

Healing through Presence: The Embodiment of Absence in the Plays of Daniel David Moses

by

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I argue that the performance of three plays, *Brébeuf's Ghost*, *The Indian Medicine Shows* and *Almighty Voice and his Wife*, written by Daniel David Moses function as healing ceremonies. This healing, so necessary after the cultural genocide wrought upon First Nations peoples by the Canadian government's attempts to legislate and educate them out of existence, is brought about through Moses' examination of the dichotic underpinnings of euro-western notions of absence and presence and how this dichotomy leads to conflict between the euro-western concept of disease as a purely physical phenomenon and the indigenous view of disease as being the physical manifestation of spiritual imbalance, of not living in accord with the land. The link Heidegger makes between absence and the essence of things, an example of this being his assertion that the essence of a wine jug "does not lie at all in the material of which it consists, but in the void that holds" ("The Thing" 169), is representative of the viewpoint of the euro-western characters of the play, most of whom base their understanding of the world and the things in it on their perception of voids. Disease, as a social construct, is presented as a manifestation of the physical and spiritual voids created by euro-western preoccupations with absence. How the performances of these texts function as a ceremony is premised on the idea that traditional aboriginal healing ceremonies, such as the Hopi *kachina* ceremony and the Navajo red ant ceremony aim to restore the wellness of an individual by physically manifesting absence. Through the process of audience and actor embodiment of absence, a philosophy of the world-as-presence is presented as a way to combat the diseases euro-western fears of absence promulgate.

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The idea that cultural mythologies can function as pathogens is suggested by Edmund Pellegrino when he writes that “like individuals, societies have physiologies as well as pathologies. Like individuals, they can be healed and harmed” (330). Daniel David Moses, a Drama professor and member of the Delaware First Nation, using disease as a prominent trope in many of his plays, explores this idea of societal pathologies using theatrical performance. Not only do his plays trace the pathologies of disease incurred when cultures clash, but the performances of these plays also suggest cures. Moses himself suggests the curative powers of his work as an artist when he writes that *Almighty Voice and his Wife* “works like a purging or an exorcism” and that “it gets a lot of the poison out” while another of his plays, *The Moon and Dead Indians*, “explore[s] the source of the poison” (“How My Ghosts” 78). The poison needing to be exorcised in these cases is the euro-western preoccupation with absence, a perceptual and philosophical pathogen that the plays imply is the cause of the physical and spiritual disease in indigenous populations, as well as the psychoses experienced by the majority of euro-western characters. This euro-western social pathogen, like all social pathologies, is perpetuated by stories, many of which take the form of religious conviction and other types of philosophical assertions. In the three particular plays examined in this thesis—*The Moon and Dead Indians*, *Brébeuf’s Ghost*, and *Almighty Voice and His Wife*—euro-western philosophies of medicine and disease are exposed as pathogens which, when transmitted from one culture to another, often result in psychological and/or physical destruction.

Euro-western culture as a disease is a powerful metaphor, in large part due to the fact that the biological pathogens carried by the Europeans to North America had such a devastating impact on First Nations communities. Not only did diseases like smallpox and tuberculosis

decimate indigenous populations, but they also attenuated tremendously the spiritual life of many native people. Due to the severity of the epidemics and the drastic decline of indigenous populations, many native religious leaders, powerless in the face of these new diseases, lost the respect and reverence that was once their due. Much of ceremonial life became damaged further as increasing numbers of native people turned to Christianity in an attempt to find salvation from the epidemiological crisis at hand (Kelton 46). Nancy Falleaf Sumpter's (Delaware) account of her visit to an abandoned meeting house structure where she had participated in longhouse ceremonies as a child poignantly demonstrates how these religious conversions resulted in the erosion of not only the spiritual health of her people, but also their physical health. Falleaf Sumpter visits the meeting house because she has heard that the Boy Scouts, a Christian organization, are being blamed for defacing the meeting house and for "leaving their debris, hacking on the corner and center posts, and carving their initials" (178). The utter devastation of the Delaware people's religious life is made apparent when Falleaf Sumpter writes, "The Delawares stayed away, but the ever-reaching hand of the white man removed the carved red and black faces, the posts, and even the old logs that could be salvaged. The supporting posts were removed and the walls crumbled and fell and the Delaware people grew weaker" (179).

The image here of euro-westerners salvaging old logs and removing the supporting posts of the Delaware meeting house is akin to the images of cannibal priests attempting to destroy Ojibwa culture in *Brébeuf's Ghost*, a play set in 1649, at the beginning of the Great Huron Dispersal. In the play, a band of Lake Nippising Ojibwa are fleeing both the Iroquois and the cannibalistic European missionaries who threaten their community's very existence. Whereas in Falleaf Sumpter's account, whites are picking over the carcass of the Delaware meeting house, an apt metaphor for how euro-westerners defaced and destroyed native culture,

in Moses' play, the priests literally pick at the carcasses of the natives who still live traditional lives. Through the characters of the cannibal priests, voracious and insatiable consumers of the Ojibwa who feed and house them, Moses likens Christianity, represented symbolically by Father Noel and Pierre, to a contagion whose pursuit for survival leads to the eventual consumption of its host. This notion of euro-western culture as a disease is echoed in Naomi Adelman's observation concerning the Whapmagoostui Cree and their attempts to 'be alive well'. "It seems, then, that the greatest obstacle to *miyupimaatisiun* is not disease, but that which impedes 'living well.' The greatest barrier to 'being alive well' is, quite simply, said the people, 'whiteman'" (100).

What is meant by the term 'whiteman' is, I believe, akin to what Mayte Gomez calls the 'Saxon.' For Gomez, 'Saxon' means "more than just an ethnic origin, it mean[s] a cultural system which has not only created stereotypes . . . but has also effaced difference and instituted acculturation" ("Healing the Border," 98).¹ The usage of 'euro-western' in this thesis is, more or less, interchangeable with Gomez' view of Saxon culture. When I use 'euro-western' I am referring to a cultural system whose epistemological underpinnings are rooted in binary terms, individualism, and Christianity, philosophies that are at the basis of the traditional project of western thought which, according to Alan Lawson, "has been to contain disorder and divergence, to see the resolution of dichotomy, polarity, binary in harmony and unity, to synthesise and to re-integrate" (70). And while terms like 'whiteman,' 'Saxon,' and 'euro-westerner' strongly suggest a primarily ethnic basis, within the context of this thesis, the term 'euro-westerner' has far less to do with skin colour and one's geographical origin than it does with one's adherence to a 'euro-western' cultural viewpoint. Conversely, the adjectives

¹ While Gomez - writing about Guillermo Verdecchia's *Fronteras Americanas* - is discussing the term Saxon in relation specifically to Latino culture, her view of the philosophical foundations of 'Saxonism' and the proclivity of Saxons to efface difference and institute acculturation is, clearly, relevant to First Nations culture as well.

‘native,’ ‘indigenous,’ and ‘aboriginal’ refer to adherents of an orally-based culture with strong communal values and a belief that everything in the world is infused with the sacred. When deciding on the indigeneity of a character, in other words, ethnic origin is not the deciding factor. Consider John Tootoosis discussing Archie Belaney (Grey Owl) in Armand Garnet Ruffo's *Grey Owl: The Mystery of Archie Belaney*. Tootoosis says "we know Wa-Sha-Quon-Asin is not born of us, and we say nothing. For us it is of no importance . . . This is how it should be, to feel good about yourself and your duty in the honourable way. Wa-Sha-Quon-Asin, we say, dance with us, as you can" (146). What Tootoosis demonstrates here is that the way a person chooses to live and the worldview she chooses to live by should be what defines a person culturally. In a play like *Brébeuf's Ghost*, then, characters like Joseph, a priest who according to Star Lily, a medicine woman, "used to be a Huron" (18), is no longer viewed by the Ojibwa characters in the play as a Huron because, as a Christian proselytizer, Joseph has become euro-western in his philosophical beliefs. On the other hand, Samuel Argent, a trapper who feels like he is "a child now, learning to be a man" (99) now that he is living with the Ojibwa, is living a life culturally closer to that of a traditional Ojibwa than that of a euro-westerner.

In his essay "Why My Ghosts Have Pale Faces," Moses explains his interest in exploring euro-western culture. He professes confusion as to why the "pale faces . . . seem to want everyone to be as lost as they are" (81). His exploration of this question through his plays suggests that this state of feeling 'lost' is a form of disease, a conclusion echoed in Lee Maracle's *Ravensong*. The novel's protagonist, Stacey, mulling over why a white girl would commit suicide, muses that "if you have only yourself as a start and end point, life becomes a pretence at continuum" and that "maybe no roots was the problem" (61). In Stacey's view, it is the extreme individualism of euro-westerners that denies them a sense of community and,

therefore, a sense of belonging and connection to the processes of life, what Stacey calls "the creative process" (61). In the novel, the white people's view of the world is so fragmented that "the members of white town do not see the overt sexism of their society, the lack of connection between family members, or their indifference to the physical suffering of their Salish neighbours as illnesses" (Leggatt 167). The euro-westerners inhabiting Moses' plays suffer from the same individualism, indifference and feelings of rootlessness and, as in *Ravensong*, their inability to understand this worldview as illness has devastating consequences not only for their own people, but for the indigenous population as well. By suggesting that euro-western disease, as well as *dis-ease*, is a manifestation of a culture founded on the core idea that the world is a place of lack, a place of absence, needing to be constantly altered and 'made better,' Moses posits that the euro-western fixation on absence is, in fact, the primary vector for illness, particularly psychological illness, in *Brébeuf's Ghost*, *The Indian Medicine Shows* and *Almighty Voice and His Wife*.

