

→ INTRODUCING



SHAKESPEARE

A GRAPHIC GUIDE



NICK GROOM & PIERO

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ICON

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Identifying Shakespeare

Shakespeare is performed, read and studied in most parts of the world today. Why is there such interest - or, more important - why *should* there be any interest in an English writer from Stratford who died nearly 400 years ago? Is it because he is often said to be the world's "greatest" writer? In other words, he has transcended the limits of time and place to become a figure of global significance. That is an astonishing claim. We can begin to understand this phenomenon by asking first: "Who is the *real* William Shakespeare?"

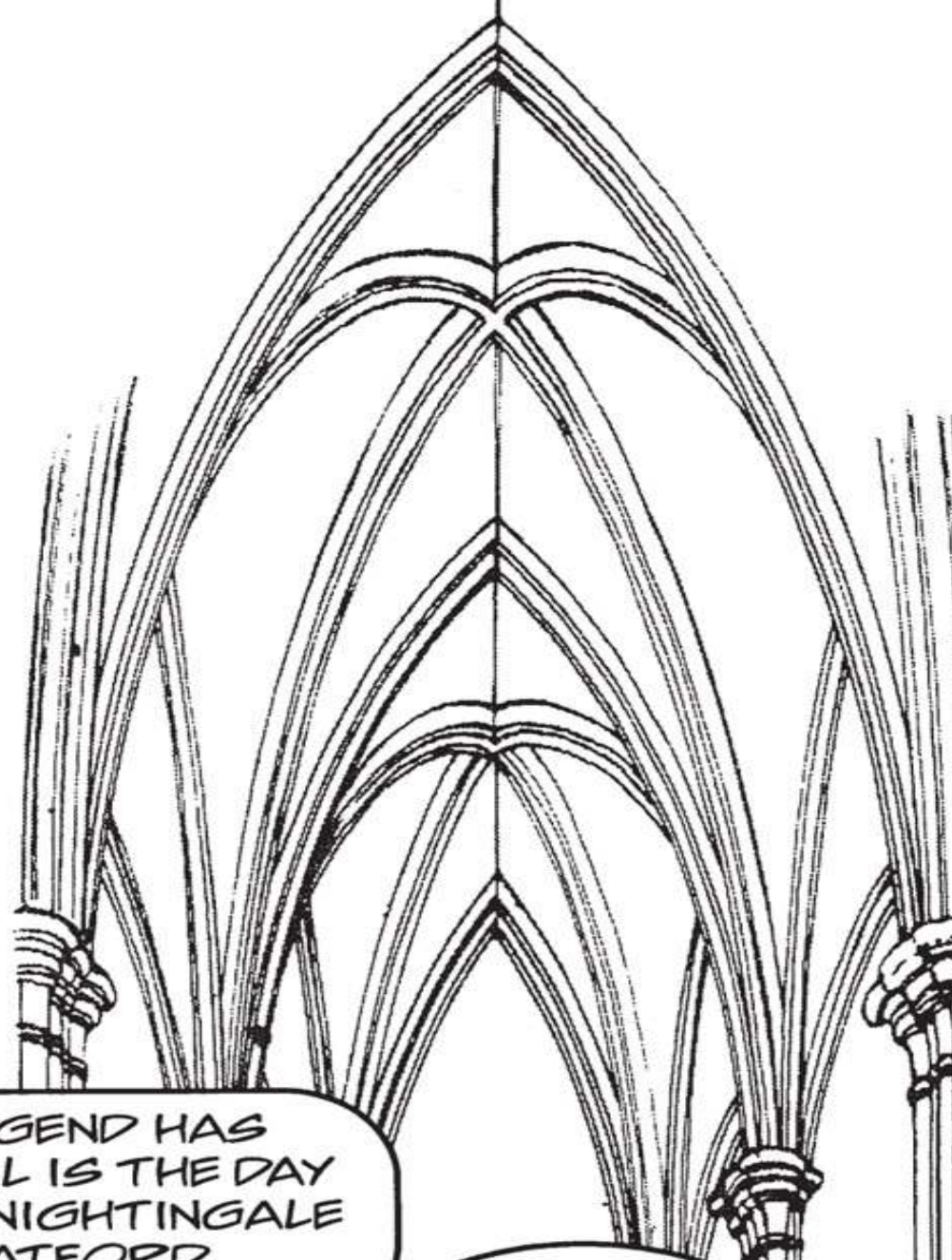


WILL THE REAL SHAKESPEARE PLEASE IDENTIFY HIMSELF?



