

# Nothing Like the Sun: Anthony Burgess's Factification of Shakespeare's Life

By [Alan Roughley](#)

Although Harold Bloom declares *Nothing Like the Sun* to be "wonderful" and describes Burgess's factual fictionalisation of Shakespeare's life as his "best novel" and the "only successful novel ever written about Shakespeare,"

he reads it from the perspective of a critic who views Burgess primarily as a "loving disciple of Joyce."

[Note 1](#)

The part of

*Nothing Like the Sun*

that Bloom seems most to value is Burgess's adaptation of Stephen Dedalus's theories on the fictional relationships between Hamlet and his father's ghost; the factual relationship between Shakespeare and his son, Hamnet; and the amalgamation of fact and fiction in the relationship between Ann Hathaway and Hamlet's mother, Gertrude.

This is all rather curious given that it was Bloom himself who, in *The Anxiety of Influence*, developed the theory of how new writers, or ephebes, must engage and wrestle with the works of earlier strong writers if they are to succeed in creating their own distinctive vision.

[Note 2](#)

In treating Burgess's use of the theories that Joyce puts into Stephen's mouth as the use that a "loving disciple" might make of his master's work, Bloom ignores the ways in which Burgess writes against Joyce and overlooks two facts. The first is the obvious one that Burgess's primary interest lies not in Joyce but in Shakespeare's life and works; the second is his own clear recognition of the essential differences between the theories of Stephen Dedalus and Burgess's use of them for his own aesthetic purposes. Paradoxically, Bloom's own theories offer one of the clearest explanations of how Burgess uses the ideas that Joyce puts into the mouth of Stephen Dedalus in order to break free from Joyce's vision of Shakespeare and pursue his own engagement with the playwright.

Bloom's oversight is understandable. In his brief discussion of Burgess's use of Stephen's theories, his focus is upon Joyce's struggle with Shakespeare and not on the ways in which Burgess took that theory and expanded it into a recreation of Shakespeare's life that is much more aesthetically complete than any representation of Shakespeare created in Joyce's writings. Bloom, however, does recognise both the aesthetic power and presence that Burgess succeeds in creating from Stephen's comparatively jejune theories. He tells us that he "long ago jumbled" Stephen's theories with "Burgess's imaginings" to such an extent that he is "startled always, rereading Joyce, not to find much that I wrongly expected to find, which is gorgeously present in Burgess." [Note 3](#)

In addition to being a creative writer with a prodigious output, Burgess was also one of Joyce's early major critics, and his two major studies of Joyce, *Re-Joyce* and *Joysprick*, –as well as his shorter version of

*Finnegans Wake*

– reveal his comprehensive understanding of the Irish writer's work from both a scholarly and imaginative perspective. Joyce himself was cynical about scholars and critics. In

*Finnegans Wake*

, for example, he creates the character of the "Grave Professor" who accidentally punctures with his fork a manuscript that he is reading while he is eating breakfast. After failing to recognise what he has done, this Professor spends much of his time trying to establish the significance of the holes he discovers in the manuscript he is studying. Burgess, who had a much more extensive formal education than Joyce, had no such reservations about scholarship and criticism. Some fifteen years after completing

*Nothing Like the Sun*

, for example,

he added to an already impressive scholarly record with his monograph,

*Shakespeare*

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[Note 4](#)

Burgess was both a scholar and creative writer (as well, of course, as being a linguist and a trained musician and composer) whose genius consisted in part of using his scholarly erudition

for aesthetic creative purposes. A comparison of *Nothing Like the Sun* and *Shakespeare* reveals that much of the scholarly research that went into the monograph must have been completed as part of the work that went into writing the earlier fictional account of Shakespeare's love life. As Burgess noted in the 1982 "Foreword" for the novel, its "brevity is not a fair index of the amount of work that went into the writing of it."

#### [Note 5](#)

##### *Nothing Like the Sun*

self-consciously offers itself as a "farewell lecture" given by one fictional Mr Burgess to his "special students."

