LOVE AND FRIENDSHIP

Distance and Time

Angie Crook

The novel Like Water for Chocolate raises many questions about love. One of the questions that interests me the most is the idea of relating proximity and love. Does absence truly make the heart grow fonder? I have to argue, from reading this book and from personal experience, that the cliché could not be any more wrong. While having time apart from a loved one for a short while can make the reunion more enjoyable, distance between two people is generally not good for the relationship. Many students who go off to college, leaving their significant other behind will agree with this. I know that is how I felt. At first, the situation was unbearable; there was no way I was going to be able to survive all year five hours away from my boyfriend. Then, as time went on, the situation got under control. I had new friends to spend
time with; there were so many people I could meet, so many parties to go to on the weekend. There seemed to be less time to miss him, less time to talk on the phone at night. Then it happened. All the boys I'd been ignoring all year started to interest me. I didn't think about my boyfriend every time I had a conversation with another guy. The bond that I thought was so strong between us was fading quickly. Mere months later, we broke up. Did the eros we felt for each other turn into philia?

Is this similar to how the characters in Laura Esquivel's *Like Water for Chocolate* felt? Early in the book, Pedro marries Rosaura when refused marriage to Tita. When questioned about this he replied "When you're told there's no way you can marry the woman you love and your only hope of being near her is to marry her sister, wouldn't you do the same?" (15) He knows that to keep Tita interested in him, he has to stay near her. Later,
John explains to Tita the magic of love by saying, “For a moment we are dazzled by an intense emotion. A pleasant warmth grows within us, fading slowly as time goes by, until a new explosion comes along to revive it. (115)” The question this raises for me is whether it is necessary to have the person who lit the fire near to keep it going? Does proximity have anything to do with how intensely you love someone?

In Gertrudis’ case, the answer seems to be no. “By then the scent of roses given off by her body had traveled a long, long way. All the way to town, where the rebel forces and the federal troops were engaged in a fierce battle. (54)” Even though Gertrudis and Juan had only met once, and there was considerable distance between them, their love and passion crossed all the barriers.

For Tita, the answer was not so clear. “At that moment she was convinced that John, who was always at
her side supporting her without reservation, was her true love. But then she saw a group of people approaching the mausoleum and from a distance she made out Pedro’s silhouette, and Rosaura with him, and she was no longer so sure of her feelings” (138). A silhouette is defined as an outline that appears dark on a light background. What is interesting about this to me is the fact that she does not need to distinguish whether the silhouette is really Pedro’s or not. The dark figure could have been anyone. Tita could have mistaken a stranger for Pedro because they were so far away. It is the thought of Pedro that makes her heart unsure. Her feelings for John were so flakey that although she was standing next to him, her mind wandered to Pedro when she thought that she might see him again.

This makes me think of my own situation. I know distance had something to do with the reason we broke up, but was that all? If I had been standing next to him,
would I be thinking about him or would my mind wander to another person? So maybe after the feelings fade proximity isn’t as important.

However, later on Tita realizes that if she ever wants to make a decision about who she is going to love, she needs to be away from one of them. “she wanted to get away from the ranch-and the proximity of Pedro-as quickly as possible. (156)” This shows that she understands that proximity is related to how strongly she feels for Pedro. She thinks that for their love to stay strong, they need to be near each other and so maybe distance will give her some peace of mind.

Personally, my feelings coincide more with Tita’s emotions. Her confusion about who she loves more and who is better for her is an experience that I hold very close to my heart. I have been in a similar situation and have had to make the same difficult decision as Tita. Although
I feel that I made the right decision, I still have very strong feelings for my ex-boyfriend. It is hard for me to imagine my life without him in it, and I know that I still love him very strongly. For me, proximity has nothing to do with whether I love him or not, it has to do with the kind of love I have for him. I've learned that love changes shapes. What once may have been a sexual relationship can turn into friendship that has an equally strong emotional bond. Then again love can seem very strong at first, but then fade with time. How do you know the difference between the two? Does proximity have anything to do with how you feel for someone, or is it just time that can change how you feel? Pedro seems to instantly know that he will love Tita forever, but how can he be sure? How can she be sure when she answers him? It doesn't seem as though she's even considered the possibility of loving him until he said it first.
"No, no, I can't! I need an answer now: you
don't have to think about love; you either feel it or
you don't. I am a man of few words, but my word
is my pledge. I swear that my love for you will last
forever. What about you? Do you feel the same
way about me?"

'Yes!'

Yes, a thousand times. From that night on she
would love him forever." (18)

Whenever Pedro went away Tita would begin to question
her love for him. Of course she still thought about him
while he was gone, but it seems that she needs to feel his
presence near her for her to be sure she is in love with
him. Even a questionable silhouette will do, as long as she
thinks it is Pedro. Then after twenty-two years, as they
are finally willing to express their love openly and are
reunited for the last time, it seems their love is as strong as
the first day Pedro said so. Knowing that they can be close to each other for the rest of time makes their love even stronger and now that they know that, time seems to have no effect how they feel for each other.