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Título: On Elizabeth Bishop

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Precio: \$360.00

Editorial:

Año: 2015

Tema:

Edición:

Sinopsis

ISBN: 9780691154114

In this book, novelist Colm Tóibín offers a deeply personal introduction to the work and life of one of his most important literary influences—the American poet Elizabeth Bishop. Ranging across her poetry, prose, letters, and biography, Tóibín creates a vivid picture of Bishop while also revealing how her work has helped shape his sensibility as a novelist and how her experiences of loss and exile resonate with his own. What emerges is a compelling double portrait that will intrigue readers interested in both Bishop and Tóibín.

For Tóibín, the secret of Bishop's emotional power is in what she leaves unsaid. Exploring Bishop's famous attention to detail, Tóibín describes how Bishop is able to convey great emotion indirectly, through precise descriptions of particular settings, objects, and events. He examines how Bishop's attachment to the Nova Scotia of her childhood, despite her later life in Key West and Brazil, is related to her early loss of her parents—and how this connection finds echoes in Tóibín's life as an Irish writer who has lived in Barcelona, New York, and elsewhere.

Beautifully written and skillfully blending biography, literary appreciation, and descriptions of Tóibín's travels to Bishop's Nova Scotia, Key West, and Brazil, *On Elizabeth Bishop* provides a fresh and memorable look at a beloved poet even as it gives us a window into the mind of one of today's most acclaimed novelists.

Colm Tóibín is the author of eight novels, three of which have been shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize: *The Blackwater Lightship*, *The Master* (the Los Angeles Times Novel of the Year), and *The Testament of Mary*. His other novels include *Nora Webster* and *Brooklyn*. He is the Irene and Sidney B. Silverman Professor of the Humanities at Columbia University, a regular contributor to the *New York Review of Books*, and a contributing editor at the *London Review of Books*.

Review:

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"[The book's] pull on the reader is almost tidal . . . it's still impossible for a reader to resist getting sucked into the orbit of Robert Lowell, the rapaciously brilliant and royally messed-up literary lion whom Bishop considered her closest friend. The cat-and-mouse dynamic of Bishop and Lowell's correspondence remains, in Mr. Tóibín's telling, as riveting as a series on Netflix or HBO, and probably ought to become one."--Jeff Gordinier, New York Times

"Novelist Tóibín (Nora Webster) gives an intimate and engaging look at Elizabeth Bishop's poetry and its influence on his own work. . . . Tóibín is also present in the book, and his relationship to Bishop's work and admiration of her style gives the book much of its power. Whether one is familiar with Bishop's life and work or is looking to Tóibín to learn more, this book will appeal to many readers."--Publishers Weekly starred review

"An admiring critical portrait of a great American poet and a master of subtlety. . . . An inspiring appreciation from one writer to another."--Kirkus Reviews

"On Elizabeth Bishop, an unusual mixed-genre critical study/personal memoir by the celebrated Irish novelist Colm Tóibín, himself something of a writer's writer, makes a particularly welcome addition to the Princeton University Press Writers on Writers series. . . . Tóibín's sense of identification with Bishop allows not only sympathy with her work but his real insight into it. . . . [F]ew critics have dealt more revealingly than Tóibín with Bishop's habitual illusion of 'spontaneous' self-correction, her process of thinking aloud on the page. . . . [I]n some essential and large way, Tóibín gets Bishop right, and even his quirkiest interpretations illuminate something about both Bishop and himself."--Lloyd Schwartz, Arts Fuse