustrated” so that he would not waste the research he had done for the film (*You’ve Had Your Time*, 190). This is his “coffee table” biography, *Shakespeare*, published in 1970.

Would *Will!* have been as successful as *Shakespeare in Love* if it had been made? Who knows. In any case, the screenplay eventually found a home in Burgess’s final Enderby novel, *Enderby’s Dark Lady, or No End to Enderby*. This is a hilarious satire in which Mr. Enderby, who has published a short story about Shakespeare, the Gunpowder Plot, and the King James Bible—the story appears at the beginning of the novel—is traveling to Indiana to produce a stage musical on the life of Shakespeare. Burgess recycles the whole process of his involvement in the unmade film. The lyrics and the plot of the musical that Enderby creates in Indiana are all straight from *Will!*, and the story of the stage production satirizes Burgess’s own experience in Hollywood and with Americans. But there is also a love story for Enderby as he falls for April Elgar, a black singer rather like Diana Ross, who is to play the Dark Lady in the stage production.

In the space of four years, starting in the commemorative anniversary year of 1964, Burgess revolutionized Shakespeare biography, bringing together fact and fiction as no one else had ever done. He made a significant contribution to the historical novel, opening the way for that double perspective, simultaneously ancient and modern, that characterizes the form today. And he wrote a musical version of Shakespeare’s life, unluckily never produced, that was a precursor of the hugely successful and influential *Shakespeare in Love*. In those four years Burgess, more than any other writer, pioneered and practiced all those different ways of

creatively mingling Shakespeare with “not Shakespeare”: mixing history and biography with fantasy and invention; and incorporating Shakespeare into new literary and theatrical forms.

*Enderby's Dark Lady* concludes with another, loosely related, short story called “The Muse.” The mode of this tale is science fiction. It is set in the twenty-third century, where people can travel round in time and space, navigating by the use of musical instruments. But Time is “plastic” and “curved” and “warped,” there are innumerable parallel universes, and you cannot be sure where you’re going to end up. A literary historian called Paley is trying to get to Shakespeare’s time, taking a copy of the First Folio with him. He finds Shakespeare writing, laboriously and painfully, plays we’ve never heard of, in terrible verse. Paley is then arrested as a madman, and Shakespeare left with the book, which he starts to copy out:

*The Merchant of Venice. A Comedy*  
Then on he went, not blotting a line.

Apparently all Shakespeare’s good plays have been smuggled from the future in the same way. So here Burgess uses sci-fi fantasy to explore the intricate and complex ways in which we reach out to history and to the writing of the past. How do we engage with the past without taking our own baggage with us? What happens when we find that the past does not answer to our needs and desires? Isn’t the past, and our collective memory of the past, something (to use Wordsworth’s terms) we “half-create” as well as “half perceive”? All this is explored by the simple expedient of grafting the Shakespearean text, and some of the apparatus of Shakespearean criticism, onto an alien form, science fiction—thus forcing Shakespeare to collide with “not Shakespeare.”

I have invoked Anthony Burgess’s sci-fi story of time-traveling back to the Elizabethan age as a precursor and justification for the piece of fiction that follows below, “The Seeds of Time,” which addresses the presence of Shakespeare in the Great Exhibition of 1851 and the 2012 London Olympics via a fantasy of time travel.<sup>2</sup> As I have shown in the brief discussion above, Burgess was notoriously indiscriminate in the way he applied his knowledge of Shakespeare to a wide range of critical and creative activities. As a consummate fiction-maker (about his own life, as his biographer Roger Lewis has shown, as well as about life in general), and an academic manqué, who thought of himself as cleverer than the

academic gatekeepers of literary criticism, he refused to corral specialist knowledge and imaginative reinvention into separate fields. His critical and biographical initiatives are more boldly speculative and risk-taking than conventional exercises in these disciplines; and his fictional explorations of cultural material are enlivened and energized as much by intellectual curiosity as they are by unfettered imagination. I have found in Burgess's work a model of how to harness Shakespeare together with "not Shakespeare" in order to generate new ideas and new perception in our continuous experience of exploring Shakespeare's works.