In *Brébeuf's Ghost*, Father Noel, as a representative of euro-westernism, provides a clear example of how euro-western philosophies function as pathogens within indigenous communities. Father Noel's attempts to physically and spiritually destroy the Ojibwa villagers with whom he lives can be seen as a direct consequence of his Christian beliefs, beliefs that, guided by the story of the expulsion of the garden of Eden, promote the view that humanity is irreconcilably different and alienated from the natural world, a paradigm that informed the euro-western view at the time of first contact in North America. For the characters in these plays who hold this view, the world is seen as full of lack, an inferior shadow to the world that was lost long ago. Historically, the power of the story of the Garden of Eden, and the ideologies it produced, profoundly influenced the meaning Europeans assigned to North America. For example, when Columbus "discovered" the West Indies, he wondered "if the Orinoco River

was actually the Gihon, one of the four rivers that, according to Genesis, flow out of Eden” (Comstock 61). According to W. Richard Comstock, this desire for North America to be Eden positioned the indigenous people—in the eyes of the European explorers—as either “gods or demons, unfallen creatures possessing an original innocence or devils with a brutish evil beyond human ken”(62). Viewing indigenous people through this binary lens (either they were of heaven or hell) meant that, eventually, indigenous people became viewed as demons by euro-western immigrants, since a culture searching for spiritual redemption would have difficulty convincing itself that it was just and ‘Christian’ to appropriate land from a group of people who embodied original innocence. Viewing indigenous people, therefore, as “fallen” opened the way for the land in North America to be seen as empty. The New World, then, became a place of absence for euro-western settlers: a place where their Judeo-Christian god had to be introduced if the land was to become the Eden euro-westerners desired. According to Gail Valaskakis, the empty land metaphor is important to understand because, among other things, “it frames the discourse of the Native experience” (95). According to Valaskakis, colonial texts not only debated the innocent or deviant nature of native people, but also constructed discourses that “claimed, named, and deeded the land, constructed Native North Americans as nameless, nomadic, vagrants who flowed in and out of continental histories” (97). The end result, argues Valaskakis, was that these texts helped euro-western colonists not only to view the land as empty (since these texts also promoted the idea that Native North Americans were in the process of dying off, or “flowing out” of the land permanently), but justified euro-western occupation of indigenous land as well (97).

To Father Noel in *Brébeuf’s Ghost*, the wilderness is godless, a lost Eden populated by “children of the devil” (53). The depth of his despair concerning the absence he perceives is seen when the ghost of Father Brébeuf appears and offers Father Noel his heart. Father Noel

responds by saying "Oh, Father, where have you been? I've been so lonely. I thought the darkness of this wilderness would never end" (73). His linking of the land to darkness demonstrates the extent to which he feels alienated from the environment. The only answer Father Noel sees for this loneliness is death. Thus, he wishes to replace absence (how he sees the material world) with an absence he believes to be presence (heaven). The physical world, in his eyes, is devoid of light and presence and the only path to salvation, he believes, is to leave the state of materiality altogether. An insight into Father Noel's fear of the absence he sees in the world can be found in Herman Voaden's play *Murder Pattern*, when a chorus member says, in reference to the early euro-western settlers, "pity the isolate hill folk, fearful, estranged. They have no words to speak the terror of the gloom, and the silence, and the unending distances that wall in life from life" (Voaden, 325). Father Noel, estranged and fearful, ends up having "no words to speak" as he becomes the "terror in the gloom." By the end of the play, he is a monster, incapable of speech, whose dying sound is an "unearthly howl" (113). Father Noel, however, is not the only euro-westerner in *Brébeuf's Ghost* feeling fearful and estranged in a world of absence. Pierre, another priest, is constantly hungry and cold, lacking in both physical and spiritual warmth and nourishment. Even though Iron Feather, an Ojibwa warrior, informs Father Noel that Pierre is a cannibal, Father Noel greets Pierre by calling him "the foundation of our faith" (38) implying that the foundation of Christianity shares characteristics (hunger and emptiness) with the windigo. The consequence of a faith whose "foundation" is a cannibal is that Father Noel becomes an eater of human flesh, applying literally the teachings of the Eucharist (in the absence of Christ, his followers symbolically eat his body and drink his blood) to their interactions with native populations. When Father Noel tries to drink Thistle's blood in an attempt to warm his own blood, slake his thirst, and remain alive in the phenomenal world, he has decided that an appropriate response to this world of

darkness and emptiness is to murder and consume the Ojibwa with whom he lives. Consuming indigenous characters who are philosophically attuned to presence in a world he understands as empty, is the only way Father Noel believes he can stay 'present' in this world. As a result of his cannibalism, Father Noel throws the Ojibwa community into a state of imbalance. As a windigo, Father Noel functions as the pathogen of consumption.²

Black Star (a medicine man) and his son, Bear, both embody traditional indigenous epistemologies. As healers, and in contrast to Father Noel, they understand the world as a place infused with presence rather than absence. Black Star and his son, Bear, spend much of the play using their powers and medicines to restore harmony and balance to the lives of those in their village. A key ingredient of indigenous medicines from many First Nations, not just Ojibwa, is voice. The Ojibwa, according to Basil H. Johnston, had a "special regard akin to reverence for speech and for the truth . . . perhaps because words are medicine that can heal and injure; perhaps it is because words possess an element of the manitou that enabled them [the Ojibwa] to conjure images and ideas out of nothing" (101). For the Navajo people, words are understood not as mere descriptors of the world, but as active creators of the world. To restore balance to the world, according to this view, "The Navajo [people] sing the world back into congruence, into being, into its original and emergent perfection" (Hall E.T. qtd. in Schneider and DeHaven

² The relationship between windigo and euro-western culture is not new territory for First Nations writers. Cannibalism, for a communal society, is an especially devastating act: an act of extreme individualism that puts the survival of the entire group in jeopardy. In Joseph Boyden's *Three Day Road*, the horror of such a crime is recounted by the character of Niska when she says "we'd grown up on stories of the windigo that our parents fed us over winter fires, of people who eat other people's flesh and grow into wild beasts twenty feet tall whose hunger can be satisfied only by more human flesh and then the hunger turns worse" (41). The fact that children grow up hearing these stories demonstrates the importance of learning about how sacred the communal bond is that is broken by acts of cannibalism. Niska's father, as a windigo killer, plays a vital role in the community, so when the North-West Mounted Police take him away "to discuss if what he'd done [kill two windigo] last winter violated their laws" (44), one point is made especially clear. By incarcerating those who would protect native communities, the justice system is facilitating windigo behaviour. Armand Garnet Ruffo, in his article "A Windigo Tale: Contemporizing and Mythologizing the Residential School Experience," also links religion and windigo psychosis when he compares the "individual and community dismemberment" Indian Residential schools have wrought upon native communities to windigo behaviour. In Ruffo's words, "the state apparatus functions as a kind of cannibalistic force" (167).

418). In "The Persistence of Songs," when Moses writes that "the people feed from the river and conceive songs," he links the songs of those to whom he refers to as "the people" (as opposed to "the strangers" who "feed off their own anger" and praise "the white meat of their own bodies") to a world of natural bounty and, presumably, health (349).

In *Brèbeuf's Ghost*, the importance of voice, especially song, is seen clearly when Star Lily is successfully able to stave off the cannibal spirit by teaching Flood Woman how to drum while she, Star Lily, sings along to its rhythm (77). Similarly, Black Star faces the cannibal by standing in the blizzard and singing (63). Since sickness is understood by many traditional native cultures as the physical manifestation of an imbalance in the spirit world, the physical act of singing — an act that mediates the gap between the physical and spiritual world — is necessary to restore balance to those who are afflicted with disease. Black Star's and Star Lily's use of voice to save people stands in stark contrast to Father Noel's *windigo* silence. Why voice, and singing in particular, is so important for medicine is because, for many indigenous people, the words with which stories and songs are created come from the land. In the words of Jeanette C. Armstrong, "As I understand it from my Okanagan ancestors, language was given to us by the land we live within" (175). The land, in turn, is the physical manifestation of songs sung by the Creator. Through song then, native people connect themselves both to the land - the phenomenal world - and the spiritual realm of the Creator. The power of song to bridge both worlds is what makes it such a crucial component of traditional indigenous medicines.

The power of words and their relation to traditional native medicine is made abundantly clear when Bear explains to Samuel Argent that his mother was killed because "another man was jealous of my father's power . . . That man, he took my mother's tongue for his medicine pouch." Bear continues to explain that this man had helpers who "live under the lake" but that "my father has his tongue now" (26). Since words give a person the ability to create realities

and to destroy them, stealing a tongue is taking, in essence, that person's power. Not only this, but someone without a tongue loses her connection to the land, since language is inextricably tied to the land from whence it sprung. Without a tongue, one becomes de-contextualized, unable to draw identity from the land and unable to draw power from the *manitou* that words contain. Bear's story thus sheds light on the way Christianity has weakened traditional values and, in this case, physically killed people like Bear's mother. The suggestion that European missionaries are the murderers of Bear's mother is seen early in the play, when Father Noel sees the maggot infested wounds of Father Brébeuf for the first time and asks him "Oh, Father what have they done to you? Where is your beard, Father? Where is your tongue?"(12).

Brébeuf's missing tongue, along with the fact that "helpers" like Father Noel rise up from the lake to hunt their next victims, suggests that Brébeuf is the man who killed Bear's mother and that his helpers, missionaries like Father Noel, through their attempts to Christianize the Ojibwa are separating any Ojibwa converts from the land, their language, and their culture, all three of which are necessary for 'being alive well'. Priests like Brébeuf, therefore, have arguably used Christianity's 'medicine', its prayers and ceremonies, to rob indigenous people of their tongues and, hence, their power. A consequence implied by the play is that, since Christian 'medicine' is created with a language that has not emanated from the rhythm, sounds, and cadences of the land where the Ojibwa reside, native people who become Catholic renounce their connection to indigenous wisdom from whence traditional medicine arises. Without words, a person becomes, literally, unable to shape the world as a member of the Ojibwa community. Christian Ojibwa, in this view, become like Brébeuf: tongueless, voiceless and, therefore, unable to access and understand traditional medicine.

Bear clearly understands the threat Christianity poses to his society. He also understands that it is Christianity's propensity for stealing tongues, of de-contextualizing indigenous people

within their own communities, that is the real problem. If one doesn't have his community to give him meaning, then one's identity must be negotiated internally, meaning the individual must compensate for his lack of communal context by understanding himself as an individual first, rather than seeing himself as, first and foremost, one among many equal members of a larger group existing in harmony with the land. The propensity of non-indigenous languages, English in particular, to promote the individual over the community is something Brian Maracle writes about in his book *Back on the Rez* when he states that "the way that the English-speaking world structures its sentences explains to me, in a small way, why western society is so self-centred and narcissistic, why it is so fixated on the cult of the individual" (263). Since sentence structures in the English-speaking world use subjects and predicates as the cornerstone of all meaning, every sentence construction in English serves to reinforce the idea that a subject, and what that subject does, is always more meaningful in a written or verbal exchange than is the context within which the subject performs the action. The French language, spoken by those who ran the missions on Ojibwa land, is similar to English in that sentence structures in the French language also highlight the centrality of the individual subject. Similar to how basic declarative sentences in English begin with a subject, followed by a predicate (He walked to the store), French also begins declarative statements with a subject, followed by a predicate (Il marche au magasin).

