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Understanding As Seeing: Conventional Cognitive Metaphor and Literary Tradition in Elizabeth Bishop's "Sandpiper"

*Yes, all my life I have lived and behaved very much like that
sandpiper – just running along the edges of different countries
and continents, "looking for something."¹*

Relying on the findings of cognitive sciences we might say that the history of human thought on understanding and reasoning is recorded in our conventionalized conceptual metaphor describing intellection in terms of vision. Such a mapping engages our knowledge of seeing organized into a skeletal pattern called a "schema."² It takes personal history to extend, elaborate and

¹Elizabeth Bishop's acceptance speech delivered at Norman on 9 Apr. 1976, published as: E. Bishop, "Laureate's Words of Acceptance," *World Literature Today* 51 (Winter 1977): 12.

²Cf.: G. Lakoff, and M. Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (U Chicago P, 1980); G. Lakoff, and M. Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh. Cognitive Science Brings to Philosophy the Embodied Mind, the Cognitive Unconscious, and Metaphorical Thought* (U of Chicago P, 1999); G. Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal about the Mind* (U of Chicago P, 1987); G. Lakoff, and M. Turner, *More than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor* (U Chicago P, 1989); M. Johnson, *The Body in the Mind. The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason* (U of Chicago P, 1987); M. Johnson, *Moral Imagination: Implications of Cognitive Science for Ethics* (U Chicago P, 1993); E. Sweetser, *From*

reevaluate this legacy. In her poem entitled "Sandpiper" Elizabeth Bishop reconstitutes the concept of seeing, structured by the detailed nature of our bodies and our brains as well as by our everyday physical and cultural functioning in the world. Arguing against the Romantic employment of the SEEING schema, which, for instance, conveyed Blake's ideal of visionary thinking and Emerson's musings on the role of the poet, Bishop defines her own poetic positioning by shifting the emphasis from transcendental vision, large scale and central vantage point to ordinary looking, small detail and periphery. Her cognitive model of THINKING becomes KEEN OBSERVATION OF DETAIL, exemplified by Darwin's "endless heroic observations" (Bishop's phrasing). The cognitivist framework and the record of the poem's drafting³ help reveal the story of this singular conceptualization.

Sandpiper

The roaring alongside he takes for granted,
and that every so often the world is bound to shake.
He runs, he runs to the south, finical, awkward,
in a state of controlled panic, a student of Blake.

- ⁵ The beach hisses like fat. On his left, a sheet
of interrupting water comes and goes
and glazes over his dark and brittle feet.
He runs, he runs straight through it, watching his toes.

Etymology to Pragmatics. Metaphorical and Cultural Aspects of Semantic Structure (Cambridge UP, 1990).

³E. Bishop, drafts of "Sandpiper," box 73.4, The Elizabeth Bishop Papers, Vassar Rare Books and Manuscripts. The drafts of "Sandpiper" are not labeled, instead the pages on which Bishop tries out different versions of the poem are numbered from 22 to 33. These numbers will be used to indicate the particular compositional stages of "Sandpiper."

– Watching, rather, the spaces of sand between them,
 10 where (no detail too small) the Atlantic drains
 rapidly backwards and downwards. As he runs,
 he stares at the dragging grains.

The world is a mist. And then the world is
 minute and vast and clear. The tide
 15 is higher or lower. He couldn't tell you which.
 His beak is focussed; he is preoccupied,

looking for something, something, something.
 Poor bird, he is obsessed!

The millions of grains are black, white, tan, and gray,
 20 mixed with quartz grains, rose and amethyst.

Bishop's sandpiper is rushing along a sandy beach and, more importantly, looking: watching and staring, but also "looking for something, something, something" (l. 17). This rich image can be treated as a specific entailment of the conventionalized conceptual mapping: UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING, which involves the SEEING schema as a source domain.⁴ The SEEING schema has slots, i.e. "well-differentiated components" of our knowledge of seeing, which are either required: the VIEWER, VISUAL FIELD, which further implies CENTRE and PERIPHERY, OBJECT OF PERCEPTION, VIEWPOINT, PERSPECTIVE, LIGHT; or optional: IMPEDIMENTS TO VISION and INSTRUMENTS AUGMENTING VISION.⁵ The metaphoric projection of SEEING upon UNDERSTANDING involves also relations, such as the FOCUSING of the

⁴Cf. Master Metaphor List <<http://cogsci.berkeley.edu/methapors>>: "the English word 'see' is typically used, not to simply imply contact with the retina, but to imply becoming aware through vision, i.e. see . . . to know what is where by looking."

