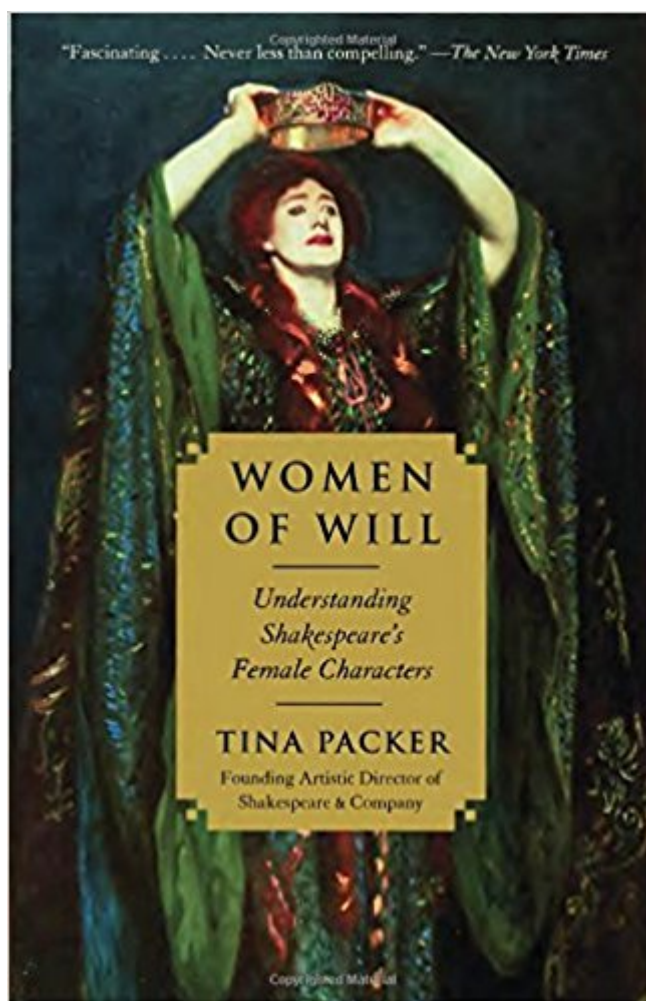


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Women Of Will: The Remarkable Evolution Of Shakespeare's Female Characters



Synopsis

Women of Will is a fierce and funny exploration of Shakespeare's understanding of the feminine. Tina Packer, one of our foremost Shakespeare experts, shows that Shakespeare began, in his early comedies, by writing women as shrews to be tamed or as sweet little things with no independence of thought. The women of the history plays are much more interesting, beginning with Joan of Arc. Then, with the extraordinary Juliet, there is a dramatic shift: suddenly Shakespeare's women have depth, motivation, and understanding of life more than equal to that of the men. As Shakespeare ceases to write women as predictable caricatures and starts writing them from the inside, his women become as dimensional, spirited, spiritual, active, and sexual as any of his male characters. Wondering if Shakespeare had fallen in love (Packer considers with whom, and what she may have been like), the author observes that from Juliet on, Shakespeare's characters demonstrate that when women and men are equal in status and passion, they can—and do—change the world.

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Customer Reviews

"Fascinating. . . Detailed . . . [Packer's] experience in the theater gives her book a hands-on dimension. . . Her knowledgeable tracing of connections among the plays and parallels among characters is never less than compelling." —New York Times
"Packer recognizes in Shakespeare's full dramatic trajectory a great artist gaining an ever fuller understanding of both genders' human identity . . . Important and fascinating."

•Booklist (Starred Review) “Astute. . . . At once humanistic and grounded in the historical context.
 •Christian Science Monitor “Visceral and intellectual . . . A sparkling, insightful exploration of Shakespeare’s words and world.
 •Kirkus Reviews “Fierce and witty.
 •Broadway World “This work by the founding artistic director of the celebrated Shakespeare & Company is everything lovers of the Bard would want. . . . Don’t miss!
 •Library Journal “Rarely, if ever, have I experienced a work that leaps from the page into my mind, heart, body, and soul with such luminous, revelatory vibrancy. . . . To ponder the trajectory of Shakespeare’s evolution in his understanding and portrayal of women, to enter into the tangled, interconnected historical and biographical connections and contexts of Shakespeare life with such precision and aliveness, and to surrender to the immense questions that matter most to us, of power, institutional and cultural structures, the realities of women in every era, the treasure of language, and the mysteries and powers of creativity itself, gave me illumination and pleasure and hope beyond what I can express here.
 •Martha Andersen “A joy to read. The language is conversational and an easy tone that belies the depth to which Tina Packer is able to reach into the plays to unveil the evolution of Shakespeare’s awareness of the power inherent in the feminine.
 . . . This consummate lover of all things Shakespeare delivers a dazzling new message about Shakespeare’s capacity to learn and grow from observations and interactions with women, and transmute these into characters that become more complex, more true, more powerful. Women of Will is destined to become one of the best-loved books about Shakespeare, never to be filed into the bookcase, always accessible in case of need.
 •Tamar March, Founder, Arden Seminars, Inc.

TINA PACKER is the founding artistic director of Shakespeare & Company in Lenox, Massachusetts. She has directed most of Shakespeare’s plays, acted in seven, and taught the entire canon at multiple colleges and universities, among them Harvard, MIT, and Columbia. Packer was an Associate Artist with the Royal Shakespeare Company in England, and worked at the Royal Court and Aldwych theatres in London, Leicester, Glasgow, Edinburgh, and other regional theatres, as well as for BBC and ITV television. The performance piece Women of Will has traveled across America as well as internationally. She lives in Stockbridge, Massachusetts.

