



A Week in October

Elizabeth Subercaseaux , Marina Harass (Translator)

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“I have never been a disciplined person and I’ve spent years not knowing what I want and not living the way I want. Perhaps now that the date and time of my death had been revealed to me, I was ready to write. But how would I begin?”

Clara Griffin, the beautiful wife of a successful Chilean architect, courageously confronts a life-threatening illness while recording her thoughts and experiences in her journal under the guise of a novel. What develops is a thinly veiled version of Clara’s own life, her disappointment with her marriage, her reminiscences of childhood, and the death that seems to surround her. When her husband discovers the notebook, he is stunned: How does she know that he had a mistress all these years? Is he really such a fatuous bore? Could it be true that his sick wife had a passionate love affair with one of his colleagues, right under his nose? Is this just a fictional story—he asks himself, turning the pages—or his wife’s very personal diary as she awaits death?

A Week in October is the first of Elizabeth Subercaseaux’s novels to be translated into English. This tale of erotic tension, deception, and resilience walks the line of suspense from page one to the unexpected, haunting ending that ponders the mysteries of a woman’s heart, where truth is a lie and a lie is truth.

A Week in October Details

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From Reader Review A Week in October for online ebook

Maggie says

I picked this up while browsing the new book shelves at the larger public library in town, mainly because the author is advertised as the great-great-great-granddaughter of Robert Schumann.

Claire is dying of cancer and her husband, an architect comes across a journal/novel she's been writing in her final days. Subercaseaux jumps between this notebook and the husband's reaction to reading the notebook and discovering a part of his wife he never knew (or which had been buried under the cares and woes of a somewhat unhappy marriage).

The flipping narrative voice is handled well enough, but I just can't seem to dislike the husband. Claire is being incredibly cruel to him and yes, he's been a bit careless and oblivious for the past ten years, but this seems like a harsh way to reveal the truth (or rather a truth). The language is lyrical, the plot predictable, but it's a decent library read.

Rodrigo says

Enfermedad terminal, matrimonio rutinario, romance extramarital, venganza póstuma. Estos son los ingredientes que la periodista Elizabeth Subercaseaux (1945) utiliza en *Una Semana de Octubre* (2010), un relato sobre la última etapa de la vida de una enferma de cáncer.

A la protagonista, Clara Griffin, le es diagnosticado un cáncer de mamas. Con la certidumbre de una muerte próxima y animada por su esposo Clemente, comienza a escribir en un cuaderno lo que parece ser un diario de vida. Clemente encuentra este cuaderno y comienza a leerlo a escondidas. Conforme avanza en su lectura, comienza a cuestionar la veracidad de lo narrado por su esposa, y debido a ciertas revelaciones vertidas en el manuscrito, esta incertidumbre se transforma en obsesión.

A partir de lo narrado en el diario quedan en evidencia los problemas de comunicación en la pareja, fruto de un matrimonio marchito por la rutina, la infidelidad y la indiferencia. Todo esto es el preludeo y posiblemente justificación para las posteriores acciones de Clara. El título, *Una Semana de Octubre*, corresponde al periodo de tiempo que duró su romance extramarital con un conocido del esposo. El romance está descrito con bastante detalle y parte de la obsesión de Clemente proviene de no saber si aquello ocurrió en la realidad o sólo en la imaginación de la autora.

Es una novela de prosa liviana, que se deja leer bastante rápido y sin forzar demasiado la concentración. Si bien es entretenida es difícil empatizar con alguno de los protagonistas, considerando que de ellos sólo se conocen sus acciones pero no sus motivaciones. Un detalle que puede ser molesto es la insistencia de la autora (o del editor) en señalar un título para cada capítulo, con lo que queda explícito el cambio de narrador. Esto medida, que parece subestimar del lector, es totalmente innecesaria dada la sencillez de la narración.

Lectura recomendable sólo para fans de la autora.

Mustafa Basree says

Two books in one! Her way of writing it is interestingly beautiful.. So intense that you just want to turn on pages to know what will happen! Suberacaseaux is telling a story of a husband that is reading his wife's journal. As he reads, he finds new things that he didn't know before about his wife. His wife, Clara, a dying woman of cancer, is submerged with the sense of hopelessness that her writings didn't make sense to her husband, Clemante. She was depressed, frustrated, and yet, a person who after many years if marry doesn't really know what she feels about her Clemante. An interesting story.. A new of a kind and A MUST READ!

Suzanne says

Set in Argentina-- I liked the surprises...

Pascale says

An interesting premise: a husband, once unfaithful but repentant now that his wife is dying of cancer, reads her diary in secret, and discovers in it things he finds hard to believe. The reader is cleverly invited to try and double guess before the character whether the diary is mostly fiction, calculated to cause grief and anger in the wayward husband. Too bad the last chapter needlessly dissipates the mystery. It's not clear to me why the author chose to remove most of the ambiguity she'd so successfully created.

Kirsten says

A man finds a notebook in which his wife has been writing - but he's not sure if it's a diary or a novel, as it seems to have elements of both. One chapter would be the wife's words, and the next would tell about the husband reading it and about his reactions. A somewhat uneven book, though it has its interesting moments. I don't really like magical realism very much, and so those parts did not sit well with me. But it's a fascinating premise - and the central mystery (is it real, or is it fiction?) kept me reading until the final "twist". 3 stars out of 5, certainly no more than that.

