



# The More I Owe You

*Michael Sledge*

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## **The More I Owe You Michael Sledge**

In this mesmerizing debut novel, Michael Sledge creates an intimate portrait of the beloved poet Elizabeth Bishop -- of her life in Brazil and her relationship with her lover, the dazzling, aristocratic Lota de Macedo Soares. Sledge artfully draws from Bishop's lifelong correspondences and biography to imagine the poet's intensely private world, revealing the literary genius who lived in conflict with herself both as a writer and as a woman.

A seemingly idyllic existence in Soares's glass house in the jungle gives way to the truth of Bishop's lifelong battle with alcoholism, as well as her eventual status as one of modernism's most prominent writers. Though connected to many of the most famous cultural and political figures of the era, Soares too is haunted by her own demons. As their secrets unfold, the sensuous landscape of Rio de Janeiro, the rhythms of the samba and the bossa nova, and the political turmoil of 1950s Brazil envelop Bishop in a world she never expected to inhabit. *The More I Owe You* is a vivid portrait of two brilliant women whose love for one another pushes them to accomplish enduring works of art.

## **The More I Owe You Details**

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Author : Michael Sledge

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# From Reader Review The More I Owe You for online ebook

## Margaret says

Michael Sledge produced a brilliant first half of this book... in particular the feel and essence of Brazil as well as an introduction to Elizabeth Bishop. I'm inspired to find her poetry to read.

I was less enthusiastic about the latter part of the book... not sure if it was me or the book. I thought it lost steam when it got so involved with Brazilian politics, or maybe I've just had my fill of politics recently.

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## Wendy says

I read this a while ago, and my review is just going to be a simple: FINALLY! A book I can KEEP! Well-written, literate, for the most part interesting. It does slow down toward the end, or become a little repetitive, but overall I really enjoyed reading this book. The imagery is tactile, the characters well-rounded if not entirely sympathetic - much like real people.

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## Kris says

This novel is a wonderful depiction of the relationship of the poet Elizabeth Bishop and the Brazilian Lota de Macedo Soares. It covers the 17-year relationship that developed when Bishop came to Brazil for a short vacation and ended up staying almost 17 years. I read this after seeing the play "Dear Elizabeth" which dealt with Bishop's 40 year correspondence and friendship with the poet Robert Lowell.

Very well written and strong characterizations. I want to read more of Bishop's poetry now.

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## Mark says

Elizabeth Bishop was an American poet who, in 1951, went to Brazil on holiday and proceeded to stay for 15 years in a tumultuous relationship with Lota de Macedo Soares, an aristocratic and artistic powerhouse. This book is a novel about their relationship and Bishop's life in Brazil. It's very well written and I believe (after reading some biographical material) very true to actual events. It made we want to bo to Brazil in the worst way.

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## Featherbooks says

Elizabeth: "If you watch any Brazilian man for five minutes, you'll see him scratching and adjusting himself.

It's as if they're constantly arranging flowers in a vase."

Lota: "Those aren't flowers. Those are the jewells of Brazil! If they didn't keep grabbing their balls, they'd forget they were men. That's the problem with this country: The men have to keep reminding themselves they are men, and the women are even worse. They have no balls, either!"

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### **Bandit says**

What a magnificent book, made all the more so by the fact that it's based on a true story. Given a chance real lives will surpass fiction, if lived properly. Elizabeth and Lota certainly did. They pursued their passions unflinchingly and relentlessly, which alternately led them together and tore them apart, but certainly defined them and gave them an admirable if dangerous sort of integrity. There is so much to love about this book, from its stunning writing that actually nearly brought me to tears (no small task) to its attention to details (betraying extensive research), but really those are just points of appreciation and it doesn't quite make up the entirety of emotion this book evokes. It is an interesting well balanced look at the fascinating historical figures. It is a well rendered portrait of Brazil's past, a country of contradictions, where violence and beauty roamed unruly. Above all, it's a really grand love story. Not the stereotypical bland Hollywood variety, but a genuine article, unflinchingly honest, the real thing, it all its brutal glory, from start to finish, enduring, patient, kind with fits of shocking brutality, fierce, frightening, sweeping, irresistible force that brings and keeps two human beings together in the face of all odds. Incredibly moving read, a powerhouse really, a thing of beauty. Highly recommended.

