

John Millington Synge's Riders to the Sea in Terms of Epistemology

Şebnem KAYA*

Abstract

Deprivation from the benefits of modern technology and the tools of communication makes the characters in John Millington Synge's *Riders to the Sea* (1904) turn to such ways of generating knowledge as testimony, perception, memory, and intuition in order to learn about what goes on in the Aran Islands as well as the big world beyond them. Nonetheless, when analysed, the supposed sources of knowledge they seem to depend on cannot prove to be thoroughly reliable, nor can they satisfactorily interrelate and lead to the formulation of a comprehensive epistemology synthesising all these sources because of the inconsistencies within and among themselves. Accordingly, it appears that the inhabitants of the Aran Islands in the play are doomed to live in an atmosphere of uncertainty.

Key Words: John Millington Synge, *Riders to the Sea*, epistemology, testimony, perception, memory, intuition

Özet

John Millington Synge'in *Riders to the Sea* (1904) adlı oyununda ele alınan Aran adaları sakinleri, modern teknoloji ve iletişim araçlarının sunduğu nimetlerden yoksun olmaları dolayısıyla adalarda ve adaların ötesindeki büyük dünyada neler olup bittiğini öğrenebilmek için tanıklık, algı, hafıza ve sezgi gibi yollara başvurumaktadırlar. Ancak incelendiklerinde, bu sözde bilgi kaynaklarının yeterince güvenilir olmadıkları ve hem kendi içlerindeki hem de aralarındaki tutarsızlıklar sebebiyle kapsamlı bir bilgi bütünü oluşturacak şekilde birbirleriyle ilişkilendirilip birleştirilemeyecekleri ortaya çıkmaktadır. Bu nedenle, oyun karakterleri bir belirsizlik ortamında yaşamaya mahkum gibi görünmektedirler.

Anahtar Kelimeler: John Millington Synge, *Riders to the Sea*, bilgi kuramı, tanıklık, algı, hafıza, sezgi

Arrival at the remote Aran Islands, which lie off the west coast of Ireland, is known as especially difficult because the boats have to sail "according to the tide" (Synge, 1979:3) "often in the mist and fog which conceal [. . .] the dreary and desolate rock of the islands" (Gerstenberger, 1990:9). The islanders portrayed in *Riders to the Sea* (1904)—John Millington Synge's only play set in Aran—lead dismal lives as they are totally surrounded by the sea. This "harsh and alien environment" (Davy, 1996:40) not only keeps the characters widely separate from the mainland but also denies them the

* Yrd.Doç.Dr., Hacettepe Üniversitesi, Edebiyat Fakültesi, İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Bölümü Öğretim Üyesi

benefits of modern technology and tools of communication whereby they could possibly learn about the happenings both in their unfrequented piece of land and the big world beyond it. Taking this state of deprivation into consideration, this article analyses *Riders to the Sea* with regard to epistemology, “the philosophical subarea that focuses on the nature, extent, and origin of human knowledge” (Brook and Stainton, 2001:1), and tries to find an answer to a traditional epistemological question, namely how knowledge is acquired, through an examination of some of the sources or ways of reaching knowledge such as testimony, perception, memory, and intuition. In so doing, it argues that these sources, none of which can capture knowledge on its own, have to rely on and complete one another while their incompatibility dictates leave almost no room for cooperation. Accordingly, the possibility of arriving at a reliable knowledge of the world by means of the aforementioned sources characterised by deficiencies and inconsistencies within and among themselves is treated with skepticism.