"The Seeds of Time" is a pastiche of H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine*, with more than a few echoes of the *Back to the Future* films. Wells's Time Traveler, scientist, and inventor, accompanied by a young Shakespeare enthusiast, embarks on a new journey, hoping to stand in the yard of the Globe Theatre for the premiere of *Hamlet*, and to speak with Shakespeare. To cut a long story short, they never make it. Things go wrong, and they find themselves instead visiting the Great Exhibition, the Festival of Britain, and the London Olympics. They discover no original source for Shakespeare, only a history of reproductions. Leaving the South Bank in 1951, they plan to advance in time to 2051, only to find themselves stranded in 2012 at the site of the London Olympics. A final attempt to revisit the past in search of Shakespeare, predictably, fails. The story is an exercise in mingling creativity with criticism, and in forcing interactions between Shakespeare and "not Shakespeare."

### THE SEEDS OF TIME

The gray eyes of the Time Traveler shone and twinkled, and his usually pale face was flushed and animated as he expounded his new theory. We sat in the garden of his house on Richmond Hill, under a huge clustering wisteria, whose purple flowers dangled luxuriantly all around, sharing with us their brief moment of temporary perfection. The sun was setting over the tranquil Thames Valley, and its dying rays touched with color the bubbles that flashed and passed in our glasses. Cattle grazed contentedly in the broad meadow; the white sail of a yacht dipped and slewed along the shining river; and the bright air seemed hushed and suspended, as if time were standing still.

"Yes," he said, in conclusion. "As I have explained, the machine I have designed is capable of carrying me to any point I choose, in space or in time."

The three other guests had been introduced to me simply as the Artist, the Scientist, and the Newspaper Man. The Time Traveler had lost none of his predilection for both stereotyping and anonymity.

"So using this machine," said the Artist, "You can now go anywhere, anytime."

"Theoretically, yes."

"Then to where—and to when—do you plan to go?"

"That is exactly my purpose in inviting you gentlemen here this evening. My machine is not quite ready for its next expedition. I look to you to furnish me with suggestions as to whither I might travel. What should I attempt to see? To whom should I attempt to speak? Which time, and what place?"

"The Renaissance!" cried the Artist immediately. "I would wish to see Michelangelo painting the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel."

"Or to speak with Leonardo about his inventions," put in the Scientist. "Find out how his mind really worked."

"I would love to discover the true identity of the Mona Lisa!" said the Journalist. "It would make my career."

"All in good time," the Traveler laughed. "For my first expedition I had not thought of traveling quite so far in space as Florence and Rome. Have you no interest in the history of your own country? Something a little closer, perhaps."

"Then I would wish to witness Holbein painting the portrait of Henry VIII."

"I would dearly love to speak to Sir Walter Raleigh, and learn the secrets of the School of Night."

While the Journalist was still thinking of something to say, I could not forbear interrupting. "I would wish to stand in the yard of the Globe Theatre on the first night of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*."

"Shakespeare!" said the Time Traveler, as if the idea had never occurred to him. "Why that would be interesting. I could ask him directly if he wrote his own plays! Do you think he would tell me?" The others laughed. "But the age of Elizabeth was a remarkable period. And its history lies buried not more than a few miles from here."

[...]

"I see you are anxious to find the solution to our controversy," he said. "We certainly have enough questions to pursue. Was Shakespeare an Ancient, or a Modern? A conservative, or a radical? Did he write to bring back an old world, or to usher in a new? Did he write for the people, or the court? Did he stand for Art, or for Science?"

I confessed that I could wish for nothing more than to have the answers to such questions.

"Then," said the Time Traveler, quickly. "Come with me."

"With you?" I exclaimed. "But ..."

"The machine can carry two. I constructed a pillion, as I thought I might need an assistant. Are you afraid?"

Of course I was, but I denied it. "Now? Tonight?"

"Yes," he said, impatiently. "We can return to this very moment, and afterwards you can go home and sleep in your own bed. But first, do you not want to meet Shakespeare?"

My resistance melted under his exhortations, and I resolved to travel with him. Immediately he bestrode the machine, and began to make adjustments to his dials.

"*Hamlet*, I think you said? That would be around 1600."

"1603 was the year *Hamlet* was first published."