"Such a playful yet intelligent blurring of the boundaries between scholarship and artistic creation is a hallmark of much of Burgess's artistic output, and his blending of fact and fiction in that novel justifies the description of it with the pun of "factification" from Joyce's

*Finnegans Wake*

The influence of Joyce is easy to detect in *Nothing Like the Sun*. Like Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*

##### *Nothing Like the Sun*

is both a bildungsroman and a künstlerroman, depicting Shakespeare's growth from adolescence to maturity as well as his artistic development. As Harold Bloom demonstrates, Stephen Dedalus's theories on Shakespeare are an integral part of the novel. It is hard to agree, however, with Bloom's assessment of Burgess's revision of these theories as the work of a "loving disciple of Joyce." While Burgess's love and respect for Joyce is clearly discernible in his scholarly work, his artistic use of Joyce's work resembles the antagonistic relationship between writers that Bloom terms an "agon" much more than the relationship between a loving disciple and his master. Bloom offers a convincing account of Joyce's struggle with Shakespeare that exemplifies the revisionary relationship between a strong writer and a subsequent writer, and Bloom's critical map of misreading is a useful tool for exploring Burgess's own relationships with both Shakespeare and Joyce.

In Bloom's theory, new writers must engage in an agon, or creative and revisionary struggle, with their predecessors if they are to succeed in finding their own artistic voice rather than submit to the silence to which their predecessors' works threatens to reduce them. Reminding

us that Joyce "rarely lacked audacity," he argues that the author of *Ulysses* "conceived of Shakespeare as Virgil to himself as Dante." Like Freud, Joyce felt an "anguish of contamination that only Shakespeare seems to have provoked" in him. This anguish was a manifestation of the anxiety that all writers feel about the influence of the strong writers who precede them.

As Bloom demonstrates, *Ulysses* reveals Joyce's agon with both Homer and Shakespeare, and his text is founded simultaneously on the *Odyssey* and *Hamlet*.

Richard Ellmann stresses that Joyce's bravery in using both texts as the foundation for his own is remarkable, reminding us that the "two paradigms of Odysseus/Ulysses and the Prince of Denmark have virtually nothing in common."

#### [Note 6](#)

In terms of engaging with strong canonical writers, Burgess's achievement is equally remarkable because

#### *Nothing Like the Sun*

is also founded on two paradigms: those provided by Shakespeare and Joyce. Bloom explains that one "clue" to Joyce's achievement lies in the intelligence with which he uses the literary characters of Hamlet and Ulysses to create Leopold Bloom. "Joyce," Bloom argues, "manages to compound Ulysses with Hamlet...by doubling": "Poldy is both Ulysses and the ghost of Hamlet Senior,

while Stephen is both Telemachus and young Hamlet, and Poldy and Stephen together form Shakespeare and Joyce."

#### [Note 7](#)

Burgess is shrewd enough to adapt Joyce's techniques but to modify them in a way that allows for the emergence of his own distinctive voice and vision from the material and techniques that he takes from Shakespeare and Joyce. Like Harold Bloom, Burgess realises that Shakespeare is a much stronger canonical writer than Joyce. Bloom argues that "Shakespeare and the Western Canon are one and the same" and that no writer could either fully exorcise or absorb Shakespeare. Burgess uses Stephen Dedalus's theories about Shakespeare, but he warns his readers that a key part of those theories did not originate with Joyce. The idea that Shakespeare was cuckolded "by his younger brother Richard" is "not Joyce's original idea" although *Ulysses* does give it "literary sanctification." Burgess explains that the story of "the

neglected Anne Shakespeare seeking sexual comfort with one, or all three of her brothers-in-law" is but one of the "many folk tales about Shakespeare" that he "heard...in the English Midlands."

#### [Note 8](#)

The caveat marks Burgess's desire to produce his own reading of Shakespeare's life instead of relying on that of Stephen Dedalus. Insisting that his version of Shakespeare's cuckolding is not Joyce's but a folk tale from the area of England where Shakespeare lived adds a claim of biographical authenticity to Burgess's "biography" of Shakespeare that is lacking in Joyce's even if the claim is spurious. The caveat is also a signal that Burgess is turning away from a comparatively sterile contest with Joyce in order to engage in the more challenging, and ultimately more rewarding, struggle with Shakespeare himself.

