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Bold and Brave Women from Shakespeare

Meet the illustrator – Becca Stadtlander

Tell us a little about yourself

I'm 32 years old and have been working as an illustrator for 11 years. I live in my hometown of Covington, Kentucky, USA with my husband and dog. I received a degree in Illustration from the Maryland Institute College of Art in 2010.



How did you go about creating the illustrations for this book?

For this book I did a lot of online research specifically into old paintings, movies and costumes. There have been many beautiful paintings created throughout history with Shakespearian themes to draw inspiration from. It was a bit tricky to come up with these illustrations, so I drew thumbnails first to figure out the composition and then found reference photos online to make sure I was able to get the characters, settings and costume right. I have a handful of Victorian Era drawings that are really helpful when trying to draw interesting stances and postures and I used those as well.

Were there any famous paintings – or performances – that inspired your illustrations for this book? Do you have a favourite painting of a character or scene from Shakespeare?

I think I found a famous painting for almost every illustration in the book, so it's hard to name all of them. I think my favourite references came from old photographs I found featuring early stage performances of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Macbeth*. The costumes are to die for!



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Who were the hardest characters to illustrate?

Portia and Cordelia. I think those were hard for me because of the indoor setting. There were a lot of things I had to think about putting in the background to keep things interesting and I didn't have any greenery to rely on. It was very difficult to get Portia's costume right. I think I redrew her about six times. There are some serious things happening and subtle facial expressions that were difficult to show in both.

How important were landscapes and interior details in your depictions of Shakespeare's heroines?

I think the backgrounds and settings are the most important thing about illustrating any book! I love creating strong environments because they create a feeling, mood and sense of place that all contribute to the experience of reading the text. It also provides an opportunity for me to cram in as much detail as possible. I love painting patterns and texture so the settings in this book created a dream project for me.

There are some beautiful details in the clothing you've painted – whose costume do you like the best?

I think I like Viola's costume the best because it was inspired by Elizabethan menswear and reads traditional "Shakespeare" to me. The details in the stockings and top are so pleasing to me.

Which of Shakespeare's Bold and Brave Women do you most identify with?

I'm not sure I can really identify with any of them, but I can tell you that my favourite character that I illustrated is Titania. It was the most enjoyable to paint and I'm very pleased with how it turned out. It brought me back to my childhood love of fairies.



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