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“By More Than One Pen”: multiple-person narratives and the courtroom metaphor

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Introduction

This paper discusses the correlations between the use of multiple-person narratives (MPNs) and legal issues in fiction, particularly in the light of the metaphor of courtroom as reading experience. I wish to show that narrative plurality in novels based on MPNs has something to do with legal procedure and that such texts imply legal metaphors such as that of the court of law, whereby evidence is brought to bear on an issue at stake, testimonies are made to converge and a form of metaphorical trial is intimated. Some of the novels under study present us with legal topics and many of them seem to resort to law as an underlying metaphor for reading and the reader’s response to the text at some abstract level. If there be a trial, it is the reader who is given the role of the judge or the jury – it is up to the readers to disentangle the multiple threads and to synthesize heterogeneous bits of information in order to bring more light to facts, to (re-)assess points in question and to ultimately proceed to some sort of judgment and bring in their own verdict. Within the context of the courtroom metaphor, the reader is therefore entrusted with an active reading role, so that MPNs turn into interactive systems.

If all MPN novels cannot be interpreted as legal metaphors, a great number of them do make a play for such interpretation, which may be evidenced by: (1) allusions to legal themes, representations of lawsuits or other legal procedures¹; (2)

thematic meditations on questions of justice; (3) and some sort of irresolution, whereby meaning—or the verdict, as it were—is left pending, so that readers are indirectly invited to seek out solutions and alternative settlements, thus substituting themselves for legal authority.

In interpreting MPNs in this way, it seems interesting to recall yet another adjective—“forensic” from Latin *forensis*, pertaining to the *forum*, the public place. The narrative phenomena here are first and foremost *public* or collective renderings of facts, sources, and testimonies, having heuristic value, insofar as they feign retrieving truths from among competing narratives. Such combination of narrative sources has seen a growing success in young adult fiction, as is evidenced by research conducted in the pedagogical field², so that the very use of MPNs may have an educational aspect as an interesting ground for activities based on synthesizing information and coordinating sources.³

My perspective is first and foremost narratological. I wish to demonstrate that MPNs have a close relation to law and that they are predicated on structural, narrative patterns that lead us to reconsider literary texts symbolically through the prism of legal procedures, the main pattern of which is the similarity between court-of-law hearings and the act of reading and interpreting. The very narrative structure of MPNs lays a foundation for judgment by implying a form of deficiency. I wish to emphasize that, by their sheer plurality, MPNs question our attitude to knowledge and our trust in testimony.

First, I shall define what is meant by MPNs and in doing so I examine the nature of narrative discourse and argue that MPNs are related to testimony, but also to emphasize the very ambiguity of such discourse in fiction. Second, I shall analyze the articulation between the framework of trials and the underlying courtroom metaphor in MPNs, the notion of pre-trial investigation and the questionings related to knowledge and testimony. Finally, I shall examine the notion of justice as characteristic of MPNs. I refer mainly to works of contemporary fiction.

One man's word against another's: singularity of multiple-person narratives

My first hypothesis is that by sharing the status of autonomous discourse with other self-centered types of literary genres such as diaries or autobiographies, MPNs contribute to an ambivalent impression of self-containment mixed with public confession, so much so that the status of the first-person narrator is at one with witness-bearing, as though MPNs mirrored legal confession, but that testimony-type of discourse is partly undermined. Additionally, MPN status as narrative seems to open up a space of narrative indeterminacy that can be bridged by the legal metaphor behind the very structure of narrative.

I wish to envisage MPNs by restricting my definition to narratives whereby more than one clearly established first-person narrator takes part in telling one or more stories usually without a hierarchical, overarching or superior narrative framework within which the narrator could be logically subsumed, but possibly endowed with or conducive to some other non hierarchical unifying framework.

The number of narrators within an MPN scheme is equal or superior to 2 $\{MPN = N \geq 2\}$. Those narrators are usually first-person narrators $\{N = 1st\ PN\}$, but many novels diverge from this scheme and present us with other forms of hybrid narrative patterns.⁴ A distinction should be made between: (a) purely first-person alternating narratives; (b) and hybrid MPN alternating first- and third-person narratives or even first-, second-, and -third person narratives.⁵ In *A Chain of Voices*, for instance, André Brink makes use of (a) only, whereas Louise Erdrich systematically resorts to (b), compounding first- and third-person narratives in *Love Medicine*, *Tales of Burning Love* or *The Beet Queen*. Hybrid MPNs also allow for multi-genre texts that put to use multiple sources (letters, documents, etc.) on top of first-person alternating narratives, which is a regular “documentary” device in multi-genre type of MPN mystery novels.

Emphasizing the lack of hierarchical framework enables us to set aside frame narratives⁶ (FNs), which would otherwise comprise too great a number of narrative forms. Although FN's are rather akin to MPNs, in the sense that an FN can include MPNs⁷, I do not consider MPNs to be tantamount to FN's, as the very specificity of MPNs lies, in my view, in the lack of hierarchical ordering characteristic of FN's and

in the meaningful use of equal footing for all the narrative voices at play. The distinction $\{MPN \neq FN\}$ can be visually represented as follows:

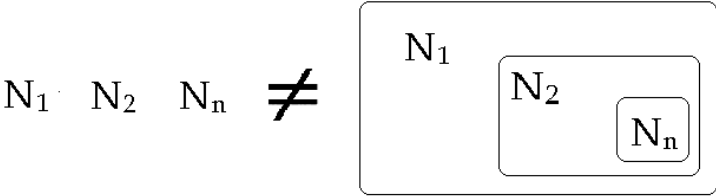


Fig.1. Multiple-person narrative vs. frame narrative

The fact that no single narrator is overtly superior⁸ leads to symbolic cultural and political interpretations, by which MPNs dramatize minority narratives.

However, MPNs *can* comprise a unifying ordering device that somehow constitutes the rationale for the use of multiple voices. A unifying pattern is not equal to a hierarchical frame ordering. Such unifying ordering might be predicated on a general idea (a hidden truth or mystery in a detective novel, for instance) or on a more precise unifying pattern (the context of a trial precisely). The distinction is thus between: (a) MPNs containing a specific unifying force (trial in Brink, for instance); and (b) novels without a specific unifying ordering, where narratives unfold without there being either a superior narrator or any specific overarching unifying force.⁹

MPNs defined in this way not only differ from FNs, but they also differ from alternating narratives where one third-person narrator is in charge of telling several stories $\{S_1 S_2 S_n\}$, as is the case in Anthony Burgess’s *The End of the World News*, which is an alternating multiple-story narrative (*MSN*: $S_1 S_2 S_1 S_2 S_3 S_n$), thus:

$$N_1 N_2 N_n \neq S_1 S_2 S_n$$

Fig.2. Multiple-person narrative vs. multiple-story narrative

Yet another distinction should be drawn between MPNs and multiple point-of-view narratives (MPOVNs), where a narrator gives us access to different characters’

perception or multiple sources of consciousness, alternating points of view¹⁰, such as can be encountered in stream-of-consciousness texts:

$$N_1 N_2 N_n \neq POV_1 POV_2 POV_n$$

Fig.3. Multiple-person narrative vs. multiple point of view narrative

This “restrictive” definition of MPNs is an oversimplification of the narrative model at play, since narrative patterns often intermingle. MPNs can be perfectly compatible with FNs, MSNs and MPOVNs, all of which might well be used as embedded forms of narrative within an MPN pattern. However, the relevance of the distinction $\{MPN \neq FN\}$ is founded on the fact that many *pure* MPNs appear as peculiar constructs, and their singularity lies precisely in the very absence of hierarchical frames. Whereas an FN is a narrative with multiple narrators, an MPN is differently so, as it strives towards a status of an *a*-hierarchical narrative, and as such it tends to question the very lack of frames.¹¹ Whereas the use of a frame may be seen as a token of narrative rationality, the lack thereof evinces an anti-realist tendency.