Conversely, the Kanien'Kehaka language works, according to Maracle, in the opposite manner. In Kanien'Kehaka, context is always provided before the subject (263). This fact helps us understand how Bear's threats towards both Samuel Argent and Thunder Voice, a Christianized Ojibwa, can be seen as an attempt to keep the Ojibwa community strong and balanced in both the physical and the spiritual worlds. For example, when we first see Thunder Voice and Bear, they are having an argument. Thunder Voice insults Bear's prowess as a

medicine man by telling him that “you can’t see shit” (6). When Bear begins repeating Thunder Voice’s name, Thunder Voice warns Bear to “leave my name alone” (6). The obvious attachment Thunder Voice has to his name, a sign of his individuality, is what makes him vulnerable. As Bear continues to mention how “strange” it is for a voice to sound more like a “black robe’s fart” Thunder Voice tells him to “Shut up” and “Don’t you ever threaten me!” (7). Thunder Voice, while Christianized, knows enough about the traditional ways to understand what Bear is doing: using his voice to make medicine: threatening to diminish, or ‘steal’ Thunder Voice's power to create and destroy realities with words.

In reality, Bear’s threats attempt to heal the negative influence Christianity has on Thunder Voice's emotional health. Thunder Voice is becoming increasingly alienated from his community because he sees himself as an individual first. As a result, he is consistently disrespectful towards Black Star, an elder and a spiritual leader in the community. In direct challenge to the cultural traditions of his people, Thunder Voice questions Black Star's visions (10) and he is disobedient towards his own father. On the other hand, he holds Father Noel, whom Thunder Voice believes “could make this rain stop. He would pray to his God” (10), in high esteem. It is possible to conclude, then, that the aim of Bear’s medicine (his verbal belittling of Thunder Voice's voice) is intended to bring Thunder Voice back into balance with the physical and spiritual world of the Ojibwa. By verbally exposing the contrast between Thunder Voice's name and his voice, which is like a "black robe's fart" (7), Bear exposes the contrast between Thunder Voice as a member of the community, whose name was given by the community, and Thunder Voice, who is Christianized and who thus puts his own wants and needs before those of his group. Until Thunder Voice returns spiritually to the Ojibwa, Bear suggests that he will be disassociated from his tribal name and its power.

Father Noel also uses his voice to mediate between the physical world and the spirit

world as Black Star, Bear, and Lily Star do. This is, perhaps, why Black Star and Bear understand his prayers as “medicine.” Yet, when Father Noel uses prayer to request that Jesus call him at the hour of death (12), he is behaving selfishly; he attempts to secure a safe passage only for himself from the physical world to the spiritual world. In contrast to Black Star, Bear, and Lily Star's attempts to keep the phenomenal and spiritual worlds in balance, Father Noel is signalling his belief that these two worlds are necessarily in conflict with each other. In his prayers, the physical world is clearly understood as inferior to the spiritual world. His conviction in this imbalance is also seen when Father Noel explains to Thistle, whose Christian name is Martha, that “this is the time, Martha, the time when the son of God will return to take all his children up to heaven. Devils will inhabit the earth. The gates of hell will open like mouths crying out for blood. But the church we have built here between us with our baptism will save us” (15). Father Noel doesn't appear bothered that the physical world will be overrun by demons. He even invites Samuel to “celebrate with us, my son. To be with us when the end comes” (53). Father Noel's belief in the imbalance between the spiritual and the phenomenal world is also demonstrated when he begins worshipping the putrefied remains of Father Brébeuf, whose increasingly decayed body symbolizes the decay, disease, and de-contextualization the Jesuits have brought to the Ojibwa community. While Jesuits like Father Noel believe that, through prayer, they are “saving” the Ojibwa by imposing a religion whose foundations are rooted in a language and a land far away, this imposition of a non-indigenous philosophical and religious system is, in fact, something that de-contextualizes both the Jesuits and their converts from the realities of the land where they currently reside.

Eventually, Father Noel de-contextualizes himself out of a physical existence. His fervent prayers for access to the spirit world, since he believes the earth is overrun by demons, come true when he becomes windigo—both spirit and material demon at the same time—so

that he may begin to prey on others. The fact that the Father Noel becomes a cannibalistic pathogen demonstrates how destructive and de-contextualizing euro-western philosophical systems founded on precepts of binary opposites can be. When Father Noel laments his failure to convert and save the Huron population, he tells Samuel Argent that “I know I have failed in my mission here. There are still witches among them” (53). The irony in this statement is that the idea of witches is primarily a European concept, stemming from a philosophy grounded in understanding the world as consisting of binary opposites. From the euro-western viewpoint, witches—heathen, single women—were evil because they existed in opposition to the ideals of the submissive female and the virtuous Christian male, a kind of which Father Noel understands himself as a type. Witches exist as a concept in North America only because euro-westerners like Father Noel have spoken them into existence. According to Paul Kelton, among the Creek, Cherokee, Choctaw, and Chickasaw, “the link between witchcraft and disease appears vividly in nineteenth-century oral history” (49), at least 150 years after the Great Huron Dispersal. Before this point, references to the euro-western concept of witches are scarce. One explanation for the increase in stories about witches is that in the nineteenth century, whereas disease had been understood previously as a punishment meted out by animal spirits to those who transgressed against the spirit world, the diseases Europeans brought to North America “called for different explanations. Instead of animals, members of the Four Nations appear to have attributed intermediary agency of epidemics to other spirits, and these new spirits were particularly mysterious and malevolent” (Kelton 48). The Fond du Lac Ojibwa shared similar ideas in that, in the early 1830s, they “came to the conclusion that the missionaries were spiritually powerful and decidedly malevolent. This decision was based on the empirical evidence of the missionaries’ combative and antisocial behaviour” (Kugel, “Of Missionaries” 239). What Father Noel fails to understand is that the witches he cannot exorcise exist because

the illnesses he, as a euro-westerner, has brought to the New World have created a need among indigenous groups for new explanations of disease. The appearance of malevolent spirits, such as witches, as explanatory tools through which people tried to understand the causes of the epidemics began only after the Europeans sowed these lethal diseases amongst indigenous populations. Father Noel, as a euro-westerner, has helped create these witches through both his actions and his words.

Witches create such anxiety among euro-westerners like Father Noel because of the lack—lack of morality, lack of masculinity, lack of adherence to accepted social custom—they represent. Father Noel's eventual psychological collapse into *windigo* psychosis is also a result of his culture's tendency to fear absence. As a person determined to convert Ojibwa to Christianity and, thus, accumulate Christian souls, Father Noel displays Baudrillard's psychology of a collector, a psychology deriving from one's understanding the world, and one's own identity within it, as absent. For Baudrillard, the impetus behind the drive to collect is the intent, on the part of the collector, to create an identity for himself, as subject, through a collection of signifiers that reflect the identity of the collecting subject back at him/herself. In essence, the collector tries to stabilize the always-shifting sense of self by anchoring this self to a collection of objects whose forms and essences do not change. The need to anchor one's identity to specific objects, in Baudrillard's view, comes from one's feeling "alienated or lost within a social discourse whose rules he cannot fathom" (24). One who is lost within a social discourse (in other words, a person with no community) will not know herself in the same way as somebody whose individual identity is defined not only by how she identifies herself, but by how she feels she is identified by the community. In many native cultures, it is one's community and one's land that defines who one is: only in this context of land and community does an individual gain personal meaning. For the collector, who lacks community, the

collection functions as a material touchstone—an attempt to have ‘things’ take the place of community in terms of determining who one is as a subject.

Father Noel, as a priest in the Ojibwa village, is an outsider. He is viewed by the Ojibwa in the play much as priests were viewed by the Minnesotan Ojibwe in the 1850s who, according to Rebecca Kugel, felt that the "inability to recognize the central components of the Ojibwe value system and their constant violations of cherished Ojibwe beliefs provided proof of their harmful intentions. Judging the missionaries socially deviant, few Ojibwe concerned themselves with the missionaries' religious ideas" ("To Be The Main" 106). The Ojibwa characters in *Brébeuf's Ghost* also distrust Father Noel because of his refusal to integrate into their society. As a community member who contributes neither food nor children to the tribe, Father Noel is treated as a child and is not respected as a male member of the group. Thistle tells Father Noel that her husband says his "god's no good" (47) and that "you'd be weaker than any woman"(47) in the event that their village is attacked. Thistle's comments indicate that, clearly, Father Noel is lost in the social discourse of the tribe. When evacuating the settlement ahead of an Iroquois attack, Bear notes that "women and men in skirts are slow" (42) when deciding to put Father Noel in one of the first canoes. Since he is unable or unwilling to understand the social discourse of these Ojibwa, Father Noel measures his worthiness according to how many converts he gains. Alienated from his own social context, living in a world almost devoid of things to which he can tie his own identity, things whose identity he can control, Father Noel holds tightly to the one Ojibwa he has managed to convert into a ‘thing’: Thistle, whom he has re-named Marie. Father Noel's imposition of a Christian name on Thistle is an attempt on his part to assert cultural supremacy. Changing Thistle's name is an act of conquest. If he controls her name, then he alone can decide upon her meaning. If he controls her meaning, then she becomes part of his collection.

However, after Thistle's daughter is found with the Iroquois warrior, Thistle renounces her Christian pretenses and reclaims her Ojibwa name. She, thus, becomes an *objet sauvage* in the eyes of Father Noel, reminding him, as a result, of his own absent identity and lack of self-possession. Shortly after Thistle renounces Christianity, Father Noel opines that he has "failed in my mission here" (53), and it is not long before he descends into lunacy, proclaiming and welcoming the approaching Armageddon before becoming a cannibal to further destroy and destabilize the Ojibwa society which, up until this point, has been keeping him alive.

