



Rare and Commonplace Flowers: The Story of Elizabeth Bishop and Lota de Macedo Soares

Carmen L. Oliveira, Louis Schwartz (Foreword)

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Rare and Commonplace Flowers—a Brazilian bestseller—tells the story of two women. Elizabeth Bishop, the Pulitzer Prize-winning American poet, sought artistic inspiration in Brazil. There she met and fell in love with Lota de Macedo Soares, a self-trained Brazilian architect. This dual biography—brilliantly researched, and written in a lively, novelistic style—follows their relationship from 1951 to 1967, the time when the two lived together in Brazil. The fact that these two women had an intimate relationship caused an uproar when it first came to public notice.

The relationship started out happily, yet ended tragically. In 1961, Soares became increasingly obsessed with building and administering Flamengo Park, Rio de Janeiro's equivalent to New York City's Central Park. Though she had been the driving force behind the park's inception, the ultimate credit that was due her was stripped away because of petty politics and chicanery. As Soares's career declined and Bishop's flourished, their relationship crumbled.

Rare and Commonplace Flowers is a tale of two artists and two cultures, offering unique perspectives on both women and their work. Carmen L. Oliveira provides an unparalleled level of detail and insight, due to both her familiarity with Brazil as well as her access to the country's artistic elite, many of whom had a direct connection with Bishop and Soares. Rare pictures of the two artists and their home bring this unique story to life.

Rare and Commonplace Flowers: The Story of Elizabeth Bishop and Lota de Macedo Soares Details

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From Reader Review Rare and Commonplace Flowers: The Story of Elizabeth Bishop and Lota de Macedo Soares for online ebook

Thais says

O título do livro, ao se referir a uma ilustração que Carlos Leão fez a Lota de Macedo Soares sobre personalidades da sociedade carioca da década de 40, prenuncia sua verdadeira natureza. Mais que uma história de amor, o livro relata acontecimentos políticos e sociais do Brasil, em especial do Rio de Janeiro, em meados do século XX.

Gostei muito de como a autora logra transportar o leitor à época, utilizando-se de palavras e expressões antigas para compor sua narrativa. Outro ponto memorável é este se configurar em um livro escrito por uma mulher sobre o amor entre duas mulheres, algo não muito comum na Literatura, menos ainda na Brasileira.

Em suma, o livro é cheio de detalhamentos de extensas manobras políticas, mas também encerra belíssimas e deliciosas descrições de Botânica, da comunhão com a natureza e das preciosas singelezas do cotidiano a duas. É como se a autora tivesse encontrado nisso uma forma de contrapor a serenidade da vida em Samambaia, Petrópolis, ao recrudescimento da vida no Rio de Janeiro.

MJ says

This book is a kind of imagined biography. In a way, you could say all biographies written after the death of the protagonists are imagined, but this one seems particularly like a novel. Unfortunately, it's not a very good novel. It is emotionally oversimplified and plays quite a bit like a soap opera.

It also paints a very unsympathetic portrait of Elizabeth Bishop. Not that there's anything wrong with an unsympathetic portrait, per se-- though she is one of my poetic heroes, she doesn't have to be everybody's. And poets can be just as badly behaved as anyone. However, this portrait of Bishop is in many instances unrecognizable. Too obvious and simple, for a very subtle and complex woman.

Nonetheless, it was interesting to see a portrait of the relationship between Elizabeth Bishop and Lota de Macedo Soares, however faulty and third-hand.

Debby says

The story is mesmerizing but I agree w other reviewers that it gets bogged down by way too many details of the pomitical shenanigans re the Park.

Personally i loved the film too!

Maria says

"Is it lack of imagination that makes us come to imagined places, not just stay at home?"

Yolanda Ornellas says

Too many political parts on this book. I didn't love it. I only finished it because I can't stand to start a book and not finish it, even if it's boring as hell. At the end, there's a little less politics and a bit more of the story of Bishop and Lota's relationship, so I liked it better. Really sad story though.

Olivia says

I would give this 2 1/2 stars if I could. As an admirer of Bishop's poetry, I was curious about her great international love story with Lota de Macedo Soares. It's clear that the book is meticulously researched, and relies heavily on primary sources, but I found Oliveira's narrative tiresome. Perhaps something is lost in the translation, perhaps the folksy interjections of "sit back, dear reader, this story is long and heartbreaking" appeal to others, but I'd prefer a more traditional biography. I also found the account of Lota's work on the Brazilian Aterro tedious; it plays a central role in their relationship, but the space in the text could have been greatly reduced. All in all, I'm glad this book was written, but wish it had been written by someone else or had a better editor.

Jords says

Once I started, I could not stop reading this deliciously written biographic novel. I regret, however, that much of the richness of the book and the language resources used cannot be translated even for a very good translator for they are very typical of the Portuguese language.