⁵Lakoff and Turner 61.

VIEWER on the OBJECT OF PERCEPTION, and properties, such as VISUAL ACUITY.

The complexity of the SEEING schema can be realized more fully, when we notice that VISION itself depends on the source domain MANIPULATION, therefore SEEING IS TOUCHING, or VISION IS MANIPULATION.⁶ Physical manipulation lends the SEEING domain a seminal relation of CONTROL – “the ability to pick out one stimulus at will from many.”⁷ The MANIPULATION domain features importantly in Bishop’s “Sandpiper,” enriching the conceptual hierarchy of the conventional mappings: MANIPULATION → VISION → KNOWLEDGE, which can in turn be subsumed under a larger conceptual system: the MIND-AS-BODY SYSTEM.⁸ Within this system, THINKING is understood as PHYSICAL FUNCTIONING: perceiving, manipulating objects, but also moving and eating – metaphors inconsistent with one another. This inconsistency testifies to the richness of our experiences of the THINKING domain,⁹ conventionalized into the intricacies of the conceptual apparatus Bishop shares with other members of her culture. As an individual and poet, she can endow this system with new values by elaborating, extending and questioning – cognitive processes evident in the poem. Since VISION is central to the MIND-AS-BODY SYSTEM, Bishop’s private conception of SEEING will colour her metaphorical mappings into the domain of UNDERSTANDING.

To Bishop, observation constitutes the very essence of poetry and life. It is enough to read through her poetry, letters, journals, interviews to find innumerable proofs of her unfailing attention to the process of seeing, with its two indispensable prop-

⁶O. Jäkel “The Metaphorical Concept of Mind: MENTAL ACTIVITY IS MANIPULATION” (Duisburg: L.A.U.D., 1993). Cf.: Lakoff, *Women*; Sweetser.

⁷Sweetser 38.

⁸Cf.: Lakoff and Johnson, *Philosophy*.

⁹Lakoff and Turner 52; Lakoff and Johnson, *Philosophy*.

erties: acuity and accuracy, which should also characterize poetic composition. "Writing poetry is a way of life, not a matter of testifying but of experiencing. It is not the way in which one goes about interpreting the world, but the very process of sensing it."¹⁰ This process of sensing the world, experiencing it, has its demands: "A friend once remarked that it must be painful to observe so much so closely. She responded: 'It would be painful for you, but life would be absolutely impossible if I didn't. It's my way of getting through life,'" relates Alice Methfessel, Bishop's partner of the last nine years, in a letter to Helen Muchnic,¹¹ mutual friend. Focussed observation can reveal the world's treasures:

The binoculars were delivered right to the front door about fifteen minutes ago and they are wonderful. I adjusted them immediately and it is just too bad there aren't any interesting ships on the sea at the moment. However, I have examined an ancient Brazilian Navy Cruiser from bow to stern, and a couple of Portuguese fishing boats and a group of fat ladies playing bridge or something on the beach – all look wonderful, – the boats have links in every chain, meshes in every fish-net, and the ladies have hairs on their arms. The world has wonderful details if you can get it just a little closer than usual.¹²

Bishop's students vividly remember her emphasis on disciplined visual perception: "The poet's eye, like that of the painter, has to be trained and sharp to notice the fascinating differences between things. Some of my students write poems in which they can easily substitute one word, one object for another. You've seen Ver-

¹⁰Bishop in 1970, in: P. Whitman Prenshaw, ed., *Conversations with Elizabeth Bishop* (UP Mississippi, 1996) 51.

¹¹A. Methfessel, letter to H. Muchnic, 23 Feb. 1977, box 33.10.

¹²E. Bishop, letter to Dr Baumann, 18 June 1965, box 23.5.

meer's paintings. The objects in them are very precisely observed and rendered."¹³

Bishop's concentration on the visual and conceptual vividness of objects corresponds to her distrust for abstraction: "I'm not good at 'ideas.' It's like being tone deaf" (in a letter to Anne Stevenson, who was writing the first book-length study of Bishop's poetry). This remark, quoted by the poet's biographer Brett Millier,¹⁴ shows Bishop defending her poems against the accusations of limited range and lack of involvement. In her opinion, the engaged male poetry frequently disregarded the detail in pursuit of larger issues, and "Sandpiper" was her poetic expression of this conviction.¹⁵ Careful to avoid generalizations about gender and poetry, Bishop was inclined to see the interest in detail as resulting from typically female preoccupations:

But it is my chief complaint against the opposite sex, anyway – with the exception of the poets and painters – they don't *see* things. They're always having ideas & theories, and not noticing the detail at hand . . . I have a small theory of my own about this – that women have been *confined*, mostly – and in confinement details count. – They *have* to see the baby's ear; sewing *makes* you look closely. – They've had to do so much appeasing they do feel moods quickly, etc. There may be nothing in it, and as I said, – it doesn't apply to artists, or not to good ones.¹⁶

¹³Wesley Wehr in: G. Fountain, and P. Brazeau, *Remembering Elizabeth Bishop: An Oral Bibliography* (U of Massachusetts P, 1994) 213.

¹⁴B.C. Millier, *Elizabeth Bishop. Life and the Memory of It* (U of California P, 1993).

¹⁵Cf. Millier 334.

¹⁶Bishop in her letter to Ilse and Kit Barker, 6 Feb. 1965, p. 511 in: V. Harrison, "Recording a Life: Elizabeth Bishop's Letters to Ilse and Kit Barker," *Contemporary Literature* 24: 498–517.

The good male poets who, like Emerson, believed that seeing and vantage point defined the role of the poet¹⁷ merit attention and systematic argument. In *Elizabeth Bishop: Romantic Revisionism* Kathleen Brogan (1989) traces Bishop's creative critique not only of the father of American Transcendentalism, but also of Wordsworth, Eliot, Pound and Stevens.¹⁸ Their transcending vision as well as ambitions of large scale and central positioning are subverted by Bishop's emphasis on ordinary looking, small detail and periphery.¹⁹

Bishop turns the cognitive model THINKING IS PERCEIVING into CREATIVE THINKING IS KEEN OBSERVATION OF

¹⁷Cf. the most representative quotations from Emerson's essays, "Nature" and "The Poet" (emphasis added throughout): "I become a *transparent eye-ball*" (324), "In the tranquil landscape, and *especially in the distant line of the horizon*, man beholds somewhat as beautiful as his nature" (324), "*Each particle is a microcosm*, and faith fully renders the likeness of the world" (which echoes Blake's "Auguries of Innocence," the poem Bishop's "Sandpiper" evokes), "*The poet is the sayer, the namer, and represents beauty. He is a sovereign, and stands on the centre*" (388) (*The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, 2nd ed. shorter (New York: Norton, 1986) 321–355, 386–403).

¹⁸K. Brogan, "Elizabeth Bishop: Romantic Revisionism," PhD thesis, Yale U.

¹⁹Bishop scholarship abounds in discussion of Bishop's eye and the observed detail in her poetry. In 1946 Randall Jarrell aptly summarized the main concerns of her first published collection, *North & South*: "all her poems have written underneath, I have seen it" (in L. Schwartz, and S. Estess, eds., *Elizabeth Bishop and Her Art* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1983) 181, reprinted from *Partisan Review* Sept./Oct. 1946). David Kalstone, author of the first definitive study of Bishop's poetry, significantly entitles his review of *Complete Poems*: "All Eye" (1970, box 92.4). These two commentaries, written by Bishop's friends during her lifetime – and, what is more important, delivered by the critics whose perceptions she respected – delineate the scope of scholarly research on Bishop's seeing and poetry. Bishop herself famously distinguished between "vision" and "look" in her "Poem," explaining that "'visions' is / too serious a word" (E. Bishop, *Complete Poems* (New York: Farrar; London: Chatto, 1983) 177).

DETAIL. The structure of the KEEN OBSERVATION OF DETAIL schema is less skeletal than that of the SEEING schema: the VIEWER is endowed with keenness or even passion for observing; VISUAL FIELD is primarily limited to a small region; OBJECT OF PERCEPTION is frequently an everyday object, small in size; VIEWPOINT is peripheral; PERSPECTIVE implies closeness, at times the distance between the viewer and object is too close, which affects the SCALE. INSTRUMENTS for "shortening" the perceptual distance and augmenting the scale of observed objects are no longer optional. This perceptual intensity is translated into the relations of the KEEN OBSERVATION OF DETAIL schema, where FOCUSING is complemented by: SPOTTING A DETAIL (cf. VISION IS MANIPULATION: picking out one stimulus); EXPLORING THE OBJECT for more details (cf. "watch" as visual surveillance and control); IDENTIFYING (cf. CATEGORIZING IS SEEING). Specifying these relations allows us to define a few more required properties: attentiveness (to detail), control, accuracy, patience, concentration.