Baudrillard writes that "in practice, the collector is unlikely to turn into an irremediable maniac, precisely because he collects objects that, one way or another, prevent him regressing toward total abstraction or psychological delirium" (24). Father Noel demonstrates what happens when the collector has no objects to possess, or loses the ones he thought he had possessed. Without a tangible collection of Christian converts to negate the absence, the void, he perceives in the land and in himself, Father Noel regresses towards delirium. It is only when Father Noel himself believes he has lost his collection, when he has no objects left to which he can anchor his identity, when he is unable to recognize himself as a tangible presence in the world, that he slides into the violently antisocial and psychopathic behaviour of the *windigo*. Thistle, however, notes that "even before the winter came he was hungry" (100) and Lily Star believes that for a long time, Father Noel had been hungry for the spirit of Thistle's grandchild, another soul to add to his collection (101). Both statements indicate that Father Noel's need to collect is a symptom of a euro-western spiritual and psychological illness and not a response to the difficult winter conditions.

What causes a collection to "transcend mere accumulations" is "the fact of its incompleteness, the fact that it lacks something" (Baudrillard 23). In other words, a collection is defined by the absences within it. Accumulations of objects, however, are defined by what *is* in

them, by *presence*. Black Star's bag of tongues, unlike Father Noel's Ojibwa victims, is not an attempt to compensate for the absence he perceives in the world. Rather, his accumulation of tongues exists due to his attempts to restore the physical and spiritual balance of his community. Black Star's bag of tongues is an accumulation, rather than a collection, because the meaning of this bag is not based upon the tongues he has yet to take. Instead, inside the bag are the tongues of the men who killed Bear's grandfather and mother. Black Star's accumulation of these tongues means that the men who killed his wife have now been rendered speechless. Holding onto these tongues is physical proof that Black Star has rendered these aggressors powerless, since these aggressors can no longer create new realities through words. Black Star's motive for accumulating these objects is, therefore, based on his concern for the safety of his people. Since Black Star understands the world around him as perpetually present, he has no need to use objects as media for self-identification. In fact, his objects cannot be considered true objects because he does not control their meaning. He understands that these tongues have a power that lies outside his own ability to control them. This is why Black Star orders Bear to destroy these objects after his death: they will continue to have power, whether or not a 'subject' is there to ascribe this power to them. The tongues, then, are perceived by Black Star to be individual subjects, as much a part of the universe as he is. He cannot, therefore, treat them as property and pass them on to his son. Black Star's desire that Bear destroy his accumulation of tongues, his birch bark, and his furs stems from the fact that, as objects from the natural world, they are 'present' and meaningful and powerful and, as such, must be treated with the appropriate respect.

This is not to say that Black Star does not recognize absence in the world. Rather, the difference between Black Star and characters like Father Noel and Pierre is the way in which Black Star responds to absence. The dominant mode of self-reference for euro-westerners,

according to Hans Gumbrecht, is to the mind, which is a thing perceived as separate from the body and, hence, separate from the material world (80).³ The cultural mythology internalized by Father Noel (premised upon teachings from both the bible and Cartesian philosophy) is why he believes that the world outside the mind is absent and ultimately unknowable. The tendency of Moses' euro-western characters, such as Father Noel, to annihilate this absence through the destruction of indigenous characters provides, at best, merely a temporary reprieve from their own fears. Father Noel consumes the bodies and spirits of those whom his Christian principles have taught him to see as "children of the devil," as voids that must be saved through filling them with God's grace. Black Star, on the other hand, actively confronts the absences he perceives in the world. Rather than trying to transform the world by turning absence into presence in an attempt to eradicate it, he confronts absence by meeting it on its own terms. To save his people, Black Star literally searches for absence where it lives. Instead of using objects to make absence present, a process which the euro-western characters consistently demonstrate is futile, he engages absence as absence, inscribing himself into its world so that he might alter it. When he recounts his first vision of Joseph and Pierre, he explains that "*it* was there, the great hunger. They were lost in it" (18, italics mine). Hunger, in this situation, exists as its own spiritual entity: it envelops and snares people in its net. It is present without human mediation. Eventually, Black Star, recognizing the hunger's presence, meets it naked, in a snowstorm, inscribing himself so wholly into the spiritual world that he is able to break the laws of physics, becoming large enough to fight absence as if it were a monster, using a weapon — the branch of a large oak tree — pulled from the natural world. Samuel Argent, a former euro-westerner now in the process of becoming more culturally attuned to the Ojibwa worldview, is

³This quotation is, in fact, in relation to a cultural typology Gumbrecht identifies as 'meaning culture' – a typology based on euro-western culture. The link between euro-westernism and meaning cultures is clarified on page 31 of this thesis.

transforming his belief system, aligning it more closely with Black Star's understanding of the world as balanced between absence and presence. When Thistle worries that Samuel will be killed without a priest to baptise him, Samuel tells her that "the world's full of spirits. I don't have to die for life to be everlasting" (99), indicating his rejection of Christianity's focus on lack as a means of understanding the world. On the other hand, Joseph, a Huron convert, is moving in the opposite cultural direction. While Joseph believes that the land will provide — indicating that he does not see the wilderness as the dark void Father Noel perceives it to be — his relationship with the land has become so thoroughly corrupted by Christianity that he refers to Sky Feather as "loaves and fishes" (27) when she runs into them. His spiritual sickness leads him to want to literally eat his own people so as to nourish himself. According to Roma Heilig Morris, traditional aboriginal knowledge teaches that there is "no distinction between the sacred and the profane, viewing all phenomena and experience as imbued with special qualities, or medicines" (96). Everything in the world, including people, is seen as entity rather than as object. Pierre and Father Noel, however, are so thoroughly ensconced in their culture's religious foundations that they are alienated from the world. Father Noel celebrates the world's demise while Pierre—to combat the lack of warmth and nourishment he feels in this land—continuously pursues his own selfish and insatiable desire to be warm and fed. Pierre becomes a powerful symbol of just how diseased, from a traditional Ojibwa point of view, the priests are in the play. In contrast to how the priests pray to be taken out of this world, Black Star engages the presence of absence—hunger in this case—by battling it, suggesting a philosophical kinship with the traditional Navajo belief that physical and psychological illnesses are thought of as monsters that must be killed (Schneider and DeHaven 419). Because the priests, unlike Black Star, are unable and/or unwilling to engage the problems of hunger and societal breakdown as if they were monsters, a presence rather than an absence, they become monsters themselves.

Insight into Father Noel's *windigo* psychosis can be found in Frederic Jameson's comparison between the temporal discontinuity experienced by the postmodernist reader and the ways in which a schizophrenic experiences the world. According to Jameson (whose understanding of schizophrenia is primarily informed by Lacan's psychoanalytical work with schizophrenic patients), schizophrenia "is an experience of isolated, disconnected, discontinuous material signifiers which fail to link up in a coherent sequence" (119). This experience, he goes on to say, is felt by both the postmodernist reader and by the schizophrenic as loss and as a kind of "unreality" (120). Father Noel is in the same position as the schizophrenic in that he is unable to connect the material signifiers he perceives into a coherent sequence. His inability to do so is why he is unable to see that he is both missionary and monster. In the eyes of Father Noel, the signifiers of evil in the phenomenal world—death from disease, Iroquois attacks, torture—occur *despite* his presence rather than *because* of it. Because he cannot see the role he and his culture have played in these disasters, he does not understand their cause and effect relationship. Father Noel cannot see material signifiers, such as war and disease, as being related in any way to him and his work. It takes Samuel Argent to explain that the reason Father Noel has no converts is because he "caused the famine" and "brought them small pox" (54). As a result, the Ojibwa are scared of him. Father Noel is seen by the Ojibwa, in other words, as a plague and, according to Stanton B. Garner, a plague "follows the laws of necessity, inflicting upon its victims/spectators an extreme disorder as it disrupts the personality and the moral/social order that sustains it" (9). The Ojibwa, whom Father Noel hopes to convert, see Father Noel as a plague and as the embodiment of moral and social disruption.

It is not only Father Noel, but euro-westerners in general who have helped create the current moral disorder in the play. The Iroquois expansion into Ojibwa land has occurred largely because of the Iroquois' desire to increase their territory so as to be able to acquire more

beaver pelts, these pelts being a ‘thing’ the dictates of euro-western fashion have commoditized. Both as priest and as a euro-westerner, Father Noel is responsible for the physical and moral disorder present in the community. When he prefaces the kidnapping of North Star by saying “I bring you news that will save your soul” (88), his position is clear. Due to the fact that he does not understand the material and spiritual signification present in this world, the physical and spiritual destruction of an Ojibwa child becomes justified to him. The end result of his moral imperative is that he embodies, unwittingly, the personas of both saviour and monster.

Father Noel’s actions, then, can be understood as a response to his inability to make coherent meaning of neither indigenous culture nor of his own. The fact that the priests, and Father Noel in particular, become monsters for the Ojibwa, rather than healers, is a result of their Christian principles that stress the importance of the individual and the idea that the world is full of lack. The loss of Eden is the absence driving Christian philosophy. The quest to transform this material absence into spiritual presence (the idea of heaven) requires that an individual make moral choices in the material world. The reason for making these moral choices is the fact that one’s soul is constantly at stake. Christ’s example, a demonstration of how an individual can rise above the society in which he lives, teaches the lesson that the moral life is the one lived by the individual, regardless of the moral expectations of his society.

This elevation of the individual has implications for western medical philosophy and practise and gives insight into how Father Noel becomes so destructive and immoral, even though he believes he is acting otherwise. Current euro-western concepts of disease are predicated upon germ theory and, according to Chidi Oguamanam, germ theory’s impact upon western biomedicine is that “the cause of illness must be traced to an organic agent, which must be targeted and isolated for therapeutic intervention” (149). The search for one specific agent

that must be targeted is a process that echoes the philosophical principles of Christianity's emphasis on the individual. Father Noel, as a Christian, uses the same epistemological foundations as western biomedical practitioners in that he, who is trying to save the souls of the Ojibwa with whom he lives, sees the "problem" of North America—the fact that Eden is absent from where it ought to be—as native people. If they are not Christians, they become, in Father Noel's eyes, solely responsible for the corruption and turmoil in the New World. They are the agents that must be targeted for therapeutic intervention. At the same time he is targeting them via his efforts to convert them, the Ojibwa are under attack by the Iroquois and people are dying of hunger and smallpox. Father Noel, blinded by Christian principles, is unable to recognize the true causal agent behind these problems. These problems are not due to any inherent godlessness of the indigenous characters; rather, these problems have been caused by the disease and spiritual corruption imported to North America by euro-western settlers. The fur trade and disease are, therefore, implicated by Moses as the primary causes of the Great Huron Dispersal. Thus, in *Brébeuf's Ghost*, Moses suggests that a "healthy" euro-western culture, symbolized by Father Noel, carries within it not only deadly physical diseases like TB and smallpox, but social and psychological diseases as well.