Cat says

I read this book in dribs and drabs, probably the least conducive reading pattern for a novel-biography that requires a good bit of focus on Brazil and its politics (when I know nothing about Brazil and its politics). I was so pleased that this book gave vivid focus to the long-term relationship between Elizabeth Bishop and Lota de Macedo Soares. I knew nothing about Soares before reading this book, and she sounds like she was both a remarkable, creative, passionate person and a pain in the butt. I think the biographer fell in love with Soares a little because if I did not already love Bishop's poetry, I would feel like I knew her very little from this book. This is really Lota's book (which is as it should be, since Bishop usually gets all the attention!).

This book is in translation, and apparently, the original was very popular in Brazil. I wonder if more familiarity with this political context would have made this book more satisfying; Soares gets very involved in planning a park for Rio de Janeiro. When that project goes straight to hell, and Soares' reputation with it, this aspect of the book becomes very interesting, but it takes a lot of pages and explanation before that, which I have to confess lost my interest a bit. Also, one of the conceits of the novel-biography is that much of it is being told from the point of view of Soares' (fictional) friends. This made me feel actually less

intimate with the characters; because this format was almost a novel but not quite, I felt distanced from Bishop and Soares. The narration could never freely enter their minds, which is probably best for posterity and verisimilitude, but which was aesthetically awkward (for me) amidst all the other trappings of novel-dom.

The descriptions of the home Bishop and Soares shared in Samambaia, Brazil are just breathtaking. The book definitely made me want to go there.

Virg says

Reading this, I couldn't get past the terrible feeling that this poorly written, fictionalized "biography" of Bishop's 15 year relationship with Lota would make both women flip in their graves. Whatever this is, it's not scholarship, and while parts of the narrative are undoubtedly true, their sum is monstrous, undignified and unfair.

T says

Love Bishop. Love this story. Worth the read if you can get past the very bad translation errors.

Claudia says

Que fim tão trágico.

Lud Oliveira says

Assisti o filme primeiro, gostei muito e só depois fui descobrir que era baseado em livro. Obviamente, quis logo ler o livro também! E me surpreendi porque a história do filme diverge em vários pontos da do livro. Tem umas intrigas a mais, a presença da Mary é mais forte, alguns eventos ocorrem em ordem diferente. Gostei ainda mais do livro, que aborda mais a Bishop e a Lota em seus caminhos. É comovente o final, e uma pena o distanciamento que foi ocorrendo entre elas. As duas protagonistas são maravilhosas.

bell says

O livro é uma biografia da vida das duas que se deu por meio de cartas e depoimentos de terceiros e a autora conseguiu fazer disso um livro com uma história interessante, cativante e nada monótona. O problema, pra mim, é que eu só queria saber da vida da Elizabeth e do relacionamento das duas, eu não queria saber do trabalho da Lota, mas isso não é culpa da autora tendo em vista que o subtítulo é "a história de Lota de Macedo Soares e Elizabeth Bishop" e elas são mais do que o relacionamento que tiveram.

Lendo o livro eu consegui entender muito mais o relacionamento das duas e me simpatizar mais com a Lota.

Diferentemente do filme, eu consegui não julgar nenhuma das duas como culpadas pelo fim do relacionamento e pelas partes desagradáveis. Elas se amaram muito e tiveram lindos dez anos extremamente felizes uma ao lado da outra, depois tudo foi ladeira a baixo e elas pararam de fazer bem uma pra outra e de querer estar ao lado da outra, mas nunca deixaram de se amar.

A Lota não planejou que a construção do parque do flamengo fosse a esgotar tanto e mudá-la tanto e a Elizabeth não poderia imaginar que perderiam o laço que tinham a ponto de pararem de se apoiar e dela ir à Boston dar aula com a esposa contrariada e as duas brigadas. A Elizabeth sempre foi muito frágil e eu nunca imaginei que partiria dela a iniciativa de ir embora, mesmo que tenha sido depois de sete anos. A Lota sempre foi muito forte e segura de si e não dá pra prever o quanto ela ficaria abalada com a questão do parque + as brigas. É muito triste que ela tenha sofrido ao ponto de se matar e perceber que as amigas da Lota culpam a Elizabeth por sua morte. Foi tudo muito trágico.

Por fim, eu queria que tivessem explorado mais a Mary Morse e a dinâmica das três tendo que conviver juntas. Das poucas vezes em que ela é mencionada, se parece muito com o que contam sobre ela no filme, tirando que no filme ela parece querer orquestrar o fim do relacionamento delas e no livro ela é uma figura amiga, mas o ciúmes, a filha e a estada dela em Samambaia é igual.

Foi bem importante pra mim ter lido o livro, apaixonada que sou pela Elizabeth, apesar de ainda ter muita coisa que eu quero saber, eu entendi muito mais o processo de escrita dela, as angustias, as lutas internas e o amor dela pela Lota, que é exatamente a proposta do livro.

Jessica says

don't know how they made the translation so good, but it's so so good. better than any other text i've read about Bishop, in that it has some of her flavoring and isn't concerned with evaluating.

Barb H. says

Interesting to learn about Elizabeth Bishop's life. Learned a great deal about Brazil in the 1950's, 60's.