MPNs are founded on an alternation of narrators. In this respect, several types of alternation can be distinguished in relation to time, the story, and the way in which narratives interrelate.

A basic alternating pattern between two narrators can be found in *The Collector* by John Fowles. The voice of the perpetrator of a crime, Frederick, who abducts a young woman, Miranda¹², alternates with that of the kidnapped victim in a fairly simple way: $N_1 N_2 N_1$. Such regularity of two alternating narrative voices is to be found in other novels, like *The Hide* by Barry Unsworth, where N_1 (Josh) alternates with N_2 (Simon) throughout the book: $N_1 N_2 N_1 N_2 \dots$. However, the alternation is commonly much more irregular, as is shown in the following sequence representing the beginning of Brink’s novel:

$$N_1 N_2 N_3 N_4 N_5 N_6 N_7 N_8 N_9 N_{10} N_3 N_8 N_{11} N_n \dots$$

Fig.4. irregular narrative alternation in Brink’s *A Chain of Voices*

Similar patterns may be found in Erdrich’s novels, where the alternation between narrators is irregular, as though the text unfolded in cycles. In *Love Medicine*, the first-person narrative dominates and the third-person narrative emerges cyclically (five times). In *Tales of Burning Love*, the third-person narrative prevails while first-person narratives emerge sporadically.

As far as the time factor is concerned, an MPN may show a chronological, rectilinear alternating narration, in which each new narrator will tell one single sequence of the story, so that the main story moves *forward* every time part of it is told by a new narrator, like in Erdrich’s *The Beet Queen*:

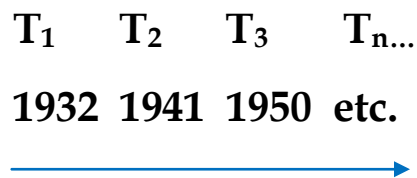


Fig.5. “Arrow narrative” in Erdrich’s *The Beet Queen*

If, from the point of view of time progression, one might call this type of MPN an “arrow” MPN, from the point of view of narrator alternation, it might be called a “relay” or “chain narrative” whereby narrators centre around the same story line, a more or less uniform time dimension, and tell parts of it by taking turns, as is the case in Erdrich, Brink or Barnes¹³:

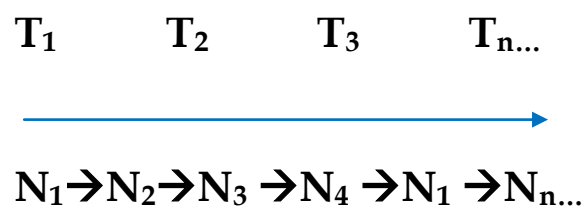


Fig.6. “chain narrative” in Erdrich’s *The Beet Queen*

The combination of chain progression and time-arrow pattern evinces a double function: it introduces different points of view around the main story line, while allowing narrative progress.

But an MPN structure might also present us with “loop” or “cycle” narratives such as are used in Erdrich’s *Love Medicine*, where the story starts in the 1980s, goes back to the 1930s and then shifts to the 1980s again:

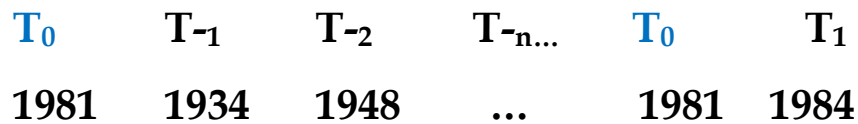


Fig.7. “loop narrative” in Erdrich’s *Love Medicine*

Opposed is the case of “variational” or “parallel” narratives, whereby two or more narrators get back to a point in time and tell each the same story from the start:

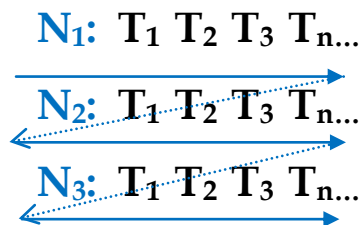


Fig.8. “Parallel narratives”

Needless to say, the time pattern is never a perfect line, but a more or less complex mixture of analepses and prolepses.

Quite in keeping with this variational form of narrative is a partly variational MPN, or the “overlap” narrative which occurs in Sarah Waters’s *Fingersmith*—each of the three subsequent narrators takes the story back to a point where the former narrator has left it off, so that only part of the story is told again:

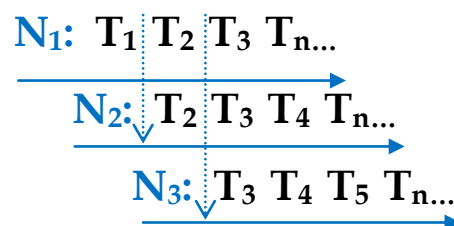


Fig.9. “overlap narratives”

MPNs are characterized above all by a non-hierarchical more or less regular alternation of narrators and sources cooperating in the telling of a story, related either linearly – as a chronological set of events – or by means of some total or partial *re-telling*.

The legal metaphor begins here. If analogy be made between MPNs and legal features, it starts off with the parallel between MPNs and multiple witness-sources, mainly in relation to investigation, cross-examination or court hearing.

My conception of MPNs and the analogy between law and literature are made clearer by allowing for the linguistic and discursive traits of MPNs, namely the fact that some discursive features found in MPNs point to testimony.

MPNs are collective narratives in more than one way. Several voices combine to convey a story, but some of them are also collective narratives in the sense of communal narratives. Yet, they are framed as individual instances of utterance, and voices do not necessarily converge towards one and the same goal, so that tension arises between the collective and the individual.

Several distinctive features of discourse may be pointed out. First, most MPNs are based on the tension between oral and written discourse, which means not only structuring idiolects¹⁴, but also bringing interaction to the fore, so that discursive marks constantly point to addressees. The most obvious type of such marks shows through questions addressed to implied addressees (“What do we know even now?” [Kingsolver, 2000: 11]), imperatives (“Look at Nicolaas. Look at Galant” [Brink, 1983: 23]), or performatives (“But I swear I tried. I swear to God” [Brink, 1983: 91]). Some MPNs toy with politeness formulae and social conventions of interaction: “But first, to introduce myself. I’m Wallace Pfef” (Erdrich, 1987: 160).

The interactive nature of MPNs is to be found in Erdrich’s *Tales of Burning Love*, particularly in the middle section where voices alternate within the confined space of a car, thus reminiscent of Boccaccio¹⁵, through a system of chain narratives: “Marlis’s voice trailed off and Candice took over” (Erdrich, 1997: 337). The aim of Boccaccio-like staging lies in perspectivism, i.e. plurality of viewpoints: “Here’s how I saw it” (Erdrich, 1997: 337). But the alternating system is subverted by the other characters

who interrupt each other's narratives by asking questions or expressing outrage: "'You pig!' Marlis broke into Eleanor's story" (Erdrich, 1997: 247).