By contrasting the ethics and fates of euro-western and indigenous characters, *Brébeuf's Ghost* suggests that 'being alive well' requires that one be contextualized by one's society and its traditions, as well as by the land itself. To be diseased is to be like Father Noel: fearing absence, lacking community and missing any connection to the land. The contrast of cultures in the play relates to an actual historical example of the destruction caused and facilitated by euro-western epistemologies, and the medical philosophies they have engendered. Christian McMillen, in his article "The Red Man and the White Plague," outlines how a euro-western predisposition to connect disease—in this case tuberculosis—to race seriously hindered the

attempts of officials from the Bureau of Indian Affairs to understand the real reason why the rate of tuberculosis infections was so high among indigenous populations. According to McMillen, theories such as innate indigenous susceptibility and “virgin soil theory” were explored with far more vigour in the late 1800s and early 1900s than were the living conditions under which native populations were contracting TB. Linking TB to race had serious social and political implications. Many physicians claimed that the tuberculosis epidemic was "slowly, but surely, solving the Indian problem" (W.J. Stephenson qtd. in McMillen 618), and as the epidemic continued, it was used as a justification for further discrimination against native people by euro-western settler populations. The link between susceptibility to TB and race was promulgated by people like the Big Horn County health officer who gave lectures on the "Crow Indian Menace" and advocated strongly that indigenous and white races not mix. At one point, the Crow people were considered by the euro-western population to be a "diseased people" (McMillen 643). Thus, the racial profiling of disease, while erroneous, was used to justify racist social policy. It was only in 1940, roughly 50 years after the epidemic began, that Joseph Aronson, working for the BIA, postulated that the reason for the high TB rate within indigenous populations was a result of bionomic factors. In other words, the high rates of TB were the result of living conditions in the slum areas within the rural districts where indigenous populations were found.

This example illustrates how an inability to see health and medicine as socially constructed concepts can create and/or exacerbate sickness. And while euro-western biomedical philosophies (the basis of which is that the source of disease is biological) have proven useful in a great many areas, especially in terms of the treatment of diseases like cancer, this understanding of disease is not infallible. Roma Heilig Morris writes that, because euro-western philosophy is predicated upon the idea that people are, in some way, separate from the

rest of nature, the medical models that stem from such epistemological foundations tend to be recidivist. In her view, biomedicine “stress[es] physical health and minimize[s] or ignore[s] the interplay among body, spirit, mind, and emotions in the maintenance of individual well-being” (105). Ignoring the interplay of these factors, in Heilig Morris' view, means that the practice of euro-western doctors necessitates the de-contextualization of the patient if one is to understand the origin of the disease. The example of the BIA's assumptions concerning the origin of TB in populations of Native people illustrates the fact that when context is not taken into account, important information is missed. The epidemiologists at the BIA—euro-western doctors operating under the myth that their socially constructed philosophies of health and medicine were universal—working on the assumption that the only important context of the disease was race (which is itself a de-contextualizing concept since what defines one race from another becomes, especially when the members of one race are trying to define other races, an arbitrary decision), were not trained to see that there were other, more important contexts to identify.

A consequence of the euro-western paradigm of disease as a biologically, rather than socially, constructed phenomenon is that euro-westerners have difficulty accepting their culpability for the sickness and disease caused by poverty and overcrowding on First Nation reserves. The unwillingness of many euro-westerners to accept this responsibility can perhaps explain why biomedical discourse is currently reviving genetic explanations of TB (McMillen, 643), despite the fact that this is poor science, since any conclusions will be based upon assumptions that conflate race with ancestry, a presumption that creates “a vastly oversimplified understanding of what it means to be of one race or another” (McMillen 644). This oversimplified understanding of race is symptomatic of the euro-westerner's need to create what Heilig Morris calls “the modern narrative of fragmentation,” which she feels “not only

impairs but automatically rejects a view of the universe as a scene of mysterious, life-giving forces” (105). The unconscious rejection of this view, Heilig Morris believes, severely hinders euro-westerners’ abilities to adapt and survive and the end result of this sort of “reductionistic and exploitative mindset” is that it “inflicts a wound on all living things” (107). A life lived with this sort of mindset, as the fate of Father Noel warns us, will necessarily be unbalanced.

While *Brébeuf’s Ghost* reveals insights into how to ‘be alive well’ through its contrasting of indigenous and euro-western cultures, *The Indian Medicine Shows* (comprised of two one-act plays: *The Moon and Dead Indians* and *Angel of the Medicine Show*), is a play involving mainly euro-western characters. Having mostly euro-western characters allows Moses to explore the euro-western psyche and its relationship to disease. Moses writes that the *Indian Medicine Shows* is a play designed to “explore the source of the poison” (Moses, “Pursued” 78). In *The Moon and Dead Indians*, a play that director Colin Taylor calls a “syphilitic western” (Moses, “A Syphilitic Western” 158), disease is not only physically present, but also serves as a metaphor for the imbalances and hypocrisies in white settler society in New Mexico 1878. The play demonstrates clearly how the alienation of a human from his/her culture and the land, rather than being the means through which disease may be cured, can be a primary cause of both physical and psychological illness. The play opens with an image of an old and sick woman who lives in perpetual fear of an Indian attack despite her son's assurances that "they's exterminated" (18). She is waiting for her son, Jon, to arrive home. After Jon arrives—having been unable to find medicine to cure her tuberculosis—an unexpected guest, Billy, arrives. Billy is greeted enthusiastically by the mother and with trepidation by Jon. The source of tension between Jon and Billy (who is alternately threatening and caring in his interactions with Jon) is revealed to be a murder in which they both

participated. The dredging up of this memory results in Jon anguishing over what he's done, while his mother, believing Indians are attacking, turns Billy's gun on herself. The second play, *Angel of the Medicine Show*, takes place twelve years later with Jon now operating a medicine show with two employees: David (who is the 'Indian' in the show) and Jon's girlfriend of convenience, Angela. After having just escaped from a lynching, David is shot by Angela (who has mistaken him for an angry villager) while he huddles under a covered wagon. While David, feverish and sleeping, recuperates from the ordeal, Jon returns from visiting the ruins of what used to be his family's ranch and his mother's burial site. Jon's grief about what he has lost fuels his determination to rebuild his show and, swinging erratically between words of tenderness and words of abuse, he is soon forcing Angela and David to practice their prescribed parts. David eventually is able to escape by vanishing after Jon forces him to wear a ghost costume and war bonnet.

In *The Moon and Dead Indians*, the relentless imposition of Christian philosophy on the indigenous populations of North America is linked to the physical epidemic of tuberculosis sweeping through both the indigenous and settler populations at the time. The connection between Christianity and disease is suggested in the opening scene, when Ma is unable to finish "Jesus loves me" due to a coughing fit (13). We later find out that Bill's mother has died of consumption (another name for TB) as has Ma's young child. The year in which this play takes place, 1878, is one year after the collapse of Grant's peace plan,⁴ a plan H. Henrietta Stockel writes was "to remove obstacles to white settlements on former Indian lands" and "was also designed to contain Indians for the benefit of non-Indians" (107). The plan collapsed due to

⁴ Grant's Peace Plan, put into effect in 1869, was an effort by President Ulysses S. Grant to bring an end to corruption among political administrators in the Indian Bureau. The Plan consisted of five key points: 1. Indians would be placed on reservations and taught to be farmers. 2. When necessary, Indians would be punished for misdeeds. 3. Reservations would receive high quality supplies. 4. Through religious organizations (mostly Protestant) high quality agents to distribute goods and uplift spirits would be chosen. 5. Christian organizations would be responsible for educating Indians about the duties of citizenship (Stockel 107).

both inadequate government funding and increasing problems between encroaching settlers and the Chiricahua Apache. Jon and his mother, as settlers, represent those people for whom indigenous populations have been moved off the land and into the squalid conditions of the reserves or—in the case of the Chiricahua Apache eight years later in 1886—shipped off in trains to Florida to languish in Fort Pickens and Fort Marion (Stockel 110). Moses writes that “I suspected that Ma’s cough was both a symptom of that historical *disease* and a thread of what was just starting to go on in the play, a clue that the other meanings of the old name for that disease, “consumption” helped me focus on” (Moses, “A Syphilitic” 153). If the plays suggest that euro-westerners are the causes of both the physical and spiritual disease transmitted among the absent indigenous populations existing offstage, they are also responsible for their own ‘*disease*’ with their own consumption of the land and its resources.

Ma, for instance, both consumes and perpetuates Indian stereotypes, and this, arguably, is at the root of her illness. She is obsessed by the threat posed by the Indians “who lurk just beyond her line of sight” (Moses, “A Syphilitic” 159). Her fears and her tuberculosis are linked, and the pathology of this fear stems from her understanding of Indians as Other. She blames the deaths of her sons, who were actually killed in the Civil War, on Indians. She also reminds Jon that “Apaches scalped your father, didn’t they?”(18), when in reality, Jon’s father passed out drunk and died of exposure in the mountains. Her view of Indians is premised upon the “textual attitude”—a term Edward Said uses in examining how the West views the Orient—her culture has of native people. The “textual attitude” of the West towards the Orient, according to Said, is comprised of “the lenses through which the Orient is experienced” (58). These lenses, in turn, consist of texts. In effect, the “textual attitude” one culture has towards another becomes the mediating representation through which one culture experiences another. In essence, one’s “textual attitude” results in a subject from one culture experiencing, through

the texts they have encountered, a subject from another culture as an experienced object. ‘Textual attitudes, in short, objectify the Other and, according to Simone Drichel, “translate what is alien into familiar terms, thus buffering what might be an unsettling or threatening confrontation with the real cultural other” (30). Armand Garnet Ruffo, in his book *Grey Owl: The Mystery of Archie Belaney* captures neatly this idea when he writes (as Archie Belaney), "you see, it's not me they see at all;/ it's the face in their mind,/ the one they expect (of me)/ born out of themselves,/ in their own image" (84). As long as Ma can convince herself there are Indians who threaten her existence, she can avoid having to confront her role in causing the physical absence of native populations who have been exterminated and/or forcibly removed from the land. The innate desire she has to perpetuate her culture’s ‘textual attitude’ towards native people is at the root of her psychosis. She is unable to distinguish what is imaginary from what is real. Ma’s representation of this absent Other is tangible enough to her that she tells Jon that she heard “hooves on the rock as they crossed the brook” and the “leather of their saddles creaking” (17).

