Discontinuous Narrative, Ojibwe Sovereignty, and the Wiindigoo Logic of Settler Colonialism: Louise Erdrich's Marn Wolde

MADSEN, Deborah Lea

Abstract

The dominant consensus among interpretations of Louise Erdrich's novel The Plague of Doves (2008) represents Marn Wolde as a victim figure, abused by her husband Billy Peace (Hudson 47-52, Strehle 119, Valentino 131-2, Roemer 122-3, 129). This characterization of Marn emerges coherently when the novel is read continuously and linearly, and especially when Marn's story is interpreted independently of other narrations within the novel and in isolation from its earlier form as “Satan: Hijacker of a Planet,” first published in The Atlantic (August 1997). A rather different profile of this narrator-character emerges when Marn is read discontinuously, across the narrations offered by five distinct narrators, across Erdrich's wider oeuvre, and across her extraordinarily wide range of intertextual allusions to Ojibwe stories, the Bible, the midrashim, the Kabbalah, and Paradise Lost. The tension between covert symbolic convergence and overt narrative discontinuity, I argue, is key to the demand that her writing be interpreted in ever-widening contexts, in order to reveal the possessive logic of settler sovereignty, on the one [...]
Discontinuous Narrative, Ojibwe Sovereignty, and the Wiindigoo Logic of Settler Colonialism: Louise Erdrich’s Marn Wolde

Deborah L. Madsen

“When we are young, the words are scattered around us. As they are assembled by experience, so also are we, sentence by sentence, until the story takes shape”

Louise Erdrich, *The Plague of Doves* (268)

The dominant consensus among interpretations of Louise Erdrich's novel *The Plague of Doves* (2008) represents Marn Wolde as a victim figure, abused by her husband Billy Peace (Hudson 47-52, Strehle 119, Valentino 131-2, Roemer 122-3, 129). This characterization of Marn emerges coherently when the novel is read continuously and linearly, and especially when Marn's story is interpreted independently of other narrations within the novel and in isolation from its earlier form as “Satan: Hijacker of a Planet,” first published in *The Atlantic* (August 1997). A rather different profile of this narrator-character emerges when Marn is read discontinuously, across the narrations offered by five distinct narrators, across Erdrich's wider oeuvre, and across her extraordinarily wide range of intertextual allusions to Ojibwe stories, the Bible, the midrashim, the Kabbalah, and *Paradise Lost.*

The tension between covert symbolic convergence and overt narrative discontinuity, I argue, is key to the demand that her writing be interpreted in ever-widening contexts, in order to reveal the possessive logic of settler sovereignty, on the one hand, and to constitute Ojibwe sovereignty, on the other. Framed by Marn's traumatic story of domestic, sexual, and spiritual abuse at the hands of her husband, it is easy to forget that the narrative she tells is the story of how she came to murder her husband and walk away with sole possession of their money and land. The fragmented and unreliable nature of her narration reveals the ways in which she rationalizes her entitlement to kill in order to possess; that is, the ways in which her discourse exemplifies the possessive logic of settler sovereignty. At the same time, the very unreliability of her narration opens discursive opportunities which reveal the repressed meaning of her actions as a traumatic repetition of the historic lynching with which the novel begins. Settler land hunger, symbolized here and elsewhere in Erdrich's writing in Ojibwe terms as a *wiindigoo* psychosis, emerges in the interstices of Marn's narration to disrupt the logic of settler entitlement to indigenous land.

*The Plague of Doves*, like many of the novels that comprise Erdrich's North Dakota series, originated in a group of nine separately published short stories. Reworked into novel form, these stories generate a discontinuous style of narrative: the twenty-two chapters are recounted by five different narrators, starting with the prefatory section entitled “Solo” by an unnamed third-person omniscient narrator, focalized through an anonymous “he”; Evelina narrates the following six chapters; Judge Antone Bazil Coutts is the narrator of the next four chapters and Marn Wolde's three chapters interrupt his telling of the story. A single chapter by Evelina follows Marn, providing commentary on Marn Wolde and the aftermath of her murder of Billy; the Judge completes Billy's story in the following chapter and Evelina's narration concludes in the next three chapters. The novel ends with two chapters narrated by the Judge, and the narrator of the final chapter is the town doctor and President of the local history society, Cordelia Lochren. While some chapters are divided into named sections or vignettes, others are unnamed both emphasizing the discontinuous nature of the novel and underlining the significance of those parts that are titled. What continuity would be created by the alternating narrations of Evelina and the Judge is disrupted by the interventions of Marn and Cordelia, which stand out in contrast with those of the two primary narrators in that Marn and Cordelia share an intimate relation to the primary problematic of novel:
who murdered the Lochren family? And why? Cordelia is the only survivor of the massacre; Marn is the niece of the real murderer, her Uncle Warren, who sees his own capacity for murderous violence inherited in Marn. The answer to the question, “who did it?” is gradually uncovered in the stories told by the anonymous narrator of “Solo,” Marn, Evelina, and Cordelia, which provide the key contexts for interpreting the novel beyond the overt level of storytelling. The novel must assume a discontinuous form because this covert story – which contradicts the hegemonic narrative of the crime – is made available in only fragments and isolated allusions. But while the novel is discontinuous, it is far from lacking in coherence. As Evelina reflects, in the words quoted in the epigraph to this essay, words must be “assembled by experience” – disconnections read connectively – and in the process characters like Judge Coutts and Evelina herself are reconnected with their Ojibwe histories, community, and selves.

Erdrich's style of fiction-writing encourages this form of discontinuous reading; from her earliest stories, gathered into the generically-ambiguous book *Love Medicine* (which itself exists in three distinct editions), to the still-expanding North Dakota series of novels, Erdrich has demanded that her readers work to make connections among her communities of characters, the places and spaces they inhabit, and the histories in which they participate. The emphasis upon history, the occupation of land, and diverse but related communities, is central to the questioning of received settler-colonial history characteristic of Erdrich's writing. As David Stirrup observes, drawing on Catherine Rainwater's work, the conclusion of *The Plague of Doves* focuses intensely on the problematic of determining historical truth (“My Body” 57-8). The narrator of the closing section, Cordelia Lochren, wonders about the legacy of her efforts to preserve the story of a town that she perceives as dying: “What shall I have said?” she asks herself, “How shall I have depicted the truth?” (308). The novel that Cordelia concludes requires that readers ask “what” has been said by determining “how” history has been “said.” That is, we are invited to read closely in the minutiae of narration to see the performative nature of discourse: the capacity of language and stories to give ontology to, and create, what is received as reality. This is the effect wrought by the possessive logic of settler sovereignty, described by Aileen Moreton-Robinson as an ideological effect that “operates at the level of beliefs and discursively at the level of epistemology ... to circulate sets of meanings about white ownership of the nation as part of commonsense knowledge, decision making, and socially produced conventions” (81). In novels like *The Plague of Doves* Erdrich shows how the conventional narrative of US formation has re-narrated indigenous historical experience so that Native dispossession becomes “manifest destiny,” land thefts become “land claims,” and lynching-murders become “rough justice” (297). Indigenous tellings of this history as attempted genocide are refract(ured) through the possessive logic of settler discourse; in response, Erdrich's discontinuous narratives offer to suture these fragments into a sovereign Ojibwe history through narrators like Evelina and Judge Coutts, who enter the collective experience of loss by learning their erased family and community histories, and the ways in which the privilege acquired by settlers and their descendants continues to be played out across the generations. As I show in what follows, this discursive suturing of residual traces of disavowed Native history operates on the covert figurative level of reference through symbolic registers that converge within the novel, Erdrich's oeuvre, and her extensive network of intertextual allusions.