At the start of the play, instead of directly observing everything for themselves, two of the island folk, Cathleen and her younger sister Nora, ground their knowledge on testimony which is, according to Ross, “any verbalized reporting of a purported state of affairs where the reporter intends that the hearer (reader, viewer, etc.) will take in on his report that the state of affairs is as reported” (qtd. in Sosa, 1991:219). They resort to the verbal testimony of the young village priest who, despite the wind and rough seas, does not stop their brother Bartley from sailing to the mainland, more specifically to Connemara, with the assertion that “the Almighty God won’t leave her [Bartley’s mother Maurya] destitute [. . .] with no son living” (397). Acting on apodeictic reasoning, the girls do not hesitate to accept the priest’s performative utterance which makes a promise on the part of God. Since he is a representative of the Church and a public figure, they take his institutional credentials as a sufficient indicator of his credibility. Actually, whether the priest satisfies “the authoritarian criterion of prestige,” that is “the reputation which a man bears for honesty and insight” and which “is a real and proper criterion of the degree of faith to be given to his testimony” (Montague, 1962:41), is a mystery; nobody knows if he has previously been a reliable source of information. Yet probably in virtue of “the credible-unless-otherwise indicated view of testimony” (Audi, 1998:136), which means the same as stating that priests are trustworthy so long as there is no reason to believe in the opposite, the receivers of his testimony have confidence in his words. What is more, being young, he does not satisfy, in Montague’s terms, “the authoritarian criterion of age” (1962:41), either. Irrespective of this fact, nonetheless, the girls credit him with truthfulness, for the church he represents dates from the distant past and is a great authority with its dogmas. In other words, he is the spokesman of a very old institution, “a treasure-house of spiritual experiences, and he who can contemplate it without a thrill has a dull and meagre soul” (Montague, 1962:43). The girls do not raise doubts about the truth of the priest’s words also because as a testifier he appeals to the recipients’ expectations by giving them faint traces of hope. As Bartley’s sisters, they cannot assume an entirely selfless or disinterested attitude; they are disposed to accept and interpret the given from their own vantage point. However, this highly pragmatic view, which alleviates the effects of life’s adversities, is forsaken at the discovery that the priest’s assertion can only be contingently true. To be

more accurate, as long as Bartley is alive, the substantial force the girls tend to find in what the priest articulates may have a relieving effect on their agitated souls; nevertheless, when Bartley is knocked off the cliffs by a pony, things turn out differently to accentuate that there is no unchanging truth. The priest's claim, which once sounded unproblematic, now causes confusions about his competence and about the validity of testimony. It becomes obvious that the priest, in his intentional state, sees things the way he wishes them to be, not as they really are, and forces the harsh realities of the solid material world to conform to his rather optimistic ontological point of view which stresses his belief in God. Hence, the failure of the unlucky guess he makes leaves the girls with a frustrated hope and brings them to question whether his testimony is worthy of their acceptance. Nora, using her capacity to remember, asks: "Didn't the young priest say the Almighty God wouldn't leave her destitute with no son living?" (399), and Maurya's response, "It's little the like of him knows of the sea" (399-400), is a lucid expression of the truth that excessive reliance on testimony, which provides only secondary knowledge based on someone else's knowledge, is dangerous. It may be possible to pass knowledge, as memetics underline, from one subject to another; *meme*, in other words, the knowledge transmitted in this way, may proliferate by spreading to many different individuals or carriers. Yet this does not guarantee that the predictions generated throughout the course of this transmission process will always be correct.

In relation to a drowned man whose body is washed up in Donegal or thereabouts Cathleen and Nora once again make use of testimony while it misleads them:

CATHLEEN (*taking the bundle*). Did he [the priest] say what way they were found?

NORA (*coming down*). "There were two men," says he, "and they rowing round with poteen before the cocks crowed, and the oar of one of them caught the body, and they passing the black cliffs of the north." (398)

Lacking the opportunity to observe in person how the body was found, the girls depend on the fishermen who establish the event as eye witnesses and do not consider this account of the fishermen to be inaccurate. This must be because there is uniformity in the way these two recorders of the event recite what happened although they are independent or separate witnesses. In default of counter narratives their story is accepted without controversy. But even so, testimony in their case, is strikingly based on perception and reason both of which can at times be misleading. Regarding the fallibility of the senses, Hume refers to "the imperfection of our organs on numberless occasions; the crooked appearance of an oar in water; the various aspects of objects according to their different distances; the double images which arise from pressing one eye ... and many other appearances of a like nature" (qtd. in Anne, 1991:157). He further argues that the senses alone should not be trusted unless they are supported by reason and by considerations like the distance between the object and the observer (Anne, 1991: 157). The fishermen in the play form the belief that they are passing by the cliffs of the north in special circumstances, namely under the effect of poteen which presumably

blurs their vision in addition to obstructing their reason. Moreover, it all happens before cockcrow when light is not strong enough to cause things to be seen clearly and therefore to enable the fishermen to determine their exact location. Owing to such factors they may be mutilating the truth or adding a false detail. Worse still, their diegetic story describing off-stage action is transmitted to the girls through a third person, that is to say, the young priest who is not depicted in his entirety within the pages of the play. He is only concretised by the girls' active imagination, and his dependability is questionable. Subsequently, the observational evidence and the epistemic status of what is learnt from the fishermen in this chain of testimony should be skeptically assessed with regard to acceptability and probability.