Like Joyce's reading of Homer and Shakespeare, Burgess's readings of Joyce and Shakespeare are a part of the necessary misreading that operates in any canonical writer's engagement with the strong writers who are his precursors. This misreading has little to do with matters of influence in terms of borrowing and imitation but with a reading that is an "inflow" which is simultaneously textual and psychic. Whenever a writer is found by the "Poetic Father" who is his precursor, he opens himself to this precursor in a reading that provides the possibility of his own participation in the canon while also producing an anxiety in the newcomer that threatens to reduce him to silence and prevent his own development as a strong writer. In order to survive this threat, the later writer must perform a misreading that will counter the danger of being overcome by the initial receptive reading of the precursor. Borrowing a term from Lucretius, Bloom describes this misreading as a "clinamen," a "swerve" that is both a reading of the earlier poet and a "misprision" by which the later poet takes a fragment or "tessera" of the earlier poet and makes it into his own through either the borrowing or stealing with which Elliot describes the relationship between poets and their predecessors.

#### [Note 9](#)

In Burgess's work, the first part of this dialectical struggle can be seen in his scholarly work on Joyce where he develops his critical understanding and appreciation of Joyce. Burgess's erudite criticism of Joyce's work reveals a powerful critical comprehension of Joyce's achievements, but had Burgess's relationship with Joyce remained at this level, Burgess would have remained as the "loving disciple" described by Bloom. Burgess was one of Joyce's earliest comprehensive critics in terms of his appreciation of Joyce's technical and aesthetic

achievements, and his work remains as the product of one of Joyce's strongest readers. But Burgess clearly had other fish to fry, and his own development as a writer depended on his ability to subsume artistically the achievement of his own critical understanding of Joyce so that he could move on to the much more pressing matter of developing his own aesthetic vision. In opening himself up to the works of Joyce as a critic, he had simultaneously to develop artistic strategies with which to limit the influence of Joyce's vision in order to develop his own.

In the terms of Bloom's theories, Burgess had to take a part of Joyce's work and make it his own through a creative misreading that is also a misprision. Among his first creative yet necessary misreadings of Joyce is Burgess's

*The Doctor is Sick.*

#### [Note 10](#)

Dr Edwin Spindrift's collapse in the middle of a lecture reflects Burgess's biography, and, like his creator, Spindrift is also a linguist. As a misreading of Joyce, however, Burgess collapses elements of both Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom into the single figure of Spindrift in much the same way that Joyce created his composite Poldy from Odysseus and Hamlet Senior and his Stephen from Telemachus and Prince Hamlet. In so far as it is an attempt to understand what love means, Spindrift's search for Sheila resembles Bloom's attempts at defining and coming to terms with the meaning of love while facing the fear and jealousy of the cuckold. Geoffrey Aggeler has compared the ways in which the obstacles and adventures of Spindrift repeat those of Bloom and "parallel, or rather parody, those of Odysseus," and he also argues that Spindrift's "descent from disembodied philology into the world of tangible reality is like the progress of

Stephen Dedalus from a world of words, in which he is an acknowledged master, to the world of Leopold Bloom."

#### [Note 11](#)

In misreading and using Stephen's theories from *Ulysses* for the plot structure of an imaginative recreation of Shakespeare's life, *Nothing Like the Sun* subordinates Burgess's critical comprehension and creative misreading of Joyce to his primary concern with engaging the more powerful canonical figure of Shakespeare. In so doing, Stephen's theories become a tessera, a fragment of Joyce's own work that Burgess re-writes and makes into his own. Originally, a tessera was a fragment of pottery used as a "token of recognition" in "early mystery religions." Bloom uses it to suggest the "completing of a link," explaining that it "represents any

later poet's attempt to persuade himself (and us) that the precursor's Word would be worn out if not redeemed as a newly fulfilled and enlarged Word of the ephebe," or later writer.

#### [Note 12](#)

Burgess's reading of Stephen's Shakespeare theories is a reading that goes against the conclusion at which Stephen arrives--a reading against Joyce so that Burgess can pursue his larger concern with merging his own poetic voice with that of Shakespeare's.

Harold Bloom provides a concise summary of the parts of Shakespeare's theories that are most relevant to *Nothing Like the Sun*: "Anne Hathaway as Gertrude, the deceased Hamnet as Hamlet, Shakespeare as the ghost, his two brothers as a composite Claudius." In Stephen's theories, Joyce pursues his own agon with Shakespeare by "condensing a total vision of Shakespeare's life and work into a handful of eloquent throwaways that conceal their finer intimations and bewilderments."

#### [Note 13](#)

Buck Mulligan mocks Stephen's theories, declaring that Stephen "proves by algebra that Hamlet's grandson is Shakespeare's grandfather and that he himself is the ghost of his own father." But this is also a "shrewd parody" and a "palpable hit" because it homes in on the very principal of fatherhood that is one of Stephen's obsessive concerns in *Ulysses*.