In the context of the novel, the revised short story exposes one of the most fundamental ideological strategies of settler-colonialism: rhetorical displacement. Marn Wolde's narration achieves the displacement of the indigenous into the category of the monstrous, and of the political into the sphere of the private, by portraying herself as the spousal victim of Billy Peace's overwhelming appetite for power of all kinds. This is the overt significance of Marn's storytelling. However, the covert levels of intra- and inter-textual reference, in both the story and the novel, together with the obvious unreliability of her narration, create a discontinuous structure of reference that exposes the settler-colonial biases of Marn's rhetoric. That is, in the very telling of her story Marn betrays the ways in which her first-person narration depoliticizes the primary problematic of
The Plague of Doves (the identity and motive of the Lochren family's murderer) by obscuring Marn's own family history and their collective land-hunger through displacement into the register of Billy's (deviant) appetites. The figure of the monstrous Ojibwe wiindigoo is assigned to Billy by his wife, who overtly characterizes this monstrous greed as a private psychosis rather than as a projection of her own inherited settler-colonial pathology. To unpack the ways in which Marn projects this mythical identity on to her indigenous husband is to uncover the discursive process of disavowal that works through the logic of settler sovereignty to replace Native histories with, alternatively, silence or triumphant settler myths such as “manifest destiny.” In Erdrich's recovery of these indigenous histories, form does not so much follow as it constitutes function; as Susan Strehle remarks in her account of Erdrich's engagement with the settler myth of American exceptionalism, “The separation of aesthetics and politics does not hold in Erdrich's fourteen novels, which enlist a postmodern aesthetics in the service of a complex politics designed to resist and reverse the disavowal of Native culture” (109). A very specific instance of the “postmodern aesthetics” to which Strehle gestures is Erdrich's use of the discontinuous narrative form combined with a complex centrifugal network of symbolic reference. This allows the overt use of settler rhetoric by characters like Marn Wolde while, on a covert level of reference, counter-discourses work subversively in the interests of Ojibwe sovereignty. Strehle describes the power of Erdrich's strategies of plural narrative points of view and dislocative chronology to “fracture the narrative surface while highlighting the political nature of the forgetting that is required by American exceptionalism” (124). To this insight must be added close attention to the covert level of storying to highlight, for example, Marn's role as a voice of disavowal structured by the logic of settler-colonialism that is subverted by a repressed register of indigenous historical truth.

From story to novel: who is “Satan: Hijacker of a Planet”?

Both the original short story and the first chapter of Marn's narration in The Plague of Doves carry the same enigmatic title, which raises central questions like: whose story is told? Who is “Satan” in the story? Is the “Satan” of the story also the “Satan” of the novel? Who “hijacks” or holds the “planet” to ransom? The way the story is told raises the question of possession: who owns the story? Who is the central subject of the action – the narrator's younger self or the itinerant preacher (Stan/Billy) who seduces her – and how does the title relate to the narrative's subject? In both texts, responses to these questions are conditioned by the unreliability of the narrator, the narrative structure, and Erdrich's use of a highly evocative symbolic register of language. Ostensibly, the story is a bildungsroman or narrative of formation, in which the unnamed first-person narrator recounts a specific event that was life-changing: the intrusion of a young traveling preacher into her dull rural life, her experience of his charismatic church, and her erotic awakening. The consistent use of anticipatory rhetoric within the retrospective narration underlines this story of beginnings by sustaining a temporal dichotomy. However, the location and situation from which the narrator is telling her past are never revealed. The narrator distances herself from her younger protagonist-self: in the opening of the story where she uses the “little did I know ...” topos; later when she prefigures her resistance to Stan's control, “I was too young to stand against it”; and in the conclusion that frames the story as the start of her uncontrollable desire for Stan that continued “always … from then on” (n. pag.).

A perhaps more important rhetorical strategy, one that conveys meaning on multiple levels, is the narrator's use of paralipsis, the practice of drawing attention to something by claiming to disregard it. At the end of the story, the narrator overtly claims that she avoids the details of Stan's childhood abuse but immediately goes on to list “the burning welts, the scissors, the pinched nerves the dead eye, the strap, the belt, the spike-heeled shoe, the razor ...” (n. pag.). Implicitly, she suggests that she could but will not recount Stan's sermon “word for word” but that is precisely
what follows. Paralipsis is a rhetorical technique also known as “preterition.” In theology preterition describes the condition of being passed over or excluded from God's elect; in Roman law preterition is the omission of an heir from a will that is then invalidated. These theological and legal subtexts establish, through the very form of Erdrich's storytelling, covert levels of meaning that complicate Marn's overt narration with themes of belonging and possession, and set up her anxiety concerning ownership of land in the novel.

Possession as a narrative theme and as ownership of the story itself is further complicated by the sequence of action, the crisis of which should concern the primary eponymous subject: Satan. There are, however, not one but two major turning points in the story. Explicitly the narrator announces, “This is when it happens” (n. pag.), when in her vision or mental “picture” she guides Ed's terminally ill mother towards death, suggesting that she is the eponymous protagonist. Earlier, however, the centrality of Stan's sermon, which is underlined formally by the shift from the narrator's direct address to her use of free indirect discourse, suggests that in fact he is the main subject of the narrative. In each of these two moments, the narration shifts from past to present tense, and the intense focalization through the narrator becomes free indirect discourse that reports what is in the narrator's head or imagination or spirit. The words of the sermon do not belong to Stan (as they would if direct speech was used), nor does Ed's mother's vision; both are mediated through the narrator's consciousness. Emphasizing this work of mediation, the prophetic structure of the sermon formally echoes the narrator's prefigurative style of rhetoric. In this way, she takes possession of his words and thoughts just as she takes possession of Ed's mother's spirit, effectively “hijacking” their autonomy as independent subjects.