Born on St George's Day

23 April 1564, St George's Day: William Shakespeare is born in Stratford-upon-Avon. The National Poet arrives on the day celebrating the canonization of the patron saint of England - or did he? Historical facts have been massaged to support national or cultural interests. The only reliable evidence is that Shakespeare was baptized on 26 April 1564, so he could have been born on the 21st, or the 22nd, or the 23rd - it was later "Bardolaters" (worshippers of "The Bard") who agreed that Shakespeare's birthday was St George's Day, marrying the nation to his verse.




AND LOCAL LEGEND HAS IT THAT 23 APRIL IS THE DAY THAT THE FIRST NIGHTINGALE SINGS IN STRATFORD..

ENTRY
IN PARISH
REGISTER ...
1564, APR. 26.
GULIELMUS FILIUS
JOHANNES
SHAKSPERE.

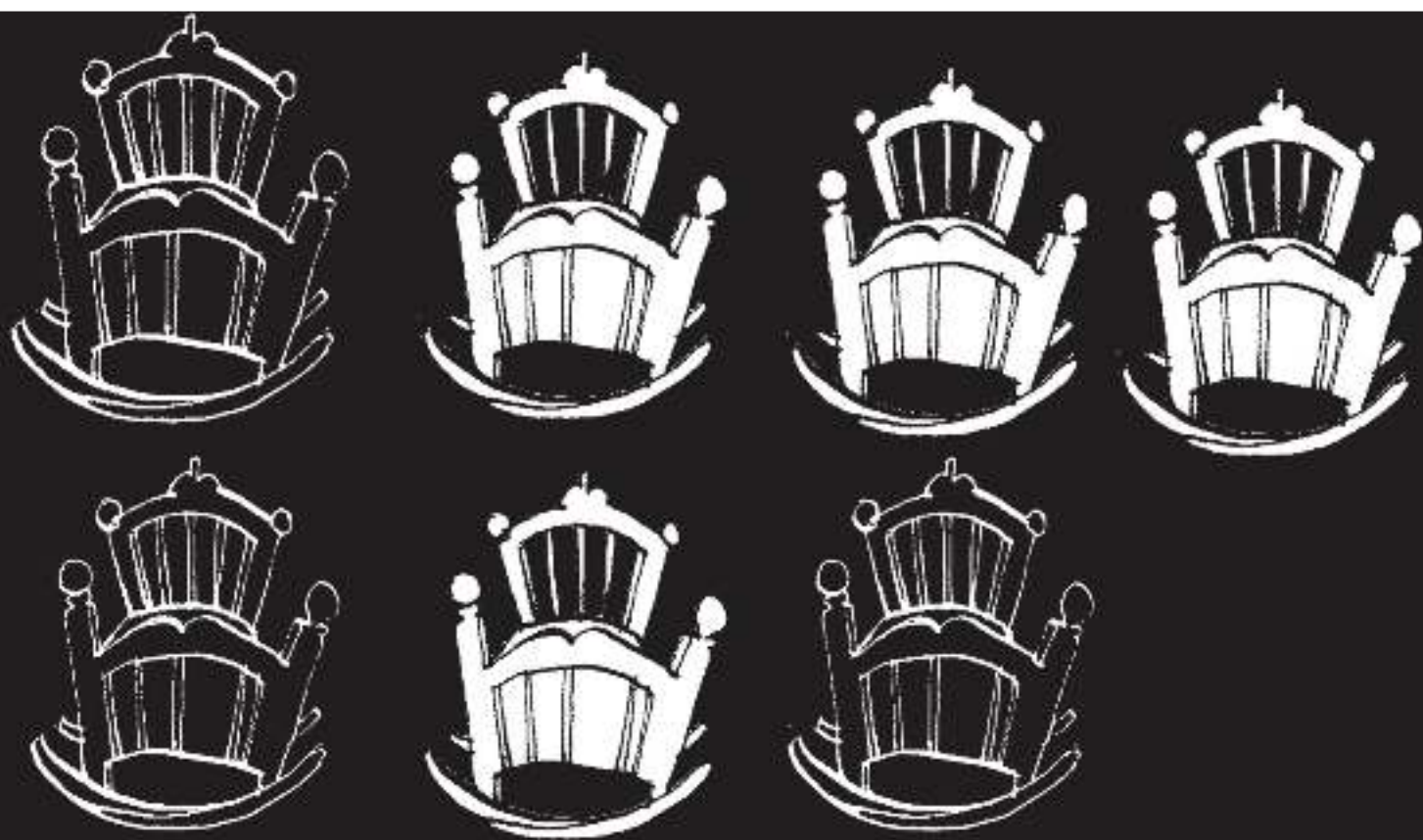




He was the eldest son of John Shakespeare, a glovemaker, who had married the Catholic girl Mary Arden in about 1557.

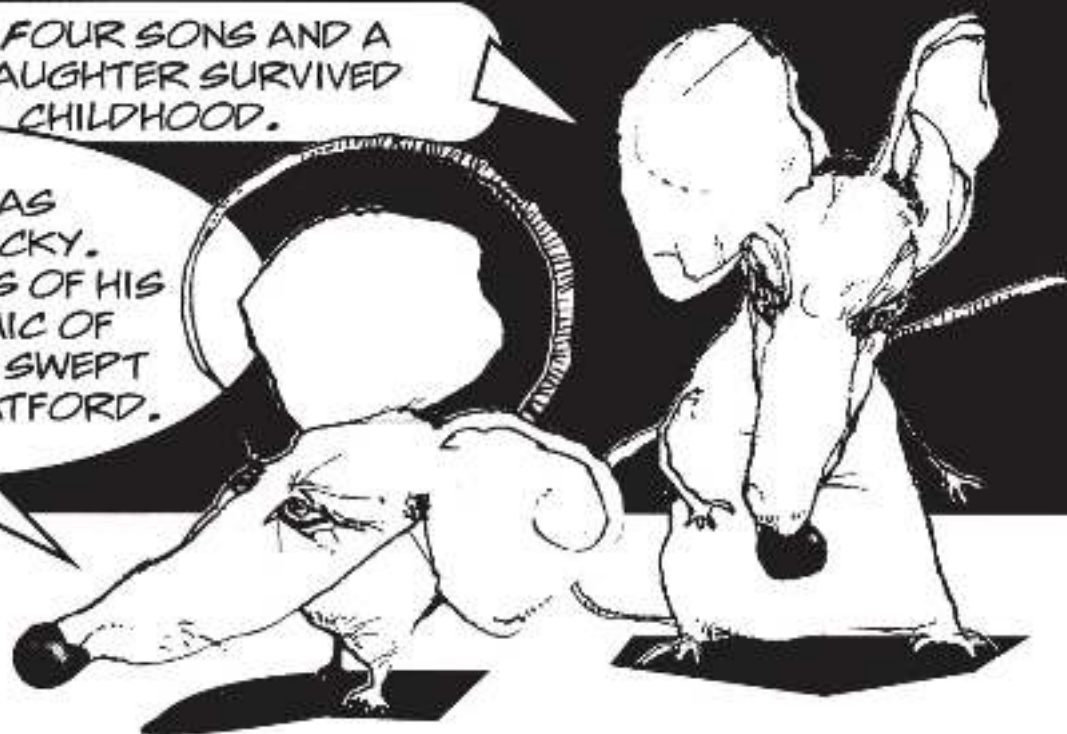


THEY
HAD EIGHT CHILDREN ...



