

BACK TO THE FUTURE!
RE-VISIONING 21ST CENTURY PUBLIC LIBRARIES
VIA A JOURNEY THROUGH TIME AND SPACE
THE SEVEN AGES OF THE LIBRARIAN IN
GRAPHIC NOVEL STYLE

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Kaboom! – Zap! – Pow! What might a 21st century librarian look like and what battles will she have to fight?

In today's world landscape, riddled with technology, war, attrition, peace, censorship, fragmentation and freedom, there remains a timeless character: the Librarian.

This graphic poem explores the protean 'Librarian' identity through history, from beginnings to future visions. Inspired by the stylistic vision of Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*, and the popularity of graphic novels in public libraries worldwide, we draw on these traditions of comic books and zines to produce a graphic narrative representing this "country of the librarian" (Irwin 1949) through the ages.

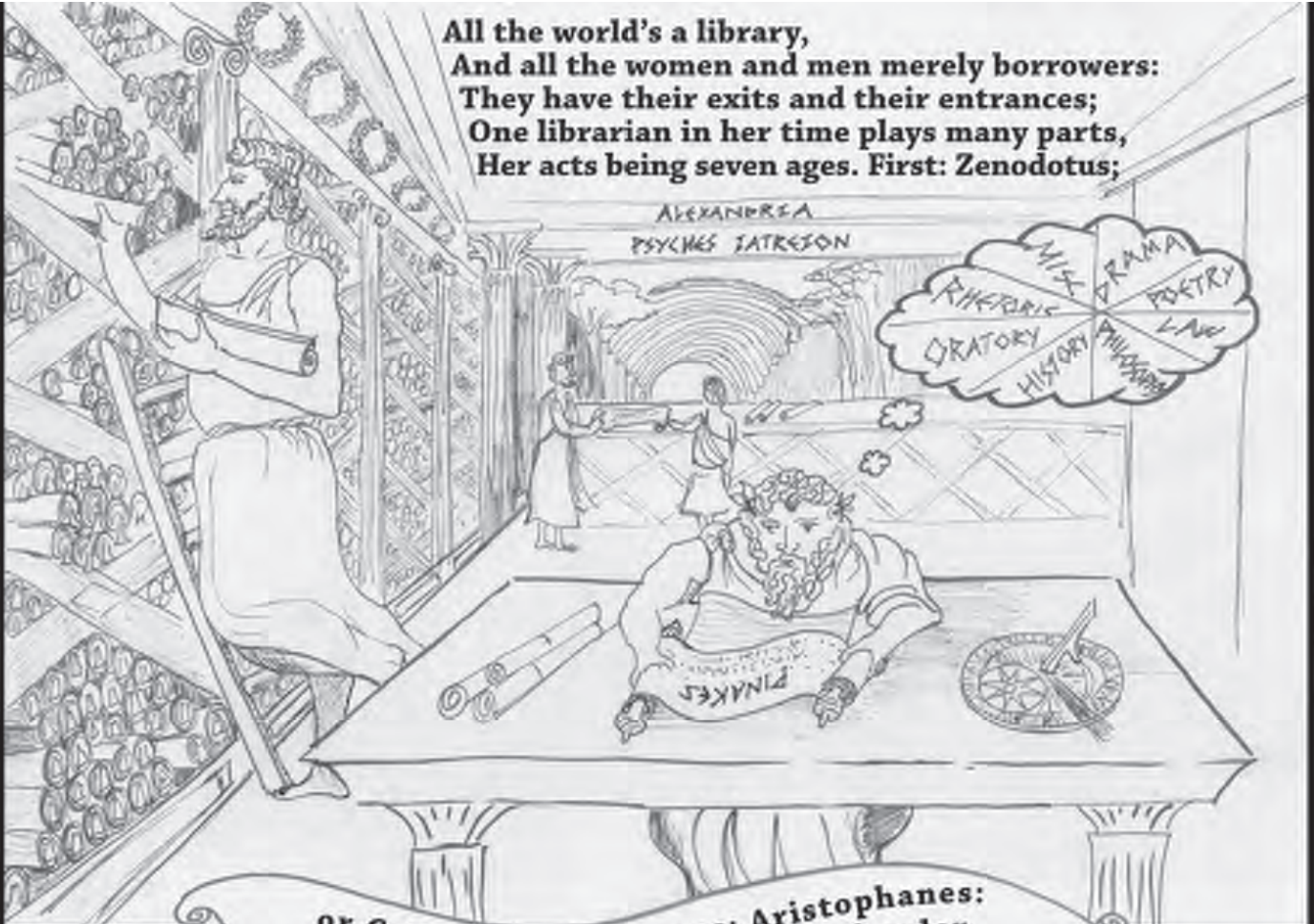
The poem that drives our graphic narrative is based on Shakespeare's "Seven Ages of Man" monologue from the play *As You Like It*, and is in Shakespearian sonnet form. Starting with the 'Scholar' Age of the Librarian, which Callimachus (the Library of Alexandria) represents, we zip through subsequent 'ages': from the religious scribes of the Middle Ages; to Edwards'/Dewey's 'Librarian' as book keeper/cataloguer or library 'economiser'; to Otlet/Shera's 'Documentationalist'; to S.R. Ranganathan's librarian 'helper'; to present-day incarnations such as Lankes' Librarian as 'community knowledge creation facilitator', arriving at the contested arena of contemporary 'Librarian' identity.

