

# Twins and Shakespeare

Throughout history twins have fascinated people. Shakespeare includes sets of twins in some of his plays and uses them to create confusion and comedy through mistaken identity and separation.

His plays 'Twelfth Night' and 'The Comedy of Errors' tell tales of twins being split up. This causes the other characters in the plays to become muddled until the twins find each other again at the end.

'Twelfth Night' begins with twins Viola and Sebastian being separated following a shipwreck. Viola disguises herself as a young man and changes her name to Cesario. She gets a job working for the Duke Orsino, whom she falls in love with. Cesario (Viola) and Sebastian are mistaken for each other later in the play. However, it all ends happily when Viola is finally reunited with her twin brother, Sebastian.

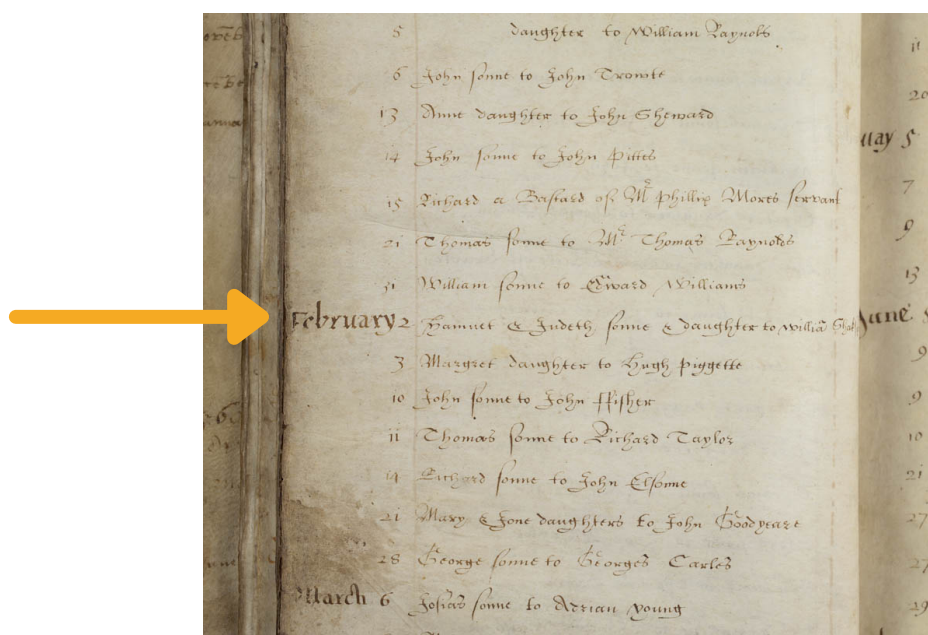


'The Comedy of Errors' tells the story of two sets of identical twins who were accidentally separated at birth. After much confusion and misidentification by other characters throughout the play, the twins are reunited.

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Shakespeare's use of twins in his plays is thought to be significant because he was the father of twins himself.

When he was eighteen, Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway and together they had three children. Their first daughter was Susanna. She was later followed by twins Hamnet and Judith who were baptised in on 2 February 1585. The baptism entry is written in the parish register for Holy Trinity Church in Stratford-upon-Avon.