Playfulness, self-consciousness, mutual awareness and constant interruption between voices characterize Barnes's *Talking it Over*, where narrators tease with implied narratees: "Listen, I'm not playing this...game [...] I'll say what I have to say [...]" (Barnes, 1992: 57). Such teasing is predicated on playing with the *impossible* relationship with the implied reader: "By the way, would you like a cigarette?" (Barnes, 1992: 127). "I don't know you. The only thing I know about you is you're reading this [...]" (Hornby, 2006: 44), declares Jess, one of the narrators in Nick Hornby's MPN, *A Long Way Down*. "You are not just my reader, but my confidant, my silent collaborator [...]" (Labiner, 1998: 29), states Pearl in Norah Labiner's *Our Sometime Sister*.

MPNs place a particular emphasis on the *phatic* and the *conative* functions, that is to say engaging with the addressee and sustaining interaction.¹⁶ Linked to that is the pre-emptive nature of some utterances, as though it were necessary to always allow for the addressee's possible objections. In Collins's text, the legal framework is highlighted by such cautious discourse, as though anything the narrator, Hester, said might be used against her: "I have to say, in answer to questions put to me [...] I have nothing to add to it, [...] I say, on my oath as a Christian woman, this is the truth" (Collins, 1994: 365).

The pre-emptive character of discourse stems from the anticipation of judgment the legal framework is bound to lead to, so that the discourse itself is shown to be fully aware of such eventuality of judgment: "Passages in this narrative are soon to come which will set the minds of others in judgment on my conduct" (Collins, 1994: 410). In *Love Medicine*, the narrator forestalls the addressee's remarks: "All right. So now I guess you will say [...]" (Erdrich, 1984: 203). There is a corrective turn to anticipation, whereby forestalling criticism or judgment allows the narrator to pre-rectify facts: "and so when they tell you that I was heartless [...] don't ever forget this: I loved what I saw" (Erdrich, 1984: 217).

The *conative*, the *phatic* and the pre-emptive are allied to the creation of a sense of self-conscious, self-reflexive story: "[...] as you'll see in the eventual telling [...]"

(Erdrich, 1984: 240). MPNs are thus at once self-conscious and addressee-wary narratives: the addressee might be one of the narrators, a character, but it might be an implied narratee (judge or jury), which, symbolically, mirrors the reader as well.

Hence, the legal structural metaphor finds its verification. Conviction, interaction and addressee-anticipation are at the heart of MPNs, as though they were above all interactive, invoking narratives, aimed at convincing an audience through specific rhetoric. “[...] I probably shouldn’t be telling you all this if I want to keep your sympathy” (Barnes, 1992: 86), says a narrator in Barnes, *Oliver*, manifesting through *praeteritio* the playful need to curry favor with hearers through *captatio benevolentiae* and to build complicity, while Orleanna in Barbara Kingsolver’s *The Poisonwood Bible* starts her narrative by stating: “Be careful. Later on you’ll have to decide what sympathy they deserve” (Kingsolver, 2000: 5).

Another significant aspect of MPNs is that they are grounded in forms of discourse that can be paralleled with confessions. There is a need to tell, to confess, to own up, which in some of MPNs takes on religious overtones, like in Erdrich: “Let’s tell all,’ she grinned, breathless. ‘Pretend this car is a confessional’” (Erdrich, 1997: 205). The closed-space setting in Erdrich stages confession that implies a confidential limited-addressee and limited-space forms of utterance situation, which gives ample vent to revelations of secrets, so that the addressee gains a privileged status of the initiated. *Decameron* itself implies a confessional-like telling, all the more so as the extreme circumstance of the Black Plague lends itself to a form of holistic telling¹⁷, whereby it is made possible to confide virtually anything, whatever the content of the secret (Erdrich, 1997: 206). Some MPNs clearly lead us to conceive of confessional discourse as testimony-bearing, as though the novel were an interrogation or hearing in which all the voices took part. The act of bearing testimony becomes such as need to confess in Brink: “I can no longer be silent about him” (Brink, 1983: 23).

The nature of discourse becomes ambiguous, hovering between confession, autobiography or diary¹⁸, emphasizing the multi-genre nature of MPNs, such as can be found in Colum McCann’s *Dancer*, which resorts to alternating first-, third- or even second-person narratives as well as to letters or diaries, or in Collins’s works, where different sources of documents are made to alternate.

What reinforces the notion of interaction is the fact that the relationship between the voices is systematically predicated on antagonism, opposition or agonistics. In Barnes, Oliver desperately states: “It’s just my word against everybody else’s!” (Barnes, 1992: 120). Racial opposition is at play in Brink: “[...] one man’s word against another’s, master against slave” (Brink, 1983: 19). Kingsolver uses *limited*, child narrators who perceive the inhabitants of the Congo as savages, marking differences between blacks and whites: “[...] they’re different from us and needs ought to keep to their own [...]” (Kingsolver, 2000: 23). Such a confrontational aspect has multiple bearings on legal discourse. It reinforces the clash of testimonies. Sometimes a narrator will negate a statement or will refuse to bear testimony: “I only came to fetch a horse. In what conceivable way could that implicate me?” (Brink, 1983: 425). Sometimes a narrator’s attitude will become defensive as though an accusation was directly issued against him or her or as though someone cross-examined a witness: “I have nothing to say about those days. What happened happened afterwards” (Brink, 1983: 95). In Erdrich, conflict between the women narrators becomes overt rivalry: “But Marlis was a tough opponent [...]” (Erdrich, 1997: 341). MPN narrators are both witnesses and rivals, vying for credit. The notion of conflict is then the logical core of evidence and testimony gathering; and, importantly, it is the basis of common law, whose adversarial nature is often said to characterize not only the legal systems influenced by the English jurisdiction, but also many political systems in English-speaking countries.¹⁹

Within the context of alternating narratives – some of which evince repetitive or partly repetitive narrative frequency based on the assumption that $nN=1S$ (the same story or event told several times, usually by different narrators)²⁰ – the agonistic confronting of witnesses and sources allows us to assign legal meaning to MPNs. We are presented with statements that compete with one another, according to the formula $\{N' \rightarrow \text{not } N''\}$, or complete one another, according to the rule $\{N'' \text{ because } N' = N''\}$. The confirmation by corroborating testimony in the latter or the invalidation in the former are at the core of MPNs.²¹

Such confrontation of versions can be clearly noted in the passages below taken from Brink and implying diverging versions:

ROOY

Oubaas Jan, Galant said, had in his
shed a bullet mould [...] and
Galant wanted [...] old Adonis to
hand it over himself. (Brink, 1983:
391-392)

ADONIS

It's a bloody lie. They all lying if
they say I stole the bullet mould
and gave it to Galant [...] He must
have taken it himself. (Brink, 1983:
397)

By contrast, other passages present us with coinciding versions or corroborated statements.

The notion of interaction is to be understood not only as (a) a form of dialogic interrelation between the narratives²² or (b) the discursive relationship of each narrative to the implied narratee or reader, but also as (c) the act of interaction between narrations as an epistemic act whose adjudication belongs with the reader.²³

Another use of multiple versions is related to “limited” point of view that allows the MPNs to insist on dramatic irony and thus dramatize narrative partiality and incompleteness. MPNs are the *locus* of “epistemic disconnections” and “epistemic limitations,” and as such, they exacerbate the epistemic discrepancies that underlie dramatic irony. In Erdrich, the narrator Lyman Lamartine fails to understand his brother’s peculiar behaviour. Then, Henry jumps into a river and dies carried away by the current. Lyman pushes the car into the water to hide away his brother’s suicide and to pass it off as an accident. This fabricated version of the story is “trusted” by Lipsha later in the novel. Then it is both deconstructed and explained in Lulu’s version.