Positing that such an identity may be caught up in a values-war between traditional principles of 'citizenship' and the late 20th century's shift to a democracy of consumerists (not to mention prevailing cultural stereotypes), our graphic poem ends by projecting a radical new vision of a 21st century librarian: one who builds people and communities, crossing borders through time and space. ■

References

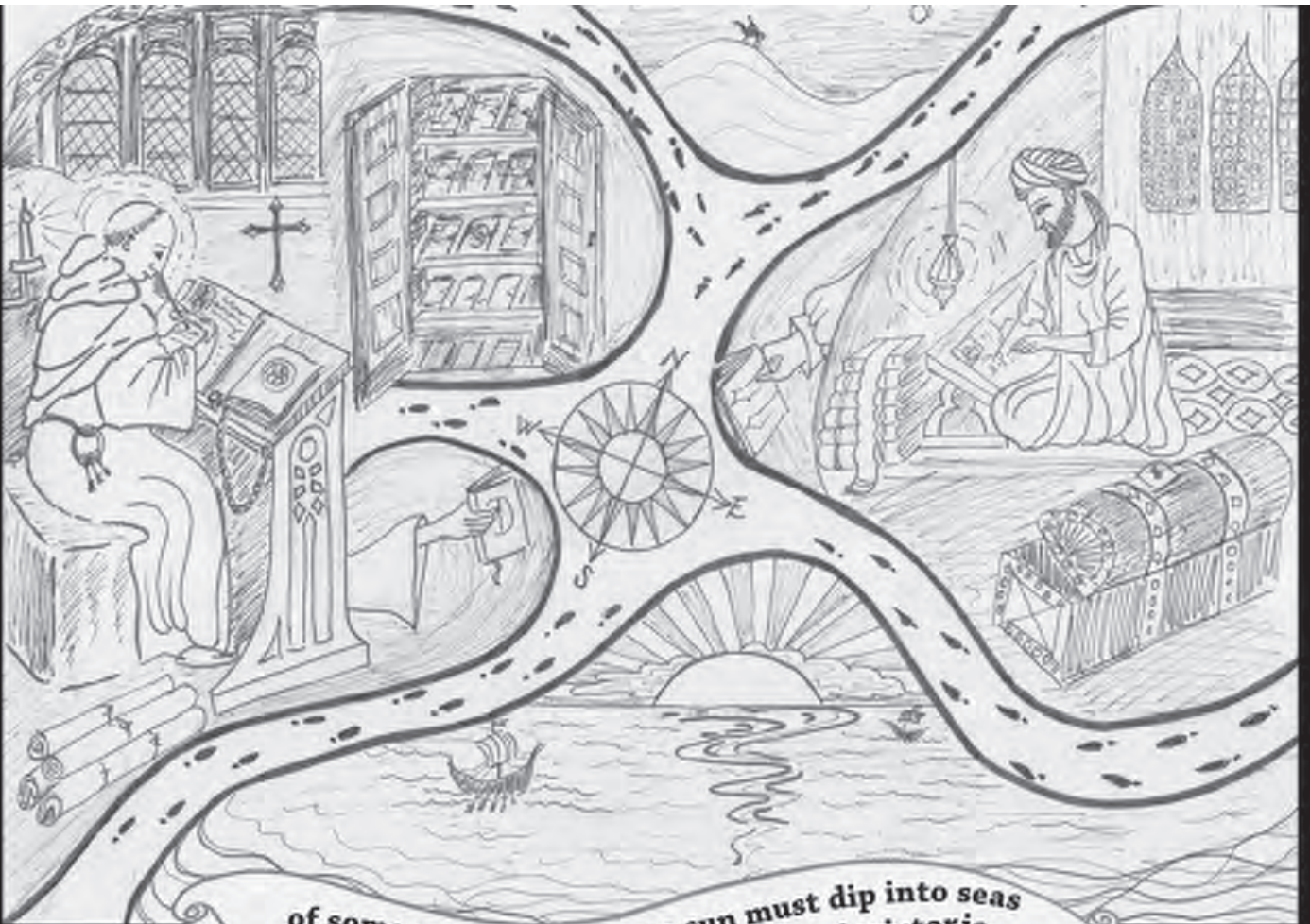
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All the world's a library,
And all the women and men merely borrowers:
They have their exits and their entrances;
One librarian in her time plays many parts,
Her acts being seven ages. First: Zenodotus;

