

Romeo & Juliet - Star Crossed Lovers "A pair of star-crossed lovers", Romeo and Juliet. From the opening scenes of the play these two children of feuding families were destined to fall in love together and eventually die together. How does the reader see this? How do we know it was fate which triggered these events?

Coincidence caused the death of these two lovers. For this reason Romeo and Juliet is one of Shakespeare's great tragedies. For coincidence to have caused the death of Romeo and Juliet it must have been evident in the events leading up to their deaths. These events include their meeting and falling in love, their separation,

their reunion and finally their suicides. Solving the ancient feud between their families was the only real result of these untimely deaths. How did Romeo and Juliet

meet? Was it by fate or could it have been avoided? Romeo and Juliet could not have avoided coming in contact with each other, they were brought together by uncontrollable circumstances. In Romeo and Juliet's time Verona (a city in Italy approximately 100 km west of Venice) was a fair sized city, and "bumping" into an acquaintance was unlikely. During the course of Act I, Scene II, the contrary had happened, and happened by chance. As Romeo and Benvolio were nearing a public area they were stopped by a Capulet servant. After Romeo had read the guest list to the Capulet party and the servant was on his way, Benvolio suggested that to relieve himself of his sadness for Rosaline, Romeo should go to the party and compare Rosaline to the other female guests. Romeo agreed Another example of coincidence is evident here. If Rosaline had not been attending, Benvolio would not have thought anything of the party. During the Capulet's ball Romeo and Juliet had seen each other, once this happened, there was no force that could have stopped them from falling in love. The encounter with the servant in the city set off an unlikely chain of events. Given the information following, none of these events could have been altered or avoided . "And for that offense immediately we do exile him

hence," (Romeo and Juliet, III, II, 191-192). Romeo's banishment and the fate involved with it is a prime factor in the deaths of Romeo and Juliet. Why banishment?

In Act I, Scene I the Prince's words were quite the contrary. Was it intentional that a man of such high standard would go back on his word? Perhaps. Romeo's exile poisons all possibility of happiness for himself and Juliet. His exile causes Juliet great sorrow, greater than if he had been executed, as stated by Juliet in Act III,

Scene II, lines 130-131. Juliet's sorrow drives her to obtain a "knockout potion" from Friar Laurence which, in effect causes Romeo to make some important decisions regarding his well being. Romeo's banishment (brought about by the death of Tybalt) initiated the Friar's scheme which eventually leads the two lovers to their deaths. In reuniting the two lovers, timing played the largest role in deciding if they would live or die. Friar Laurence had two chances to deliver the message to

Romeo regarding Juliet's present state. The first and most practical method of sending this message was through Romeo's "man", Balthasar. The second method was to send the message with Friar John. Timing was an important factor in both of these events. Friar Laurence had missed his opportunity to send the message with Balthasar and reverted to sending it with Friar John. As fate would have it, Friar John was locked up in a condemned house because of the plague. As a result Romeo received incorrect information. The only information he received from the unsuspecting Balthasar was that Juliet was dead. There are two important points to note in this area of the play. One being the reference to star-crossing made by Romeo when he heard of Juliet's death. "Is it even so? then I defy you, stars." (Romeo

and Juliet, V, I, 24). The second being that when Romeo received the poison he states "Come cordial, and not poison, go with thee." (Romeo and Juliet, V, I, 85). This is coincidental to what Juliet had said earlier, in Act IV, Scene III, when she drinks to Romeo. Cordial means hearty, or sincere. When someone drinks to

someone else it is usually in good health. The reuniting of the two lovers in such circumstances (Romeo's unawareness) could only have happened as it did by timing. One could ask what if the friar had left early?, or what if the friar had caught Balthasar and given him the message? Because of bad timing neither happened. Coincidence is a controlling element regarding the deaths of Romeo and Juliet, more so than in other areas of the play. The following examples also deal with "close-calls", which involve timing as well as coincidence After Romeo had slew Paris and entered the tomb and found Juliet's seemingly dead body, he uttered some interesting words. "Death that hath sucked the honey of thy breath, hath had no power yet upon thy beauty. Thou art not conquered; beauty's ensign yet is crimson in

thy lips and cheeks." (Romeo and Juliet, V, III, 92-95.) Here Romeo is saying how alive Juliet looks. All he had to do was touch her and she may have been awakened and the play would have ended without a tragic closing. As Romeo drank the apothecaries mixture he drank to Juliet, as she had done before in Act IV, Scene III. This minor coincidence does not have much bearing on the course of the play, but changes the way we think of "toasting" to someone. Friar Laurence entered the tomb just less than half an hour after Romeo had killed himself. If the Friar had entered the tomb earlier he could have explained the situation to Romeo and no harm would have come to anyone. The Friar has proved himself to be a brave man. He married Romeo and Juliet without the consent of Juliet's father. Then why did the friar behave out of character and leave the tomb when he heard the call of the watch. This gave Juliet the opportunity to get hold of Romeo's well placed dagger (coincidence?) and kill herself. If the Friar had not fled he would have convinced Juliet not to kill herself as he did with Romeo in Act III, Scene III. To prove

Romeo and Juliet to be a tragedy we must first prove that the death of the two lovers was caused by circumstances outside of their control or more simply, by destiny. The events which lead up to Romeo and Juliet's death are all inter-related. If any of the events were absent from the list, the following events could not of

happened. The list, as mentioned before is as follows; meeting, separation, reunion, and their suicides. Romeo and Juliet's meeting has been proved to be by coincidence. If Romeo and Benvolio had not "bumped" into the Capulet servant the events would not have unfolded in the way they did. Romeo and Juliet had been separated because Prince Escalus had ordered it, what makes this unusual is that in Act I, Scene I, the Prince's warning indicated that further violent confrontations would result in death. Romeo did not receive the message from the Friar in Act V, Scene I, because of coincidence. If he had received the message, the Friar's scheme would have gone as planned. Coincidence is exceedingly evident when Romeo enters the tomb to die with Juliet as proven earlier. As the coincidences in the novel build up, the reader's idea of reality changes, and enables Shakespeare create one of his greatest tragedies, Romeo and Juliet.