Not only as a character in the action but also through her style of characterization the narrator instrumentalizes others, interpreting the world she narrates as a projection of her own feelings, values, and circumstances. For every characterizing observation that is offered of others, the narrator betrays something of how she evaluates that world. Almost exclusively she uses objects to describe others: Stan through his car, her mother through the objects she buys, her father through the land he unsuccessfully farms. She describes her father's love of “his” land in terms of possession and exploitation: “He loves his land, so he has to figure out how to cultivate it – what it needs in each season, how much abuse it will sustain, what in the end it will yield” (n. pag.). Immediately she goes on to characterize herself through this image: “And I, too, in order to increase my yield and use myself right, was taking my lessons” (n. pag.). Her instrumentalization of the land is later represented formally when she uses it as the objective correlative of her own emotional landscape: “All my life my parents had been splitting up. I lived in a no-man's land between them, and the ground was pitted, scarred with ruts, useless” (n. pag.). This land is Creston, Montana, a town adjacent to the Mission Mountains, a landscape located on the Flathead Indian Reservation and sacred to the Salish-Kootenai peoples. This sacred land is further instrumentalized by the narrator as the place to which she takes Ed's mother in her vision or “picture.” Even more than instrumentalization, this action is desecration: the narrator violates the sanctity of this indigenous place by guiding the spirit of the dying woman so she “gains peace from it, gains the rock strength, the power” (n. pag.). In a sense, she “hijacks” the sacred power of the land for her self-interest.

The capacity of the narrator to take possession of the words of others and to instrumentalize them through her characterizations is an effect of the intense focalization of the action through the first-person perspective. The story's obsessive interest in sight and pervasive imagery of eyes emphasize this effect: from the story's epigraph, to the contrast between Stan's eyes and her grandfather's when he is planting trees, and Stan's eyes “the blue of winter ice” (n. pag.); the sermon incorporates the epigraph's image of the eyes of God and stresses the imperative to look in “The Book”; later, Stan demands of his congregation a gesture of belief by closing their eyes and surrendering their credit cards; and when in her “picture” the narrator privileges sight over the senses of sound and smell. Sight then takes on multiple meanings: as an access to personal character or personality, spiritual knowledge, and faith. Faith or belief is elaborated by the double meanings
of the word “credit” in Stan's sermon, signifying not only salvation through belief in a future redemtion but also financial security through the assurance of future payment. Stan identifies the Antichrist with “the plastic in our wallets” and damnation with reliance on the financial future. If we return to the narrator's own desire, as she admits, to “increase my yield and use myself right,” then despite the words that Stan directly addresses to her – “You're too young to have established a line of credit” – she has already taken Satan's part by interpreting herself as the object of investment in her own future security.

The eponymous Satan of the story's title (who hijacks a planet), on the overt level of the storytelling, is Stan – who has stolen the narrator's agency by holding her captive to the sexual power he wields over her, directing her life towards charismatic religion. But on the covert level, it is the narrator who conforms to Stan's description of the Antichrist and it is she who appropriates the world for her own needs. She “hijacks” in the sense of seizing control of the consciousness of the other characters: Stan through her appropriative use of free indirect discourse, Ed's mother through the vision in which her spirit is controlled and guided. The narrator assumes the communicative power of others' minds and spirits (through her “pictures”) and so becomes an illicit source of power and influence. But in what sense does she hijack a “planet”? Certainly she appropriates landscapes for her own emotional and spiritual uses with no regard for the indigenous status of the land she and her family occupy. Thus the narration performs a complex exposure of the settler-colonial biases of the story by revealing covertly the indigenous status of the world in which it is set.

This work of exposure is taken further in The Plague of Doves. The novel shifts the setting of the story from Montana to Pluto, North Dakota, but the narrator's (Marn Wolde's) land is still located adjacent to indigenous land. As Billy tells her, the family farm was once reservation land and, he threatens, it will be again. The conflict between Billy and Marn over land is one aspect of the novel's transformation of the relationship between Stan and the unnamed narrator of the short story, though all of the revisions contribute to a very different characterization of their relationship by placing it squarely in the context of settler colonialism. The classical temporal unity of the story that unfolds over the course of one day is extended to several years in the novel, though the exact time-span is indeterminate, so the moment when Marn decides to murder Billy is difficult to specify. Stan becomes Billy Peace and his Ojibwe backstory is elaborated both through the guides Henri and Lafayette Peace, who helped to found the town of Pluto, and also Cuthbert Peace, one of the lynched men. Stan's itinerant preaching is expanded into Billy's cult-like congregation; and the narrator of this sequence is identified by name as Marn Wolde, who is now Billy's wife. Perhaps the most important addition in the novel is Marn's Uncle Warren, along with her two children. The story is located in the middle of the novel and the original story is split into three sections: the events of the story leading to the encounter with Ed's dying mother comprise the first chapter, which retains the title of the short story; in Marn's third chapter, entitled “The Kindred,” she gives her account of the Milwaukee “picture” (160-1); and the sexual encounter that concludes the short story is presented in the novel after her return from a fund-raising trip to Seattle and it is represented in much more violent terms than in the story. The implicit struggle for dominance portrayed in the short story between the narrator and Stan becomes, in the novel, an explicit power struggle that characterizes the possessive logic of settler colonialism working through relationship between Marn and Billy.

This struggle is intimately connected to the change of setting, which is thematically incorporated into the action of the novel. After “wandering in the desert” where Marn has “trouble with the pictures” (147), she returns to her family farm in Pluto and there her visions also return. The significance of the link between Marn's capacity for spiritual visions and the physical landscape she occupies is underlined by a seemingly minor change in the setting: the “lodgepole pines” described early in the short story become “the great oak” whose roots suck water “from the bottom of the world.” This echoes the “hanging tree” from which the innocent Ojibwe men were lynched,
which is also located “on the edge of Wolde's land” (77). The sole variety of oak indigenous to North Dakota is the bur oak (*Quercus macrocarpa*) which, with the long trailing limbs of its mature specimens, agrees with the description of the “hanging tree.” The bur oak is described interestingly by USDA Forest Service scientist Paul S. Johnson as “a pioneer tree invading prairie grasslands” (USDA n.p.). Johnson explains that, because of its flood-resistance, the bur oak is the first variety of tree to become established on the edge of flood-plains, such as those of the Missouri River in North Dakota. Thus, the bur oak is both a native plant and a “pioneer” because it begins the process of environmental transformation. In *The Plague of Doves*, the “pioneer” oak displaces an indigenous reference embedded in the name of the “lodgepole pines” and specifically functions as the residual physical trace of historic settler murder, in a place where Marn regains her exceptional spiritual power. And she is not the only member of the Wolde family who has visions or “pictures” here. In a sentence added to the original introduction of her “pictures,” in the novel Marn remarks: “That's what my uncle does when he's just staring” (146). Her Uncle Warren is her grandfather's brother, “whose dad originally bought the farm” (139). In the time-scale of the novel, this land would have been allotted Ojibwe land: “Indian land,” as Billy calls it. The figure of the grandfather is absent from the novel but, like his brother Warren, he would have been of the generation of settlers who lynched Billy's ancestor. Her Uncle Warren repeatedly confronts Marn claiming insight into and affinity with her capacity to kill. Fixing her with his “frozen” eye, he predicts that she is going to hell: “Sometimes he would say that I was just like him, that I maybe was him, he could see it. He could see my whole structure. I couldn't hide” (141). In the opening to the chapter, “The Kindred,” in unmarked direct speech, Marn reports his assertions, “It's on you, I can see it. … You're gonna kill. … It's on you. You're gonna kill” (158). Later, as Marn watches her “picture” and listens while her snakes tell her how she will kill Billy, her exchange with Uncle Warren's returns:

It's on you, I can see it.
What's on me? What?
It's on you, I can see it, you're gonna kill (177).