If I hadn’t bought this book in Kindle format, I would be throwing it out the window.

It is such a frustrating read for anyone who is interested in accuracy. I'm only a quarter of the way through this book and it is filled with many of the author's suppositions about Shakespeare stated as facts. Perhaps Ms. Packard's *Women of Will* should be listed under historical fiction. The author, who is an accomplished Shakespearean actor and director, appears to have little knowledge of the history she purports to tell. She has Shakespeare writing *Henry VI Part I* while still a boy at school. This is problematic since there is no evidence that he actually attended the Stratford grammar school yet she states his attendance as an established fact and then goes on to suppose he was writing his first play while still in school. She does a lot of supposing and creating an imaginary life for Shakespeare without regard to the known facts of his life. Packard has young Shakespeare probably leaving Stratford with a troupe of actors, but "however he left he swore to send every penny he earned back to Anne and the kids." How could she know this? No Shakespeare letter, diary, note or manuscript exists to confirm this statement. Packer states as a fact that the dowager Countess of Southampton commissioned Shakespeare to write the procreation sonnets to encourage her son to marry. This is another of her suppositions unsupported by any verifiable facts. Many Shakespeare scholars would be deliriously happy if this was a proven fact since this would help solve many of the mysteries surrounding Shakespeare's Sonnets. Shakespeare scholars have long searched for direct evidence linking Shakespeare to his supposed patron the Earl of Southampton or even the Southampton family but they have found none. The only known link is Shakespeare dedicated two narrative poems to the young Earl. She also claims that Lord Burghley was trying to arrange a marriage between his daughter and the Earl of Southampton. Burghley's daughter Anne married Edward de Vere the Earl of Oxford. Burghley was actually trying to arrange a marriage between his granddaughter Elizabeth de Vere and the Earl of Southampton. A simple fact check would have avoided this gaff. These are just some of the inaccuracies found in this book. The lack of citations in *Women of Will* is a good indication that much of Packer's Shakespeare comes from her fertile imagination and has little to do with the facts. A scholarly treatise requires citations whereas a historical fiction novel requires none. I suggest that Ms. Packer read Diana Price's *Shakespeare's Unorthodox Biography* for a strong dose of much needed reality.

Listen to this work -- don't read it. You will come away with an entirely different perspective. I did not read the book; rather I listened to the unabridged version on MP3. The audio version is narrated by the author and her partner in the *Women of Will* Project, Nigel Gore. Tina Packer is, in my opinion,

first and foremost and actress. *Women of Will* is truly a performance piece and the book is for all intents a script. Like most scripts it best comes alive when watched or in this case listened to. The scenes cited in the book are enacted on the disk. The slower pace of the recitation forces one to "listen" to what is being said instead of skimming. This work deserves a deeper consideration. Despite the author's considerable speculation the thesis that if the plays are ordered correctly one can discern a changing attitude of Shakespeare toward women as he matured is interesting and deserves consideration. I found the entire audiobook to be fascinating and listened to several parts a number of times.

The book isn't bad, it's just not what's on the cover...Packer spends around a hundred pages altogether discussing Shakespeare's women. The other 200 discuss elements of the live version of the book; her own experiences as an actor, whether in Shakespeare or not; talking about what the men do in the plays; or simply explaining the plots, sometimes at great length. What she does speak of regarding Shakespeare's women is fascinating - it's just sidelined over and over with many digressions. There's also the occasional questionable assertion - for example, she observes in *Macbeth* how Malcolm in 4.3 fears himself as monarch to be a terrible despot and insatiable lecher, without also pointing out that at the end of that bit he tells Macduff, basically, 'J/K that was all lies LOL'. As rumination on Packer's own actor's and scholar's life with Shakespeare, the book is great. As a study on women, it leaves one wanting more.

A very interesting good read to add to the explosion of Shakespeare scholarship in the 400th anniversary. Ms. Packer includes a convincing explanation of how Shakespeare progresses in writing women's parts, why they are written that way for male actors and what his life may have been like. All this is covered in an eminently readable way.. She takes a scholarly subject and draws the common reader into the story. Perhaps a writing career after she is done with the theater.

Shakespeare had the rare, if not unique, ability to view the human condition from every conceivable perspective. Ms. Packer does an excellent and persuasive job of explicating her thesis concerning the growth and evolution of his presentation of women and the impact his ultimate view of their nature and inherent attributes should have on civilized society. The book is a valuable addition to the field of Shakespeare studies and to every reader in search of life's meaning.

Excellent! Many new insights from a woman who has both acted and directed many of

Shakespeare's plays. Her thoughts on how it feels when you immerse yourself in one of Shakespeare's characters and present it on the stage are revealing and sometimes surprising. Required reading for anyone who has a love of Shakespeare, and wants to share it with someone as knowledgeable as Tina Packer.

Tina Packer is a consummate actor, director and writer. She brings all her skills right here at my feminist fingertips. I have been following her career in Lenox MA since Shakespeare and Company started back in 1970's. Hooorrrraaaaayyyyy for Tina Packer and Women of Will.

An excellent addition to my extensive Shakespeare library. I highly recommend it for everyone who enjoys Shakespeare; especially Shakespeare addicts.

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