"Very well. Observe how I can target our destination exactly, using my positioning system. The Globe Theatre. The southerly bank of the Thames, close to what is now the Iron Bridge. We are ready. Hop on!"

Wasting no more time, I slung a leg over the machine and sat behind him. He touched a lever, and we were off.

## Ω

We came to rest in the darkness, under a canopy of trees. Through their black branches I could glimpse moonlight, and not far off the yellow lights of a high-road.

"Where are we?" I asked, dismounting the machine. "And when?"

"1851," he replied. "Where, I'm not sure. We were traveling slightly off course and I had to stop to correct the deviation. I think we are in Hyde Park."

He was bent over the machine trying to see his instruments, but by this time I had turned around, and was astonished at what I saw.

"Are you sure?" I asked.

"Yes," he said, "No doubt. See, there is the Round Pond. And yonder is Kensington Palace."

"No. About the date, I mean. If this is Hyde Park, what on earth is that?"

In the direction of the road, where I expected to see the spire of the Albert Memorial, I beheld a vast structure, surmounted by a great curved roof, apparently composed entirely of glass. It was larger than any building I had ever seen: well over a hundred feet in height and easily a



third of a mile long. The bright moonlight reflected brilliantly from millions of panes of glass. I thought it must be one of those buildings of the future of which the Time Traveler had spoken, and I feared he had taken me forward to the time of the Eloi and the Morlocks.

"Why that," he exclaimed "is a miracle of modern engineering. How could I have missed the significance? 1851! It is the Crystal Palace!"

"The Crystal Palace! Then we are in Sydenham?"

"No, no. The Crystal Palace was erected in Hyde Park for the Great Exhibition of 1851, and relocated later to Kent."

"Can we take a closer look at it?"

"We can do more than that. We are only a few years back in time, in the age of our own parents. We will not excite attention: our clothes will seem little different from those of an ordinary working man. Before we resume our journey, we will be the first men to return from the future, and visit the Great Exhibition."

[...]

"You know he was a gardener, Paxton, designer of the Palace? A landscaper at Chatsworth. But he made use of new techniques in construction, combining wood, plate glass, and cast iron, to design the great conservatory there. Have you seen the Chatsworth Lily House? Erected to house the *Amazonica*. A building with roof and walls of light. He used cast plate glass with a curtain wall system, so vertical bays of glass could be hung from cantilevered beams. That was his invention, and the basis for the construction of the Crystal Palace. Paxton said that the ribbed floating leaves of the giant Amazonian lily were his inspiration for this design. What a perfect marriage of art and nature! Of science and imagination!"

"Of architecture and engineering," I added, marveling at the airy lightness of the huge building, and the delicacy of its crystalline structure.

"Yes. It must have been Brunel who saw its promise. You know he was on the selection committee that picked the design? In any event, he imitated the method when he redesigned Paddington Station, and used the same construction company. Brunel now: he was a true visionary. A man of immense imagination, with the practical knowledge to realize his dreams."

At the entrance the clerk looked curiously at our modern shillings, but allowed us in without comment. I believe he thought we were foreigners.

"I think I see what I was looking for," said the Time Traveler, and threaded his way through the crowd that was gradually filling up the immense pavilion. He led me to a beautiful wrought-iron canopy

standing right beneath the central dome of the Palace, which sheltered beneath its elaborate artistry a white plaster effigy of Shakespeare, copied from the statue in Westminster Abbey. The dome was a kind of cupola, fashioned from delicate traceries of wrought iron, exquisitely curved into an inverted flower-like shape. Slim iron columns supported the dome, each one surmounted by a perching eagle. At the apex a cylindrical chimney tapered into a kind of spire, topped by a weather-vane and a figure of Eros. Somehow the heavy iron structure managed to assume an effect of lightness, the iron seeming as fragile as lace, and easily mistaken for a garden trellis threaded with clambering flowers.

"The dome is from Coalbrookdale," said the Time Traveler. "You know the scientific history, of course: how Abraham Darby made advances in the smelting of iron, using coke as fuel. How his company built the first iron bridge. This work of theirs takes pride of place here: a perfect synthesis of beauty and industry, of art and manufacture."