This untagged indirect dialogue could be Marn's memory; it could also be her internalization of her uncle's words. The dialogue is set off from the surrounding sections of the text and stands dramatically isolated, emphatic, and chilling.

**Satan and the wiindigoo**

Marn's character and her relation with her uncle, grounded in settler history, is covertly explained through the dense subtext formed by the novel's figurative language. The symbolic significance of names, for example: one variation of Marn is the shortened form of Maren signifying the sea and Wolde, as a German name, means “child of.” The name Marn Wolde, as a child of the sea, would underline her status as the child of immigrants in contrast with Billy's indigenous ancestry. Of their children, Marn identifies herself explicitly through physical likeness with her daughter, Lilith. In *midrashim*, Lilith was the first wife of Adam who refused to serve him and so was sent into exile (Neusner); biblically, Lilith is associated with the screech owl, the harbinger of death (Isaiah 34, Ginzberg, Graves & Patai), while Marn and Lilith also share a symbolic link through the novel's extensive intertextual register of snake imagery. In *Gilgamesh*, Lilith is the spirit inhabiting a powerful tree in the base of which lives a serpent; in the *Kabbalah* she is the “Tortuous Serpent”; in Greco-Roman mythology she is the daughter of Hecate, human but serpentine from the waist down, gifted with second sight but cursed never to close her eyes. In Marn's own narration, intratextual traces link her intimately to snakes. Her copperhead snake bears hourglass markings (160), which echo the “figure-eight sign of eternal life” that Billy engraves into Marn's thigh (173). Significantly,
given Billy's desire to return the Wolde land to the reservation, this image is also evocative of the flag of the Métis Nation: “The horizontal figure or infinity symbol featured on the Métis flag ... represents the immortality of the nation” (metisnation.org n.pag., see also Roemer 129), though the two conjoined circles suggest the coexistence of Native and settler peoples. Marn reports Billy's action simply as an instance of his physical abuse, but the image further recalls the 888 acres of farmland that Marn wants to claim by returning to Pluto (149). The connection between snakes and the disputed Ojibwe origins of the name for their traditional enemy the Sioux adds an even more sinister dimension to this cluster of allusions: Douglas Parks and Raymond DeMallie reference both J. N. B. Hewitt's etymology of “Sioux” as derived from nadoweisiw-eg, “a diminutive of nadowe, 'an adder,' hence 'an enemy',” and also Frances Densmore's “more accurate translation 'they are lesser enemies'; she noted that the word nadowe meant both 'an adder' and 'an enemy'” (Parks & DeMallie 234). When to this allusive cluster of enemy, snakes, and land is added the allusion to the daughter of Hecate and the infinity symbol – evoking a capacity to see into time twinned with the inability to disavow this vision – the resulting symbolic complex is suggestive of Marn's continual silence about, but inadvertent betrayal of, her family's implication in the historic lynchings and the Lochren murders.

Marn's unwitting exposure of her family's historic involvement in settler violence is an effect of her unreliable narration. A perhaps innocent yet radical example of her unreliability is the inconsistency between Marn's description of the town café as “a spare room, big and functional” (165), in contrast with Evelina's perception of the same space as both “solid” and gracious, befitting its former role as the National Bank of Pluto (190), an account that is later validated by Cordelia Lochren's description of “[t]he granite façade, arched windows, and twenty-foot ceilings [that] make our café seem solid and even luxurious” (295). More subversive of her reliability is Marn's passing remark that she works as a waitress when necessary – otherwise, she “raised money for Billy by speaking at big tent meetings and writing pamphlets and handling my snakes in the spirit-trance” (164) – which conflicts with her subsequent claim that when she returns to the farm she will be a prisoner and it will be a long time before she sees the outside world again. The falsely sinister tone of Marn's description of the farm buildings casts significant doubt on the objectivity of her claim: “I couldn't stop my eyes from catching on certain things – the lock on the gate of the play area, the intercom in diapering, the way the windows shut and locked from the inside, the walls built heavy, reinforced, a bunker” (174). All windows lock from the inside; windows that lock only from outside certainly would be indicative of a prison, but Marn frames her account of the material fabric of her environment in such a way that normal features appear to be threatening. In such an environment she frames herself as victim.

It is as a victim that Marn contextualizes her murder of Billy as the killing of a wiindigoo. And yet her actions, starting with Billy's assertion that their land should be returned to the reservation and leading to the murder, reveal a different set of motivations. Billy's words are mediated through Marn's voice as reported speech, rendering the whole exchange ambiguous: “The end of our land bumps smack up to the reservation boundary. This was reservation, Billy says, and should be again. This was my family's land, Indian land. Will be again. He says it flat out with a lack of emotion that disturbs me. Something's there. Something's different underneath” (152). Billy's sentiments are presented in terms of the effect of his words on Marn so that what becomes “different underneath” is her attitude towards him, now that he wants to return their land to tribal ownership. It is from this point in Marn's narrative that she begins to characterize Billy in very specific ways that evoke the Ojibwe figure of the wiindigoo, a cannibalistic monster with an insatiable appetite.

Basil Johnston's account of Ojibwe spiritual and cultural traditions includes the following description of the wiindigoo:

The pain of others meant nothing to the Weendigo; all that mattered was its
The Weendigo gorged itself and glutted its belly as if it would never eat again. But a remarkable thing always occurred. As the Weendigo ate, it grew, and as it grew so did its hunger, so that no matter how much it ate, its hunger always remained in proportion to its size. The Weendigo could never requite either its unnatural lust for human flesh or its unnatural appetite. ... the more it ate, the bigger it grew; and the bigger it grew, the more it wanted and needed (222).

Marn stresses Billy's appetite, his bodily expansion, and limitless energy (152-5), describing "the bigger, uncontrollable force that Billy becomes" (154) and, after Billy is struck by lightning, she sees that he is left "bigger than before, swollen with unearthly power" (156). However, upon her return from Seattle, Billy seems to her "[n]ot vast as he'd been when he'd absorbed lightning, but big enough" (167). With the threat of losing her land less urgent because she has already decided to murder him, Billy also appears less threatening, less monstrous. Only Marn figures Billy as a wiindigoo but covert elements of the novel that are independent of Marn's perspective characterize her in precisely this way. In the short story the narrator remarks upon Stan's "icy blue eyes" that are evocative of the wiindigoo, but in the novel Evelina describes the "intense blue iris" (184) of Marn's eyes; unlike Billy, Marn has the capacity to run very fast as when she runs her "rattlesnake route" (175-6); she enters the spirit of other people and possesses them through her "pictures"; and the wiindigoo's uncontrollable greed and desire to consume characterize Marn's instrumentalization of the landscape, objects, and other people as well as her appetite for food and land.