Fathima Cader says

Though it's not explicitly billed as such, this novel is as much a mystery as anything else. It isn't as quite as purple or cloying as the official GR blurb suggests. The writing is too precise and collected for it be anything except occasionally and self-consciously overly-rhetorical. The plot moves with discipline and smoothly quickening pace through the narrative's structure of alternating first-person narratives from Clara with third-person descriptions of Clemente. The technique worked well, reinforcing the self-reflexive nature of the content and the style. What makes it a mystery is that by the end of it, you're still not sure what was fact and what was fiction -- definitely fertile ground for anyone into literary theory.

Floral says

I liked this book, it was soft and had quite a few phrases I could relate to my own life. Perhaps in the future help me avoid making some mistakes that would affect the rest of my life. Who wants to grow old without true love and passion for life... not me!! This book isn't a big page turner or top shelf type book but it is worth reading and I think you can take away some things that would help you in real life. It also had a interesting twist at the end but then again the writer did hint to it.

Shana says

Diagnosed with terminal cancer, Clara Griffin begins writing in a notebook. Her husband, Clemente, comes across this notebook and begins reading it without her knowledge or explicit permission. The main question at hand: Is this Clara's journal, or is it a novel? It's written as if it were a personal diary and this torments Clemente as he learns more about his wife than he bargained for, and yet he still finds parts of it hard to believe. In alternating chapters, we see what Clara has written and then how her husband reacts with disbelief at times and despair at others. Up until the very last page, Subercaseaux has the reader wondering, and even after that last page, there are still so many more questions left unanswered.

Joseph Pfeffer says

A postmodern gem about a woman who finds she has breast cancer and starts writing a "novel" about her family life, an affair she may or may not have had, other details about her life. She leaves this secret diary (?) in a drawer where her errant husband is sure to find it. Subercaseaux plays with conventional notions of truth and falsehood by making the reader wonder whether the character is writing a true story or making it all up or both. The book reads so intensely it feels short, and you don't want it to end. Subercaseaux has published nothing since *A Week In October*. Where are you, Elizabeth?

Ferris says

What an intense read! This is a haunting book about a woman dying from breast cancer. The lines between reality and fantasy become blurred and have enormous impact on her spouse and what emotions and beliefs and confusions he is left with when she is gone.

As a breast cancer survivor, I have to say that her descriptions of the insidious invasion of cancer into one's life is perfectly described by this talented author. It was a powerfully emotional read. The structure, the use of language, and the deeply psychological nature of the character development were wonderful. Highly recommend this book.

Jenn says

Beautiful story. I'm not a writer, so I'll do my best here:

It was a little difficult to "get into" the story in the beginning, but it was such a quick and easy read that I was drawn in by the middle of the book for sure.

They say things are always lost in the translation, and I do believe that was the case in this book. Knowing a little about the culture, it was very easy to envision the scenery, the "exaggerations"...

I love that the author didn't tell us exactly what did occur between Clara & Hyde, it leaves a lot of room to think and ponder what her motives for the book were, what really did happen, why she told him the things she did, why she made up the things she did. I do believe that Clara and Lionel had the affair, that it was a one-time thing. I think his death in her story symbolized the end of the affair, despite her affections for him. She mentioned before that she was a liar, like her grandmother. But when she wrote that, I think she meant to say to Clemente that although she was telling him things that were true, and some not, some things were true metaphorically.

Her "revenge" was quite bold and sharp. Clara had written in her story that she still didn't know what to say to Clemente about his affair with Eliana. I think that was quite true, and before she died, she found a way to say it to him indirectly, her story. While she still appreciated Clemente and was fond of him in some ways, she was still hurt and angry by his betrayal.

This book is quite large for the 208 pages it is told on.

Bob says

Very well written/translated...a curious "character study" in that both narrators are suspect.
if you don't read Spanish, here is the author's brief bio:

Journalist and writer. She has been employed like correspondent, interviewer, columnist and columnist in a variety of publications. She was a teacher at the School of Pedriodismo at the University of Chile. She has been a correspondent of the BBC of London and the magazines Week (Colombia) and Crisis (Argentina). She is an authoress of journalistic books, of humor and literature. At present he lives in Pennsylvania, the United States

pb says

A very unique story about a woman dying of cancer who decides to keep a journal. The opening chapter is strange. But then in the second chapter we find out from the husband's viewpoint, that we had just read the opening pages of his wife's journal, or is it her novel? This is how the book goes, back and forth between the two, and like the husband, we don't know if what she's writing in the journal is true or not. She writes candidly about her husband and about past events, but then she starts writing about an affair she had last year and her husband has trouble believing some of the details. Is she making this up? The story is very well written with some great reflections on life and death. Towards the end it's hard to put down.

Jackie says

Chilean born Subercaseaux has crafted what feels like a delightfully old fashioned novel set in modern times. The formality and reserve of it makes a stark comparison to much of today's writing--and a wonderful change of pace. Clara Griffin is married to a successful but distant man--their marriage has grown stale at the very least. Then she discovers that she has cancer, and she feels the need to say things too long unsaid in the gentlest way possible--she writes a "novel" in a notebook, kept in a drawer where it seems that her husband is most likely to find it. Much of this book shows us the dance between these two people as one reveals veiled truths and the other has to absorb them without admitting he's been reading them. Truth is a fluid thing in this book--there's some "he said-she said", but the rest is indefinable to the very end. I found it to be a very interesting read.