"Here, at any rate, is one image of Shakespeare for you, at the very center of the exhibition your hero William Morris refused to enter! Does he not look entirely at home?"

I owned that he did, and that here in this miraculous glass palace, modeled on the leaves of a lily; constructed by means of the most advanced engineering technology; at the heart of a Great Exhibition that gave equal emphasis to art and industry—the figure of Shakespeare seemed in no way out of place.

A colorful and cosmopolitan throng skirted the frontal base of the statue. We walked around the back, and were there confronted by a very different scene. Here a large group of common people stood and sat around, completely at their leisure beneath the Bard's avuncular gaze. A red-faced woman, basket at her feet, held out a glass to be filled with wine by an equally rubicund man. Two soldiers in shakos flirted loudly with a couple of pretty country girls. There were children everywhere: a small boy with his father's hand-me-down hat slipping over his ears; a little girl holding wool for her busily knitting mother; and at the center of the pedestal, a nursing mother suckled her baby at her breast, her own mother looking indulgently on.

"All human life is here," said the Time Traveler, "gathered together under Shakespeare's masterful shadow."

"One touch of nature," I quoted, "'makes the whole world kin.'"

"Indeed. And there is the answer to one of our questions, at least for this time and for this place. There is no separation here between

Shakespeare and the common people. Moreover, they themselves are enfolded within a cosmopolitan gathering of all nations, the focal point of which is the image of Shakespeare. Your quotation is very apt. But do you know what Prince Albert said was the ultimate purpose of the Great Exhibition? To bring closer 'that great end, to which all history points—the realization of the unity of mankind.'"

[...]

"Why don't we go further forward, and see if Shakespeare figures as largely in the second anniversary of the Great Exhibition?" he said. "Have a look at Shakespeare 2051?"

I agreed with alacrity, and he set his dials for that date. I had another idea. "Suppose we shift our physical location, and visit Shakespeare's birthplace, Stratford-upon-Avon, in 2051? It will be interesting to see what has happened to the old town."

No sooner said than done. The Traveler used a kind of keyboard fitted to his map to enter the place-name "Stratford," and once again we committed ourselves to a journey through time and space. After a brief period of motion, involving some little relocation, the machine seemed to slow itself down, as if reluctant to proceed any further. The dials showed that we were past the second millennium, but there seemed to be some obstacle inhibiting us from voyaging any further than 2012. The machine stopped in that year, in a clump of trees by a river. The Traveler sat staring at his instruments, and scratching his head.

"I don't understand," he said. "Something is preventing us from proceeding further. The continuum seems to end here. We seem to be locked inside a paradigm, and have reached its outer limit. It is almost as if we are caught in a temporal narrative that is only being written at this time, and has no perspective on the future."

"But we have been traveling into the future," I said.

"Our tomorrow," he retorted, "but someone else's yesterday. The machine cannot see beyond 2012, and so we are held here, like characters imprisoned in an author's past."

"An author? But who is writing the story?"

"I don't know. I've never believed in God. And where are we? The map shows we've traveled only a few miles north-east. I don't think we're in Stratford-upon-Avon."

That much was obvious, as we peered out from our hiding place. We were in an enormous park, full of huge buildings, seemingly constructed for sporting events. Prominent among them was an immense stadium, tall and circular, engineered with outstanding ingenuity, and exquisitely

designed. Gradually, as darkness began to fall, innumerable colored lights, set into intricate patterns, began to illuminate the structure, forming varying patterns and shapes, so what had been a large building turned into a fantasy palace of glowing vermillion. We had never seen so much power, generated presumably from electricity, and applied to such subtle and aesthetically thrilling purposes.

We hid the machine, and walked towards the stadium. After a few brief observations, the Time Traveler said: "I know where we are. We should have given the machine more precise instruction. This is Stratford in London's East End!"

As we seated ourselves, we heard the announcement that told us where we were: the venue of the 30th Olympic Games. We had known only two Olympiads, of course, in Athens in 1896 and Paris in 1900. Evidently, the custom had been continued every four years ever since. This was the opening ceremony. An old omnibus drawn by two shire horses entered the arena, and deposited a group of men who wore the top hats and frock coats of Victorian capitalists. One of them, who seemed to be *primus inter pares*, strode ahead of the group, carrying a book. We realized immediately that this actor was representing none other than Isambard Kingdom Brunel himself. But to our surprise, he stood on the mound, and in a ringing declamatory voice spoke Caliban's lines from *The Tempest*: "Be not afear'd; the isle is full of noises."