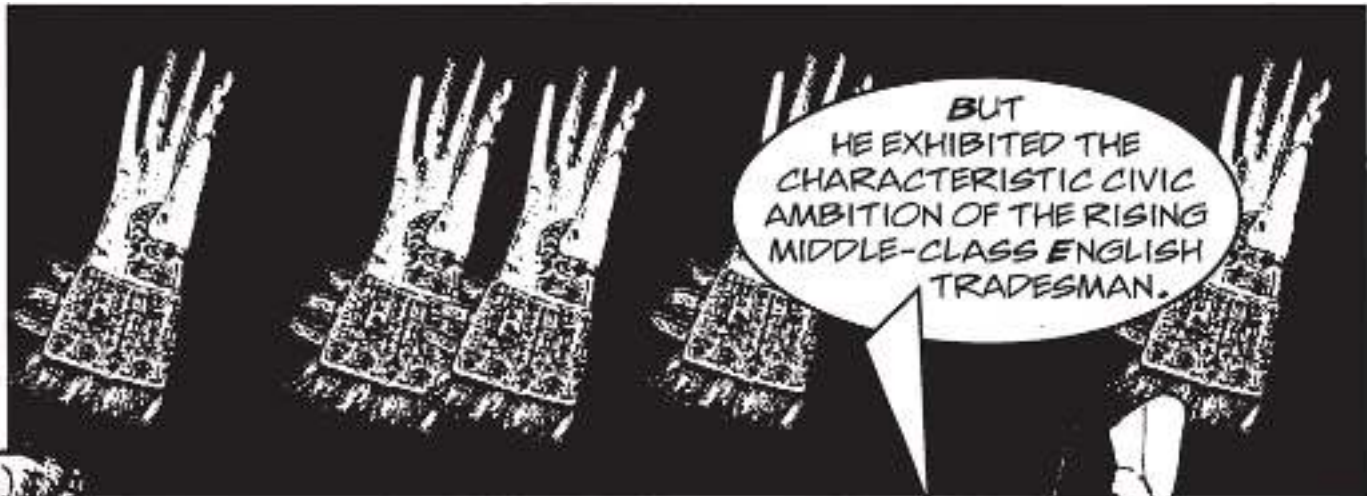
FOUR SONS AND A
DAUGHTER SURVIVED
CHILDHOOD.

WILL
HIMSELF WAS
ESPECIALLY LUCKY.
WITHIN A FEW WEEKS OF HIS
BIRTH, AN EPIDEMIC OF
BUBONIC PLAGUE SWEEP
DOWN ON STRATFORD.



Family Ambitions

Will's father, the glover of Henley Street, may not have been an educated man. He could probably read, but couldn't write much more than his accounts (though his wife signed documents with an elaborate mark that demonstrates she had some facility with a quill pen).




BUT HE EXHIBITED THE CHARACTERISTIC CIVIC AMBITION OF THE RISING MIDDLE-CLASS ENGLISH TRADESMAN.



I SERVED ON THE BOROUGH COUNCIL, BECAME MAYOR (OR HIGH BAILIFF) AND SAT AS A JUSTICE OF THE PEACE.





But in 1570, as Will was about to start at school, his respectable father was fined for breaking money lending laws, and the family fortunes began to decline. Two years later, he was accused of “wool bragging”: illegally dealing in fleeces. His eldest son was certainly privy to these goings-on - he remembered the details for the rest of his life.

Let me see. Every 'leven wether tods, every tod yields pound and odd shilling; fifteen hundred shorn, what comes the wool to?

This reference occurs in Shakespeare's play

The Winter's Tale, Act IV, scene iii, lines 32-

In modern English:

Every eleven rams yield a tod of 28lbs, worth 21 shillings = £14



Debts and Troubles

The Privy Council clamped down on broggers and suspended licensed wool-dealing. John Shakespeare fell into debt and mortgaged some of his property. He stopped attending Anglican services, claiming to be afraid of meeting creditors - and he may also have declared his faith as a Catholic. His application to the Heralds' College for a coat of arms was rejected, and he was eventually expelled from the Stratford council for absenteeism.