Working through the novel and into Erdrich's earlier fiction, the cannibalistic wiindigoo figure is strongly associated with the insatiable land-greed of settler colonialism. The term "wiindigoo" is explicitly used in The Porcupine Year, published in the same year as The Plague of Doves: "The dreadful cannibal spirit of the wiindigoo was on the land, the spirit that drove people mad with hunger as it hid the animals and put the fish to sleep. They could all feel its bitter breath" (114). In The Birchbark House (1999), the protagonist's father tells a story about his near-escape from such a monster and, in his commentary on that story, reflects with Omakayas's uncle upon the pressure of white aggression that is relentlessly pushing the family westward, and the growing knowledge that this process of dispossession through settler greed will never end: "'Not until they have it all,' said Fishtail. 'All of our lands. Our wild-rice beds, hunting grounds, fishing streams, gardens. Not even when we are gone and they have the bones of our loved ones will they be pleased. I have thought about this. ... Before they were born, before they came into this world, the chimookoman must have starved as ghosts. They are infinitely hungry'" (79-80).

Woven into the anti-colonial subtext of The Plague of Doves is the only explicitly cannibalistic wiindigoo character, Liver-Eating Johnston, who appears in Mooshum's various tall tales of their encounter. Folk "heroes" of the settler frontier, like Johnston, are sustained in stories that celebrate the hero as "the perfect representative of frontier virtue and independence" (McNeil n. pag.). Often called "pioneers," "explorers," "frontiersmen" (most famously, Davy Crockett) and hunters (like Buffalo Bill Cody), these figures were actively engaged in the process of colonial indigenous erasure. John "Liver-Eating" Johnston belongs to this group of Indian-killers – he was, among other things, a scout, gold-seeker, hunter, trapper, and whiskey-peddler (Walker 92) – and he is most famous for stories in which he eats the livers of those he killed, as a revenge-fueled insult against the Crow (who consider the liver necessary to entry into the afterlife) for killing his Native wife (Walker 92). This "hero" of settler-colonial folklore is introduced by Evelina who overhears Mooshum recounting to the priest the story of how he lost part of his ear. In Mooshum's terms, Liver-Eating Johnson (sic) becomes an anti-heroic Indian-hater, an "evil trapper and coward" (37) characterized by features of the wiindigoo: his ability to run very fast over very great distances, his desperation, and the eating of human flesh. But Mooshum also places himself in the position of cannibal, biting off Liver-Eater's fingers, toes, and his nose, which he offers to show the priest. The
priest's objection to the idea of keeping a relic of the encounter, and his outrage when Mooshum not only likens it to the Christian relics held in the local Church but goes on to compare Liver-Eating Johnson's cannibalism to the Eucharist, creates the novel's opportunity to suggest that cannibalism is an appropriate image of the workings of settler colonialism. Later, Judge Coutts makes this explicit by underlining the cannibalistic wiindigoo impulse among the founders of Pluto. Struggling to survive the brutal winter that interrupts the land-claim expedition, the Buckendorf brothers – whose “eyes glowed with hunger like mystic stones and their fangs had grown yellow” (111) – want to eat Reginald Bull and are prevented only by the Ojibwe guides who bury the dead man before he can be consumed by his partners. The “blackened piece of leatherlike gunk” Mooshum produces ostensibly as Liver-Eater's nose is identified by Evelina's brother as “[a] bit of Thamnophis radix” (39), the common garter snake that Evelina identifies by its scientific name shortly after (49), and one of the varieties of snake that Marn celebrates on her regular runs around the boundaries of her family farm (176). Mooshum connects Liver-Eating Johnson with the image of Marn's snakes, when he encounters her in the town café following Billy's murder; Mooshum offers to tell the story of his escape to Marn but is interrupted and when he addresses her again it is to ask her about the rumors he has heard concerning her plan to create a snake ranch on her newly-claimed land. Their exchange brings together land, snakes, and cannibalism in the context of settler violence.

Greed for land and a willingness to murder in order to satisfy the hunger for land defines the wiindigoo logic of settler colonialism. And in The Plague of Doves it is Marn who wants the family's land for herself. I am suggesting that caution should be exercised in relation to Marn's account of her motives for murder, particularly in view of the clear parallel across Erdrich's oeuvre between Marn's murder of Billy and Pauline Puyat's killing of Napoleon Morrissey in Tracks (1988). Believing that she is subduing Satan or Lucifer in the guise of the lake manitou Misshepeshu, but in the midst of a vision that can otherwise appear to be psychosis, Pauline strangles Napoleon with her rosary. Comparisons between Pauline and Marn are manifold, based on their figurative yet murderous possession by spirits of evil. In an incisive 1997 essay, Kate McCafferty maps the Ojibwe contexts in which Pauline is characterized as wiindigoo through affiliation with the Wa'bano witches society and its practices of ritual cannibalism, the use of the owl (or bear) as their tutelary spirit, and the capacity to travel at great speed (737). McCafferty traces the development of Pauline's wiindigoo character through her opposition to Fleur Pillager's growing spiritual power (743); similarly, as Marn sees Billy increasing in spiritual power (the power to heal, for example), so she extends her own capacity (through the charismatic power of her snakes, for instance). Pauline, in her work with Bernadette Morrissey, “brings living souls into the waiting hands of death” including the schoolmate she “dreams to death” (McCafferty 744, Tracks 67), much as Marn guides Ed's dying mother through her “picture.” McCafferty explains Pauline's turn, first to wiindigoo practices, and subsequently to the Church, as a consequence initially of her marginal position as a clan-less mixed-blood on the reservation and then as her response to the continuing influx of settlers into Ojibwe territory: “What makes Pauline's behavior Wa'bano is the fact that she twists this critical historical and personal moment toward competitive self-aggrandizement in opposition to her tribe” (746). While Marn is a member of the settler community and so cannot turn against the Ojibwe in the same way as Pauline, she acts to aggrandize herself by taking the children, the money, and the land – and rationalizes the killing of Billy that makes this possible by portraying him, in her narration of the murder, as being himself a wiindigoo.

McCafferty offers a possible explanation for Marn's discursive maneuver as a self-interested psychological projection when she quotes Ruth Landes' paraphrase of her tribal informants: “The windigo disorder involved projection of the sufferer's fears and vindictiveness ... from profound melancholy to violence [until] in the latter phase the sufferer yearned to kill and eat all human beings around” (qtd 743 emphasis added). The self-interest that motivates Marn – obtaining land as her personal possession – serves the settler-colonial interests of herself and the historic “mission” of the town. As McCafferty suggests, through the character of Pauline Puyat, and in Erdrich's work
more generally, “the 'new' god of Western society may be the shape that a much older power has shifted into … [f]rom a certain Chippewa angle, the church's evangelical mission has veiled its own windigo desire to murder a culture in order to scavenge its heart” (746). The windigoo segues into the settler-colonial practice of murder and the Christian image of “Satan.”