Having sketched out Bishop's SEEING schema we are better prepared to investigate its deployment in the poem. Here the VIEWER slot is filled in by the sandpiper, presented as a thinking creature, even if somewhat unreceptive: The roaring alongside he takes for granted (l. 1). The personification helps Bishop highlight the THINKING domain; it shifts the emphasis from Nature in general to the (human) mind in particular, thus preparing the ground for the elements of the MIND-AS-BODY SYSTEM that Bishop is going to introduce.

Unexpectedly, Bishop enters the domain of PERCEPTION not with the mention of seeing, but with the implication of hearing: the bird can hear the roaring of the ocean rather than see the expenses of its waters. Or can he really hear it, as he takes it for granted? As usual Bishop complicates our reading: since the THINKING-AS-PERCEIVING metaphor allows the projection

BEING PERCEPTIVE IS HEARING, the sandpiper's dull attention maps onto his receptiveness. Our inferences about the bird can be used in reasoning about the target domain of CREATIVE THINKING: the sandpiper's attitude can be mapped onto the attitude of the CREATIVE THINKER. Interestingly, in an unfinished poem Robert Lowell dedicated to Elizabeth Bishop,²⁰ we might find a hint how to interpret the ocean's sound:

Dear Elizabeth,
 Half New-Englander, half fugitive
 Nova Scotian, wholly Atlantic sea-board –
 Unable to settle anywhere, or live
 Our usual roaring sublime.

The loudness and commonality (“usual”), not befitting “sublime,” render this magnificent quality awkward, unable to be lived. Yet “roaring” defines this predicament. Bishop’s poetic debate with the Romantic tradition of the sublime could justify our assumption that the increased sound might correspond to the heightened thought and diction of the Romantic writers. Bishop invites such a correspondence by summoning the figure of William Blake – she pictures the sandpiper as a student of Blake (l. 4) (or: a “Follower of Blake” and, alternatively, “reader of Blake” on Page 24). The draft seems to link the visionary power of the English poet with the VIEWER’s property: his obsession. The earlier pronouncements: “quite obsessed,” “obsessed,” (Page 22) “Oh, he is obsessed!” (Page 24) do not keep pretences of the final version, which passes the judgment specifically about the bird: Poor bird, he is obsessed! (l. 18). Actually the whole poem might have started off with this idea of obsessive preoccupation, if we are to believe the spatial sequence of Bishop’s notes. Moreover, Page 22 shows

²⁰Qtd. in I. Hamilton, *Robert Lowell. A Biography* (Random House, 1982) 135.

the poet considering *sand*-obsession: she twice comes back to the phrase: “sand-obsessed,” each time accompanied by the mention of staring into his/the “sand-world.” The whole page is covered with attempts at combining the colours: “white, tan, black, gray” of the millions of “little grains,” which fill in the OBJECT OF PERCEPTION slot. However, our knowledge about the relation of FOCUSING in the SEEING schema lets us infer the discrepancy between the act of intense looking and the innumerable quantities that demand visual concentration. The sheer impossibility of meeting such a perceptual challenge allows us to import negative evaluation into the CREATIVE THINKING domain: indeed, the bird proves obsessed.

Obviously, Bishop’s references to “sand-world” and “grains” make us recollect William Blake’s poem “Auguries of Innocence”:

To see a World in a Grain of Sand
 And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,
 Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
 And Eternity in an hour.²¹

Very significantly, the viewer in Blake’s famous quatrain investigates closely only a single grain of sand. The intensity of this singular observation enables him “to see a World” in it, consistently with Blake’s belief in imaginative vision rather than physical eyesight, the demeaning affliction of the fallen human kind. “I question not my corporeal or Vegetative Eye any more than I would Question a Window concerning a sight: I look thro it & not with it.”²² Therefore, for “the Bard!/ Who Present, Past & Future sees,” looking at a sand grain means looking through it to the world of unified

²¹W. Blake, “Auguries of Innocence,” *Collins Albatross Book of Verse*, ed. L. Untermeyer (London: Collins, 1972) 289–292.