Yet another detail in the play leads the reader to arrive at a decision as to whether visual testimony can be more confidently depended on than the verbal one. Solipsistically stuck, Cathleen and Nora are not acquainted with anything beyond the boundaries of their extremely small world:

NORA (*giving her a knife*). I've heard tell it was long way to Donegal.

CATHLEEN (*cutting the string*). It is surely. There was a man here a while ago - the man sold us that knife - and he said if you set off walking from the rock beyond, it would be seven days you'd be in Donegal. (398)

This time the informant is a salesman who offers a visual image of the landscape on the way to Donegal without going into detail. He maps the area for the girls and structures their way of "seeing" the landscape. And although there is not a single indication of the testifier's trustworthiness, the girls do not think that the salesman may not have a keen eye for topography or that he may be simply lacking in knowledge. They also appear to be oblivious to the fact that "there is a sense in which testimonially based belief passes through the will - or at least through agency: the attester must select what to attest to and in the process can also lie, in which case the belief does not constitute knowledge" (Audi, 2002:80). One of the reasons why they take the statements of this non-expert person with probably no representational competence as expert opinion is that they lack the necessary knowledge to approach his proposition critically. They do not question his testimony while they may be fooled into believing a fictitious topography also because through the image he creates they can visualise the scenery and thus gain access to the world outside putting aside spatial limitations. Yet there is a problem: even if the salesman describes the setting accurately and in full detail which can make their experience come close to first-hand observation, to visualise a place cannot be a substitute for literally being there. In fact, they do nothing but hallucinate the field. Although radical constructivists reason that the nervous system of a living being has by no means the power to recognise the difference between a perception originated in an external phenomenon and a hallucination, an internal happening, as Audi argues, visual hallucination differs from ordinary seeing: "What is directly seen, the immediate object of one's visual experience, is the same sort of (non-physical) thing in a perfect

hallucination of a field as in an ordinary experience of seeing a field”; nevertheless, “What is directly seen in a hallucination is not a field (or any other physical thing)” (1998:32).

On many other occasions, notwithstanding, Cathleen and Nora prefer direct perception based on sense data and accumulate information using their senses about the acuity of which there seems to be no question. Along with their ability to recognise motion, as reflected when Nora says, “He’s coming now, and he in a hurry” (397), they have the power to get sight of distant targets like Bartley riding a mare over the green head (399); and they do not overexert themselves to distinguish targets smaller than a certain size like the stitches of the drowned man’s clothes, parts of a shirt and stocking sent to the girls in a bundle so that they can decide whether they belong to their elder brother Michael who has been missing for nine days. Likewise, their ears, which register a wide range of auditory information, enable them to hear sounds of minimum intensity including Maurya’s footsteps described as “a little sound on the path” (399). More markedly, they are capable of locating whence sounds emanate, an ability referred to as “sound localisation” that “can be as important as the capacity to identify those sounds” (Sekuler and Blake, 1990:341). Soon after Bartley leaves, for example, they hear a cry and assert that it comes from the sea shore.

The stated sensations in their ears are in truth cues that precede the events yet to come. Cues serving “to direct our attention, so that we focus on particular objects to the exclusion of others” give way to knowledge in the sense that they “alert us to the occurrence of an event” (Sekuler and Blake, 1990:424). To illustrate, the footsteps noticeable to the girls inform them of an approaching visitor, and shortly afterwards Maurya appears at the door. Similarly, recognising the cry from the sea shore and knowing that Bartley too went there, they associate the two things and come to the opinion that the cry is necessarily related with Bartley; and to confirm this conclusion his body is soon brought into their cottage. So the things they hear around them, which are preceded and confirmed by what they see, give them an idea about the immediate future.

