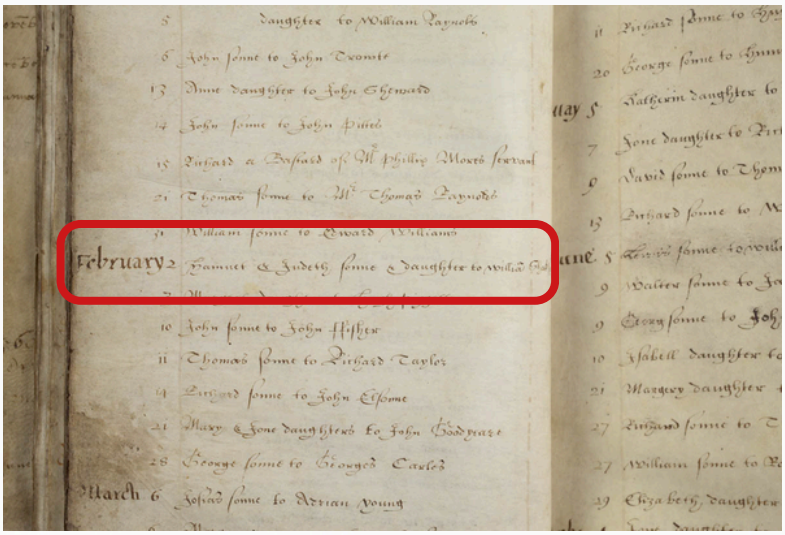
Creative writing - Twin Tales

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.

'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. 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.

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
CC-BY-NC-ND Image Courtesy of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust

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.

© 2013 Shakespeare Birthplace Trust.

Registered Charity Number 209302

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).

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

Activity

Use your imagination to write an account of the time Viola and Sebastian spent in Illyria, from each of their points of view.

Things to think about:

Who did they interact with?

What happened when each twin landed in Illyria?



What problems did they have?

When were they mistaken for the other twin?

How did their feelings change during their time on the island?

How did they react when they realised their twin was alive?

© 2013 Shakespeare Birthplace Trust.

Registered Charity Number 209302