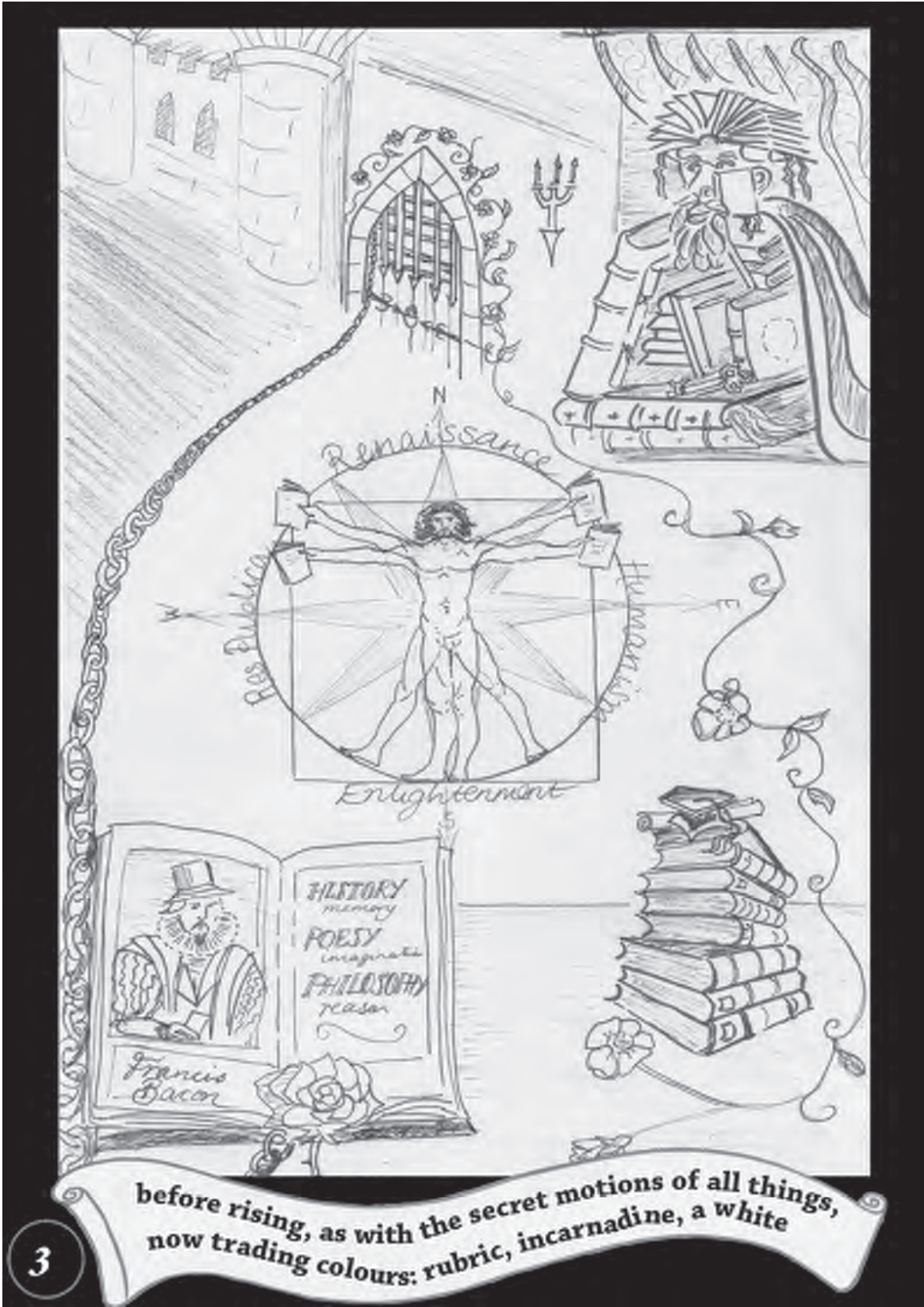


or Callimachus of Cyrene; Aristophanes:
Greek poets, classifiers, augurs of order