At first sight it looks as if these examples underline the epistemological centrality of direct perception; by way of contrast, they suggest that direct perception on its own is barely sufficient. Due to its inability to yield knowledge independently of another source, which is consciousness, direct perception cannot be treated as a basic source. The idea here is that before anything else one has to be conscious in order to be able to perceive an external object (Audi, 2002:73). Furthermore, the object outside the mind has to be perceived internally. This amounts to saying that to be an alleged source of knowledge direct perception also needs the support of indirect perception which involves the interpretation of sense data. The raw information collected from the external world has to be processed by the agency of reasoning. In accordance with this, the girls whose preference is usually for sensing, use their reason together with observation and experimentation and interpret the perceived things in the light of their previous knowledge. For instance, they are informed about a drowned man, but on account of incomplete data they cannot be certain if it is Michael. The correlated bits and pieces of data they have are that a man was drowned; Michael too was at sea at the time; and the dead man was wearing a stocking similar to Michael’s. With a view to identify

the clothes in the absence of much evidence, they first perceive the stocking by sight and touch which are near senses that necessitate closeness between the perceiver and the perceived thing or event. The sense of touch both proves decisive evidence of the very existence of the object and contributes to their analysis of the parts of the stocking which is fundamental in fixing the identity of its owner. They deal with the measurable primary qualities of the stocking that reside in the number of stitches probably not only by looking but also by touching, inasmuch as the number of stitches they thought it to have is apt to change on tracing them with their fingers. Combining the powers of their eyes, ears, and reason, they count the stitches and at last infer that it is Michael's:

NORA (*who has taken up the stocking and counted the stitches, crying out*). It's Michael, Cathleen, it's Michael [. . .] It's the second one of the third pair I knitted, and I put up three score stitches, and I dropped four of them.

CATHLEEN (*counts the stitches*). It that number is in it. (399)

In other words, they begin with the known and come up with a conclusion, the previously unknown, which is a transition entailing reason.

To a certain extent, memory too has to complement direct perception. Cathleen looks out of the window and sets forth what she sees as Bartley "riding the mare now over the *green* head, and the *gray* pony behind him" (399; italics mine). But are these the true colours of the things she describes?

We have taken it for granted that our ordinary cognitive processes such as color vision are reliable, but are they? Color vision (e.g., standard lighting conditions) and unreliable under other circumstances (e.g., illumination by colored lights). Judgments of reliability are usually made relative to rather narrowly circumscribed circumstances. We *can* talk about reliability in the universe at large, but the lighting conditions on earth are quite unusual by universe-wide standards. In the universe at large, color vision is unreliable. (Pollock and Cruz, 1999:116)

Visual acuity is affected by the level of light (Sekuler and Blake, 1999:87); therefore, the way something appears does not always cohere with the way it really is. Colours look differently under different conditions because sunlight, which makes colour discrimination possible, exposes the true colour of the object, whereas dimness veils it. In consideration of the references to a nearing storm in the play, one is unavoidably stimulated to assume that it is a day of complete or partial darkness. Furthermore, Cathleen looks outside from inside which subjects her sight to a change from indoor illumination to outdoor illumination. The intensity of light changes; so does the way the eye perceives the objects. Under these conditions, what she portrays as green and gray may not actually be coming into her view as green and gray at the time; she may well be imagining the true colours of these objects in the light of her earlier observations and her

familiarity with them. Accordingly, to be foolproof and to lead to true beliefs, colour vision, a cognitive process the reliability of which is contingent, requires the assistance of previous knowledge stored in memory. And this dependence on factors out of the sphere of perceptual experience, which Audi calls “negative dependence,” shows that perception as a source is blocked (2002:73).

Sometimes the act of perceiving founders. The girls, who focus their sense organs, in particular those of hearing and sight, on input stimuli, are less attentive to smell designated by Sekuler and Blake as a “minor sense” (1990:384). They cannot smell the cake they put over the fire thinking of sustaining Bartley on the way to Connemara although in the process of being baked it must be disseminating vapours of a combination of different qualities: sweet and spicy and maybe at the same time tarry. The odorous substance is there, but the girls are unsuccessful in detecting the presence of any one of these odours associated with a cake; nor can they smell it as a synthesis. It is as if they suffer from a deficiency in odour perception which might be related with “anosmia” or “odor blindness” (Sekuler and Blake, 1990:402). Yet in their line of thinking the reason why they miss this noticeable smell is Maurya’s attitude: “There’s no sense left on any person in a house where an old woman will be talking forever” (398). To say it another way, they tire out and lose attention because of Maurya’s incessant talk. This underlines that they are faced with the necessity to filter out details of secondary importance in order not to be overloaded with stimuli coming from their perceptual surroundings; because without selective attention, knowledge cannot originate in perception, especially in scant olfactory sensations.