There followed an extraordinary performed history of the Industrial Revolution. The green grass of rural England disappeared, replaced by a brownfield industrial site full of machinery: a water wheel, beam engines, looms. And then came the most incredible theatrical manifestation I had ever seen. At the center of the display I had noticed a large circular trough, linked by a long channel to a crucible that put me in mind of steel production. Now before our very eyes that same smelting process seemed to begin, with what looked like a sparking river of molten steel pouring into the channel, and slowly making its way towards the central trough. Steelworkers busily hammered and sieved the glowing ore. In truth the display was manufactured by a combination of light effects and fireworks; but no more convincing simulation of smelting has, I am sure, ever before or since been done on a stage. Running around the trough, the molten steel appeared to form a perfect ring. Above our heads, we noticed, four identical rings of light were hovering suspended in the air, slowly converging towards one another. The ring that had shaped itself in the center

also rose and moved towards the others. In a dazzling technological *coup d'oeil*, these five rings, which seemed to have the mass and density of metal, yet hovered ethereally in the air, effortlessly combined together to form an image, which then seemed to burst into flame and cascade showers of brilliant sparks down into the space of the auditorium.

"The symbol of the Olympics," said the Time Traveler, gazing up with something like awe at the interlacing rings. "Pierre de Coubertin showed me his design. Derived from an ancient Greek hieroglyph. All the nations of the world, linked together in peaceful competition. It is wonderful."

"Man has a bright future, then, at least for a hundred years or so."

"And one in which our own time is remembered and revered. The hero of this show is none other than Brunel!"

"Yet the only words he spoke were from Shakespeare."

"Yes. What do you make of that?"

A pretty young girl in a seat next to the Time Traveler overheard his question and said helpfully, "It's from *The Tempest*. We did it at school."

Like many other members of the audience, the girl held in her hand a small oblong machine that clearly interested the Time Traveler. I had observed her entering writing onto a screen, as if sending messages. Now, however, she pressed her fingers onto the device and conjured up for us on the screen a tiny image of the actor playing Brunel, speaking Shakespeare's lines.

"May I?" asked the Time Traveler, and took the device from her hand. "Lumière would be interested to see this," he said thoughtfully.

"You can keep it," said the girl. "It's only a Pay-as-you-go. I've got a contract phone."

"I'm sure you have," he said, concealing his incomprehension. But I saw him slide the device quickly into his pocket, before she changed her mind. I noticed two ushers pointing at us, and talking to one another. We both felt it was time for us to move on, though the show was continuing. We slipped out the way we had come in, and returned to the spot where we had left the Time Machine.

"Why do you think they used those lines of Shakespeare?" My companion asked as we walked. "From Caliban to Brunel? Brunel was no dreamer, and certainly no primitive man."

"I've been reflecting on it," I replied, "and think I have the answer. We have just witnessed the same creative conjunction of Shakespeare

with industry and engineering that we saw in the Great Exhibition, and in the Festival of Britain. Caliban lived in a wondrous isle, surrounded by the shapes of his imagination. He was an instinctive artist, a poet, and a dreamer. He heard random noise as exquisite music, and when he looked at the sky, he saw the clouds open onto infinite possibility.

“Brunel too lived in an isle of wonders, and heard the same music. He listened to the random babbling of nature, and interpreted it into a common language. He dreamed the same dreams: dreams of space and time. And what he dreamed, he invented; his mind and hand went together. His imagination reached out across distance, abbreviated time and annihilated space, crossed rivers and linked towns, burrowed deep into the earth, and rode the pitching waves of the high seas. And from those visions, he conjured machines that made dreams into reality: bridges, ships, railways.

