Bishop Redux

**The poet’s portfolio, enlarged by ADAM KIRCH**

Some writers have an uncanny way of becoming more prolific after their deaths than they ever were while living. Elizabeth Bishop, who was born 100 years ago and taught poetry at Harvard from 1970 to 1977, published only four slim collections of poems before she died in 1979. But love for those poems—which include twentieth-century American masterpieces like “The Fish,” “Questions of Travel,” and “One Art”—has made readers eager for everything from Bishop’s pen. Her fiction and essays, several volumes of her letters, even her watercolor paintings have all been posthumously collected in books. Most controversially, in 2006, a trove of Bishop’s unpublished and unfinished poems appeared in Edgar Allan Poe and the Jukebox, edited by Alice Quinn (see “Iambic Imbroglio,” January-February 2007, page 20). Porter University Professor Helen Vendler, writing in the New Republic, voiced strong doubts about this fattening of Bishop’s carefully dieted body of work: “Had Bishop been asked whether her repudiated poems, and some drafts and fragments, should be published after her death, she would have replied, I believe, with a horrified ‘No.’”

Now, to mark Bishop’s centenary, Farrar, Straus and Giroux is adding three more titles to the list. Elizabeth Bishop and The New Yorker: The Complete Correspondence documents her decades-long relationship with the magazine that published much of her best work. And the standard collections of her poems and
prose—long familiar to readers in their salmon-pink and pale-green covers—are being replaced by new, substantially expanded editions. *Poems*, edited by Saskia Hamilton, includes everything that was in *The Complete Poems: 1927–1979*, and adds a group of “selected unfinished manuscript poems” as an appendix. As Vendler predicted, most of these 28 items add little to Bishop’s stature, though “It is marvelous to wake up together” does offer a rare glimpse of her as an erotic poet:

It is marvelous to wake up together
At the same minute: marvelous to hear
The rain begin suddenly all over the roof,
To feel the air suddenly clear
As if electricity had passed through it
From a black mesh of wires in the sky,
All over the roof the rain hisses,
And below, the light falling of kisses.

On the other hand, the “unfinished” work in *Poems* does not detract from Bishop’s masterpieces, either. Really, its purpose is to offer a tantalizing glimpse into Bishop’s poetic workshop. This effect is heightened by the way *Poems* offers facsimiles of Bishop’s manuscripts—in one case, to comic effect. In 1971, Bishop inscribed some light verse on the title page of *The Fannie Farmer Cookbook*, in which she pokes fun at Claude Levi-Strauss’s recent anthropological study, *The Raw and the Cooked*:

You won’t become a gourmet cook
By studying our Fannie’s book—
Her thoughts on Food & Keeping House
Are scarcely those of Levi-Strauss....

The *Prose* has grown even more than the *Poems* in this new edition. It incorporates the full text of a book on Brazil

Last summer, Dawn LaRochelle, J.D. ‘96, catered a 250-guest Jewish wedding in the Berkshires of western Massachusetts. The bride, the daughter of a Reform rabbi, was a vegetarian and many of the groom’s ultra-Orthodox family kept strictly kosher.

“When the bride said she wanted an all-dairy wedding, my heart sank,” says LaRochelle, owner of Bete’ Avon!, the only kosher caterer in the region. “Most seriously observant Jews don’t consider it a celebration unless there is some sort of meat.”

LaRochelle, who is Jewish and keeps “nominally kosher” at home, founded Bete’ Avon! (Hebrew for *bon appetit*; http://betavonkoshercatering.com) in 2007 to serve a niche market: a substantial local Jewish population, including summering New Yorkers, that wants to keep kosher despite the lack of Orthodox stores, restaurants, or synagogues nearby. (She also runs the non-kosher Apogee Catering and Perigea, a restaurant in South Lee.)

After five fairly uninspiring years practicing law in Manhattan, she and her husband, Dennis LaRochelle, J.D. ’96, moved to the Berkshires right after 9/11. When the kosher-catering idea hit, she was 36, had three little boys, and had never cooked professionally. She had been her family’s chef growing up, however, and wined and dined classmates in Cambridge, co-founding the Harvard Law School Food and Wine Society. “Despite a lack of knife skills,” she says, “I can make anything taste and look fantastic.”

Annual sales of kosher food in the United States are about $14 billion; most of the consumers are not Jewish, but Muslims, Seventh-day Adventists, vegetarians, those with lactose or gluten intolerance, and health-conscious people who believe kosher food is of higher quality because it is more heavily vetted. Beyond the familiar rules—“No pork or shellfish,” “No meat and dairy served together”—*kashrut* laws can be complicated, and not just in reference to what parts of which animals to eat, who does the butchering, and when and how. Grape products made by non-Jews are prohibited, for example, including baking powders that contain cream of tartar, a by-product of winemaking. “But any cuisine in the world can be prepared under kosher law,” LaRochelle avers, and with the right ingredients.

Last summer’s client eventually decided that every dairy item at the wedding had to pass an even stricter measure of *kashrut*—*cho-low Yisroel*—followed by about 1 percent of Jews. “It means that at certain parts of the processing of the dairy products, only an observant Jew was involved,” says LaRochelle. “The products are very hard to find and very expensive—and the bride wanted a lot of different cheeses.” So LaRochelle drove for hours through traffic and summer heat to the Orthodox Jewish community of Crown Heights, Brooklyn, to the only qualified store whose cheese met her own standards for taste. She also had to acquire new wedding china, “because
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when she was sick in Stillman Infirmary.

“No one else she knew was in town,” Schwartz recalls, “and I came to see her every day, all day, bringing her mail, and just chatting about anything but poetry: movies, records, mutual acquaintances.” Later, Schwartz suggested that he write his Ph.D. thesis on Bishop’s work: “To my surprise, because she never talked about her work, even with friends, she not only agreed (I think it was her motherly instinct), but also offered to meet with me regularly and answer any questions I had about her poems!”

Bishop was often more self-revealing in prose than in verse; her stories “blur the distinction between fiction and mem-

*And the War Came*

**At its sesquicentennial, a fresh, revealing narrative of the advent of the Civil War**

by Michael T. Bernath

WE ARE IN THE MIDST of a perfect storm of new Civil War books. With the bicentennial of Abraham Lincoln’s birth in 2009 and this year’s sesquicentennial of the beginning of the conflict itself, historians have kicked into overdrive, threatening to overwhelm even the most voracious readers. Still, Adam Goodheart’s engrossing *1861: The Civil War Awakening* will not be lost in the crowd. Many already know Goodheart from his frequent—and these days, it seems, almost daily—historical pieces in the *New York Times*, but this book permits him to demonstrate the full range of his narrative powers.*

Its title notwithstanding, the book is actually the history of 10 crucial months across two calendar years, October 1860 to July 1861, as the nation—soon to become two nations—teetered on and then crossed over the verge of revolution. Rather than begin his story with the firing of the first shot on April 12, Goodheart purposefully opens his book months earlier as Major Robert Anderson raises the Union flag over Fort Sumter, in Charleston Harbor, following his garrison’s secret removal to the fort in the dead of night, under the noses of hostile and heavily armed South Carolinians. Goodheart’s reasons for doing so say much about the book as a whole.

For one, he wants to give the United States, not the Confederate States, the initiative in the forthcoming struggle for na-