Riders to the Sea also indicates that truth is not always so plain to be discovered by sense data. Even if their senses do not fail to fulfil their function, the perceivers in the play who undergo the same goings-on in the external world perceive in different ways. For example, Maurya, whom the girls dispatch after Bartley to give him a mother’s blessing as well as the cake Cathleen baked for him, returns to the cottage terrified, claims to have seen Michael’s ghost on the gray pony following her last living son Bartley, and integrates this into another supernatural experience: “I’ve seen the fearfulest thing any person has seen, since the day Bride Dara seen the dead man with the child in his arms” (399). She compares the information Bride Dara’s experience provides, that is the child held by the dead man will accompany him to the other world, to the vision she saw and comes to believe that Bartley, like the child, will die. In other words, she brings together two seemingly unconnected supernatural situations, recognises the similarities between them, and presents them as a unified whole with a clear-cut conclusion. Conversely, her daughters cannot accommodate themselves to Maurya’s construction which is inconsistent with or sufficiently distinct from the pieces of knowledge they possess. They do not engage in such an exegetical interpretation in view of the fact that from their phenomenistic point of view the ghost is not a perceptible thing. They approach the physical world in terms of real or at least possible experiences and critically evaluate or rather undermine Maurya’s assertion refusing to accept the possible existence of something immaterial. Cathleen voices “their doubts [. . .] about the reality of Maurya’s vision” (Benson, 1992:53): “it wasn’t Michael you seen, for his body is after being found in the far north, and he’s got a clean burial by the

grace of God" (399). Their stance, however, invites a few questions: Maurya cannot prove that she saw Michael's ghost; therefore, the girls cannot agree with what she says. Still, how can they prove that she is wrong? Can they really trust their senses? Can their perception be flawed? What if it is not Maurya, but they themselves who perceive non-verbatimly? At a time when settling the argument by taking a middle course acceptable to both sides is difficult, the girls, who are flexible and spontaneous, relinquish the dictates of perception and put reliance on Maurya's claim and way of interpreting this single central event. Finally, the two rival claims are made compatible with each other, but this compromise is reached at the expense of sense data as an answer to the question of how to know.

Since the possibility of knowledge solely founded on sense data is in this manner refuted, one can turn to memory, another likely source, and examine its epistemological status taking Maurya as the focus of attention. Because she has lost "a husband, a husband's father, and six sons" (400) to the sea, the most salient event of Maurya's life is death. Despite the bygone years, she remembers each and every case of death, even the earliest one, thanks to the storing power of memory or *mneme* (Jacques Maritain Center) the function of which is to take a recent event to short-term memory and then to transfer it from short- to long-term memory in case the event is repeated. Death occurs singularly often in Maurya's life, and each new death is added to what already exists in her memory. This is how it finds its way into her long-term memory and stays there for good. Moreover, with the help of *anamnesis*, that is "a subsequent recalling power" (Jacques Maritain Center), she recalls even the circumstances in which she learnt about these grievous happenings. Maurya recounts these "flashbulb memories," as termed by psychologists (Loftus, 1988:125), when she looks back on the moment the body of her son Patch was carried in:

There was Patch after was drowned out of a curagh that turned over. I was sitting here with Bartley, and he a baby, lying on my two knees, and I seen two women, and three women, and four women coming in, and they crossing themselves, not saying a word. I looked out then, and there were men coming after them, and they holding a thing in the half of a red sail, and water dripping out of it - it was a dry day, Nora - and leaving a track to the door.
(400)

This description is an indication of Maurya's visual or photographic memory which retains images in minute detail in conformity with the statement Pashler and Carrier make in "The Flow of Information," that is even most brief displays, which last 1ms or 100ms, do not disappear instantaneously (1996:5-6). Together with a series of other successive images, she keeps in mind catching sight of water dripping out of the sail which must have taken place only in seconds. The sensory trace of these briefly presented stimuli remains intact and vivid in her visual memory while they could be easily clouded over the years.

