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Humanities

18 March 2011

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**A Comparison of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Dear Zoe***

George Patton once said to "Accept the challenges so that you may feel the exhilaration of victory." In both *Romeo and Juliet* and *Dear Zoe*, the main characters have trouble accepting challenges that they are faced with. *Romeo and Juliet*, by William Shakespeare, is about lovers from rival families who cannot be together and commit suicide because of it. *Dear Zoe*, by Philip Beard, tells the story of Tess, a young girl who feels partially responsible for her younger sister’s death and, as a result, becomes depressed and moves in with her dad. At his house she falls in love for the first time and eventually learns to overcome the grief of losing a family member and, more specifically, a little sister. The characters in *Romeo and Juliet* and *Dear Zoe* have many similarities and differences even though they were written thousands of years apart.

There are many similarities between the characters of Romeo, Juliet, and Tess. A big theme and example of their similarity is their depression. For example, Tess says "Even though it’s been almost a year, sometimes I still miss you so much it feels like someone is pushing their finger into the base of my throat and I cry like it just happened yesterday. But now when I cry like that it kind of cleans me out, and each time it happens it feels like I'm going to have a little longer until it happens again and I usually do" (Beard 13). Although Tess is coping with her grief (albeit badly) she is beginning to

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overcome it. Tess copes with her grief by getting high, or avoiding it, which is similar to what Romeo and Juliet try to do (ignore it). Yet, Tess has a difficult time dealing with her feelings of guilt and tries to kill herself because she feels responsible for Zoe’s death. Tess, like Romeo and Juliet, is very eager to find love wherever she can and she is as impulsive as Romeo and Juliet are about their feelings. Romeo also has some very impulsive moments. An example of this can be seen when he says "Come bitter conduct, come, unsavory guide!/Thou desperate pilot, now at once run on/The dashing rocks/thy seasick weary bark!/Here's to my love. O true apothecary,/Thy drugs are quick. Thus with a kiss I die" (5.3.116-120). Romeo is so depressed and desperate to be with his love that it drives him to committing suicide when he believes she is dead. Tess also tries to commit suicide but, because she still has people left that love her, she does not follow through. Although their situations are very different, Romeo, Juliet, and Tess have many similarities.

There are also many differences between Romeo, Juliet and Tess. These differences can be seen when Tess says "Remember how I said nothing changes everything? I think I was wrong about that. I'm starting to think maybe everything changes everything. That we never know what's going to happen next and we're not supposed to" (Beard 195). In this passage, Tess is beginning to understand that Zoe's death is not her fault. By the end of the book, Tess has talked about her grief to a therapist, to her parents, and to Jimmy, and her other sister Em. Talking about her feelings helped Tess to heal because she became aware of the people who cared about

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her. Romeo and Juliet, however, have no one to talk to about their problems and they end up committing suicide. Because Tess gets help for herself and believes in the effect of her actions on the world around her, she learns to heal herself. Because Romeo believes death is his destiny, he does not seek help by talking with others about his feelings.

It is clear that Romeo, Juliet, and Tess have, not only many similarities, they have many differences also. Romeo, Juliet and Tess all have suicidal thoughts and tendencies. Tess, however, finds help for herself and talks about her pain while Romeo lets it fester within. Tess and Romeo have very different outlooks on certain aspects of life such as the presence of fate. Teenagers still suffer from depression in modern times as they did in Shakespearean England. It is a good idea to be informed about the symptoms of depression and about these classic pieces of literature so that situations such as the ones presented in these books are prevented for future generations of teenagers.

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**Works Cited**

Beard, Philip*. Dear Zoe*. New York: Penguin Books, 2006

Shakespeare, William. *Romeo and Juliet*. New York: Washington Square Press, 1992.