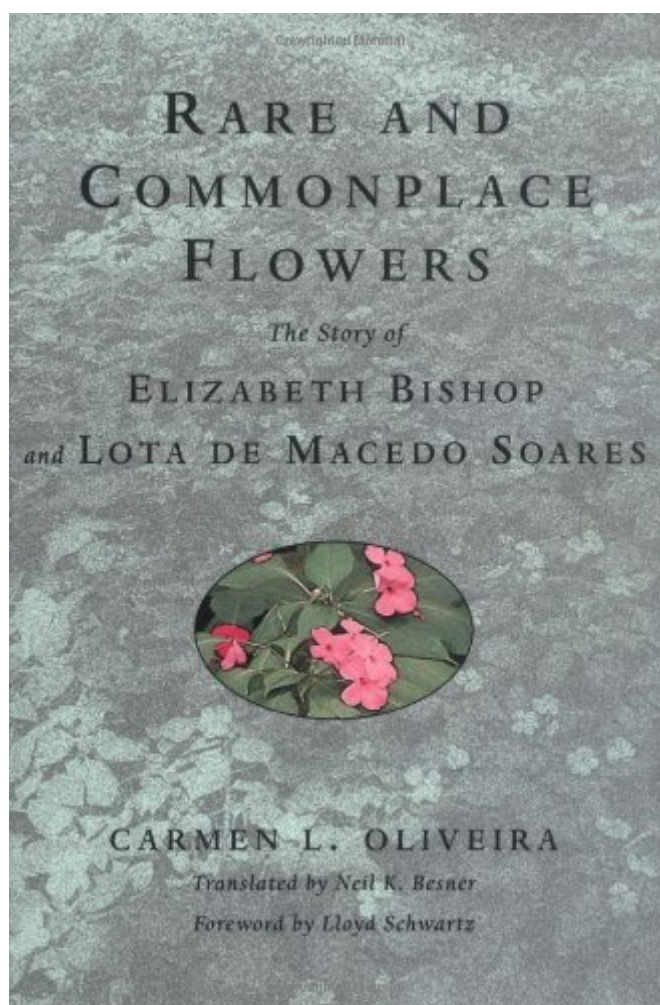


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Rare And Commonplace Flowers: The Story Of Elizabeth Bishop And Lota De Macedo Soares



Synopsis

Rare and Commonplace Flowers is a Brazilian bestseller that 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 is brilliantly researched, and written in a lively, novelistic style that 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.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Seeing the film, "Reaching for the Moon" about the relationship between the American poet Elizabeth Bishop and Brazilian architect Lota De Macedo Soares, I was inspired to read the story in its original book form. This translation is lovely. Talk about star-crossed lovers! This relationship was doomed from the beginning and could only end badly. They were both too disturbed, too narcissistic, and too in love with alcohol to have anything other than the tumultuous, on-again/off-again affair they carried on for nearly two decades until Soares' untimely death from an overdose (accidental?). They were chic, sophisticated, knew everyone, and were sought after by everyone who was anyone. Living in that rarefied atmosphere requires the MOST sober and level-headed approach to relationships. These two women were anything but - a most compelling read.

I read this novel after viewing "Reaching for the Moon." As usual, the scriptwriters took liberties with the source but in this case the liberties were improvements. For fans of Elizabeth Bishop, this so-called novel is very dreary reading. At least three quarters of the novel is devoted to the blow by blow political struggles that engulfed Bishop's lover and partner Lota Soares during her long tangle with the Brazilian government over plans for an ambitious park development in Rio. These struggles are recounted in the manner of a diligent college sophomore relentlessly citing newspaper accounts for a term paper. For her part, Bishop is shown with very little sympathy or insight by the author who instead relies on unflattering interviews given by Lota's friends to complete the picture of their friendship with a nod to the fact that at least Lota believed her to be a genius. Perhaps something truly was lost in the translation from Brazilian to English, perhaps the American Bishop was never meant to be more than a troubling curiosity in this Brazilian "fiction." Either way, if you're after a lyrical, moving, even-handed account of the love affair between Lota and Bishop this is one of the rare times you should skip the book and watch the movie instead. I give it two stars instead of one because it was well researched; too bad it couldn't have been better written. (Oddly, the opening sample pages were very well done, enticing me to buy and then everything fell flat after that.)

What can I say that would do justice to the characters portrayed in this exquisite translation. Perhaps the less said the better as I simply encourage the read. Seeing inside these two,

complicated and remarkable women has been a great joy for me. Their art and lives unfolded naturally and I've been transported in place and time- I understand their attraction, love and their appreciation for one another and beautiful to witness. Thank you Carmen L. Oliveira for sharing your story of Lota and Elizabeth and Many thanks Neal for talking the time to share it with us.

This book starts as a decent character study. However, a little over halfway through it turns into a Byzantine treatise on Brazilian politics that is a snoozefest. The latter part of the book is so light on actual biography it just falls apart.

This was a good read (187 pgs) giving one an understanding of the strong bond between two remarkable women: one an American poet and the other a Brazilian landscape architect. I never would have heard about Lota and what she did for the building of Flamengo Park in Rio de Janeiro (similar to Central Park in NY) had it not been for an article about her in Garden Design magazine. This book shares an inside look at these two women, their circle of friends and acquaintances, and their struggles both personal and professional within their selected fields.

The book is not as engaging as the film, though I did enjoy the narrative and 'through the keyhole' look into Elizabeth and Carlotta's lives.

I purchased this after seeing the movie. The movie deviated from the book quite a bit, but I found the movie more interesting. Still it was a very good book. Interesting and sad.

Wish I could have read it in the original language of the writer. Translation was awkward at best. What a force of nature Lota was.

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