In epistemological terms, the retentive power of memory matters a lot in that remembering may also be a process of foresight which enables one to anticipate the future. Using what is stored in memory, one can connect the past and the future and acquire knowledge through inference. From her accumulated previous experiences Maurya can infer that Bartley, like the others before, will encounter a terrible fate if he puts out to sea. Since she also voices this judgement about what is going to happen, the scene in which Bartley's body is brought onto the stage does not take the audience by surprise; it evokes the sense of *deja vu* on account of which it is no longer difficult to trace the similarities between the two separate scenes, one reported, one enacted, in which the islanders walk into the cottage bearing Maurya's sons in procession. When they brought Patch at a time in the past, men, following women who silently came in crossing themselves, were "holding a thing in the half of a red sail, and water dripping out of it [. . .] leaving a track to the door" (400); at present the stage-directions describe that men, yet again coming after women, "*carry in the body of Bartley, laid on a plank with a bit of sail over it, and lay it on the table*" (400). So in terms of the manner of entrances, gestures, the grouping and interaction of the characters alongside the properties they use, the second scene is a repetition of the first, which, by implication, underlines the truth of Maurya's inference rooted in memory.

Nevertheless, the validity of memory as a source of knowledge can still be debated because, in the first place, as Audi accentuates, memory merely transmits knowledge rather than generating it (2002:81). It exercises "previously acquired knowledge, and the source of remembered knowledge is whatever the source of knowledge when it was first acquired" (Pollock and Cruz, 1999:18). Secondly, although in general held as a highly essential source without the retentive or preservative function of which one's knowledge is bound to collapse, memory may not be a strong enough faculty. It is true that Maurya satisfies the two requisites stated in the definition of memory, that is remembering of the past and recognising it as past. She has the ability to turn back in time, and whenever she does so she uses the past tense to refer to the former events which evidences her cognisance of the time shift. Closely allied with that, as the reminiscences touched upon so far reveal, Maurya is capable of establishing a link between old and present happenings in a chain of associations and in a chronological order. However, as the action proceeds she loosens or rather loses associations between ideas and in this manner shows how frail memory can now and then be. She can think of her sons' deaths. Since the barren soil of the island does not allow the growth of trees (Durbach, 1992:84), as T.R. Henn points out, it is even probable that she imports the coffin boards (Davy, 1996:44). Nonetheless, curiously, the nails necessary for Michael's coffin slip her mind as if death is an unfamiliar or *jamais vu* experience she encounters for the first time. This lapse in her memory is, in Cathleen's words, attributable to the fact that "It's getting old she is" (401). Mental and physical events run parallel to each other; therefore, with advancing age Maurya starts having difficulty in walking as well as in remembering. Like the loss of physical ability, she begins to have less of her previous mental ability, a condition Loftus mentions employing the term "senility":

The typical senile man or woman can usually recall past events or information that has already been stored in long-term

memory before senility sets in. However, there is a disruption of ability to store new information. Recent events stay a very short while in short-term memory and then are lost, never making into long-term memory. Most of the person's references are to the events of the past; these are the only events that have meaning. Thus the present slips away, while memories of the past linger. (1988:104)

Maurya's memory which fits in with this definition is, as Price remarks, much stronger for far-off events (1961:187). She recollects everything in the matter of the procession around Patch, but the coffin nails for the latterly deceased Michael are furthest from her mind. And the effects of this aging process, which impairs the mechanisms underlying Maurya's cognition, should make the audience question whether one may elicit impeccable knowledge from an imperfect faculty like memory.

Strange as it may seem, the strength of Maurya's cognitive processes, which does not have much to do with her memory, lies in her extrasensory perception or intuition, that is the "capacity of the soul by which man comes in direct telepathic communication with disembodied spirits, with mysterious cosmic energies, or even with God himself" (Montague, 1962:55). She undergoes a number of anomalous experiences pointing at her surprisingly spontaneous and powerful psychic abilities. Besides her inferential insight, she has a weird intuitive capacity for thinking about something before it happens and is able to see things invisible to the remaining characters.