MPNs exacerbate dramatic irony by multiplying versions of the same event or story, thus magnifying relativity of truth and access to knowledge through limited sources. There is a crucial difference between a truly unreliable narrator, and a limited narrator. The first cannot be relied on because of some flaw; the second can only be relied on partly, given the limitation of information and competence.²⁴ The fact that the notion of dramatic irony is emphasized in MPNs bears a link to legal questions of testimony and access to information.

Through their reliance on dramatic irony, MPNs also toy with a form of reader's voyeurism by their making the reader the recipient of multiples stories or testimonies. Symbolically, in Unsworth's *The Hide* the idea of voyeurism creates meaning when Simon builds a tunnel to observe girls. Here, a symbolic parallel may be drawn between a voyeuristic watching without being seen and knowing without others' awareness of such knowledge.

The notion of interaction and the confession-style type of discourse shape a unifying imaginary frame, i.e. an audience *in absentia*. That unifying frame is a mirror the readers might recognize themselves in, or, as Collins's narrator states: "The reader will have an opportunity, ere long, of forming his own opinion of the document" (Collins, 1994: 539-540). That mirror to the reader is the metaphor of legal discourse. What MPNs share with legal narratives is: (a) a collective or communal narrative that makes sense only once all available versions have been combined, but whose coherence may well be subverted by the very plurality of views; (b) linguistic features related to interaction, avowal or confession; (c) and the adversarial aspects of relationships between the voices. MPNs are addressee-oriented narratives and collectively-oriented narratives. The distinction between MPNs and FNs seems crucial as: (a) it allows us to envisage the text through a latent, covert, legal metaphor or to reinforce the overt courtroom metaphor; (b) as well as to acknowledge the sometimes artificial, singular or even strange aspect of MPNs.²⁵

The paradox of the type of discourse one encounters in MPNs is that, in spite of their highly dialogic nature going as far as to imply mutual dialogues, a sense of solipsistic discourse is sustained. In Brink's novel, one of the narrators is dumb. In Nancy Huston's *Les Variations Goldberg*, the narrators give us the impression of a series of interior monologues. Orhan Pamuk makes use of *prosopopoeiae*, giving voice to the dead, to a tree, a horse or a coin. Such interior, solipsistic or even fabulous confessions dramatize the tension between legal testimony-bearing, confession-making and the poetic function.

Beyond reasonable doubt: investigation, testimony, and the courtroom

MPNs are hence attuned to testimony, playing with the law of evidence and the framework of the court of justice. The trial becomes a metaphor of narrative confrontation. Linked to this legal aspect is the epistemic value of MPNs, some of which are undoubtedly manifestations of the postmodernist issues associated with epistemological relativism.²⁶

Whereas the legal metaphor in some of the MPNs is not overtly stated, some of them do suggest such readings. Nancy Huston resorts to the legal metaphor in *An Adoration* by addressing the reader and suggesting that the witness-characters will appear before the only judge—the reader.²⁷ In *Brink*, the reader-response courtroom metaphor is implied, but the trial setting is clearly provided.

In the light of these considerations, my second contention is that MPNs question epistemological issues associated with evidence and testimony as well as the notion of truth and the validity of information, and, by doing so, they extend their legal aspect to the context of discovery or investigation, so that the MPN structure has bearings not only on the courtroom and legal procedure, but also on inquiry, and—more abstractedly—on testimony-bearing and knowledge.

I wish to extend my examination of the legal metaphor to (a) mystery novels in order to suggest that they, too, make use of MPNs as a means of entrusting readers with an active epistemic role; (b) and a concrete example of trial staged in *Brink* in order to confirm the courtroom metaphor.

One of the early MPN models happens to be Collins's *The Woman in White*, as a mystery genre related to detective fiction.²⁸ The novel is structured by alternating narratives. Such pattern is clearly stated in chapter titles, so that the chain-like nature of the novel is gradually revealed: "The story continued by Vincent Gilmore [*of Chancery Lane, Solicitor*]" (Collins, 1994: 109, emphasis in the original).

Such "to-be-continued" novel structure, told in multiple voices, creates the impression of a unifying structure governing all the narratives within the novel, and that unifying force seems to be related to the legal procedure, be it detective work, inquest or trial proceedings. It is remarkable that some narratives should be presented as oral, transcribed statements—"The narrative of Hester Pinhorn, Cook in

the service of Count Fosco [taken down from her own statement]" (Collins, 1994: 360)—, or even "signed" depositions of a coroner. Collins's MPN is a multiple multi-genre narrative, overtly predicated on legal environment and circumstances associated with a mystery case, as is clearly stated by the first narrator:

If the machinery of the Law could be depended on to fathom every case of suspicion, [...], the events which fill these pages might have claimed their share of the public attention in a Court of Justice. (Collins, 1994: 1)

Of crucial importance is the notion of deficiency that provides the fictional rationale and justification for the narrative. In other words, if it proves *necessary* to resort to a legal MPN, it is because justice has somehow *failed*.

What I wish to emphasize is the fact that within their very narrative structure MPNs contain a more or less obvious legal metaphor associated with the notion of judgment. Such legal metaphor is quite openly put forward in Collins:

[...] the story here presented will be told by more than one pen, as the story of an offense against the laws is told in Court by more than one witness—with the same object [...] to present the truth always in its most direct and most intelligible aspect [...]. (Collins, 1994: 1)

The image of the telling of a story "by more than one pen" is likened to that of a hearing of witnesses, and the aim is the heuristic and legal objective of discovering the truth, so that the very MPN structure adds an epistemological dimension to the novel: by presenting us with a narrative drawing on legal procedure, the text questions both our production of and our response to knowledge, information and truth.

There is a form of imitation of legal circumstances. The structural metaphor is that of hearing in a court of law: "Let Walter Hartright, teacher of drawing, aged twenty-eight years, be heard first" (Collins, 1994: 1). The chain-like symbol for MPNs and the arrow-like temporality of the novel are revealed by the second narrator, but then the text will constantly hover between its status as story and its status as legal

narrative presenting evidence. The readers are presented with transcribed oral testimony as well as written documents.

Another example relates to evidence admission.²⁹ The text feigns to abide by legal rules, such as exclusionary rules, by means of omissions: “The passages omitted, here and elsewhere, in Miss Halcombe’s Diary are only those which bear no reference to Miss Fairlie [...]” (Collins, 1994: 141). Omission hence becomes exclusion, which means keeping at bay such evidence as is irrelevant or harmful to the case, so that ellipsis is yet another token of the legal metaphor.

The text engages with the status of witnesses and their independence—“[...] those witnesses should represent two opinions which are perfectly independent the one of the other” (Collins, 1994: 215)—which is, to an extent, symbolized by the very narrative structure. But there is also the question of articulating reliability and straightforwardness of testimony, or the question of how reliable a first-person self-addressed narrative can be, as is the case with the inclusion of the diary in Collins. In keeping with the confession-style MPNs, Marian Halcombe writes: “I am almost afraid to confess it, even to these secret pages” (Collins, 1994: 192). But then, even the written word—the supposedly *direct* access to an individual’s secret as—is proven unreliable and thus subverted by the very diary when it suddenly stops short, “ceases to be legible” (Collins, 1994: 302), and is ironically continued by another narrator, Fosco.

Reading MPNs consists of putting atomized scraps of information back together. Collins’s text refers to such interpretation reflecting the novel’s narrative pattern “presented in fragments, sadly incoherent in themselves, and widely detached from each other” (Collins, 1994: 382). “Widely detached” are, in fact, the fragments of the novel itself, and the vision of fragmented story seems to be a recurrent concern in MPNs. The narrator’s duty, that of “gathering together as many facts as could be collected” (Collins, 1994: 392), is also the reader’s task.