As Bloom points out, Mulligan's mockery of Stephen's theory underlines Stephen's desire "to dissolve the authority of fatherhood itself."

#### [Note 14](#)

*Nothing Like the Sun* creates a Shakespeare who has no such obsession with the dissolution of the father but who, like Hamlet, attempts to sustain and fulfil the father's desires. The Shakespeare that Burgess creates willingly acquiesces in his father's desire for the recognition of the family with a coat of arms. Translating the family motto that his father cannot pronounce, Shakespeare reveals his satisfaction: "'Not Without Right,' translated WS. Good," he said after a little time. "That is very good" (173). Burgess also gives us a Shakespeare who is as deeply moved by the loss of his son as any father would be. For Burgess's Shakespeare, Hamnet is the primary force in his desire for both material and poetic success: "'My son.' The building for the future, the making of a gentleman that should come into his estates, range his deer-park, be dubbed knight. 'Sir Hamnet Shakespeare,' said WS. 'A proud name. He will talk of his father,

who had built his fortune for him in the playhouse." "But what he had somehow dimly provisioned in his son was the poem he himself could not make with words" (164, 166).

Burgess does use Joyce's doubling of Hamlet and Hamnet, but he inverts Joyce's paradigm of Stephen-the-son who is preoccupied with dissolving fatherhood to create Shakespeare as a son who is attentive to his father's desires and as a father who has a loving concern for his son. Where Joyce's Stephen "wishes to dissolve the authority of fatherhood itself," Burgess's Shakespeare willingly accepts the desires of his father and also creates an image of his son that embodies "his own desire for sterility." There is a very Joyce-like identification of father and son- "The son *was* the father"- but although Burgess's paternal Shakespeare has "also been willing...that son-father's annihilation," it is also a willing-to-death of the self that might save the son from suffering: "he could only pray that whatever hellfire, awarded by an unjust God, awaited that boy after death, he himself should embrace it on his son's behalf. If he could not die for his son, let him at least be doubly damned for him" (166-67).

There are recognisable traces of the relationship between Simon and Stephen Dedalus in Burgess's re-writing and adaptation of Stephen's theories on the relationships between fathers and sons. The embarrassed account of the decline in Simon Dedalus's fortunes that Stephen relates to his friend, Cranly, are clearly discernible in WS's meditations on his own father. Burgess, however, playfully undercuts the importance of the role John Shakespeare plays in his son's life by punctuating WS's meditations with an echo of Molly Bloom's affirmative yeses. These yeses mark a moderation of the harsh tone in WS's thoughts while simultaneously stressing the increasing importance that the Goddess plays in Burgess's depiction of WS's creativity: "His father was his betrayer. Yes yes, that gentle-voiced man, so patient under the Xantippe railings and Arden scorn, had sunk and sunk to one of little account. John Shakespeare, once Bailiff (of all magisterial glories the most high) paid no more for his levies for the poor's relief, was alderman still, but of low rate for the musters, dared not appear at the Corporation's meetings. He had sold the greater part of his most meagre properties. He had sold his eldest son into kidskin slavery" (8).



An important part of the resentment that WS feels for his father is his fear of spending the rest of his life at his father's trade of glovemaking: "Tears pricked at the thought of a life spent so, in a fair trade, a cleanly trade, but till the end of his days, the end, the end of his days" (8). Burgess stops this self-pitying resentment from developing into the paralysing obsession which consumes Stephen Dedalus by a double strategy. He first combines the resentment with the growing preoccupation with language that enables WS to leave the trade and become a poet: "The cutting of the trunk, the slitting of the slim fourchettes, the bitty gussets, the thumb, the slit binding, the patient glover's stitch. A pair of mirror-twin poems" (8). The experience of glove making is linguistically transformed into a poetic operation upon language that concludes with the model of the poem-as-mirror with which Hamlet describes the role of art as holding a mirror up to nature.