Homi Bhabha helps us understand the mother’s fears of helplessness in the face of this mediating representation. The power of the Other comes from the fact that “in the identification of the Imaginary relation there is always the alienating other (or mirror) which crucially returns its image to the subject” (81). The Other reminds us, then, of our limitations, and of the ephemeral nature of our imagined Selves. Because the gaze of the Other is always able to “look back from a point outside the viewer’s field of vision,” its gaze “annihilates the subject by bringing it face to face with the limits of its own representational power” (Drichel 93). The mother’s fear of Indians arises not just from her fear her physical death, an inevitability of which the existence of native people (as Other) reminds her, but because she also fears the death of the cultural mythologies she can no longer perpetuate. As a woman settler living a

largely isolated existence, she is a cultural hybrid, residing in what Alan Lawson calls a “Second World.” As a colonist, she occupies the space inhabited by what Lawson and Tiffin call “the settler subject,” an ambivalent figure who “is both mediator and mediated, excluded from the unmediated authority of Empire and from the unmediated authenticity of the indigene” (231).

As a colonist, Ma’s experiences, much like Father Noel’s in *Brébeuf’s Ghost*, are characterised by “discrepancies between image and experience and discontinuities between culture and context” (Lawson 67). In other words, it is absence—the space between her actual context (isolated settler, beneficiary of the extermination of a people, living in poverty) and her culture (a civilized member of euro-western society)—that governs her behaviour. Her fear of the ever-approaching Indians is a result of her feelings of ‘lack’ stemming from being so culturally alienated from euro-western society. While she longs for Boston and for what she calls “real society” (37), lamenting that Billy is the “only civilized man we know” (37), she feels better when “there’s a gun in the house” (24) and she never goes into town (48). The increasing problems Jon’s mother has in retaining a clear sense of identity forces her into undergoing the process of hybridity: a state which, according to Bhabha, “is the revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory side effects” (112). What allows her to imagine she is still ‘civilized’ is the presence of absent Indians to whom she defines herself in opposition. Due to the process of hybridization, the Indians she fears become what Bhabha calls a “metonymy of presence” (115). As a non-Indian, she still retains membership in the society from which she is now excluded. She is incredibly grateful for Billy’s visit, despite the fact he is, in the words of Daniel David Moses, a “psychopath” (Moses, “A Syphilitic” 165). What matters to her is that he is a euro-westerner and that he is company: in her mind, his presence signals her clear difference from the savagery of the Other. Billy,

thus, rescues her temporarily from her confusion which has resulted from living in this Second World, this space of cultural hybridity. However, when Billy refers to her as Other, referring to her to as “this one” (68), the limits of her representational power to override reality is reached and she kills herself. In the end, the price she pays for creating an identity predicated upon the Other is that she annihilates herself as subject.

Jon’s mother kills herself because she perceives the world in which she lives as threatened by absence. Her fear of absence is the reason her representations of Indians become ‘metonymies of presence.’ Like Father Noel in *Brébeuf’s Ghost*, Ma’s understanding of the world as lacking, as absence, is the pathogen responsible for causing disease in both euro-westerners and in native people with whom these euro-westerners come into contact. This view of the world-as-absence is a hallmark of what Hans Gumbrecht calls *Idealtypen*, or “meaning cultures” (79). One of the key philosophies of a meaning culture, according to Gumbrecht, is that people “conceive of themselves as eccentric in relation to the world (which is seen, in a meaning culture, as exclusively consisting of material objects)” (80). People living within this paradigm understand themselves as subjects. Subjects, in turn, are makers of meaning in a world full of objects, each one of whose ontology is separate from the subject and is, therefore, ultimately unknowable.

The difficulty euro-westerners have in understanding the essence of objects is explored by Martin Heidegger in his discussion of a jug's essence, which, he concludes, "does not lie at all in the material of which it consists, but in the void that holds" (169). The essence of the jug, therefore, is in the space—whether that space be filled with wine or with air molecules—surrounded by the material making up the jug, and what that space is used for (pouring). The jug’s essence is not to be found in the material itself. When things ‘presence’ themselves, according to Heidegger, they gather the four components of the world (earth, sky, mortals and

divinities) together for a brief moment. It is in this moment of 'gathering' that we perceive Being; however, according to Heidegger, as soon as we use our words or thoughts to make meaning of the thing, "it fails to transcend the world's nature, and falls short of it" (180). In other words, our attempts to understand the thing-in-itself severely limits any chance we have at truly understanding it. According to this euro-western philosophical view, a view shared by Jon, his mother, Billy, and Father Noel, even the recognition of presence leads immediately to absence.

This philosophical position provides useful insight into the characters of Jon, Ma, and Billy in *The Moon and Dead Indians*, characters Moses describes as "survivors of the frontier who are haunted by a denial of their parts in that process" ("How My Ghosts" 78). As people who have dispossessed and colonized First Nations people, Jon, Ma and Billy live a dichotic existence. On the one hand, their occupation of the land is justified via what Gail Valaskakis calls the 'empty land' metaphor which "is predicated on the construction of land as material object" (95). On the other hand, these settlers are obviously aware of the lie this 'empty land' paradigm perpetuates, for they know that the empty land was not always so; *they* emptied it so as to claim it for themselves. The price these characters pay for occupying this land is that their denial of the injustices they have committed in order to make their settlements possible causes them to become metaphorical ghosts: "lost, souls far from their homelands, their peoples" (Moses, "How My Ghosts," 80). As ghosts, these settlers become con-substantiated with those whom they have removed and relocated. The price Jon's mother pays for her role in emptying the land is her obsessive fearfulness of the absence she has helped to create. Quite literally, she is afraid of what is not there. However, what is physically absent has become a presence in her mind, and it is this presence that consumes her. Benjamin Lozano explains how absence can become presence in his analysis of the writings of Arjun Appadurai and Thomas M. Hawley.

Absence becomes presence when lack “proceeds to instill a fullness or *presence of absence* where there was once *neither* presence nor absence . . . lack itself functions as a presence of absence in sociality that often emanates or is created *ex nihilo*” (1). Put another way, in the context of social situations, ‘lack’ is not viewed as something that is lost, something that is now absent but that once existed; rather, absence in a social context is something that exists and needs to be acted upon.

Each euro-western character in *The Moon and Dead Indians* understands lack in this way. Billy, for example, lacks not only a family, but also an ability to maintain meaningful relationships. This lack, which Billy experiences as a tangible presence in his life, is connected to his psychosis. In fact, it is Billy’s preoccupation with death, and his understanding of death as a form of absence, that is behind the conflict driving the play’s narrative. His fear of absence is suggested when he tells Ma that he finds it “hard to be alone in the middle of the night” (35) and when he responds to Jon’s concerns about his dying mother. When Billy hears of Jon’s worries, he attempts consolation by saying “Hell, we all will. Die. That’s life. Solo entonces te olvidare, hermano” (28). Billy’s statement—that only in death is one forgotten—suggests that he believes that death not only makes one’s body absent, but that death erases one’s entire identity. Upon death, according to Billy, all memories cease and existence is negated. At the same time, however, Billy reminds Jon that death is a part of existence: it is a part of life. This suggests an understanding on Billy’s part that death is simultaneously a void *and* ever-present: an absence manifested as presence. Indeed, Billy sees, and causes, death everywhere he goes. The main reason he is visiting Jon and his mother in the first place is because he has murdered his friend, Frank Grady. Jon recognizes Billy’s clear association with death and absence when he asks Billy how he can “live with death all the time?” (57). Billy, as one who “lives with

death,” understands death as the presence of lack, of lost memories and erased identities, rather than as an absence needing to be filled.

Viewing lack as presence, according to Lozano, means lack becomes perceived as a “fullness or positivity that remains to be removed (and sometimes even greatly resists removal)” (13). Billy’s psychopathic tendencies are fuelled by his need to be in control and by his perception of death as a presence in need of removal. As a euro-westerner, Billy understands lack as something that needs to be acted upon, and the inevitability of death is something Billy finds intolerable. His most violent actions can be understood as attempts to control and master, in any way he can, the absence death represents. Billy’s solution is to find ways to objectify death so that, by mastering these objects, he can try to master and control it. By murdering other people, Billy possesses death in the only way he can, by deciding when and how others will die, by promising death to those things he can’t control. We see this in Billy’s recounting of the murder of the two-spirit who needed to learn that the “fucker’s not going to ignore Billy” (65). The two-spirit’s crime in this case was ignoring Billy: he/she didn’t behave like an object to be mastered and controlled; therefore, Billy used him/her to possess and master death in the only way he knows how. Another of Billy’s struggles for control over the absence death represents is seen immediately after Jon’s mother kills herself and Billy cries, “Jonny? Jonny, look at me” (68). His demand that Jon look at him is, essentially, an attempt to wrest Jon out of death’s control. Jon’s response, “see how black the blood looks?” (68), hearkens back to the murder of the two-spirit and clearly breaks Billy’s hold over Jon. The immediate presence of death Jon evokes is more powerful than Billy. Jon’s evocation overpowers them both. The object, absence, now controls the subject: Billy. The play ends soon after, with Billy, unusually contrite, apologizing to Jon before both characters go their separate ways. The hold Billy had over death, and the lack it represents, has proven illusory, leaving him chastened and alone.