“This we knew already. But what we have seen here tonight, takes Brunel’s machinery, and renders it back into dream again. The technology of 2012 far surpasses that of our own day, and is capable not only of construction, but of creation. Engineering has entered the realm of poetry. Art and science have become one, as they were in the Renaissance. And so Shakespeare and Brunel no longer stand opposed, as the dreamer and the artisan, or the poet and the engineer. They have become one voice, one hand, one mind. And by the combination of their powers of vision and practice, they have kept Britain great, or perhaps made it great again.”

## Ω

We retrieved the machine, and prepared to bid farewell to the future, and return to the past. I thought we would be going straight home, but the Time Traveler was thoughtful, studying the device the girl had given him.

“Let’s have one more try at finding Shakespeare,” he said quickly. “I’d like to show him this. So he can see how his words will live on in the future.”

The Traveler had obviously perfected his directional instruments, and steered the machine confidently back to Southwark, this time to the less perilous date of 1599, and a time around late morning. We hid the machine, and asked at the door of the theatre if there was to be a play that day. The answer was unfortunately negative, so we inquired into

the whereabouts of Master William Shakespeare. We would find him, we were told, later in the day, along the river at the George and Dragon Inn.

So we walked along to the old high street, our clothes courting curious glances, but no interference, as the district was a favourite haunt of foreigners. We found the old inn easily enough—it remains there still—and entered its gray cobbled yard. Inside we were able to purchase food and drink with a small silver coin I happened to find in my pocket. A few rough-looking characters eyed us, but gave us no trouble. We waited, and as the hours passed, people came and went, workers, servants, apprentices, gentlemen, soldiers, players, prostitutes, taking a drink and going about their business. We sat watching in fascination the colorful pageant of Shakespeare's London. Before our very eyes appeared the contemporary originals of Shakespeare's dramatic characters: that angry young man had a touch of Hotspur; the lean and slippered pantaloone resembled Justice Shallow; there was Doll Tearsheet, and around her a whole crowd of fat, red-faced, and boisterous Falstaffs.

But Shakespeare himself never appeared. The little communications device the Traveler had brought back from the future seemed to stop working, its display showing a warning of "no signal." We had lost our link to the future, and no one was expecting us in the past. As the light began to fail we gave up, and returned to the Time Machine. Silently, not without a tinge of disappointment, we recovered the machine, re-boarded, and returned to our own time.

## Ω

Everything was as we had left it. The laboratory remained silent and undisturbed. The clock on the wall told us that no time at all had elapsed since we embarked on that incredible journey.

"If you hurry, you'll still catch the last train," he said to me in a strangely matter-of-fact way. "But come tomorrow night, won't you, to help me convince the others that I'm neither mad, nor an inveterate liar!"

As I walked towards the station, down the hill into the little town, quotidian reality encroached and pressed upon me, claiming me for this time, and this place. The hissing of gas lamps along the street; low laughter of lovers in the nearby park; the distant sigh of a train from over the hill, making its way to Kingston. Yet in my mind, all this was fractured and transected by an unavoidable awareness of other times, and

other places; of lives long gone, yet still inexplicably present; of ages still unknown, yet into which, against all laws of nature, I had already traveled. All our yesterdays remaining to be revisited; tomorrow as easily accessible as today. Was I here, or there, or elsewhere? Did those street-lamps illuminate a flare-path to the future? Was that whispering I could hear from over the low wall, a lover and his lass, an echo from the past? Would my train really take me only a few miles away in space, back to a humdrum, imprisoning present?

Be not afraid, I said to myself. The isle is full of noises. Everything is still there, if our dreams are true enough: all that is past, and passing, and to come. I had no idea whether I was still dreaming, or had wakened from a long sleep. Or perhaps there was little difference between the two. In any event, as I walked briskly through Richmond, Caliban's rich imagination and inconsolable longing burned within me; and though I was far from unhappy, I cried to dream again.

## NOTES

1. Anthony Burgess, *Shakespeare* (2015). See also Graham Holderness, *Nine Lives of William Shakespeare*.
2. A historical and critical account of this same material, including a study of Shakespeare in the Festival of Britain 1951, is contained in Graham Holderness, "Remembrance of Things Past: Shakespeare 1851, 1951, 2012." The story was published as "The Seeds of Time," *Critical Survey* 25.3 (2013): 88–113, and is reprinted here in abridged form by kind permission of the editors and publisher.

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