Marn's narration ends with her vision or “picture” of herself as she leaves the scene of the murder, taking with her the money, the children and, as she says, “the land deed in my name” (179). In the next section, told from Evelina's first-person perspective, Marn sits with her children in the café and there she tells Evelina that her purpose in coming to town is to see the judge and get her land back (187). But Marn's murder of Billy has an even greater significance than her appropriation of the land and her effort to ensure that it is not returned to the reservation. After she has killed Billy, Marn describes how her “picture” dictates that she must hang his dead body from the rafters (178), explicitly recalling the historic lynching of Billy's ancestor. This gesture brings together a number of covert elements of the novel, clustered around the image of the hanging tree. These symbolic traces are framed by the snakes that dictate to Marn in a vision the procedure by which she kills Billy. She only experiences these visions (the capacity for which she shares with her uncle) when she is on Wolde land. In combination, these details suggest that Marn inherits her Uncle Warren's psychosis and that the land itself is haunted by the terrible crimes it has witnessed.

**Satan, the windigoo, and the possessive logic of settler sovereignty**

The settler pathology of land-hunger haunts the reservation boundary, itself a remnant or trace of historical dispossession by the logic of possessive white sovereignty. The Wolde farm borders reservation land and the Lochren farm, locating both farms on what was once Ojibwe land. When Cordelia Lochren finally reveals the identity of her family's killer she does not disclose Warren Wolde's motive for murder; rather, she asks, “to what profit? For nothing was taken. Nothing gained. To what end the mysterious waste [of her family's lives]?” (308-9). The motive emerges from the covert intersection of fragmentary details, assembled discontinuously and synthesized into an indigenous counter-logic of possession. From the perspective of indigenous occupation of sovereign land, the settler disavowal and re-narration of a genocidal history is re-avowed. Cordelia Lochren, speaking in her role as town historian, remarks that the lynching is never mentioned (297); that she was always led to believe that the lynched men were guilty until her fellow local historian, Neve, told her the truth (307). But even Neve does not want ask the pressing historical questions forced upon her by Mooshum: how it is that Pluto lies within the reservation boundaries, “how was it stolen? How has this great thievery become acceptable?” (84).

The discursive reappropriation of indigenous history is played out through the symbolic value of the hanging tree both in _The Plague of Doves_ and in the companion novel, _The Round House_ (2012). Another narrative structured around violent anti-Native crime and narrated entirely by Joe – the son of Judge Coutts and Geraldine, Evelina's aunt – _The Round House_ explores the transmission of settler violence into the next generation of Pluto. Joe's mother is savagely raped and nearly killed as she tries unsuccessfully to save a young Ojibwe woman and her baby from Linden Lark. The money that Lark tries to steal from Mayla, money she has been paid to keep quiet about the identity of the baby's father, is found by Joe who banks it and then buries the passbooks. He buries them near “the tree that the people call the hanging tree, a huge oak. … This was the tree where those ancestors were hanged. None of the killers ever went on trial. I could see the land of their descendants, already full of row crops” (140). While the settler claim to the land has not been displaced (indeed, their descendants prosper on stolen land) the tree itself has undergone a primal shift in symbolic significance: “There were prayer flags, strips of cloth. Red, blue, green, white, the old-time Anishinaabe colors of the directions … . Some cloths were faded, some new” (140). The tree, and the history it holds, has been and continues to be indigenized. The hanging tree is framed
in the novel, early and late, by Joe's memory of pulling tree shoots from the foundations of his home, a memory that he later marks as the last time he was happy, unaware, untouched by evil (294). The language of his recollection intimates that these trees, like the hanging tree, bear a considerable symbolic burden: "... how funny, strange, that a thing can grow so powerful even when planted in the wrong place. Ideas too, I muttered. Ideas" (293). The idea that immediately comes to his mind is the Doctrine of Discovery, explained by his father as the foundation of possessive settler sovereignty: an idea that has been "planted in the wrong place" and yet continues powerfully to grow. However, the hanging tree festooned with Ojibwe prayer flags is an assertion of indigenous sovereignty that re-avows the history of US settlement as a murderous land-grab enacted by the wiindigoo that also comes to Joe's mind, simultaneously with the remembrance of the unjust case law that is based on the fiction of "discovery."

Lark's sister Linda identifies something of his motive for theft and murder; she tells Joe: "why he did this to your mother had more to do with a man who set loose his monster. [A monster that is always] still hungry. Know why? Because no matter how much it ate, it couldn't get the right thing. There was always something it needed" (300). But it is Joe who names this monstrosity wiindigoo, as he recounts his fears: "Would I become a wiindigoo? Infected by Lark?" (294). Linda suggests that Lark inherited his “monster” from his mother; Judge Coutts offers a further line of descent when he reminds Joe that Lark's great-uncle was among the men who formed the lynching-party (211). These men, continuing the legacy of their settler forebears, resemble the colonial Scots-Irish described by Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz as: "the foot soldiers of British empire-building ... [T]hey and their descendants formed the shock troops of the 'westward movement' in North America, the expansion of the US continental empire and the colonization of its inhabitants" (52). Though these “foot soldiers” rarely benefitted directly from their work of “clear[ing] areas for settlement” (53), they served the interests of US settler colonialism and passed the material benefits to their descendants: just as it was the later families of the “discoverers” of the land that became Pluto who benefitted after the railroad made the town viable.

The discontinuous, interconnected stories of Pluto's history explore settler sovereignty as the assumption of entitlement to take whatever is desired. In The Plague of Doves, when Maggie accuses her former lover John Wildstrand of being “just like your Indian-hating grandfather” (131), she speaks in the context of the instrumentalization of her brother Billy Peace, who is used by Wildstrand to kidnap his wife and, under the pretense of a ransom, to steal her retirement fund. Wildstrand acts from a sense of entitlement to the money, although it is not his, and a righteous desire to buy a house for Maggie in which she can raise the child of their adulterous affair. Judge Coutts tells Wildstrand's story immediately following his account of the land-claim expedition, which included Wildstrand's ancestor. What these two stories have in common is the dramatization of the fundamental settler-colonial attitude of entitlement. In the Judge's telling, the historical Wildstrand and the other land speculators never paused to question their entitlement to claim indigenous land. This is precisely the attitude that informs John Wildstrand's exploitation of Billy in order to steal money and property from his wife Neve, and it is the assumption that motivates Marn to kill Billy in order to acquire, again, money and land.

