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Kim Fortuny. *Elizabeth Bishop: The Art of Travel*. Boulder: University of Colorado Press, 2003. 121p.

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As one who not only has traveled to several continents but has also lived overseas for almost a decade, I was immediately engaged by Kim Fortuny's *Elizabeth Bishop: The Art of Travel*. Although my familiarity with Bishop's poetry is limited to anthologized selections, I couldn't resist this study of an artist whose work is largely based on perceptions garnered beyond America's borders.

Anyone conversant with postcolonial theory has encountered the straight-talking critique of Western power by such writers as Homi Bhaba, Gayatri Spivak, and Edward Said. Fortuny makes evident in this slim volume, however, that her subject has adopted a far more indirect and subtle deconstruction of what it means to be a privileged Western observer. In fact, Fortuny sees her explication of Bishop's poetry as an overdue addition to existing criticism that misreads—perhaps *underreads* is more accurate—the poet's politically inflected oeuvre.

The book's slenderness stands out in contrast to most contemporary critical texts; Fortuny concedes in her introduction that her narrow focus on Bishop's work is intended. Information regarding Bishop's life, and in particular her lesbianism and alcoholism, is purposely skipped in order to concentrate on a close reading of three poems that earlier criticism has mostly failed to consider as politically motivated. Fortuny's use of New Critical textual scrutiny to disclose Bishop's subtle questioning of unacknowledged American colonialism is as ironic as it is effective.

In an initial chapter Fortuny briefly traces Bishop's involvement with leftist/progressive art of the '30s. The latter's conservative demeanor and appearance match an early penchant for classical form, but masks a brand of resistance so unorthodox that critics have largely overlooked it. Fortuny effectively stakes out her critical claim "to help define Bishop's radical politics in her own terms" (24).

For anyone who questions the role of aesthetics in writing calculated to convey socio-political critique, Fortuny's book exemplifies how close reading, that is, a focused consideration of how language builds meaning, can yield a poetic consciousness able to embody "what it's like to be on the outside looking in" (36). Bishop's inclusion of detail in such poems as "Over 2,000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance," and her dramatization of subjectivity in "Crusoe in England," are never without a verbal nod to the "potential historical ramifications of those same particulars" (74) at the heart of all masterful description. Fortuny demonstrates how Bishop's travel-based verse resists the comfortable pleasures of

the picturesque, offering instead foreign objects whose genealogy, if attended to by the reader, bears out Pascal's theory of the "imperceptible cause." Under Bishop's treatment, those negative tropes Westerners use to re-present the Oriental—from so-called shiftlessness to assumed promiscuity—fold back onto those who resort to such labels. Bishop, Fortuny insists, tethers particular detail or characterization to national impoverishment, suggesting through the poet's oblique approach that there may exist imperceptible links between northern privilege and southern poverty, especially in the Americas.

*Elizabeth Bishop: The Art of Travel* offers a rewarding read, as much as for its sensitive and intelligent interpretation of Bishop's poems, as for the writing of the book itself. Fortuny is a subtle thinker with a masterful command of language. Her erudition is such that teachers wishing to assign this may over-challenge undergraduates, though her chapter on "Crusoe in England" would work well if considered in conjunction, say, with Defoe's classic and Coetzee's novel *Foe*. Readers interested in Bishop as writer will benefit from Fortuny's re-vision of a modernist poet who avoids didactic statement about the West and the Rest, choosing instead to "engag[e] history elliptically" (12). If nothing else, we come away understanding there is never "complete concordance" between home and the foreign that confronts us when we travel. As Fortuny aptly puts it, "That is the beauty of it and the terms of traveling right" (59). ✱