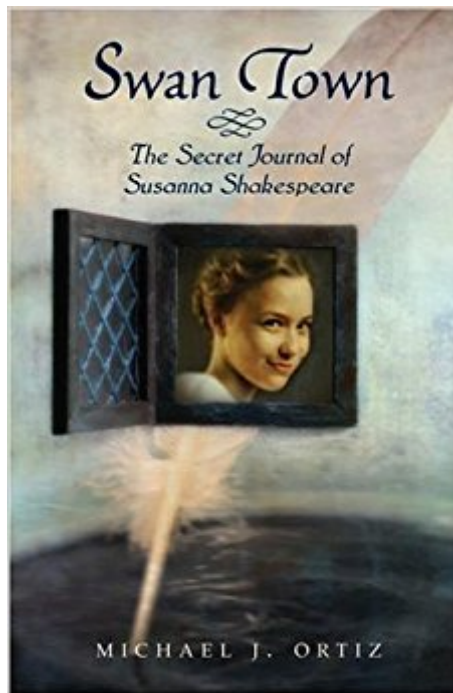




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# Swan Town: The Secret Journal Of Susanna Shakespeare



## Synopsis

The witty and engaging diary of Susanna Shakespeare, the young daughter of William Shakespeare, from a first-time author. Thirteen-year-old Susanna Shakespeare longs for something exciting to happen in her boring village of Stratford, England. Her father, Will, is always off in London, busily working on new plays, and Susanna yearns to be a part of that world. When Susanna's uncle gets himself in trouble with the Master of Revels, and Susanna is whisked off to London to help, the stage is set for adventure...and romance. Told in a diary format with Susanna's humorous, witty perspective of late-sixteenth-century Elizabethan England, this extensively researched debut novel offers an unconventional glimpse into the life of the famed Bard's family.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Grade 6-10Written as the diary of Shakespeares eldest child, this story gives a human face to the Elizabethan genius who changed the course of theatrical history. Rich with details about 16th-century home life in Stratford and theatrical conditions in London, the novel relates the story both of Susannas feisty determination to be more than a common country maid and of the development of her relationship with Dr. John Hall, the man she eventually marries. Susannas actual epitaph, which states that she was witty above her sexe, forms the basis of this fictional account. Bored with her simple life, Susanna yearns for adventure and dreams of seeing The Parrots King, a play that she has written, performed at her fathers theatre. While on a visit to London, she persuades the Globes clown to allow her and her timid sister, Judith, to present her

play as a prologue to her father's premiere of *Hamlet*. This puts her in great danger when the crowd turns on her plays' antimonarchical sentiments. Standard biographical facts are carefully woven into Susanna's entries, dating from March 2, 1597 to January 1, 1598, and the text is filled with references from Shakespeare's plays. However, this journal focuses on the personal side of the Bard's life. A good deal of emphasis is placed on the possibility that Shakespeare and his family were Roman Catholics. This circumstance adds tension, intrigue, and a political dimension to the story. The book's well-written prose will serve as an excellent introduction to Shakespeare, with its historical details providing a good background of Elizabethan society. Its real strength, however, is that of Susanna's forceful character, enabling readers to make a personal connection with a classic writer.

— Nancy Menaldi-Scanlan, LaSalle Academy, Providence, RI Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Gr. 7-10. As in Peter Hassinger's *Shakespeare's Daughter* (2004), Ortiz's debut novel offers a rich view of Shakespeare's life and times through the eyes of the playwright's daughter, Susanna. Here, the teenager tells her story in diary entries that reveal her aspirations to become an actor and a writer. A plot surrounding the Shakespeare family's religious secrets adds complex drama, but it won't involve readers as much as episodes featuring Susanna's defiant attempts to appear onstage and her growing affection for a man her parents disapprove of ("Have I become taken with a Montague? Must I play a wretched Capulet?"). Readers with some knowledge of Shakespeare's works, language, and history will best appreciate Ortiz's challenging references, and those who demand swift action may grow weary of the slow pace and abundant detail. But even reluctant readers will enjoy the colorful Elizabethan slurs ("Marble-headed tyrants!" "O lily-livered one") and join Susanna in her outrage at the narrow roles available to young women of her time. Gillian Engberg

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Remember your high school History? Me neither. "Swan Town" will give you a second chance. It is written in the voice of Shakespeare's 13-year-old daughter Susanna, a girl who has to grow up real fast. And she is the one who will supply you with all the really interesting information about Shakespeare's era. Did Sister William ever tell us about "ducking"? Of course disease was rampant - there were horse droppings all over the streets! Shakespeare had a son named "Hamnet"? Huh! The pudding game...what's that? Need a snappy retort for that rude neighbor? See page 41. Besides providing all these absorbing facts, Susanna places Shakespeare in historical context for you. So maybe the next time you hear Shakespeare quoted you will have a better understanding of

what he was saying...or leaving unsaid.

My 10 year old daughter really enjoyed this book. The story is engaging and well written. I highly recommend it.

This book was outstanding all the way through until close to the end. So all the glowing reviews here I absolutely agreed with. It brought the life and times of Shakespeare alive in a wonderful way and detailed way. (I could smell the herbs the author described.) The end of the book greatly surprised me though because it left reality so far away--too far away for it to still be historical fiction. It's as though it broke a trust with the reader and became so fantastic and untrue that I no longer enjoyed it. It became contrived with it's overdone plot and the execution of a particular character that I won't name in this summary. While I liked portions of this book very much, I would have to recommend a different book for the purpose of learning about Shakespeare and that is *All the World's A Stage* by Gretchen Woelfle. Alternatively read this book too, but just stop reading after everyone goes to see Hamlet. Just close the book and thank it for all you learned up to that page.

I enjoyed this book enormously. It made me think about the connections between religion, geography, history and the times that are the backdrop in the book. The diary style made the book move quickly, and learning about Shakespeare, his place in history, and the life of a young girl in his day was joyous exploration. A great middle school read for students studying European history or Shakespeare's plays. I thoroughly enjoyed this novel.

very good book. I needed it for a school assignment and I (i'm a fast reader)n was able to finish it quickly.

From the first page to last Mr. Ortiz' expert handling of his protagonist and her world makes this a truly enjoyable read. Whether it's tending the families herb garden or experiencing the sights and sounds (and smells) of London, Susanna's adventures capture the imagination and encourage the reader to accompany her in her exploits. She is witty and charming and worth the time to become better acquainted with.

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