²²W. Blake, “A Vision of the Last Judgment” (1810), *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 5th ed., vol. 2 (New York: Norton, 1986) 78–80.

imaginative perception: “to the Eyes of the Man of Imagination, Nature is Imagination itself. As a man is, So he Sees. As the Eye is formed, such are its Powers.”²³ By such visionary standards, the sandpiper’s running and staring at millions of grains of the “sand-world” must appear finical, awkward (l. 3) and panicky. Surely the student has not learnt enough from his master; or, possibly, the student’s awkwardness reflects onto the master’s theory put to practice. A state of controlled panic (l. 4) results from the disparity between the VISUAL FIELDS, OBJECTS OF PERCEPTION as well as their arrangements affected by VIEWPOINTS and PERSPECTIVE. In the VISIONARY SEEING schema structured by Blake, the visual scope can be limited because, thanks to the central vantage point, the eye can travel over a long distance to transcend it, as the object of perception surpasses the visual field. Therefore, it is possible to “Hold Infinity” secured and stable “in the palm of your hand.” In the SEEING schema structured by Bishop, the peripheral changing viewpoint (the bird runs, runs [l. 3] along the coastlines) expands the visual scope, though the viewer, a student of Blake, insists on narrowing it down to properly explore infinity in a detail. Instead, he ends up staring at infinite details that constitute the whole “sand-world.” And his efforts to adjust the perspective seem at first to fail, as he is looking for something, something, something (l. 17) rather than looking through the grains or at least at them.²⁴

²³W. Blake, “Four Letters on Sight & Vision” (1799), *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 5th ed., vol. 2: 81–82.

²⁴Discussing the components of the UNDERSTANDING-AS-SEEING metaphor, Mark Johnson (Johnson, *Moral Imagination*) lists EYE (ORGAN OF SEEING) rather than VIEWER. Corresponding to MIND’S EYE in the UNDERSTANDING domain, this slot is profiled within Blake’s and Emerson’s cognitive models – thanks to such a metonymic short-cut the eye epitomizes the power of imaginative vision, with which the poet-viewer is endowed. In Bishop’s “Sandpiper” the eye features only indirectly in the bird’s various acts of seeing; thus

Bishop's viewer, however, is not completely lost, even if he may be distracted. Bishop mounts obstacles in front of him, filling the IMPEDIMENTS TO VISION slots with scorching heat (The beach hisses like fat [l. 5]), interrupting water that comes and goes (l. 6), the Atlantic dragging the grains backwards and downwards (ll. 10–13). The image of the burning-hot beach helps profile the sandpiper's feet: he needs movement to bear the scorching. Here we might be puzzled – what connects feet with seeing? It seems that the running along can prove the bird's persistence in looking, not weakened by the adversary conditions, even if at first we might presume that the sandpiper is forced to move along by his unfavourable vantage point. With such deliberate ambiguities Bishop enriches the poem's basic metaphorical structure: if the heat of the sand is unbearable, then the interrupting water can bring relief as well as disruption; glazing the bird's *brittle* feet (emphasis added), the ocean paradoxically covers them with a protective layer. Thus line 8, He runs, he runs straight through it, watching his toes, conveys the sandpiper's determination, control and caution. Bishop skilfully combines the metaphor THINKING IS PERCEIVING with the THINKING-AS-MOVING mapping, extending the two to embrace the conceptual structure of watching as not only looking down/regarding, but minding his toes (cf. "watch" as manipulation and control), and to employ the concept of STRAIGHT PATH and DIRECT MOTION AS A LINE OF THINKING THAT IS RATIONAL. Such an entailment allows us to derive new understandings of the target domain, as it establishes an opposition to the VISIONARY THINKING that relies on stasis and transcendence. The RATIONAL THINKING, though initially scary to a student of Blake and awkward in its inherent finical search, involves repeated changes of the vantage point,

structured, Bishop's VIEWER slot corresponds more readily to her deliberate shift from "vision" to "look."

scale, perspective – in short, it is a DYNAMIC SEEING. Its energy flows from the engagement of the viewer conscious of the limitations to his vision.²⁵ No longer “a transparent eye-ball,” he needs to resort to various means in order to assist his visual perception. These, in turn, help him forget the roaring of the sublime – too busy to listen, the viewer cannot take too seriously the conviction that the world is bound to shake (l. 2) (cf. the conventional entailment of the THINKING-AS-PERCEIVING metaphor: TAKING SERIOUSLY IS LISTENING; also Blake’s belief in revolution as the purifying violence, which could be implied by the roaring and shaking).

