

THERE IS NO ORACLE  
OR INCITING ACTION THAT  
GOVERNS THE FORMATION  
OF CHARACTER--

--RATHER--

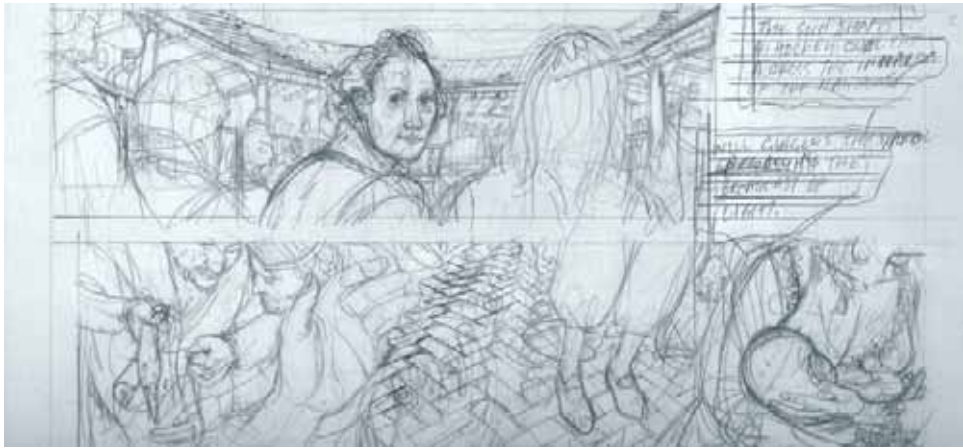
IT'S THE SLOW DRIP  
OF A THOUSAND DAYS  
THAT MAKES A  
MAN.

## Parchment of Light: The Life & Death of William Shakespeare

SHAKESPEARE WORKED, in substantial part, in the gutter of the arts in his own time. His decision to work in the theatre was not a passive act of whimsy. Rather, theatre was his entry point to survival. Having no standing in the world and no interest in following in his father's footsteps, the theatre allowed him to capitalize on his most valuable asset—his wit. It also permitted him to foster a rich internal life. In exchange for this safe harbour, Will elevated the theatrical medium from disposable pop to meaningful, complex narrative and, eventually, masterpiece.

The decision to depict Will Shakespeare's life as a graphic novel, with all the rich visual and literary resonances of the genre, is the guiding aesthetic of *Parchment of Light*. To portray the Bard's life in a comic strip narrative makes the telling itself a relentless artistic action emerging from the margins of so-called high culture, as did theatre in Shakespeare's own time. Using the basic vocabulary of comics, I insert complex narrative structures and call on alternative modes of visual depiction to

*Parchment of Light: The Life & Death of William Shakespeare* is a graphic novel conceived, written, and illustrated by Nick Craine. *Parchment of Light* interprets and adapts the known facts of Shakespeare's life to create a revealing and personal portrait of the Bard.



NICK CRAINE

create a meaningful portrayal—in essence “drawing” high art out of bubble gum. The action in the graphic novel subverts expectations and perhaps parallels Will’s own experiences as he traversed the terrain from popular to courtly culture.

*Parchment of Light* also attempts to gather literary capital from an association with Shakespeare in the same way in which the Bard’s history plays gained capital from centering on King Henry or Titus Andronicus. Shakespeare’s history plays garnered the playwright validation as a maker of high art, a distinction that he sought.

*Parchment of Light* consolidates the study and conjecture of Shakespearean lore into one expansive visual telling—a go-to reference text for the Elizabethan period. Not just a play-by-play of the collected facts of his life, *Parchment of Light* also views Will as a punk rocker—a grub in a world full of cultural anxiety and religious dynamism—an obsessive observer who loved human beings and, ultimately, someone who strove to become a gentleman and, in so doing, found acceptance of himself.

Craine’s *Parchment of Light* is an adaptation in both content and process. Each page starts as a pencil sketch, becomes an ink drawing, and, in final rendering, is completed with the addition of hand-lettered text.

**Nick Craine is an artist and musician living in Guelph, Ontario. He is the author of two acclaimed graphic novel adaptations, *Dance Me Outside: The Illustrated Screenplay* and *Portrait of a Thousand Punks: Hard Core Logo*. His illustrations have appeared in the *New York Times Review of Books*, the *Washington Post*, and *Quill & Quire*.**