Billy's psychosis is not only due to his fear of death, but it is also due to his need to create and control his identity through his relationship to objects. The one object with which Billy most identifies is his gun. The gun, as a material object, is 'present' and recognized as such by Billy. His intense identification with this artefact is seen initially when a gunshot echoes up the valley, signalling his approach. The gun, in this way, is the first impression we get of his character. The gun is an integral part of his identity, as both a cowboy and a protector. When he offers himself to Ma as a protector, it is with the words "Pow! Pow! No more "How how!" (24), suggesting a sense of self-as-protector that is inextricably tied to his gun-as-possession. When he mentions that cowboys and Indians "ain't exactly civilized" (54) we can see how the gun, which his dead mother used to say "no civilized man needs" (25), is also integral to his identity as a cowboy, a person living on the margins of civilized society. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, in his article "Why We Need Things," writes that artefacts aid in the objectification of self in three key ways: by demonstrating the owner's social and sexual power, by revealing the continuity of self through time, and by giving concrete evidence of one's relationship with others. In these ways, things provide a concrete anchor to which one can attach his/her ever-shifting identity (23). Jean Baudrillard also writes of the psychological dependence euro-westerners have on objects, saying that they "constitute themselves as a system on the basis of which the subject seeks to piece together his world, his personal microcosm" (7). Billy uses the gun in all three ways Csikszentmihalyi suggests euro-western cultures do. He uses it as a way of establishing his social power over Jon, other white settlers, and the Indians we never see in the play. He also uses it as a way of establishing his identity through time and as a way of making continually present his past relationship with Jon. The gun is a constant reminder of the hunting they used to do, as well as of the murder Jon helped him commit.

Billy's relationship with his gun establishes the relationship he has with 'presence'. According to J. Heath Atchley, the "conventional way to look at presence" is to understand it as "that which fills emptiness. What is present is there; it can be seen, touched, experienced. It is part of consciousness. What is present can be possessed and mastered" (253). This idea of presence as something that fills emptiness and becomes part of our consciousness is reinforced by Baudrillard's and Csikszentmihalyi's ideas concerning the relationship of things or objects to subjective identity. What is present becomes perceived by the subject as an object and, according to Atchley, our response to those things we understand to be objects is a desire to control them. The need to control material objects is certainly a key desire of Billy's. For instance, after Jon returns from town, having left without explaining his absence, Billy greets him by training a gun on his heart and saying "So this is what it takes to get you to look me in the eye" (39). After Jon tries unsuccessfully to disarm Billy, Billy attempts to belittle Jon by disparaging Angie, with whom Jon has been corresponding. Billy tells him that "she's gone whore, Juanito" (41), implying Jon's inferiority through his usage of the Spanish diminutive of Jon. Billy's assertion that Angie is a whore is also meant to imply that Jon does not possess or control her. When Billy sees Jon is not bothered by this idea, he suggests they go hunting, reminding Jon of the last time they went into the hills. Jon, haunted by the part he played in the murder of the two-spirit, reacts to the presence of the ghosts being summoned. It is here that Jon finally succeeds in disarming Billy, an act that reaffirms Jon's materiality and physical presence as subject. Disarming Billy establishes Jon as subject in that Jon succeeds in doing to Billy what Billy has been trying to do to him: controlling that which is present, that which fills emptiness. Towards the end of the play, Billy attempts to objectify, and thereby control, Jon again by threatening to kill him. This moment occurs just before Billy pins Jon to the ground to

kiss him. When Jon lies still, Billy belies his need to master presence when he says “Don’t play dead on me, mijito” (59). He hasn’t come all this way to encounter absence.

For Jon, the world is full of absence and feelings of social alienation. He lacks a father, a sane mother, and he lacks contact with civilized society. Both he and his mother sense this lack acutely. His mother regales Billy with stories of what life had been like in Boston, how there would be “dances on the Green” and that “there would be such a number of soldiers playing, it was almost like a proper orchestra. Like they have in London or Paris” (31). To mitigate the loneliness she knows Jon feels, she imagines they will move into town one day so they can “have visitors all the time” (48). In the meantime, she is unaware that “the town’s dying” and “everyone’s going” (48). The intense solitude of life on their ranch has created an absence, in this case a lack of connection to ‘civilized society’, and this absence hangs over both Jon and his mother. Its effect on Jon is made clear by the horror and fascination he feels towards Billy. While Billy demonstrates social graces towards Jon’s mother, Billy is aggressive, violent, and controlling when he is alone with Jon. In response to Billy’s aggression, Jon tells him that “you might as well be an Indian” (57), a statement intended to distance himself from Billy and the lack of civilization Billy represents. This idea of ‘Indian’ is the repository of all Jon’s fears that are related to absence. Instead of Jon accepting the role he has played in connection to the indigenous land clearance of New Mexico and in the murder of the two-spirit—both crimes indict the savagery contained beneath the euro-western veneer of civilization—he uses the native Other as a vessel in which to store those ‘uncivilized’ parts of the self he does not wish to recognize. The Indian is a safe place to store this lack in his own character because “None of them ever come up this way. There’s nothing here” (54).

It is Jon’s struggle with the absence, or lack, he perceives in the world that creates the drive he has to destroy himself and others. Jon’s fear of the lack that characterized his father’s

life is seen when he tells Billy that “I’m not ending up like her. Or Pa. In a grave before he died. There’s more gold in one of your teeth than he ever found in that mine” (43). Jon's father was already dead, “in a grave” while he was still alive, signifying Jon was well-acquainted in childhood with the presence of absence that death represents. The mention of the mine on their land implies that the promise of gold was the reason why Jon’s family moved there from Boston. Without a commodity like gold in the mine, however, the ranch is seen as lacking and unproductive. In such an oppressive setting, Jon expresses his fear that he will end up physically and psychologically sick, like his mother. As it turns out, this fear is well-founded. His mother’s obsession with immaterial Indians mirrors Jon’s inability to rid himself of the memory of the two-spirit he scalped with Billy. When Jon tells his mother that “you’re hearing ghosts” (18), he could just as easily be talking about himself.

The extent to which absence makes itself present in his life is seen when Jon tries to “kill” the scar on his hand by thrusting it into the fire (61). In Jon’s case, the scar, as an object, has the same importance Billy gives his gun. The scar links Jon to his past and is a constant reminder of the murder he committed. His attempt to burn it off is an attempt to rid himself of the presence of death, of Billy, and of the memory of the boy he scalped. When Billy bandages the wound, Jon cries out “No. No, I don’t want to die” (62), implying that he construes Billy’s aid as an attempt to bind him again to the irremovable absence Billy carries within him. Only when Jon’s mother kills herself is Jon able to extricate himself from the clutches of his friend and the absence the ranch represents to him. However, Jon’s culturally driven belief that absence can be left behind, as if it were just another “thing,” proves to be false. Despite the fact that *The Moon and Dead Indians* has Jon walking away, suitcase in hand, from the ranch as its final scene, we soon learn in the following play that absence cannot be left behind as one would leave behind an object. This is because the absence Jon feels is a cultural construct. Jon can’t

escape it because, as a euro-westerner, this view of the world-as-absence is the epistemological foundation of his culture's worldview, and it is this understanding of the world that proves to be so destructive for himself and others in the play *Angel of the Medicine Show*.

Since Jon's understanding of the world is as a place full of absence, he uses objects in *Angel of the Medicine Show* to anchor his own identity and the identities of those around him to time and place. Upon returning from a visit to the ranch where he grew up, Jon tells Angie that the house has burnt down and "the land's all grown over. Even the Indian couldn't stay there" (107). The term "all grown over" suggests that Jon has seen the land replenished, bursting with flora; however, in his eyes, land without people is not full of life. To Jon, this land is empty, a signifier of decay and loss. His mother's body is also absent, having been dug up by coyotes, and there are no flowers. In Jon's words "it's all gone" (109). The only thing he has managed to salvage from the ranch is a piece of the quilt in which he buried his mother. It would seem that in a world of absence, Jon will cling to anything, even a piece of quilt, to help him stabilize his identity, his sense of self. The lack of objects left to which Jon can anchor his identity, however, not only signifies his rootlessness but also threatens his status as subject. This is why he tells Angie that he won't return to the ranch with her. The ranch, devoid as it is of any sort of mementos or signs that Jon existed, physically manifests the absence he fears.

Jon, lacking 'things' with which to counter absence and so stabilize his sense of self, treats David as an object to be mastered or controlled. One way Jon tries to control David—and deny him his humanity at the same time—is by his refusal to dignify David with a proper name. Jon refers to him as "chief," "smoky," "bright eyes" and "my poor little Indian" (113). These names are not intended to denote an individual; rather, they are used to transform David into an object. Stockel writes that "naming is an excellent example of Eurocentrism - the notion of cultural supremacy that characterized most colonizers in northern Mexico "(xvii). Having

mastery over David reaffirms Jon's identity as a subject, not only as a follower of “possessive individualism,” a seventeenth-century idea which espoused “the emergence of an ideal self as owner” (Clifford 51) but as an American. Jon uses David in the same way Philip Deloria says euro-western Americans used the stereotype of the savage Indian, as an “oppositional figure against whom one might imagine a civilized national Self” (3). Like all possessions, David is made into a 'thing' that is, in the words of Baudrillard, “divested of its function and made relative to a subject” (7). Yet, according to Bhabha, the colonial tendency to objectify the Other in order to establish one’s own identity has the unintended consequence of “produc[ing] the colonized as a social reality which is at once an ‘other’ and yet entirely knowable and visible” (70-71). David, as social reality and a representative of a displaced minority, is a constant reminder of the barbarism behind the creation of the American state. According to Arjun Appadurai, “they [minorities] are often the carriers of the unwanted memories of the acts of violence that produced existing states” (42). While objectifying David seems to provide Jon with a stronger sense of self, Jon’s use of David-as-object to anchor his identity means Jon will constantly remind himself both of his role in the forced removals of the people who lived in New Mexico before he arrived and of the murder he committed over a decade earlier.