The land-greed that brings dispossession and death to the Ojibwe creates the town that is significantly named “Pluto,” a word that evokes the ruler of the underworld (and by implication the “Satan” of Marn's opening chapter) and Plutus, the Greek god of wealth. Through the novel's emphasis on imagery of vision – sharing the stress on “eyes” in the short story – and of light, the mythical allusion to Plutus is linked to the biblical figure of Mammon: signifying greed, materialism, and gluttony, underlining the transhistorical force of settler land-hunger. Mammon is opposed to the true God in Matthew 6: 22-24, in the caution that no man can serve two masters. The opposition between God and Mammon is explained through the image of the eye that allows the body to be filled with either light or darkness: “But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!” (Matt. 6:
23, original emphasis). Marn describes herself as “dark inside” while Billy is, to her, “too full of light” (173). In Marn's self-description and in the symbolic underworld of Pluto darkness reigns and, with it, loyalty to Mammon. The narrative's indirect invocation of Mammon through the name assigned to the town of Pluto is supplemented by Marn's account of the intention of the congregation to mine the farmland for gold:

We were imaging gold. We were visualizing total and complete original support. We were seeing chunks, flakes, beads, veins, whole nuggets. We were seeing through the rock and gumbo, through igneous peat and shale, through the vestiges of lost black time, through the ivory teeth and petrified wood, through the bones and the tarry blood of dinosaurs. We were seeing gold, tasting it, biting gold coins, believing. We were going to start digging in the back field pretty soon (172).

Marn introduces this description of the Kindred's faith in gold by telling of her “imaging”: “I closed my eyes and from inside my own dark consciousness I stared down, far down, into the shaft of an empty mine” (172). The closing of her eyes, the entry into darkness and emptiness are details made significant by their biblical contextualization. Worshipping Mammon, she closes her eyes to the light and sees instead form after form of gold. Imagining through layers of earth and time, her account is evocative of the Black Hills Gold Rush in Dakota Territory that both violated the Treaty of Laramie (1868) and profoundly desecrated the sacred site; Marn's description is also strongly reminiscent of Milton's story of Mammon in the first book of *Paradise Lost* (ll.679-695). Even in Heaven, Mammon directs his eyes downward, preferring the “riches of Heav'n's pavement, trod'n Gold” to

... aught divine or holy else enjoy'd
In vision beatific: by him first
Men also, and by his suggestion taught,
Ransack'd the Center, and with impious hands
Riff'd the bowels of thir mother Earth
For Treasures better hid. Soon had his crew
Op'nd into the Hill a spacious wound
And dig'd out ribs of Gold. Let none admire
That riches grow in Hell ... (ll. 683-91).

The congregation, which includes some descendants of the lynching party (243), is named “the Kindred” and while the name simply refers to the alliance among group members, the symbolic significance attached to them via the name again connects their violent greed, and allegiance to Mammon, to the figure of the tree. Billy's congregation may be called the Kindred as a gesture towards the indigenous term “all my relations”; however, the narration exclusively through Marn's first-person perspective blocks access to this kind of information. The OED lists among the obsolete meanings of the word “kindred” that of a genealogical tree, suggesting again that their appetite for wealth is an inherited settler drive for possession. Evelina brings the two into conjunction when she describes the location of the hanging tree: “The tree still grew on Marn's land, where Billy Peace's kindred used to stay” (253). Reinforcing this symbolic evocation of inherited settler-greed are the multiple meanings of the term “kindred.” Figuratively, the application of kindred to a community of vampires suggests blood-suckers in the sense of those who ruthlessly prey on others. The practice of drinking their own human blood is set out in John Borrows’s account of the *wiindigoo* in *Drawing Out Law* (223), to which he adds “other harmful forms of cannibalistic consumption that destroy lands and people” (224). The figurative link to US settler colonialism is supplemented by
an older significance of the word “kindred”: the Middle English Dictionary lists a variant meaning of “kinr??de” as “nation, tribe, people” including the twelve tribes of Israel.12

This cluster of discontinuous intertextual references casts particular light on the title of the novel. As Margaret Noori observes, “A biblical dove can be a sign of peace or of the Holy Ghost, and a flock is a message from God. Yet all that whiteness descending on Chippewa reservation farmland, hungry and destructive, is also a metaphor for the myth of manifest destiny” (12). The doves that plague Pluto with their voracious, insatiable appetite do indeed evoke the myth of manifest destiny when read in the context of the novel’s exposure of the workings of settler colonialism.13 In Genesis 8:11, doves are sent by Noah after the flood to discover land where the Ark could disembark; the significance of the dove as a symbol of the people of Israel is made explicit in the Rabbinic midrashim on “Song of Songs” 2:14 (Neusner 106), an association that evokes the Puritan settler myth of themselves as divinely-guided “Israelites” and their colonies in Native America as the “New Canaan.” The connection between doves and settlers accounts for the ominous tone of Mooshum’s words to Evelina as they return Holy Track's boots to the now flag-festooned hanging tree, “Awee, my girl. The doves are still up there” (254); earlier, Evelina reports overhearing Mooshum tell his brother, “I saw the same thing as Holy Track, the doves are still up there” (33, original emphasis). This image is repeated later by Marn to characterize the moment when she becomes possessed of a power that she suspects has been transmitted to her by her uncle: “I feel the stark bird that nests in the tree of the Holy Ghost descend and hover” (151). Marn's experience coincides with Billy's plans to take over her family farm, the land that she later kills to obtain for herself rather than allow him to return it to the reservation.

The evocation of the settler-myth of manifest destiny operates in the context of the “kindred” as followers of Mammon, inheritors of the wiindigoo settler-hunger for wealth, and Marn herself as “the great deceiver” or the Satan figure named in the title of her first chapter and the original short story. The symbolic subtext or covert level of the novel's meaning works together with a network of allusions to Erdrich's other writing and a constellation of intertextual allusions to re-avow the disavowed history of settler invasion and occupation of sovereign indigenous land, by identifying the pathological (and potentially psychotic) nature of settler-colonial greed. Asiginak, shortly before he is lynched, confirms that the settlers are just not like the Ojibwe men: “You are a madness on this earth,” he tells them in Ojibwemowin (75). And much later, the Judge thinks about this land-greed recalling his “grandfather's phrase for the land disease, town fever, and how he nearly died of greed, its main symptom” (115). The possessive logic of settler sovereignty, exposed through Marn's unreliable narration, is subverted by Erdrich's pervasive Native reappropriation and indigenizing of this history.