Whereas Collins’s text suggests an implied trial, an example of staging of a precise trial may be found in Brink’s novel, *A Chain of Voices*. The courtroom seems relevant in two ways: (a) as part of an MPN’s reading contract; (b) as a latent metaphor illustrating the act of reading in many MPNs, whereby the reader is

symbolically made to be judge or jury.³⁰ However, the deficiency factor that lies at the base of MPNs leads to a mirroring system whereby even the staged trial depicted in the text is partly disallowed to permit the readers to operate their own verdict.

Brink's novel revolves around an instance of crime and the subsequent lawsuit. The text opens with an "Act of Accusation," signed by His Majesty's fiscal, D. Denyssen, dated the 10th March 1825, located at the Cape of Good Hope. Eleven characters are accused, among whom Galant, a 26-year-old man, "born in the Cold Bokkeveld, formerly slave of the late Nicolaas van der Merwe" (Brink, 1983: 7). The accusation follows a report dated the 8th February 1825. Galant is accused of deserting from his master, Nicolaas van der Merwe, from Houd-den-Bek in the Cold Bokkeveld, of fomenting unrest and rebellion with other slaves and servants from his master's farm and from neighbouring farms, and of murdering Nicolaas. The novel ends with a "Verdict" chapter, where the court members find the convicts guilty of treason, murder and armed violence, and sentence some of them to death.

Brink makes use of a historical event, i.e. the revolt carried out in South Africa in 1825 by slaves led by Galant. A similar rebellion had already taken place in 1808³¹. This happens to be a transition period in South Africa as far as slavery is concerned, for while the slave trade is banned within the British Empire in 1807, slavery is only to be abolished by the 1833 Slavery Abolition Act, enacted in 1834.

This notion of transition in relation to freedom is of utmost importance, as it is assumed that "false reports" have been circulating in the colony in reference to slavery abolition, thus emboldening slaves to emancipate: "[...] it was his disappointed hopes of freedom that induced him to it." (Brink, 1983: 504). But then, the "eagerness to shake off the yoke of slavery" (Brink, 1983: 510) is considered not as a mitigating circumstance, but, quite the opposite, as an "aggravation of the punishment" (Brink, 1983: 511).

What is fascinating here is that the beginning and the ending of the novel are historical documents. Brink cites the act of accusation and the verdict verbatim.³² The middle section of the novel—the trial proper—is the literary text that symbolically supplants the historical trial, becoming a metaphor of re-trial. The novel is composed of a series of 82 alternating narratives told by 33 voices, giving the floor to both the

accused and the victims of the rebellion. The characters are eye-witnesses of the crime, as both victims and perpetrators.

The very core of the text confronts testimonies, private confessions provided by narrators, revolving around the central event, i.e. the crime and the rebellion, but the reader soon realizes that the issue at stake is more general, drawing on more abstract questions of guilt or the motives that led to the crime. Even farther from the crime itself are the accounts of the narrators' past at the farm that occupy a central place in the text. Hence, while some of the narratives reconstruct the events so that the novel offers multiple versions of some of them, it also lingers on elements that at first sight have nothing to do with the trial. Such a plural network of information provides access to the complex psychology of both slavery and the criminal act, prevents a Manichean judgment and may well lead readers to identify with both the victims and the perpetrators. The novel subverts the very legal circumstance by partly legitimizing both sides' motives and rationale. By doing so, the text presents us with an arduous task – that of trying to come to terms with a judgment that keeps eluding us. One is led to adjudicate out of often affective, emotional and memorial contents rather than facts. The greater part of the facts has been exposed in the “Act of Accusation”; the text then only provides fictional context that is not necessarily factual, but that aims at providing insight into the very relationships between the slaves and the masters as a form of background to the crime itself.³³

The staged legal framework and Brink's symbolic suggestion of a reassessment of that trial by the reader overlay each other, as though the jury-task were incumbent on the reader and required active participation. While the multiple narrators appear as at once eyewitness and participants of a crime, it falls to the reader to reconstruct all the threads in view of both the historical documents quoted in the novel and fictional elements.

The very nature of the MPN novel encourages us to question our judgment and our sense of justice, and even though Brink's text presents us with a tangible legal framework of a trial, all MPNs, regardless of whether they resort to precise legal courtroom cases or not, may be regarded, in varying degrees, as metaphors of trials whose verdict belongs with the reader. The question at stake is not a simple

“guilty/not guilty” verdict, but a more complex and general interrogation, such as that of witness reliability.

MPNs and the reader-as-judge/jury metaphor leads us to epistemological questions, such as those relating to our ways of perceiving truth, dealing with testimony, resolving paradoxes, handling otherness and alternative versions, or, simply, facing aporia.

One of the motives behind investigation and inquiry engages with family matters, filiation, parenthood and “skeletons in the cupboard”. Collins’s work is all about family law and marriage transactions. Such is also the background in Pamuk’s *My Name is Red*. In Erdrich, narrators become metaphorical detectives pursuing family secrets and their own mixed identity: “I had to get down to the bottom of my heritage” (Erdrich, 1984: 248), says one of the narrators in *Love Medicine*, where voices seem to imitate family relationships, complex filiation, whereby “the world was branching out in shoots and growing faster into bits and kept dividing” (Erdrich, 1984: 271). Viewed from this angle, MPNs are akin to complex family trees, arborescences whose meanders are hard to uncover.

Whereas Collins’s text gives us an opportunity to contemplate a family mystery story, Erdrich’s novels are such stories based on the metaphor of family “investigation” and genealogy research. However, whereas in Collins’s family story, inheritance issues and property law prevail, it is genealogy and collective identity that are in question in Erdrich. In *The Plague of Doves* one of the narrators admits: “I became obsessed with lineage [...]. I wrote down as much of Mooshum’s story as I could remember, and then the relatives of everyone I knew” (Erdrich, 2008: 86). In *Tales of Burning Love*, family identity quest is encapsulated in the character of Jack, married and divorced several times.

The Beet Queen provides us with another instance of family investigation dependent on multiple sources of information that are reflected in the MPN structure. Lineage and family relationships are shown to be abstruse: “Months after what I’d seen in Celestine’s yard, I heard that she was pregnant and no one knew who the father was” (Erdrich, 1987: 168). And it is within a multifarious conglomerate of sources, akin to gossip and speculation, that truth is shown to

emerge as a form of uncertainty or detective work: "Much later, I was to piece together what happened [...]" (Erdrich, 1987: 249). Such domestic or ordinary epistemology, as it were, is shown to constitute a communal form of knowledge.

Since MPNs have a role to play within the construction of suspense and curiosity in some of these novels, the question of ordinary epistemology is a cognate of interpretation and legal issues in MPNs. MPNs interrogate knowledge from the very interiority of social structures in Erdrich. But such domesticity of truth mirrors wider aspects. If family knowledge is knowledge indirectly grasped "from sitting around the aunts, from gathering shreds of talk" (Erdrich, 1984: 28), then all forms of knowledge seem indirect, partial, uncertain or simply relative. Thus wider legal issues of truth and testimony are questioned from within, from the social family structure.