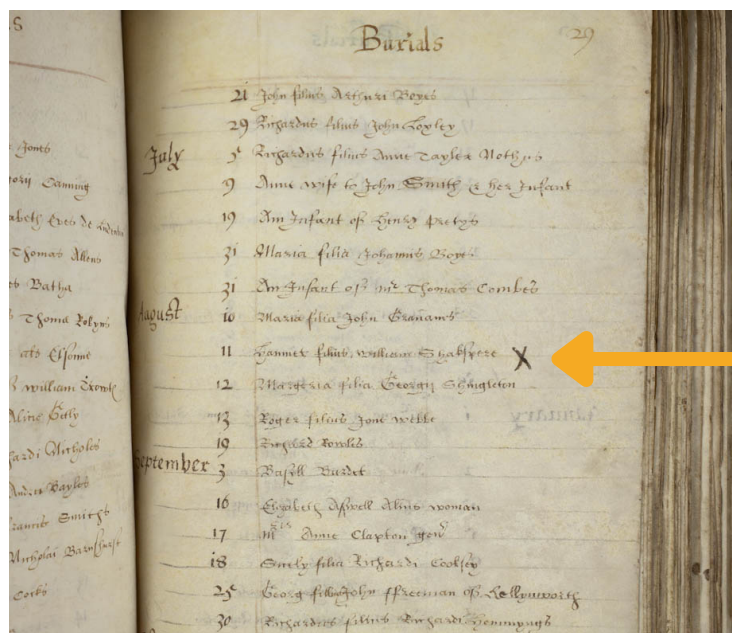
Parish register entry for the baptism of Hamnet and Judith Shakespeare  
Composite Register of Baptisms, Marriages, and Burials, 1558-1776  
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As well as the records of his children, the parish register also includes the baptism and burial of William Shakespeare.

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It is believed that Shakespeare probably went to London in the mid-1580s, sometime after the birth of the twins. We know that by 1592 he was an actor in London and therefore almost certainly spending lots of time away from his home and family.

Sadly, Shakespeare's only son, Hamnet, died aged 11 and was buried on 11 August 1596, in the churchyard at Holy Trinity Church in Stratford-upon-Avon. While lots of people have discussed how they believe Hamnet may have died, causes of death were not recorded in parish registers, so no one really knows.



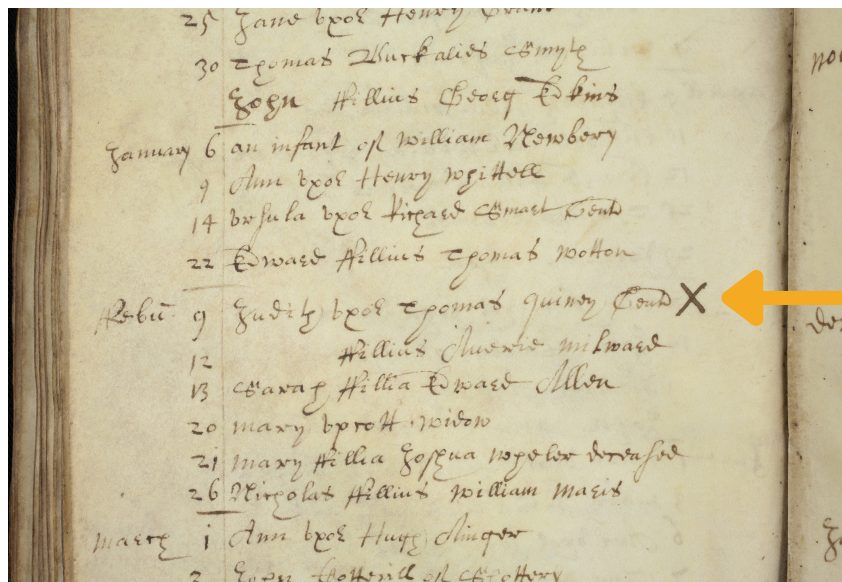
Parish register entry for the burial of Hamnet Shakespeare  
Composite Register of Baptisms, Marriages, and Burials, 1558-1776  
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Judith Shakespeare, Hamnet's twin, lived to the age of 77. By the time she died in 1662, she had outlived every member of the Shakespeare family except for her niece, Elizabeth (the daughter of her sister Susanna and her husband John Hall).

Judith married Thomas Quiney. In 1616, shortly after the death of her father, Judith gave birth to a son whom she named Shakespeare. Her other two sons, Thomas and Richard, followed a couple of years later. Sadly all three sons died before reaching adulthood.

With first-hand experience of twins, it is perhaps easy to see why Shakespeare might have enjoyed using twins in his plays.



Parish register entry for the burial of Judith (Shakespeare) Quiney  
Composite Register of Baptisms, Marriages, and Burials, 1558-1776  
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