Burgess's second strategy for limiting WS's resentment at having to practice his father's trade is by making that practice an avenue by which WS can gain yet another of the many encounters of the female other that will eventually merge into an experience of the inspiring and transcendental Goddess: "Then the deliveries by a well-spoken boy who, at the doors of the greater houses, must meekly wait on the pleasure of servant, sniffed at by little dogs. And then..." (8). Burgess uses a rich poetic language to transform WS's experience of "meekly" waiting into the inheritance of a vision that is simultaneously biblical and worldly: "the great lady asked that he might be sent in to her, alone at table in a fair room full of tapestries (Susanna and the lustful elders; the Ark and the dove and a son of Noah looking for landfall; Judith raising her sword to Holofernes."

The vision intensifies as Burgess sets more of WS's senses to work: "He saw so clearly, he smelt the great fire of spitting pearwood. Dinner was done, the trenchers and silver castles of salt cleared, the steward with his tasselled staff had bowed out backward. Little dogs...leaped and fawned about her, their sharp neat teeth clogging in the soft candy they chumbled from her gloved hand" (8-9). Eventually, "all his senses shudder," and Burgess provides WS with a sexual encounter that is simultaneously sexual and transcendent: "She was naked, gold, glowing, burnished, burning, the sun... . And there was the promise that when the moment came, and soon, too soon, it must come, he would be possessed of all time's secrets and his very mouth grow golden and utter speech for which the very gods waited and would be silent to

hear" (9). The sexual experience is no end in itself; nor is Burgess's romanticising of it as a mystical experience of "all time's secrets." Instead, the physical act and mystical experience function as a dialectical thesis and antithesis that are synthesised in the *Aufhebung* of poetic utterance in which WS sees "his mouth grow golden" and he "utter[s] speech for which the gods waited."

Harold Bloom sees Shakespeare as the very foundation of the modern Western concept of personality, and he argues that Falstaff and Hamlet are the "fullest representations of human possibility in Shakespeare."

[Note 15](#) Revealing a strikingly similar view of importance of these two characters in Western literature, Burgess uses them both as models in his own writing. In his later novel,

*The End of the World News*

,he recreates Falstaff as the poet, Willett, who shares his dramatic prototype's love of wit and his fondness for the pleasures of the flesh. Burgess's recreation of Falstaff has such a strong self-knowledge and inward awareness of his place in the natural cycle of life that he refuses the offer of salvation in the form of a place on the spacecraft that takes his fellow characters to safety as the world comes to an apocalyptic end at the conclusion of the novel. In

*Nothing Like the Sun*

, Burgess uses the same technique of recreating Hamlet, but in an ingenious move that prevents Joyce's version of Shakespeare from dominating his novel, Burgess uses Joyce's technique of doubling the parts played by his characters against Joyce, so that Stephen Dedalus's theories are limited to playing a structural role in the novel's plot.

In *Ulysses*, Joyce divides his recreation of Hamlet between Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom. Stephen is a cynical, disgruntled and disaffected young man who is extremely unhappy about the state of affairs that he finds in Dublin upon returning to Ireland for the death of his mother. He is estranged from his father, and the pride with which he refused to perform his Easter duty in order to please his mother in *A Portrait* manifests itself with a more malignant force in his refusal to pray for his mother on her death bed. While Stephen is given most of Hamlet's negative characteristics, Leopold Bloom is given the capacious consciousness and inward awareness that both Harold Bloom and Burgess seem to have valued as Hamlet's most striking quality. Bloom suggests that "Poldy has a Shakespearean inwardness, far more profoundly manifested than the interior life is in Stephen, or Molly, or anyone else in the novel."

[Note 16](#)

This inwardness is the quality of Hamlet that Bloom values most and it belongs to the character who shares his name rather than to the character whom Joyce identified as his version of Hamlet.

Bloom's theoretical appreciation of the Prince of Denmark draws on Nietzsche's recognition that Hamlet is not "the man who thinks too much but rather...the man who thinks too well."

#### [Note 17](#)

For Nietzsche and for Bloom, Hamlet is a kind of Dionysian figure. He looks into the true nature of existence, gains a painful, nausea-inducing, existential knowledge of life and realises the futility of action in a world that is little more than a series of illusions: "In this sense, the Dionysian man resembles Hamlet: both have once looked truly into the essence of things, they have

*gained knowledge*

, and nausea inhibits action, for their action could not change anything in the eternal nature of things." To be required to correct wrongs in the external world is foolish and humiliating: "They feel it to be ridiculous or humiliating that they should be asked to set right a world that is out of joint.

Knowledge kills action; action requires the veils of illusion: that is the doctrine of Hamlet."