MPNs seem to constantly interrogate testimony, reliability and truth. In Erdrich, Eleanor reflects on "lies of omission, of indirectness," and raises a more general question: "Are all lies embroidered stories or just the absence of truth?" (Erdrich, 1997: 84). Brink's novel allows us to question truth and reliability as well: "their story, which I took with a pinch of salt since their versions differed rather startlingly on several points" (Brink, 1983: 307). Sarah Waters's *Fingersmith* is founded on the quest for truth in the face of "counterfeit knowledge," mistakes, deceit and uncertainties, so that the whole MPN is predicated on a constant need of dis-ambiguation (Waters, 2002: 264). Ambiguity lies at the heart of Elliot Perlman's novel, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, whose epistemic centre revolves around William Empson's definition of the poetic. Jeanette Winterson's magical realism gives free rein to contraries and contradictions in her MPN novel: "The Earth is round and flat at the same time" (Winterson, 1990: 81). Ernest J. Gaines's *A Gathering of Old Men*, evinces an interesting case in point, where false testimony and self-incrimination is at the heart of epistemic questions: " [...] but I could see from the start she was lying, [...], she was trying too hard to make me believe her" (Gaines, 1992: 50). Collins uses the question of legal conspiracy to question truth and fairness. In *Barnes*, there is a comical aspect to the courtroom metaphor and the questioning of truth, where one of the narrators, Val, declares: "Members of the jury, I rest my case" (Barnes, 1992: 190).

The amusing play with the notion of truth and testimony mirrors the novel's epigraph, a Russian saying: "He lies like an eye-witness".

In Erdrich the relativity of knowledge is made obvious when a narrator is made to dither as to the guiltiness of a character:

If I tell you he said *no*, you will think he was lying. [...] If I tell you he said *yes*, and relate to you how it all happened, it might get used against him. [...] Let's just say he answered: "That's the penetrating mystery of it. Nobody knows." (Erdrich, 1984: 269)

And in *Tracks*, gossip—"the old men talk, turning the story over" (Erdrich, 1988: 31)—ends up by distorting the truth: "It comes up different every time [...]. They only know they don't know anything" (Erdrich, 1988: 31). Such epistemic questionings lead to relativism: "*No final truth, she jotted down, all is relative, personal, all is subjective and proof is fickle*" (Erdrich, 1997: 446, emphasis in the original).

But collective narrative fails as well because the institution misuses it. We find a token of such questioning in the idea of corrupt legal institution in Collins and the notion of conspiracy, so that testimony is bribed, biased, corrupt, compromising fairness and justice. Similarly, in Erdrich, for the individual the question of truth is wed to that of faith or trust. And trust is shown to falter faced with abuse and misuse.

What MPNs foreground through the notion of faith and trust is the individual's emotional, affective, subjective relationship to justice and the legal system. In other words, the system itself is shown to participate in the aporia of reliability and trustworthiness by foregrounding deficiencies. Truth is that disillusion with the authority and law; and, as such, it lies at the heart of the deficiency MPNs rely upon: "Of course, since when were higher-ups interested in the truth?" (Erdrich, 1984: 221).

The very chain-like structure MPNs illustrate is symbolically ambivalent and paradoxical. In *Tracks*, the story's plurality translates the never-ending, loop-like pattern: "[I] had to squeeze so many stories in the corners of my brain. They're all attached, and once I start there is no end to telling because they're hooked from one

side to the other, mouth to tail" (Erdrich, 1988: 46). The plurality of MPNs turns the unity of stories into an unfathomable construct of irreconcilable possibilities: "There were so many tales, so many possibilities, so many lies" (Erdrich, 1988: 61). In Brink, the symbol of the chain is ambiguous as well, insofar as, while the story is actually that of the 19th century struggle for liberation and emancipation of slaves, the chain is preserved as that which unites all, regardless of race, deed or background.

Consequently, by questioning access to knowledge through mystery, quests, investigation and witness status, MPNs raise issues related to epistemology, conducive to epistemic relativity. Such relativity may mean: (a) refusal of the possibility of one single truth; (b) emphasis on multiple truths; (c) questionings of access to knowledge; (d) questionings of communal knowledge.

Redressing an infamous wrong: visions of justice or emancipating the voice

My third hypothesis is that by brining legal and epistemological issues to the fore, MPNs emphasize questions of justice on the whole, and lead to the implication that from the confrontation of voices springs an implicit need to *re-try*, to *appeal*, thus a form of injustice requiring redress. "There are laws in England to protect women from cruelty and outrage" (Collins, 1994: 262), states Water Hartright who speaks of "the righteous purpose [...] of redressing an infamous wrong" (Collins, 1994: 389). MPNs give the floor to forgotten, unheard or oppressed voices lending themselves to "poetic justice".³⁴ As courtroom metaphors, MPNs are primarily metaphors of *appellate* procedures of sorts. In other words, MPNs give equal footing to those who have been historically, socially or economically excluded from expressing their viewpoints and participating in democratic acts.

MPNs appear as deficiency narratives, originating from disillusionment with a justice system, and therefore they are fundamentally symbolic of struggles for democracy and redress, where deficiency stands for stifled expression. They engage with "minority narratives," "emancipation narratives," or even "healing narratives,"³⁵ aimed at a symbolical form of reparation – while harm has been done, MPNs seem capable of both emphasizing injustice and restoring justice by *re-assigning* narrative, empowering the voice and *re-voicing* the silenced. No wonder

MPNs may also appear as a form of repentance narratives, as in *Kingsolver*, where the themes of grief, regret and sin are intertwined.

In Erdrich's novels, the question of justice is to be sought in the double deficiency underlying the relationship between the early European settlers and the Native Americans, with respect to not merely the dispossession of the Natives' lands and their oppression due to government policies, but also cases of miscarriages of justice.

First, the question of land distribution leading to tensions between the Europeans and the Natives is an ever-present motif in Erdrich's novels. Government misuse of power is a recurrent allusion imbued with resentment:

I grew up with her [...] next to the old house on the land my great-grand-parents were allotted when the government decided to turn Indians into farmers. The policy of allotment was a joke [...]. (Erdrich, 1984: 11)

An allotment system was imposed on the Indians in the late-19th-century with the Dawes Severalty Act (1887). The aim of the allotment scheme was to dissolve tribal possession in favour of individual ownership, thus "civilizing" the Native Americans by turning them into farmers, as alluded to above, and, ultimately, getting hold of the Indian land.³⁶ The size of land allotments was later reduced and it was made possible for the government to negotiate and buy land back from Indians at cheap prices. As a result, land sale gave free rein to speculation, purchasing land from the Indians³⁷, and tribal conflict, which constitutes the legal background of MPNs in Erdrich. In *Love Medicine*, dispossession is clearly voiced:

[...] That land had always belonged to the tribe, I was sorry to find, for now the tribal council had decided that Lulu's land was the one perfect place to locate a factory. [...] But government money was dangling before their noses. [...] Lulu was kicked off the land. (Erdrich, 1984: 104)

In *Tales of Burning Love*, speculation is brought to light. Jack, a real estate agent, best embodies the transformation of the Native culture by the European settler and the discrepancy between the Western vision of land as individual property and the Indian communal perception of land:

Jack did not see land in the old-time Ojibwa sense, as belonging to nobody and nothing but itself. Land was something to use, space for sale. [...] Land seemed dead to Jack. To Chuck, land was living stuff. (Erdrich, 1996: 153)

The notion of dispossession is an overriding part of injustice that the MPN structure dramatizes by playing up the dialectic between separation and togetherness. Land allotment policies convey a sense of separation MPNs illustrate. Symbolically, the diverging paths of lives present us with such illustration of togetherness/separateness in the asymmetry between Eli and Nector in *Love Medicine*, brought up according to different standards.