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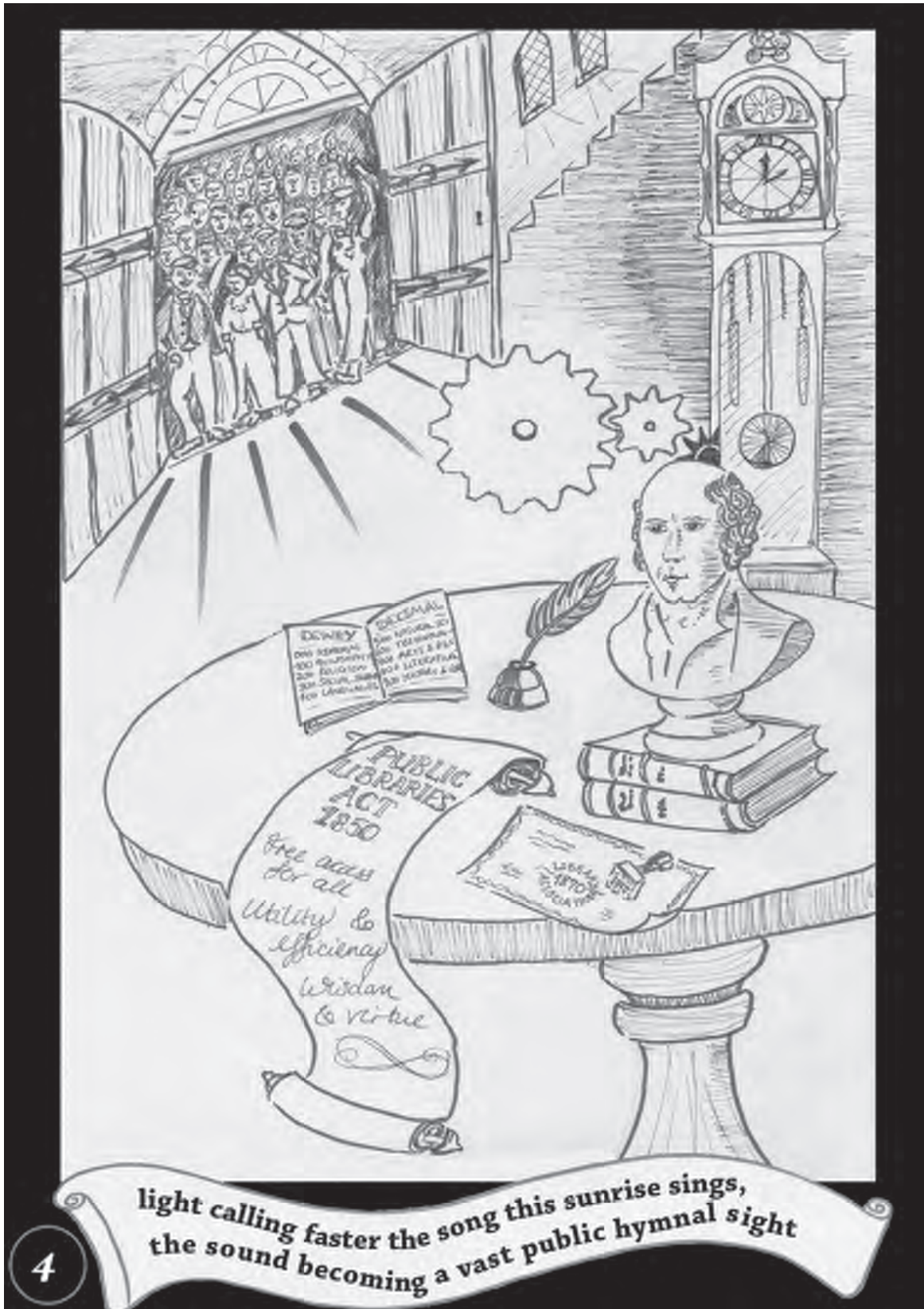


of some golden age, whose sun must dip into seas
dark as the iron gall ink of a monk's Scriptoria,



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before rising, as with the secret motions of all things,
now trading colours: rubric, incarnadine, a white





of commons revealed by common birdsong's lifts;
epochal daybreak. Then newness sprung fast: growing,