#### [Note 18](#)

This Nietzschean sense of the self is what Bloom terms Hamlet's "inwardness," and in Burgess's version of Shakespeare it is combined with the wit and freedom that Bloom values in both Hamlet and Falstaff: "Inwardness as a mode of freedom is the mature Hamlet's finest endowment...and wit becomes another name for that inwardness and that freedom, first in Falstaff, and then in Hamlet."

#### [Note 19](#)

Burgess's Shakespeare lives among his family, shares a bed with his wife, Anne Hathaway, writes and acts with his fellow playwrights and actors and has major relationships, first with Henry Wriothesly, the Earl of Southampton, and then with the Dark Lady (to whom Burgess gives the name, Fatmah, which means "destiny"), but throughout all of his relationships, Burgess's WS maintains a self-conscious awareness of his separateness from his fellow creatures. From the first to the last page of

*Nothing Like the Sun*

, Burgess endows WS with an inwardness that is sustained and directed towards the inspiring

Goddess who makes her first appearance in the novel's initial sentence: "IT WAS ALL A MATTER OF A GODDESS-dark, hidden, deadly, horribly desirable. When did her image first dawn?" (3)

Adapting the Joycean word play that is grounded in a poetics of associative logic, Burgess creates an inner, linguistic stream of consciousness that becomes WS's defining characteristic: "Goat. Willow. Widow. Tarquin, superb sun-black southern king, all awry, twisted snakewise, had goatlike gone to it. So *tragos*, a tragedy. Razor and whetstone. But that was the other Tarquin. WS saw great-bellied slack whiteness in the spring of a southern country, a Lucy lawn peacock ghost-aglimmer, Arden, patrician, screaming" (4). The image of the dark goddess is never far from WS's poetic, associative musings: "He seemed to himself to be dreaming of straining after some dark image just beyond the tail of his spaniel eye" (4). WS's first sexual encounters are bound up with this goddess who is at once threatening and the source of his poetic vision, and with his inward-orientated consciousness, WS speculates on the links between his developing sexuality and the figure of his muse: "He had thought that was one way toward the goddess; he had thought he saw golden feet on the dying sun, that former apparition of Good Friday returned on Easter Sunday evening" (11).

Exploiting the relationships between death and sexual orgasm with which Shakespeare played in creating Falstaff, Burgess uses WS's sexual encounters to create WS's Hamlet-like inwardness and to develop further his inner consciousness as one that is structured by language. WS experiences his own sexual desires as something that is quite distinct from his consciousness: "It was not he, it was not WS; it was some outlandish and exterior beast to which he must needs, and all unwillingly play host" (11). Unlike Joyce's Stephen Dedalus, who never realises the grandiose poetic destiny of which he dreams-a destiny that was Joyce's rather than Stephen's-Burgess's WS is always and essentially a poet. He experiences his own sexual desires as something from which he is alienated because he *is* nothing other than the will to create poetically. Even his awareness of his inner sexual drives as something other is a poetic experience that is felt as, and punctuated by, poetic rhythms: "At it, WS watched, as it were, this other one, astonished, hearing him cry with some other's, stranger's, voice yet aware of the rhythms of his need as starting in iambs and ending in spondees" (11).

Each sexual experience is important because of the opportunity that it might afford for WS to encounter his goddess in a vision that offers both the promise of creation and the threat of an apocalyptic destruction: "And then the great vision glowed, its feet set on the fiery ball that made ready to go underground. But the goddess was greater fire, consuming the world as the sun died. He made haste to possess her, through the dark-flued country priestess who lay beneath him" (12). When WS learns of Anne's strange sexual inventions and becomes entangled in a "bed-slavery," (43), he begins to feel a loathing for her that borders on hatred. Only the possibility that another avenue to the goddess may be opened through this hatred and the sexual practices Anne desires prevents him from following his instinct to leave her: "There was a fascination in hate; moreover, it seemed to him that, in those shameful bedchamber antics he could not leave off, he grew...somehow close to the goddess he had all but neglected" (43). These "bedroom antics" include a blasphemous game that "entailed kneeling and a show of pious prayer." WS participates in such games knowing that they may be evil because of the possibility that such participation may lead him to another encounter with his dark goddess: "there was a dark way that was shown to him, but he was fearful of entering it wholly; he knew not properly what it was but it was to do with evil" (43).