Intuition, a nonsensory or nonrational faculty which is supposed to be rooted in the unconscious mind, can be reached via meditation. As the stages of mind processes like concentration and contemplation progress, meditation gives way to a higher faculty which is that of intuition (Bailey, 1998). The way Maurya isolates herself from outside influences is comparable with the practice of meditation or a state of trance throughout the course of which she is wholly unaware of the signals coming not only from her surroundings but also from her own body although in the usual conditions the human body is believed to be a powerful receiver. Lost in contemplation, her sensory receptors do not provide her with "kinesthesia" which can be defined as "the awareness of direction of movement" (Pohle and Selover): "*Maurya takes up the tongs and begins raking the fire aimlessly without looking round*" (398). Her body language expresses in a roundabout way that she does not take any notice of where she exactly is in space and time. Nevertheless, clearing her sensory systems of other influences, Maurya becomes spiritually attuned to the reception of intuitive impressions in a number of unanticipated ways.

That she listens to the voices and feelings coming from inside is indicated when Cathleen and Nora hand her the pieces of Michael's clothes. "*Maurya stands up slowly and takes them in hand*" (400); unlike her daughters who scrutinise what is left behind from Michael to determine whom these belong to, she only holds them as if through qualia, that is the felt aspect of an experience, she reads the things in her hands receiving insights in relation to their owner and eventually puts them across Bartley's

feet in total acceptance. A possible interpretation of this wordless scene is that she may be proficient in learning about objects out of their vibration, an ability referred to as “psychometry”; in other words, the metaphysical presence, whatsoever, inhabiting the physical object extends outwards by means of Maurya’s mind and thereby makes her an intuitional knower.

Likewise, clairvoyance, which manifests itself by means of hunches or “a sense of knowing without knowing how one knows” (Pohle and Selover), brings to Maurya the knowledge she unwillingly looks for. Just before Bartley leaves, she exclaims with pain: “He’s gone now, God spare us, and we’ll not see him again. He’s gone now, and when the black night is falling I’ll have no son left me in the world” (398). “This is not just the pessimism of extreme fear,” writes Grene, “it has a finality - enforced by the suggestiveness of the ‘black night’ - which cannot be resisted. Nora and Cathleen are anxious for Bartley’s safety, Maurya *knows* that he will be lost” (1985:48). She also refuses to give him her blessing and withholds from him the cake or “the life-sustaining bread” (Benson, 1992:56). Even though Benson explains her way of action with references to the failure of mother and son to exchange ideas and feelings and their being at enmity (1992:56), this may well be linked to Maurya’s awareness that Bartley is going to die regardless of whatever she does to preclude it. Her conviction that he is pulled towards an undesirable end, which is confirmed to be true by the following course of events and which has been previously explored in this article as an example of Maurya’s inference, can also be regarded as a hint that Maurya, who even locates Bartley’s death in time, has a capacity for precognition. Moreover, such insights into the future may not be limited with her conscious state. Much earlier in the play, for instance, she lies down, and as Cathleen’s words, “God help her, and [she] may be sleeping, if she’s able” (396) imply, she falls into a restless sleep probably to have a nightmare predicting a troublesome state of affairs.

Deserving to receive more attention, out of a telepathic connection to others’ minds Maurya intuitively perceives the events that take place elsewhere. Her ability to tune in with Michael when he is miles away gives her an inexplicable impression that he is no longer alive; it makes her know even the moment of his death without being told about it and openly express her grief:

NORA (*in a whisper to Cathleen*). She’s quiet now and easy; but the day Michael was drowned you could hear her crying out from this to the spring well. It’s fonder she was of Michael, and would anyone have thought that?

CATHLEEN (*slowly and clearly*). An old woman will be soon tired with anything she will do, and isn’t it nine days herself is after crying and keening, and making great sorrow in the house? (401)

Interestingly, while he is mourned over by Maurya, Michael, who has been dead for nine days, appears to be an ever-present influence in the play as a paranormal phenomenon. He manifests his presence in the form of “a gust of wind” which blows open the door “Nora half-closed” (397) the minute they talk about the bundle containing

his clothes. In addition to this sensation in the cottage, in spite of the girls who in their capacity “devise subterfuges to spare Maurya just a little sorrow” (Price, 1961:186), through clairvoyance, or the “third eye” which is referred to by Pohle and Selover as an internal sense, Maurya visually perceives Michael’s ghost, a life form from another dimension. Apart from this transcendental and at the same time immanent occult force, she speaks of “a power of young men floating round in the sea” (400). The imagery offered in this line “suggests that the accumulating dead bodies of the sea’s victims (a power?) do not decompose and revert to nature but rather remain forever ‘young men,’ an image that transforms the objective sea into a subjective phantasmagoria of staring eyes and dead faces moving forever in the waves” (Davy, 1996:43). Due to her potential for an altered state of consciousness, Maurya sees visions of death in the sea to the effect that she can sense the radically divergent realms of the natural and the supernatural worlds.