Conclusion: discontinuous narrative, “assembled by experience”

When it was published, The Plague of Doves joined several earlier Erdrich novels criticized by Native and non-Native readers alike for its discontinuous form. Typical of the view that Erdrich's use of narrative discontinuity is symbolic of indigenous alienation is Louis Owens' description of Love Medicine: “Formally, the novel's fragmented narrative underscores the fragmentation of the Indian community and of the identity that begins with community and place” (64). Owens echoes the earlier, and better known, criticisms made by Leslie Marmon Silko who, in her 1986 review of The Beet Queen, approached the novel as a “postmodern” exercise in linguistic self-referentiality divorced from the actual experience of indigeneity: “In Erdrich's hands, the rural North Dakota of Indian-hating, queer-baiting white farmers, of the Depression, becomes magically transformed. … is an oddly rarified place in which the individual's own psyche, not racism or poverty, accounts for all conflict and tension” (180). These framings of Erdrich's narrative style appear to be indebted to understandings of discontinuity as a postmodern legacy of “high” Modernist fiction, such as John
G. Parks remarks in his 1984 essay, “Human Destiny and Contemporary Narrative Form”:

The loss of boundaries, experimentation and exploration, and Protean identities characterize much of the serious fiction since the Second World War. Not only has the thematic content of fiction reflected cultural breakdowns – in its treatment of madness, disintegration, alienation, loneliness, absurdity – but also the way fictions are told. The abandonment of plot and character in favor of episode and voice, and an often fragmented and discontinuous narrative, reflect a radical questioning of, if not outright disbelief in, a notion of human destiny and a sense of relatedness to an overarching theological and cultural narrative paradigm. In short, for many writers, there is no longer available a central story which explains and gives human value to experience (99 original emphasis).

These references to “alienation,” “cultural breakdowns,” and disbelief in the relatedness of humanity and grand cultural paradigms – like Parks' claim that narrative must be discontinuous in the absence of “a central story which explains and gives human value to experience” – do not adequately describe Louise Erdrich's literary achievement. Indeed, if the most fundamental principle of postmodernism is, as Jean-François Lyotard claims, the rejection of master-discourses or “metanarratives,” then a novel like The Plague of Doves is emphatically not “postmodernist.”

The narrative is structured around the very real historical “metanarrative” of settler-colonial possession and indigenous genocide. More relevant to Erdrich's work, then, are the terms used by Brian Kiernan to account for the discontinuous style of Australian writer Frank Moorhouse: “What happens does not 'develop' as in a continuous narrative, yet there is the sense that all is not random, disconnected, arbitrary. … discontinuity would seem to presuppose some continuity to depart from … ” (75, 94). In a comparable way, Erdrich creates a sense of indirectly communicated continuity through an elusive, covert pattern of reference that defies direct description yet articulates the violent dispossession and murder underpinning US national formation. This history is disavowed by the white inhabitants of Erdrich's fictional Pluto but it constitutes the primary challenge confronted by indigenous American writers who seek to recover their sovereign histories under the regime of remembrance imposed by US nation-state hegemony. John Freeman reports that in his interview with Erdrich shortly after the publication of The Plague of Doves she observed, “In the beginning, the whites had all the power … but … [t]he Indians have the history” (n. pag.).

What I hope to have shown is that when Erdrich's 1997 short story is integrated into the longer narrative of the 2008 novel, two important shifts occur. First, the story becomes radicalized. Marn Wolde, as a contemporary inheritor of wiindigoo psychosis, becomes the focal point of a settler-colonial history of violent land theft: she, through all that she represents, is “Satan, Hijacker of a Planet” as the short story suggests. Secondly, the story is “indigenized” by the novel's mobilization of the interlaced settler and Ojibwe histories of the town of Pluto in order to “imply an elusive pattern of interaction” (Kiernan 75), which is an indigenous remembering of original and enduring tribal sovereignty beyond the disavowal of that sovereignty by the possessive logic of settler colonialism. Using a metaphor that is particularly appropriate to discussion of The Plague of Doves, in Love's Knowledge (1990) Martha Nussbaum describes “the terms of the novelist’s art [as] alert winged creatures, perceiving where the blunt terms of ordinary speech or of abstract theoretical discourse are blind, acute where they are obtuse, winged where they are dull and heavy” (5). In the context of indigenous dispossession and the disavowal of settler-colonial genocide, the “blunt terms of ordinary speech” are always already obtuse and blind to indigenous sovereignty, conforming instead to the “common sense knowledge and socially produced conventions” that Moreton-Robinson describes as the discursive vectors of possessive settler sovereignty. In a slightly different context, the protagonist of Erdrich's novel Shadow Tag (2010) writes in her private journal:
How many times have I told you how difficult it is to resist the lure of the historical moment? The one action, the instantaneous truth that changes everything? How many times have I described my own struggles in telling stories, relating historical occurrences, searching for the sequence of events that results in a pattern we can recognize as history? There are always many moments, there is never just one. There are many points of clarity and many causes to one effect. However, after many, many, of these points, these moments, have occurred, there is, I should tell you, a final moment. A final scene” (48).

A “final moment” of this kind is described by Evelina in *The Plague of Doves*. Her narration concludes: “When we are young, the words are scattered around us. As they are assembled by experience, so also are we, sentence by sentence, until the story takes shape” (268). The possessive logic of settler sovereignty structures the disavowal of histories of US national formation. Thus, the construction of an Ojibwe counter-narrative of settler land-theft and the *wiindigo* pathology of insatiable land-hunger requires that words be reassembled “sentence by sentence” across a widely dispersed discursive field: across the novel itself, across Erdrich's oeuvre, and across the canon of literature. And as the words come together, performatively they re-create Ojibwe history: “the story” that displaces the settler fiction called the “Doctrine of Discovery.”

**NOTES**

I am deeply grateful to the anonymous reviewers whose comments enriched and extended my thinking in this essay.

1. Throughout, I follow Erdrich's habit of referring to the Anishinaabe as Ojibwe.
2. Though beyond the scope of this essay, the figure of Fleur Pillager in *Four Souls* poses a significant comparison with Marn, as another woman who kills her husband to retake control of her land.
5. On the symbolic significance of trees in Erdrich's work, see Stripes.
6. The opening of *Tracks* is set in 1912, during the devastation caused by allotment and the subsequent loss of indigenous land, and the stripping of forest from what was once reservation land. For a succinct account of the Ojibwe experience of dispossession as the result of allotment in the context of Erdrich's writing see Stirrup 2011, 2010 5-10.
7. On the significance of naming in the novel, see Roemer.
8. Erdrich changes the spelling of Johnston's name to Johnson.

10. The OED entry reads: “1741 C. Forman Some Queries & Observ. Revol. in 1688 11 These are the vampires of the publick, and riflers of the kingdom.”

11. In Borrows' account of dealing with the wiindigoo, which Erdrich acknowledges in The Round House, what is stressed is compassion for a possessed community member rather than brutal killing. So even if Billy were a wiindigoo, Marr's actions are in stark contrast to traditional Ojibwe practices.


13. Gamber comments on “an excessively large, migrating, white mass of life clamping down on the American landscape, overusing the land and starving out the indigenous population” (144).

14. Quennet sets out the case for reading Erdrich's early North Dakota novels as postmodernist.

WORKS CITED


Valentino, Gina. “‘It All Does Come to Nothing in the End’: Nationalism and Gender in Louise Erdrich's *The Plague of Doves.*” *Louise Erdrich: Tracks, The Last Report on the Miracles at*