YET
THROUGH THIS HE
REMAINED "A MERRY CHEEKD OLD
MAN", WORKING IN HIS SHOP, FATHERING
MORE SHAKESPEARES AND
JESTING WITH HIS SON.



Will was by now attending the local grammar school and doing his bit to maintain the family honour

School Days

*Then the whining schoolboy, with his satchel
And shining morning face, creeping like snail
Unwillingly to school.*

As You Like It, II.vii.145

In Elizabethan England, the grammar school day ran from 6:00 in the morning until 5:30 in the afternoon, six days a week. Lessons were spent learning Latin, translating to and from Latin, and memorizing and reciting Latin poetry and prose.

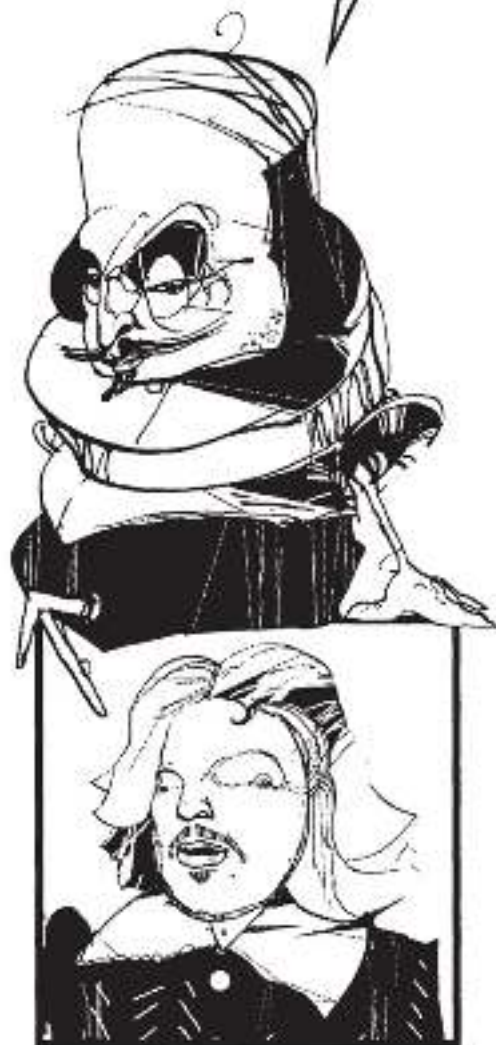


Will spent probably eight years studying Latin, covering grammar, logic, rhetoric, the drama of

Terence and Plautus, Virgil, and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, a favourite.

His friend the playwright Ben Jonson later jested that Shakespeare had only “smalle Latine and lesse Greeke”, but Latin poetry and rhetoric trained his ear and shaped his imagination. For his early tragedy, *Titus Andronicus*, Will was inspired by Ovid, Seneca and the Roman historians.

BUT
I ALSO DEVELOPED THE
PRACTICAL IDEAS OF CONTEMPORARY
PLAYWRIGHTS LIKE THOMAS KYD
(1558-94), CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE
(1564-93) AND GEORGE PEELE
(1556-96).



He continued to use Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (in Arthur Golding's translation) for inspiration throughout his writing career, checking it against the original Latin.

