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Exploring the origin of soul mates

■ From ancient Greece to Romeo and Juliet, the idea of one true love persists

By Holly Goodin
for the Emerald

soul mate, n. It means a person with whom one has a strong affinity, according to the Random House Webster's College Dictionary.

The concept of soul mates has been around for a long time, and for people who believe in one true love, the dictionary's definition might be too bland.

The idea of searching for a soul mate dates back to the ancient Greeks, according to Malcolm Wilson, a University classics professor. This quest's origin is told in a myth by Aristophanes in Plato's "Symposium."

"Human beings were originally round, eight-limbed creatures with two faces and two sets of genitals," the story says. They were "powerful and ambitious," and in order to reduce their strength, Zeus had them cut in two. Afterward, the split pairs clung together in a desperate attempt to reunite.

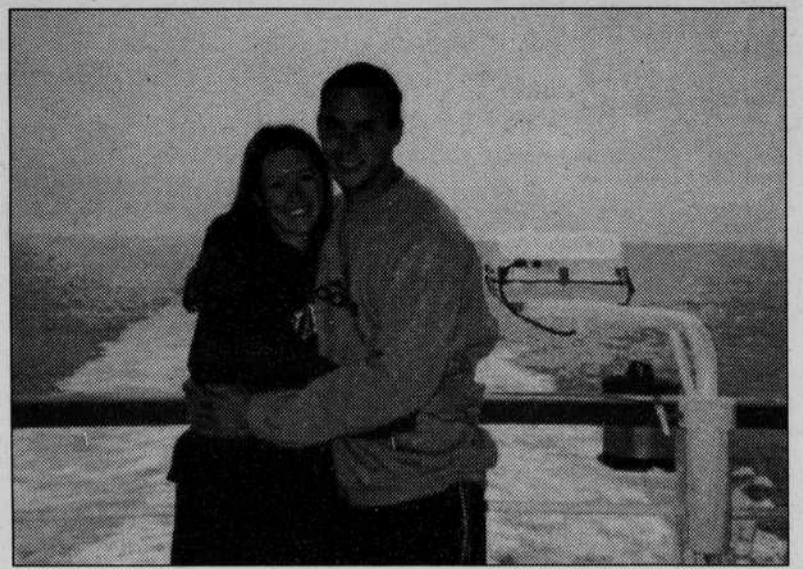
"Zeus took pity on their incurable longing and created intercourse, allowing the separated halves to temporarily experience the ecstasy of completion again," Wilson said.

Humans all have a void they wish to fill, he said, and this desire drives them to wander the earth in search of their missing halves. The myth explains why people bond with many others until they find their perfect fit, Wilson said.

He believes that in today's society, most people look for their soul mates in one person.

"The education of men and women equally allows for a couple to experience both companionship and romance in a relationship," he said.

The poetic story of Romeo and Juliet, who chose to be united in death rather than separated in life, is a classic example of soul mates that emphasizes the theme of one true love, English and folklore Pro-



Courtesy Photo

For Vanessa Scroggins, 20, and Mark Potter, 26, love at first sight happened on a cruise.

fessor Sharon Sherman said.

It may be rare for present-day lovers to be forced apart by rivaling families or suffer such anguish that they sacrifice their own lives. But Sherman said these stories do relate to modern couples by illustrating the intensity of human emotion — people endure the same consuming passion as Romeo and Juliet in their own relationships.

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Malcolm Wilson
classics professor

She thinks the idea that one true love exists is charming and inspirational, but "true love is an idealistic concept," she said. "People can love more than just one person." She added that love is subjective and comes in many forms.

"Love is (also) unexplainable," Sherman said. She believes the sto-

ry of Romeo and Juliet encapsulates that indefinable aspect of love. Clearly understanding the root of their passion or the reasoning behind their tragic end is impossible, she said, and the same uncertainty is inherent in all relationships.

"Only by experiencing love for themselves can people decide if true love exists," Sherman said.

One person who does believe in true love is Adam Olsson, 24, who met his girlfriend Angie Rome, 21, about a year ago while studying in Mexico. Before the trip, he had just ended a five-year relationship with a girl he thought he loved, but in retrospect, he perceives his past relationship as something he fell into instead of chose. Olsson said. He simply went through the motions and stayed in the relationship for security, he said.

After meeting Angie, he began to see love as an act of destiny.

"Fate brought her into my life, but it's my responsibility to keep her," he said.

Although their first moments together were wonderful, their relationship grew slowly, he said.

"Making the relationship work is an investment," he said. "It takes time and effort, but when you consider every day together as a gift, it's still fun. Love is an exchange of vulnerability and understanding to reach intimacy. Once you reach that level, it's truly rewarding."

For Vanessa Scroggins, 20, and her boyfriend Mark Potter, 26, love happened at first sight.

"My mom told me, 'When you fall in love, you just know,' but I never believed her until I met Mark," Scroggins said. "After our first night together, I knew he was the one."

The sparks flew just as quickly for Potter.

"I fell in love with her the moment we first kissed," he said.

The catch to their whirlwind romance is living half a world apart, he said. Their relationship began on a cruise, and they spent one amazing week together but then were forced to separate, Scroggins said. Potter lives in New Zealand, and she is a student in the United States.

"Despite the distance, we still grow together, and I know he is always there for me," she said. He has flown out to see her twice and remains in constant contact, Scroggins said. Their relationship has continued for seven months, and after Scroggins finishes school, they plan to start a life together.

"I don't think we decide who we love — it's something out of our control," she said. "Mark is my true love, and I believe we will make it work."

Holly Goodin is a freelance reporter for the Emerald.

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