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### **Diane Lockward says**

Fictionalized version of Elizabeth Bishop's life. Completely convincing. Very readable. Is sending me back to the poems. My only objection was that occasionally the author would stop the forward movement of the narrative and jump way ahead and tell us what happens years later. Those interruptions took me right out of the illusion of fiction. But I'm going to forgive Sledge for that as everything else was so terrific.

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### **Dan says**

The title of this book comes from a lines by a Portuguese poet--"The more I pay you, the more I owe you." It's not addressed to a credit card company; it's about emotion, attachment, love and lives lived fully, flaws and all. I wouldn't call this novel a love story, though, because that might suggest a too-familiar pattern I suppose you might (perhaps unjustly) call it a fictionalized biography of American poet Elizabeth Bishop. Many of the characters go by their names in life, I'm guessing all but one of them, in fact. It also seems accurate in its facts and in the way it portrays the personalities involved, even in the way it captures different aspects of Brazil where much of the book is set. (Sledge mined her collected letters and her poems.) Elizabeth's lover--you come to feel you have a first-name friendship with her-- is Lota, a real-life Brazilian woman deeply involved in Brazilian life, cultural and politics. She's a character as fully developed as Elizabeth herself, as if the novel is as much about their love as it is about either of them alone. If this novel is partly a fictionalized biography, it is also much more.

At the time open Lesbian lovers were totally unacceptable in Brazil, but Elizabeth and Lota live openly as a couple without fanfare. They have sex, but sexual preference plays no role. It is natural to them and, unless you are asexual or a homophobe, it will seem natural to you as well; they love each other, it's that simple—and that complex, because their love, like everyone's, is highlighted by their flaws. You will also enjoy probably enjoy their love, more, not less, because of those flaws: they are real people.

I don't want to leave the impression that the book is one-dimensional. The characters are wonderfully developed. I suppose Sledge was much helped in that respect by his careful use Elizabeth's letters and poems. But I doubt that his source could be entirely responsible for his fine depiction of a wide range of people in Brazil, of Brazilian politics, and of the lush jungle with its own personalities such as Uncle Sammy, the Toucan at Lota's jungle house who can eat an unlimited number of bananas.

The book's humor is sometimes understated, but real. Sometimes it comes in the form of Elizabeth's acerbic language; sometimes it is a character who surprises us by her reaction. Lota and Elizabeth are awed by a stone carving of the prophet Isaiah. Then, after the awe settles, Lota says she still doesn't like Isaiah.

I've mentioned before my encounters with readers who must have constant movement, drama, cliff-hangers and physical action in their novels rather than nuance or carefully developed characters who actually have thoughts and express them. I actually like both, myself, but if you want only high action and plot, this book might not be for you. For instance, there are a number of passages, mostly short, in which Elizabeth's process of writing, even some of her thoughts about what she wants to do with a poem. I liked these passages as well as almost everything in the book, but they aren't cliffhangers.

I formed a desire to read this book when I and 100,000 other Tucsonans attended the 2011 Tucson Festival of Books two or three weeks ago. Michael Sledge was among the authors I chose to hear because he was addressing the topic of writing fiction about foreign cultures, this case Brazil (where he went for this book, very profitably, I'd say, since his Brazilian scenes are colorful and real.) I hadn't heard of Sledge or Bishop, but I left with a desire to read his book, and I'm glad I did. Others should not wait for a book festival to read this novel.

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## **Anna says**

An immensely fun (though tragic) and often moving novel about the life of Elizabeth Bishop and in particular, her years in Brazil with Lota. I was especially drawn to the way Sledge shows Bishop constructing an "ordinary" life (which is all but ordinary!) --with children and animals, the politics of Brazil, friendship, cooking.... There, she is a poet largely outside the American culture of "bustle and sell," writing few poems a year, not given to readings and conferences and the 21st century life of the artist, incorporated. This book made me want to revisit her letters and prose and, of course, her poems! I'd like to do the same with her friend, Lowell and their correspondence.