Lost Years

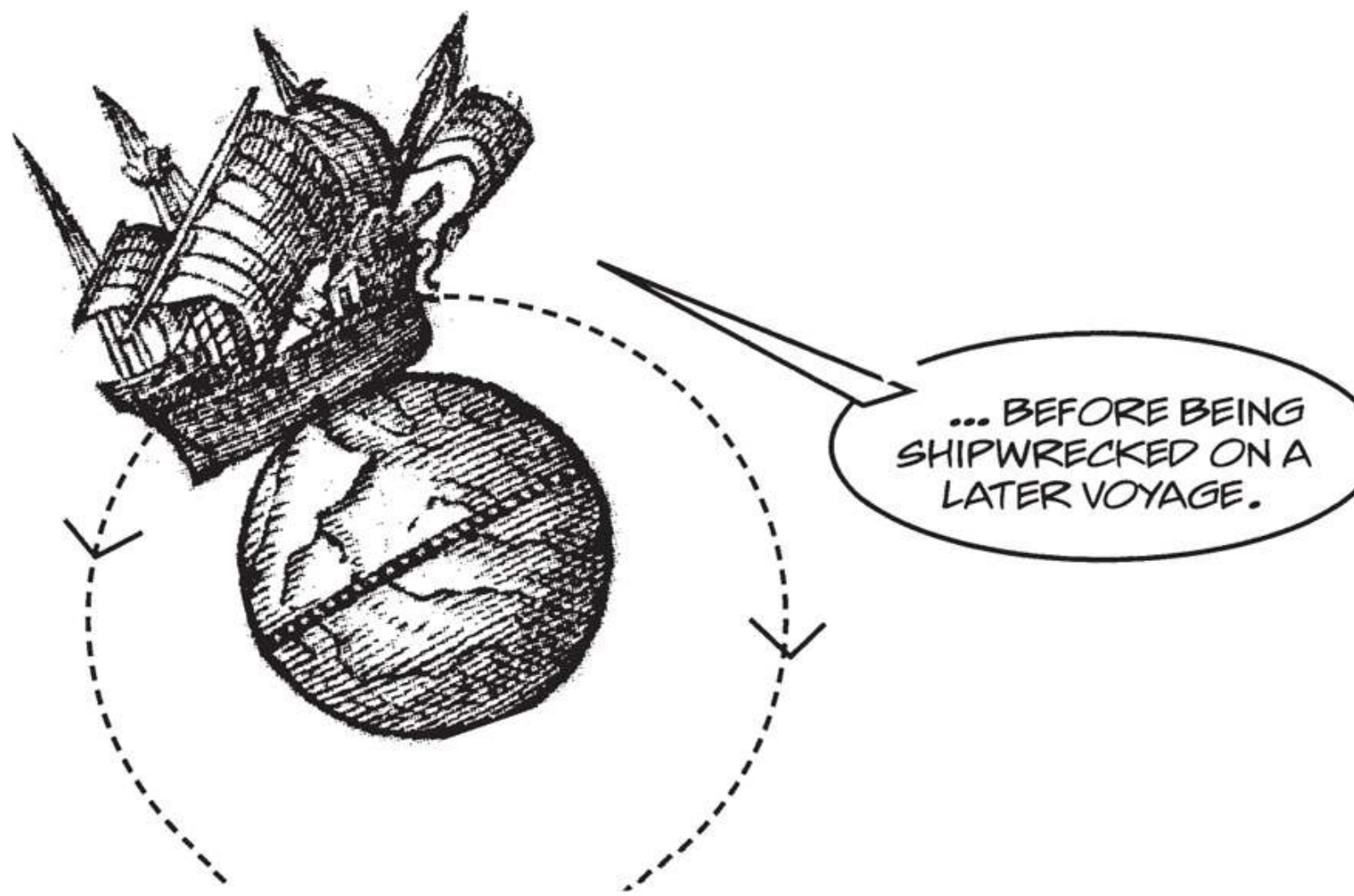
Will may then have spent another two years teaching Latin as a schoolmaster for the Houghton family in Lancashire. These are Shakespeare's "lost years". There is no reliable record of his activities, although the scholarly detail in his early plays might suggest a brief teaching placement. Many academics (being teachers themselves) support this theory, but there are others.

The wit and diplomat Duff Cooper wrote a book just after the war called *Sergeant Shakespeare* (1949)

...



The canoeist William Bliss imagined that Shakespeare circumnavigated the world with Sir Francis Drake ...



Shakespeare's life has many blank passages in it, in which critics and biographers are liable to see their own reflections as clearly as they can - or not, as Anthony Burgess wrote in his biography of Shakespeare ...

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