Under such circumstances, visual perception can be assisted by object manipulation – instead of the eye focussed; the beak is focussed (l. 16). SEEING (cf. he stared used by Bishop in line 12, where “to stare” means “to look with one’s eyes wide open”; OED) evolves into grasping (cf. THINKING AS OBJECT MANIPULATION), the scope of the immediate visual field is drastically narrowed down. With Bishop’s qualification, the act of watching concentrates now on the spaces of sand between the sandpiper’s toes (l. 9), where the Atlantic drags the grains (ll. 10–12), decreasing the sureness of grasp. As if the poet deliberately complicated the mapping IDEAS ARE MANIPULABLE OBJECTS, the grains are simultaneously manipulated both by the sandpiper and the ocean. What is more, the two manners of manipulation are contradic-

²⁵It should be clarified that the term “rational” does not imply scientific thought conventionally perceived as narrow-minded in comparison with imaginative seeing (cf. the typical Romantic opposition). Here we have to bear in mind Darwin’s “endless heroic observations” as Bishop’s model. Though this kind of seeing may be referred to as “rational” (actually Bishop mentions Darwin to prove that she “can’t believe we are wholly irrational”), it is at the same time characterized by the property called by Bishop “a self-forgetful, perfectly useless concentration,” which affords “glimpses of the always more successful surrealism of everyday life” (Elizabeth Bishop to Anne Stevenson, 8 Jan. 1964, in: Millier 346).

tory: the examination is opposed by the incessant process of draining (cf. the sense of “drain” as “deprive of possessions, resources, spiritual strength,” also the phrase “brain drain”; OED). The confrontation with the ocean’s draining strength requires effort: in the drafts the bird “peers into” the grains (Page 26) or “gazes into” them (Page 29). Not only do these verbs of seeing in themselves connote utmost concentration and, possibly, exertion; the accompanying preposition “into,” which directs the perceptual exploration deep inside the bounded region of the sand spaces the sandpiper is watching (cf. VISUAL FIELDS ARE CONTAINERS / BOUNDED REGIONS), profiles the probing movement of the mind. The preposition may as well describe the movement of the beak that “drills” the sand surface looking for something, something, something. The triple repetition in line 17 may refer to the sandpiper’s hurried search; it may convey his confusion at the multitude of “little grains” to be observed. Most importantly, however, it represents iconically the bird’s pecking, his repeated grasping, lifting, examining, identifying, putting aside, looking around for another sample – the activities constituting Bishop’s “timorous pecking for subsistence.” Naturally the body and the mind need to acquire new resources to replace those taken away by the ocean’s drainage.

Interestingly, in Bishop’s drafts the sandpiper focuses on one more property of sand grains apart from their colours – on Page 30 and Page 31 he is looking:

for something live, something living,
something to eat, –

His concentration on food is instinctive and natural; we cannot really treat it as a symptom of obsession. Maybe for this reason the poet has given up the mention of eating in the poem’s final version. However, the eating could have been reconciled with the THINK-

ING IS PERCEIVING and OBJECT MANIPULATION metaphors, since within the MIND-AS-BODY SYSTEM there functions another mapping: ACQUIRING IDEAS IS EATING. Its concern is a well-functioning mind,²⁶ the property of the viewer at stake in Bishop's poem. The mind, just as the body, requires the proper type of food – can it be found among the grains, in the grains or in a single grain? What is obsession: envisioning a world in a grain of sand, or exploring details to supposedly differentiate millions of similar sand grains?

Bishop withholds a straightforward answer, as usual inviting us to contemplate more than one side of an issue. The poem's closing image of sand grains mixed with quartz grains, which patiently enumerates the six colours, can be read as the entailment sanctioning the combination of the two metaphors: KNOWING IS SEEING and THINKING IS OBJECT MANIPULATION. Bishop modifies the conventionalized mapping: ANALYSING IDEA IS TAKING APART OBJECTS, filling the OBJECT slot with the substance: sand, and – to achieve a "fine-grain" presentation – rendering it countable. Such a conceptual strategy allows cognitive action of picking out and distinguishing between what seemed homogeneous mass. The amethyst, which Bishop saves till the end so that we can spot it as the last object/word/concept of the poem, is indeed a treasured gem. The regular quatrains guide us to see it as the equivalent of something: the viewer's search seems finally satisfied, even if (we know that) he will shortly run along to pick out yet another grain.

²⁶Cf. Lakoff and Johnson, *Philosophy*.