The inwardness that Bloom sees as the key quality in the characters of Hamlet and Falstaff is sustained throughout Burgess's depiction of WS's relationships. Travelling by boat towards Gravesend with Southampton, WS perceives the physical decay and spiritual malaise of the "flower of English manhood": "They were idle, they were dying of *ennui*...they hid diseased bodies under silk and brocade" (107). WS takes advantage of the opportunity for advancement that his patron offers, but it is above all a poetic advancement that he continually seeks: "He would give them what they wished, redeeming his craft to art... . He would provide, he would lend words to these elegant puppets" (107-08). Although he uses Southampton's patronage and friendship to ensure that he can send money back to Stratford and to borrow a thousand pounds to purchase a player's share in the playhouse, he remains conscious of his isolation from those around him as his inwardness develops in the form of a growing consciousness of his poetic destiny: "But he sighed, knowing himself to be caught forever between two worlds-earth, and air, reason and belief." Like Hamlet, he is also exists between "action and contemplation. Alone among all sorts of men, he embraced a poet's martyrdom" (108).

As Burgess develops his fictional Shakespeare by endowing him with the same characteristics with which the historical Shakespeare created his two strongest characters, his writing employs

more of Joyce's strategies even as it stresses Burgess's independence from Joyce. Using the present-tense form of journal entries with which Joyce concludes *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Burgess employs

Joyce's technique of the literary epiphany to depict WS's deepening love for his dark mistress as well as his creation of

*A Midsummer Night's Dream*

. Under the entry dated January Six (the celebration of Epiphany), Burgess merges WS's creation of the play with his desire for his mistress: "Well, I put the bad harvest in Oberon's speech and then thought for a fancy I would give my dark one in the window a womb rich with Titania's young squire" (145).

Although Burgess uses Joyce's journal form as well as his device of the literary epiphany, the contrast in their respective themes confirms Burgess's independence from Joyce. *A Portrait* uses the journal form to depict a would-be poet's departure from his family and home;

*Nothing Like the Sun*

uses it to depict a mature poet's creativity, his passion for the woman with whom he can approach his goddess and muse and the inward independence of mind that enables Burgess's WS to fight both the weakness of the flesh and the pain of jealousy with the practice of poetic creation: "it is a sort of cuckolding. The trick is to be glad and noble and to smile; better far, it is to wish this loss and conceive it as the child of mine own will... .I, and all men in me, am condemned by reason of time and flesh and indolence... . It is time then to rise all above the body and live in a making soul" (157).

In a playful acknowledgement of Joyce as the writer who was once his master, Burgess, the ex-disciple, borrows the cavalcade procession from *Ulysses* and uses the words "jingling" and "jaunty" with which Joyce depicts Blazes Boylan's adulterous visit to the house of Molly Bloom. He uses these to depict Southampton's departure from London with Essex after Elizabeth sends him to Ireland to subdue the Irish: "WS stood silent. There was that lord whom he had once called friend, aloof on his chestnut...a great captain bound for the quelling of the kerns." (207) The identification of Southampton, who has cuckolded WS with the latter's dark mistress, and Blazes Boylan, who cuckolds Leopold Bloom, is triggered by the description of the horses "richly caparisoned, the harness

*jingling*

." It is sustained in the description of the procession as the "cavalcade went by in

*jaunty*

magnificence" (207, emphasis added).

The writer with whom Burgess most identifies in *Nothing Like the Sun* is obviously Shakespeare. This should be clear from both the title and central character of WS, yet Harold Bloom's reading of the novel as an expansion of Stephen Dedalus's theories about Shakespeare in *Ulysses* is understandable. Burgess does use Stephen's theories and he also borrows Joyce's technique of inventing compound words. WS, for example, describes himself as "filled with lunaticloverpoet's pride" (146). Like Joyce's *A Portrait*

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*Nothing Like the Sun*

is both a Bildungsroman and a Künstlerroman, and Burgess also steals specific words like "jaunty" and "jingling" from

*Ulysses*

and uses them in a context that makes their source quite obvious. By the time that he wrote *Nothing Like the Sun*

, however, Burgess had finished his Joycean apprenticeship and developed both his own literary styles and a very distinctive poetic voice. If there is any sort of literary contest carried out in the novel it is clearly between Burgess and Shakespeare, and Burgess's strategy in the contest is to use Shakespeare's own fictional creations in order to endow the playwright with the inward strength and consciousness which Shakespeare himself engendered. It is both an effective and cunning device: to give life to the Western canon's central poet by giving him the gifts of his own creation.

