

## David Kalstone: On "The Fish"

The poem is filled with the strain of seeing ? not just the unrelenting pressure of making similes to "capture" the fish, but the fact that the similes themselves involve flawed instruments of vision, stained wallpaper, scratched isinglass, tarnished tinfoil. This is why, on some readings, the poem has the air of summoning up a creature from the speaker?s own inner depths ? the surviving nonhuman resources of an earlier creation, glimpsed painfully through the depredations of time and the various frail instruments we devise, historically, to see them. The "victory" that fills up the little rented boat is one that more than grammatically belongs to both sides. Like "Roosters," though without its bitterness and fear, the poem taps and identifies nonhuman sources of human energies. What makes it different from [Marianne] Moore?s animal poems is its interest in the difficulties of locating and accepting such energies.

From David Kalstone, "Logarithms of Apology," Chapter 4 in *Becoming a Poet: Elizabeth Bishop with Marianne Moore and Robert Lowell* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1989), 87.

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