A related albeit different point is her intuitive insights. When “Bartley and Michael, the living and the dead merge together as one, [. . .] Maurya here suffers total defeat, but it is a defeat achieved through total certitude: *Maurya knows*” (Davy, 1996:47). The ghost says nothing, but it communicates a dire warning to her. She knows that it is a crisis apparition which appears prior to a decisive turning point such as a death and suffers from the feeling of restlessness, one of the indicators of this type of information. By the same token the ghost heralds Maurya’s own oncoming end in addition to Bartley’s death. “Bartley will be lost now, and let you call in Eamon and make me a good coffin out of the white boards, for I won’t live after them” (400), remarks the bereaved woman and continues with a life review, or to put it in another way, with the flashback memories of her life which generally occur as near-death experiences. After mentioning her family’s men whose lives were cut short, she foreshadows the termination of her own existence in terms of getting to sleep: “‘It’s a great rest I’ll have now, and it’s time surely. It’s a great rest I’ll have now, and great sleeping in the long nights after Samhain” (400). Maurya, who always cared for others and never acted in self-interest, now thinks of all those deaths in relation to her own self and sees the situation from a self-focused point of view. Knowing that she too is going to die shortly, she finds a sense of security from danger; finally, a calm comes to her.

Whether or not Maurya soon dies as she predicts is not given in the play, but all the rest of information she obtains from the voice within is found to be surprisingly impressive for its accuracy when tested against reality. Her intuition never errs. So much so that her internalist way of knowing trivialises the supposedly strong firm base of externalism and turns into a central and fundamental power in the acquisition of knowledge. However, one difficulty with intuition is that to be seriously expounded and proposed as absolutely valid it needs empirical evidence: “What are we to do with those intuitions which for any reason are beyond or above all direct objective tests? Are we justified in accepting them, at least tentatively? Or should we reject them as utterly groundless? Or can we find an indirect criterion which would help in their evaluation?” (Montague, 1962:65) For lack of such direct objective tests one can, under the most favourable circumstances possible, consider traces of Maurya’s psychology as an indirect criterion, an explanatory framework in relation to which her extraordinary experiences can be grasped and conjecture that the formidable outer world conditions

may have destroyed her inner balance. Fears and acrid ideas may have caused her to have an abnormal state of nerves, whereupon, for example, the material presented in the prediction dream she presumably had may only be the manifestation of her unconscious or the return of the repressed. It is quite likely that the material she has been repressing cannot be removed from her psyche; it tends to reappear in the form of dreams. Also, while the late Michael is not physically present there the vivid thoughts of him might be creating his image in Maurya's brain. The ghost is perhaps nothing more than an internal phantasm that she takes for an external phenomenon. And if these propositions are correct, her intuition is apparently destined to be taken as valueless.

Altogether, it would not be baseless to assert that in order to access information within the boundaries of their acutely narrow and isolated environment, the characters depicted in John Millington Synge's *Riders to the Sea* follow the statements of other people, use their senses, recall past experiences, reason to some conclusions, and appeal to intuition undergoing the process of introspection. Yet testimony and the sources within, when analysed and compared, cannot be safely defended as through and through adequate and convincing supplies of knowledge because they are shadowed by the fact that they offer incomplete, inconsistent, obscure, even deceptive data. Perhaps they could be parts of a whole, put differently, steps to a totality of information, and comparatively comprehensive, if not complete, knowledge could be captured out of this fusion. Nevertheless, memory and reason intrinsic to the human mind contrast with sense experience which empirically tests the environment; intuition on the whole dispenses with testimony, memory, and perception together with reasoning to a conclusion. That is to say, their contradictory approaches restrain them from interrelating and completing one another, which makes it impossible to formulate an all-encompassing epistemology that synthesises all the ways the characters resort to. In consequence, Maurya and her daughters can only have an inkling of the world around them as their exceedingly repetitive use of the conditional word "if" alluding to the prevailing atmosphere of uncertainty evidences.

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