Along with land allotment government policies, Erdrich's texts hint at other assimilation policies, such as forced education in boarding schools, imposing Western religion on Indians, or, later, "that policy called termination" (Erdrich, 1984: 18) that only created further tensions and separation between groups of people.³⁸

Such divide stemming from legal and governmental policies is clearly grounded in the new forms of tribal organization imposed by the government. In *Love Medicine*, Kashpaw is in charge of mediating between the people and the government through the tribal government. New regulations wind up by dividing the tribe, thus disrupting the collective.

Jeff Spinner-Halev emphasizes such disruption of the collective narrative (Spinner-Halev, 2012: 69). If the collective narrative is disrupted, so is the collective voice, for the Chippewas lose their ability to invoke their gods once they have come into contact with the settlers:

That makes problems, because to ask proper was an art that was lost to the Chippewas once the Catholics gained ground. Even now, I have to

wonder if Higher Power turned it back, if we got to yell, or if we just don't speak its language. (Erdrich, 1984: 195)

The desperate yelling betokens a symbolic loss of voice and thus that of the tribal collective identity and communal narrative.

Equally important in Erdrich's works is the notion of miscarriage of justice. The unheard voice is that of the falsely accused or the unduly sentenced. This is "tough justice" based on racial prejudice as in *The Plague of Doves*:

In Mooshum's story, there was another foul murder, of a woman on a farm just to the west; the neighbors disregarded the sudden absence of that woman's husband and thought about the nearest available Indian. (Erdrich, 2008: 17)

The "nearest available Indian" symbolizes the mistreatment justice is shown to exploit, plunging the whole system into a prejudiced biased legal machine. Ensuing distrust of law becomes prevalent in *Love Medicine*, where defiance towards Western laws and legal practices is emphasized. Here, too, a gap is perceptible—the discrepancy between Western legal codes and local, tribal, more general vision of justice. Gerry believes in a more general sense of fairness: "Gerry's problem, you see, was he believed in justice, not laws. He felt he had paid for his crime [...]" (Erdrich, 1984: 161). The tension also lies in the unequal treatment before the court of law, highlighting prejudice, especially in regard to witness-bearing and the racial status of the witness:

He also found out that white people are good witnesses to have on your side [...]. But they are terrible witnesses to have against you, almost as bad as having Indians witness for you. Gerry's friends, you see, had no confidence in the United States judicial system. (Erdrich, 1984: 162)

Racial prejudice becomes a prominent feature of witness-bearing and sentencing through an ironic vision of a two-tiered justice: “Gerry was socked with a sentence that was heavy for a first offense, but not bad for an Indian” (Erdrich, 1984: 162).

To an extent, MPNs create meaning as a reparatory narrative framework brought to bear on communal disruption. But then, MPNs bring to prominence access to a collective form of narrative that takes into account each voice integrating individuality into community. By this token, the formal aspect of MPNs does not merely make up symbolically for legal deficiencies and misuse, leading to the fictional voice emancipation, but it is also symbolic of the very inadequacy it denounces—or the very effect of land allotment and segregation or assimilation policies—, i.e. the dichotomy between separation and togetherness that tribal policies were conducive to and the tribal dissolution through assimilation policies. The very atomizing MPN structure may be seen as both a formal device figuratively celebrating individual emancipation while denouncing assimilation by means of dramatizing the tension between togetherness and separateness.

Another revealing case is the vision of justice that is placed at the forefront of Brink’s novel, bringing us face to face with the separateness/togetherness dialectic and a both skeptical and ironic perception of law. Here, too, MPNs are a means of giving voice to the unheard as a symbolic form of emancipation, and a way of dramatizing tensions. In the context of the racial and colonization-based tensions, white laws weigh against both local and slave sense of justice. Skepticism derives from the epistemological aporia, as can be glimpsed from one of the narrators’ reflection on truth:

I thought I knew what had happened. [...] Now, having taken down all their statements, [...], I am perplexed by the obscurity of the truth. [...] Can the virgin be celebrated except in the act of violation, or innocence established except in the corruption? (Brink, 1983: 432)

Grappling with the ambiguous plurality that MPNs symbolize, Du Toit fails to make sense of the legal procedure or to acknowledge the justice system, envisaging it

instead through the prism of his own predicament and decadence. Justice is seen as that which humiliates man in man's basest instincts:

Justice: a word as profound and passionate as that faceless naked woman I burn for and will never possess, [...], offering the cleft flesh I feverishly dream of, a fire in which to sheath and engulf myself – forever unattainable [...]. A word as disgusting and noisy as a pig held down by slaves for my furious entry, briefly to assuage the searing of a base need, an innate incompleteness; girl-sow, degrading, risible, and indispensable. (Brink, 1983: 432)

Du Toit satisfies his needs with a sow and his recognition of zoophilia provides a striking image of justice where a debasing consolation echoes a degrading deprivation. The vision of justice is clearly that of an alienating system, all the more so as the final – historical – verdict is at once – ambiguously – a denial and a confirmation of slavery.

Denied justice, slaves are condemned to make do with some semblance of it. The insistence of the centrality of the courtroom metaphor at odds with justice and fairness is not out of keeping with more general political and historical aspects in South Africa: the corrupt jury system, finally abolished³⁹, obviously the apartheid laws and regulations, and the segregation policies that followed.⁴⁰ Brink's use of MPNs only emphasizes the paradoxical tension between togetherness and separateness, segregation and equality, *oxymoronically* emancipating and enslaving the self before the law. A relative synthesis of and an antidote to such skeptical and pessimistic vision of justice appears in the reconciling character of Ma-Rose who refuses to hear the dialectical opposition between white and black, slave and master, reminding us of the notion of *ubuntu*⁴¹:

[...] all these voices in the great silence, all of us together, each one forever alone. We go on talking and talking, an endless chain of voices, all together yet all apart, all different yet all the same; and the separate links might lie but the chain is the truth. (Brink, 1983: 431)

The MPN paradox chimes with the implications of the *chain of voices*, as both empowering and enslaving, uniting and sundering—a multiple structure at once playing a reconciliatory and reparatory function and disclosing the very harm and iniquity it inveighs against. Yet the barrier remains—the symbolic reenactment of cleavage in Erdrich: “the barrier between us like a swollen river” (Erdrich, 1984: 213). In Waters, separateness is evoked through the myth of Pyramus and Thisbe (Waters, 2002: 291). The barrier in Gaines is a trace of past wrongs—a remnant or a spectral presence that continues to haunt the collective narrative. “You know why proud to be African? ‘Cause they won’t let me be citizen” (Gaines, 1992: 1982), states Albert Jackson in Gaines. In Gaines’s MPN, staged following the American Civil Rights movement, the harm of racial segregation persists as a spectral memory of injustice.

Conclusion

The works I have examined all draw on MPNs and display links to legal issues. I have demonstrated that MPNs: (a) are presented as a form of testimony; (b) imply the legal metaphor of the courtroom as a framework for reader-response; (c) constitute a symbol of empowerment and democratization of voices, while continuing to dramatize oppositions. The courtroom metaphor is a simple or even naive template that is immediately perceivable as such. But it is precisely this immediacy which is interesting, since it bridges the gap left by the anti-realistic artificiality of MPNs.