Geoffrey Aggeler has mapped out the extent to which Burgess identifies his own voice with that of Shakespeare in the novel, and he reminds us of the important role that the *fictional* Mr Burgess plays as the speaker whose farewell speech to his students constitutes the novel. Ultimately, the voice that Burgess creates for WS is the result of his intensive research into Shakespeare's canon and Elizabethan words and linguistic patterns. At times slightly puritanical in tone, the voice of WS is one that an "Elizabethan audience might associate...with a fire-breathing Calvinist preacher such as William Perkins." As Aggeler insists, however, "neither Perkins nor any other hellfire Elizabethan preacher would lubricate his tongue for a Godly

discourse" with a "swig" of the

*samsu*

that

Burgess's fictional alter-ego imbibes while delivering the farewell address that is

*Nothing Like the Sun*

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[Note 20](#)

As

*Nothing Like the Sun*

reaches its conclusion, the distinctions between the voice of Burgess's narrative alter ego and that of WS start to disappear, and when we reach the "Epilogue," the voice of Mr Burgess, the Lecturer, speaks to us from within the narrative: "I am near the end of the wine, sweet lords and lovely ladies, but out there the big wine is being poured-thin, slow, grey" (224).

The emergence of this voice from within the narrative signals the culmination of the dialectical synthesis bringing together the voices of WS and Mr Burgess. Aggeler traces this development and suggests that the "identification of Burgess with Shakespeare has become so strong...that we are not surprised to hear him discoursing from within the poet's conscience, troubling his dreams."

[Note 21](#) Because the primary identification is between Burgess and WS, the role of Joyce is little more than that of a source for some of the themes and literary strategies with which Burgess engages in his literary agon with the bard as he forces him to step forward from the concealing shadows of his plays and sonnets.

Burgess's struggle with Joyce was finished before he wrote *Nothing Like the Sun* and turned his attention to the life and texts of Shakespeare, but it is not too fanciful to see the farewell blessing that WS bestows upon Southampton as echoing one that Burgess wished to give to the Irish writer on whose work he had once devoted such careful and fond critical attention. After establishing the identification of Southampton with Joyce's Blazes Boylan, Burgess has WS bid farewell to his friend with mixed feelings. He is sad to see Southampton go, but he knows the danger that his friend's return will bring. These are appropriate sentiments for a writer who knew all too well the demands that Joyce makes on his readers: "WS broke his silence to call: 'God bless you, God save you... .God help you his heart murmured. A victorious general would return to claim his due-not bays, not laurels. Those nearest to him in loyalty would then be in most need of God's help" (207).



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1. *Nothing Like the Sun* (London: Vintage, 1964). All subsequent references are to this edition and incorporated into the body of the essay. Reference to Burgess's "A Foreword"(1982) are provided in these notes. Harold Bloom, *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* (London: Fourth Estate, 1998), 426; *Canon: The Books and School of the Ages* (London: Papermac, 1995), 416. [Return to article](#)

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2. Bloom, Harold. *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (London: OUP, 1973). [Return to article](#)

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3. *The Western Canon*, 416. [Return to article](#) .

4. Burgess, Anthony. *Shakespeare* (London; Penguin Books, 1970). [Return to article](#) .

5. "A Foreword" to *Nothing Like the Sun*, 1. [Return to article](#) .

6. *The Western Canon*, 414. [Return to article](#) .

7. *Ibid.* [Return to article](#) .

8. "A Foreword," 1-2. [Return to article](#) .

9. *The Anxiety of Influence*, 44-45. [Return to article](#) .

10. Burgess, Anthony, *The Doctor is Sick* (London: Pan Books, 1963). [Return to article](#) .

11. Aggeler, Geoffrey, *Anthony Burgess: The Artist as Novelist* (Alabama: The U of Alabama Press, 1979), 124 and 123. [Return to article](#) [Ret](#)

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12. *The Anxiety of Influence*, 67. [Return to article](#) .

13. *The Western Canon*, 416. [Return to article](#) .

14. *Ibid.* [Return to article](#) .

15. Bloom, *Shakespeare*, 743. [Return to article](#) .

16. *The Western Canon*, 419. [Return to article](#) .

17. *Ibid.*, 393. [Return to article](#) .