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## **Michael says**

The writing in this novel is as gorgeous and complex as both its setting and main character. Delicious and dreamy, difficult and deadly, the story of Elizabeth Bishop's time with the love of her life in a world far from her own is simple, enticing and inexorable. It is the story of life, the constant battle for self and sanity and the occasional brilliant moment of peace that makes it all seem worth it.

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## **Full Stop says**

<http://www.full-stop.net/2011/01/13/r...>

Review by Amanda Shubert

The More I Owe You is Michael Sledge's biography of the modernist poet Elizabeth Bishop – a biography told as fiction. The novel covers the decade and a half Bishop lived in Brazil with the architect and aesthete Lota de Macedo Soares, years on which Bishop's 1965 book Questions of Travel is based. The poems in Questions of Travel deal with the twin experiences of belonging and itineracy that occur equally in visiting memory as continents. This is also Sledge's main theme, but imagined through the love affair between Bishop and Soares (a subject Bishop withheld from work published in her lifetime).

Incorporating the poet's own words from her letters, journals and drafts, Sledge's novel questions the terms on which we perform biographical inquiry. But it is an awkward grafting of genres, and the seams show. It is difficult to know whether this is finally a failure of concept or of craft. Sledge's writing is clumsy and redundant, and the story moves at a glacial pace. The endless bedroom exchanges between Elizabeth and Lota are full of gratuitous sentiment and treacly expressions of affection. Moreover, Sledge cannot resist using these dialogues as opportunities to deliver little thesis statements about the novel's main themes. In an early scene, as Elizabeth and Lota begin to fall in love, Elizabeth's allergic reaction to a cashew causes her skin to break out into a rash so severe it encrusts her face and swells shut her eyes. It is a metamorphosis of sorts – her disfigurement at once a protective shell and an expression of crippling vulnerability. Lota has this to say about Elizabeth's ailment:

What is it when a toenail goes inside? Turns on itself and causes pain? Oh, yes, ingrown. Encravado means ingrown. And tesao is a word that means life, passion for life... I know what has made you so sick. It is tesão encravado, ingrown tesão. And I also know the cure.

Read more here: <http://www.full-stop.net/2011/01/13/r...>

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## **Tara Chevrestit says**

First of all, right off the bat, I gotta say, for two women that obviously made enough impact on the world in the 1950s to go down in history and even have a novel written about their romance, they sure did live very dull lives. (That's if this book is anything to go by.)

For full review and pictures, click the following link:

<http://wwwbookbabe.blogspot.com/2010/...>

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## **Michelle says**

This carefully researched novelization of the life of the poet Elizabeth Bishop and her time with Lota Soares in Brazil paints an intimate portrait of the two women and their obsessions, passions, and emotional challenges. While their passion for each other was unmistakable, their different interests and perspectives

constantly pulled at them. From Elizabeth's health issues and alcoholism, to Lota's strong political leanings, we see a relationship drawn to the brink, but pulled back together, although not without consequences. The novel provides a depth of historical detail that adds to the telling of their story. This was a wonderful debut novel, and I had the fortune of meeting the author at the Tucson Festival of Books. I look forward to his future works.

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### **Doreen Lafferty says**

I randomly chose this book and I absolutely loved it. It is a beautiful novel based on a true story. I liked how the author bounced around. Sledge did start to lose me some with all the politics, however, it was a part of Bishop's life with her partner. I now want to find Elizabeth Bishop's poetry and essays and research her more.

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### **Ilyhana Kennedy says**

The subtle movement from one character's view to the next and back again without losing any sense of who's telling the story is very skilfully handled.

The treatment of the sexual relationship between Lota and Elizabeth is both sensitive and sensuous.

The setting captivated me, provoking curiosity about Brazil and its people. Evocative descriptions of the natural world of Brazil float through the story, intimately colouring the intricate web of relationships.

It's an elegant book, reading for pleasure.

I do have a difficulty with this novel that I've expressed with others. When is a novel not a biography? A statement that it is a work of fiction in the front of the book contrasts with the references in the back of the book to an actual person, even using her name in the novel. It just doesn't wash for me that because someone is deceased, a novelist may say what they will about that person without having to verify what they are saying. This practice does not consider the descendants and their right to an authentic portrayal of their ancestor's life.

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