This study aims to be a point of departure for other narrative investigations of the link between law and MPNs. It seems interesting to emphasize the role of this research within interdisciplinary studies. In their essay on “Literature and Law,” Weisberg and Barricelli distinguish four categories of legal influence in literature: (a) fiction where some legal procedure is represented; (b) books where a legal figure/character is depicted; (c) novels where laws or procedures are used as an organizing principle; (d) works where the individual’s relationship to justice is a theme. Each of these categories is represented in this study. The main point of my inquiry has been to show the significance of a fifth category, i.e. (e) fiction where law

acts as either a narrative frame or a legal metaphor for that frame. Thus, (e) seems close to (c), but goes further than (c), insofar as it is largely a matter of narrative presentation and structure. To an extent, the alliance of the courtroom metaphor and MPN narration has something to do with *unnatural narratology*⁴² and anti-realist aesthetics.⁴³

At a more abstract level, the very use of MPNs, and its questioning of knowledge, truth and testimony, not only in relation to law, but also as a means of indirectly interrogating literary texts, literary criticism, and interpretation. Just as it seems obvious that the narrative voices in MPNs are irreconcilable, the tension between one and the multiple in narrative interpretation is only heightened when both law and literature come into play. It is at the juncture of epistemological and hermeneutical questions that law and literature part company, for, to get back to the courtroom metaphor, fiction is always a courtroom hearing, while remaining forever a phantasmagoria.⁴⁴ It is no coincidence that MPNs interrogate our ways of telling, receiving and trusting stories. They are a celebration of stories where “a hundred alternative routes [that] present themselves” (Winterson, 1990: 102).

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NOTES

¹ Staging a court hearing allows to thematically suggest a symbolical structural embedding. Such stagings or allusions are to be found in most of the MPN novels under study.

² (Gillis, 2002: 52-59), (Koss, 2009: 73-80).

³ Gillis imagines activities for young adults based precisely on legal role-playing (Gillis, 2002: 56-57).

⁴ Legal principles, the interrogative nature of these texts and their artificial aspect all derive precisely from such use of first-person narratives. Therefore, I wish to consider it as *par excellence* mode of MPNs.

⁵ See Richardson (1994: 312-328).

⁶ FN may be defined as a “narrative in which another narrative is embedded; a narrative functioning as a frame for another narrative by providing a setting for it.” (Prince, 2003: 33).

⁷ Such is the case in Boccaccio’s *Decameron* that, to an extent, constitutes a template of MPNs, but which is also a frame narrative whose overarching narrator is clearly stated from the onset (Boccaccio, 1972: 47). Nicholas Mosley’s novel, *Hopeful Monsters*, refers to a “correlator (as it were) of these stories” (Mosley, 1991: 528). Wilkie Collins’s main narrator, Hartright, may be considered as such a *correlator* as well. However, I find it more rewarding to consider such overarching presence to be part of the legal metaphor rather than instance of FN.

⁸ This does not rule out the possibility of one of the narrative voices being considered as a protagonist and some other being seen as a secondary character. But the underlying principle is that of a relative equality, which tallies with what I wish to demonstrate about the relationship between multiple narratives and voice emancipation.

⁹ This is precisely the type of MPN that strikes me most as a *source-less* narrative, inasmuch as the mere plurality of voices questions the very possibility of constructing narratives.

¹⁰ Alternating first-person narratives are not tantamount to alternating points of view. There is a significant difference between a narrator giving indirect access to the consciousness of multiple characters and autonomous voices. Genette speaks of variable and multiple perspectives (Genette, 1972: 206-224). A good example of alternating focus is provided by Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*.

¹¹ Thus, whereas an MPN can comprise one or several FNs, FNs cannot include MPNs as long as MPNs are defined as *a*-hierarchical. If one defines FN as *hypodiegesis* (Rimmon-Kenan, 1993: 91-94), MPNs should then be defined as *equi-diegesis*. If one follows Todorov’s view of FNs as *hypotaxis* (Todorov, 1971: 78-91), MPNs emerge clearly as *parataxis*.

¹² Miranda’s voice is in fact a diary which allows for the notion of multi-genre MPNs.

¹³ One of the narrators in Barnes, Stuart, provides an amusing metaphor for such chain alternating narratives—the cuckoo clock mechanism whereby “the good-weather weatherman” alternates with the “bad-weather weatherman,” so that “[...] only one of the two can come out of his little door at any one time [...] because the two little men are joined together by a metal bar [...]” (Barnes, 1992: 67).

¹⁴ Linguistic, oral “stylization” is notable in Barry’s *The Hide* or Gaines’s *A Gathering of Old Men*.

¹⁵ The middle of the novel stages four woman characters telling stories after their car has come to a standstill in snow. The use of closed space, the need to tell stories in order to survive and the alternating system are obvious clues to Boccaccio.

¹⁶ See Jakobson (1963: 213-220).

¹⁷ What such holism allows is unrestrained discourse, where axiology prevails. An example is provided by direct characterization through unmediated expressing of opinion on other characters, like in *The Beet Queen* (Erdrich, 1987: 233).

¹⁸ By inserting dates, some MPNs might give the reader the impression of a diary, as though the text were to be read as a multi-voice diary, as in Chevalier's *Falling Angels*.

¹⁹ See Elliott, Quinn (2006: 361).

²⁰ I refer to Genette's distinction between singulative, repetitive and iterative frequencies in narratives (Genette, 1972: 145-182). Interestingly, Genette does not linger on the repetitive frequency that characterizes precisely some MPNs, and he contends that it is much of a hypothetical or even strange pattern (Genette, 1972: 147).

²¹ See Walton (2008: 296-338).

²² Such interaction between narrators may be noticed in Josipovici (1986) or in Kingsolver (2000).

²³ See James Phelan's definition of "character narration" and "serial narration" (Phelan, 2005: 198).

²⁴ The use of child narrative in MPNs, for instance, like in Chevalier's *Falling Angels* or Kingsolver's *The Poisonwood Bible*.

²⁵ It is noteworthy that the lack of overarching frame in multiple narratives partakes of their singularity whereas a single first-person narrative does not usually give one a sense of inherent strangeness (Scholes, Kellogg, 1981: 262).

²⁶ Some 'version narratives' might be seen as such postmodern preclusion to the unequivocal (Heise, 1997: 58).

²⁷ See Huston (2005: 9).

²⁸ See Grossman for the relationship between the Victorian courthouses and fiction (Grossman, 2002: 24).

²⁹ See Dennis (2002: 50-84) or Emson (2006: 31-54).

³⁰ The jury system remains essential in criminal cases in common law countries. It may be recalled that whereas trial for indictable offenses is carried out with a judge and jury, in Britain, for instance, summary offenses are tried by magistrates (Herring, 2002: 24). Though legally crucial, the distinction between judge and jury does not seem as significant in terms of MPN legal metaphoricity, since both connote judgment. One narrator in Labiner declares: "Oh, you my judge and jury, call me guilty [...]" (Labiner, 1998: 218).

³¹ See Worger, Clark, Alpers (2010: 111-116).

³² See Theal (1904: 189-341).

³³ One of Brink's sources was the famous Pierre Rivière case (Gallix, 2006: 76), examined by Michel Foucault as *murder-discourse* (Foucault, 1973: 324-325).

³⁴ See Dolin (1999: 5).

³⁵ See Rosenberg (2002: 113-131).

³⁶ See Brown, Stentiford (2008: 206-207).

³⁷ See Banner (2005).

³⁸ Indian Termination policies implemented between the 1940s and the 1960s. See Ulrich (2010: xiii).

³⁹ See Gordon (2006: 229-230).

⁴⁰ See Chanock (2001: 128).

⁴¹ See Koulayan (2008: 183-187).

⁴² See Alber, Heinze (2011).

⁴³ See Scholes, Kellogg (1981: 262-263).

⁴⁴ "C'est une audition comme toujours, une fantasmagorie comme toujours [...]" (Huston, 2005: 9).