Associating David with objects that generalize and stereotype his ‘Indianness’ (the war bonnet) and his two-spiritedness (the calico dress) is Jon’s attempt to curate David's identity. To transform David into part of a collection, Jon must de-contextualize him so as to, in the words of James Clifford, “create the illusion of adequate representation of a world” and make him stand for an ‘abstract whole” (53). Forcing David into this kind of circumscribed role as ‘Indian’ is Jon's attempt to visually represent David's culture through an act of substitution. Representing an image this way, according to Craig Owens, entails that “the image is conceived as a replacement, a stand-in, and therefore, as compensating for an absence” (97). David is to

Jon what the non-existent Indian threat was to Jon's mother: a metonym of presence. Jon's effort to resurrect David, to "raise him up to the light" (103), can be seen as an act of compensation, a fantasy, a way of filling the absence left by the murder he committed and which has haunted him all these years. The irony of forcing David into a visual mimicry of 'Indianness' is that this mimicry further reveals to Jon the absence of a fixed self. According to Bhabha, "the excess or slippage produced by the *ambivalence* of mimicry (almost the same, but not quite) does not merely 'rupture' the discourse, but becomes transformed into an uncertainty which fixes the colonial subject as 'partial' presence" (86). On the one hand, Jon uses David as a stand-in to compensate for both the absence of a rooted, contextualized self (this lack being an inevitable result of euro-western epistemologies) and for the memory of the two-spirit Jon killed. On the other hand, trying to fill this absence by forcing David to mimic 'Indianness' reveals the true nature of Jon's self: rootless and without a true community. As a subject trying to dictate the meaning of others, Jon can only ever be partially present at best.

Jon's desperate need to anchor his self to presence leads to his fetishization of David. His treatment of David-as-fetish indicates that Jon suffers from the same mental disease as do Billy, Ma, and Father Noel in *Brébeuf's Ghost*. Jon tells Angie that he cares about David, because "I need him to forgive me. For what we did to the Indians" (103). Yet, despite the fact that Jon wants David to forgive him, he abuses David both sexually and physically because – as a fetish – David "gives access to an 'identity' which is predicated as much on mastery and pleasure as it is on anxiety and defence, for it is a form of multiple and contradictory belief in its recognition of difference and disavowal of it" (Bhabha 74-75). Therefore, David, as fetish, serves simultaneously as a metonymical marker of identity (contiguously registering the perceived lack Jon feels) and a metaphorical marker whose function is to mask absence and difference. The act of turning David into a fetish is a form of psychosis in that David as a

fantasy “tells the story that allows the subject [Jon] to (mis)perceive the void around which drive circulates as the primordial loss constitutive of desire . . . *It* [David-as-fantasy] constructs the scene in which the *jouissance* we are deprived of is concentrated in the Other, who stole it from us . . .” (Selinger 82). Through the process of fetishising, a process that carries “always the trace of loss, absence” (Bhabha 81), Jon manages the feat of placing all his fear of absence, his guilt over killing the two-spirit, as well as his guilt over the way settlers in New Mexico emptied the land, into the figure of the Other, David. However, David also contains the *jouissance* of which Jon has deprived himself through his own actions. Thus, Jon not only transfers his fear of absence and feelings of guilt onto David, but David—as fetishised object, as *jouissance*—becomes an erotically charged object at the same time. The categorization of David as both Other and as a vessel embodying his *jouissance* allows Jon to see David as a “void” of lost desire, as a container, one that Jon may fill as he pleases, whose essence is everything Jon represses and understands as morally wrong. David, as fantasy, allows Jon the freedom to both relish and deny responsibility for the reprehensible acts he has committed.

Jon's psychosis, not surprisingly, functions as a pathogen in both the physical and spiritual life of David. David's diseased spirit is first seen when David tells Angela that he is “dead. Let me rot”(80), echoing Pierre's response, “His skin – It's peeling off him!” (5), to the ghost of Father Brébeuf. In both instances, rot is linked to a character's deteriorating spiritual state. In David's case, he is a native person reduced to peddling tonics. Traditional native medicine that once had a high cultural value has now become a commodity in the marketplace of non-indigenous buyers. Thus de-contextualized, these tonics have lost their power as a curative. Igor Kopytoff's discussion concerning the cultural biographies of things⁵ neatly

⁵ In “The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process,” Igor Kopytoff writes that “biographies of things can make salient what might otherwise remain obscure” (67). His opening discussion of slavery, something

captures the situation in which David (symbolized by the tonic/medicine) finds himself. He is "caught between the cultural structure of commoditization and his own personal attempts to bring a value order to the universe of things" (Kopytoff 76). He has become separated and isolated from his community and place where he receives both his power and his identity as a member of a social group. He has, like the Salish community in *Ravensong*, "caught the disease of emptiness that infects the white people" (Leggatt 176). The tonics David sells are a metaphor for his current state: both of them are weakened versions of what they once were. David, in his feeble state, is easily fetishised and humiliated by Jon, who calls him "baby" (113) and treats him as a sexual plaything. In his current diseased state, David, like the tonics, has become a commodity who, like the medicine, has been fetishized and singularized. The result is his spiritual demoralization.

David's attempt to de-commoditize himself, to assert himself as a human being and an equal, is what provokes the white crowd into wanting to lynch him. When David tells the crowd that "The Great Spirit is kind – he has taught his creatures what is good for them. The real Natives of America have learned many good Medicines from the Beasts, Fowls, Fishes, and even from the insects themselves" (98), he is attempting to re-contextualise the medicine by connecting it to the land. If Kevin Wildes is correct in his assertion that "medicine is a socially constructed set of practises" (74), then the reason for the medicine's current ineffectiveness becomes clear. Without native cultural practises to contextualize it and provide instructions that tell how to use the remedy correctly, what was a powerful medicine in one cultural realm becomes an ineffectual tonic in another. David's attempts to contextualise the medicine by

he defines as "a process of social transformation that involves a succession of phases and changes in status" is highly applicable to David's situation in *Angel of the Medicine Show*, as is his discussion later in the paper concerning how states of singularity, sacralisation, and commoditization regularly shift within commercial monetized societies.

connecting it to the land stand in stark contrast to the scripted lines Jon forces him to use. In the medicine show, David is made to say, “I call attention to the bottle I hold in my hand, containing one of the greatest gifts to man. This famous Indian Herb Medicine is made from a formula handed down from generation to generation by my forefathers, who were chiefs of the Osage Indians” (130). The speech begins with a request for everybody to look at the bottle. The presumption behind such an opening is that euro-western customers will be at least as interested in the container, a material object, than in the medicine contained therein. David then emphasises that the medicine was given to him by *people*, by chiefs in particular. David, in order to sell the medicine, must divorce it entirely from its natural origins so as to accentuate its connection to humans and to social hierarchy. To a euro-western audience, the link to the natural world invalidates the product (as is demonstrated by the mob’s efforts to lynch David); however, linking the medicine, a commodity, to figures of hierarchical importance in a society (the chiefs) not only makes the medicine more appealing, but also demonstrates the extent to which medicine is truly a socially constructed discourse. This transformation of native medicine into a commodity and object to be consumed by euro-westerners, however, has severe repercussions for David. The ‘medicine’, described as, a “bright red liquid” (85) is a metaphor for the effects of cultural appropriation: the red liquid is indigenous blood in a bottle, a fact realized by David towards the end of the play when he yells, “You shit, you’re here to drink my blood!”(114), identifying Jon as a disease and a cannibal, a physical manifestation of the consumption decimating the indigenous and settler populations of New Mexico at the time.

The extent to which David's spiritual centre is diseased—and, thus, imbalanced—is seen when, having just escaped death, he mistakes Angela for an angel and, begging to get into heaven, he says, “Make my skin white like yours, lady, white like the holy lily Catherine!” (84). His plea indicates that a key part of his self-perception is his ‘lack’ of whiteness. When David

defends the honour of his people after Angie has accused them of being bloodthirsty she tells him “Don’t! Don’t answer back. That’s not your number. Your number’s all you got to do” (89). Clearly, in Angie's view, David's value as a person is as a performer, as someone whose meaning is decided upon by his 'owners'. She admonishes him yet again with “you’re not a wild Indian now” (90) after he defends the value of Scout, their horse. The implication is clear. The fact that David has answered back to Angie, the fact that he has provided even a modicum of resistance, places him clearly in opposition to the impositions of euro-western culture. The fact he is holding his own opinions, then, is what makes him “wild.” To be ‘civilized’, he must agree to be an object, something that is present and, thus, meaningful only when euro-western subjects call him into existence. The penalty for transgressing these rules, for refusing to play the part of an object, is death. When David talks back to the townspeople, defending the efficacy of his people’s medicine, he is seen not as a subject, but as an *objet sauvage*, an object whose power lies in its resistance to classification. What makes the *objet sauvage* so disconcerting for euro-westerners—people who combat their fear of absence by anchoring their identities to ‘things’—is that it serves as a forceful reminder of the euro-westerner’s lack of self-possession by exposing the fallacy that one’s sense of self can ever be fixed through attachment to an object (Clifford 60). His speech also exposes the town peoples’ lack of power to name and control the objects they wish to master and control in their environment. By breaking out of the classification of slave and object, David reminds the townspeople of the artificial nature of the myth—the myth that they are populating and ‘civilizing’ a previously ‘empty land’—they have created for themselves. By speaking up, David reminds these people of their “lack of self-possession,” making their spiritual absence present. The crowd responds as Billy and Jon do when confronted with absence; they try to control or eradicate it. The crowd tries to lynch David because, if they don’t, they will have to face the fact that the fixed

identities they have constructed for themselves, as civilized members of a virtuous nation, are non-existent. Either David dies, or the townspeople become ghosts.

David's reconnection to presence and his own indigenous culture is what starts him on the path to 'being alive well'. His spiritual recovery begins with a dream. David's dream of sister Catherine helps him see the disease—Christianity, the fear of absence and the philosophy of possessive individualism, all of which de-contextualize him and make him both physically and spiritually sick—that must be worked out of his system before he can be healthy again. In the first scene, he is ready to die; he has already separated himself from the world. He pleads with Angie to "let me rot" and "let me go to heaven!"(80). Later, after having fallen asleep, the part of him that belongs to Jon, the part Jon calls "Bright Eyes," dies. In his dream, Bright Eyes is in heaven, observing sister Catherine "the Lily of the Mohawks" who was "the one Father Andre loved best . . . She was burning, burning up. Angels of flame, tearing her brown skin, that dirty meat, from her body" (121). This dream reinforces the lesson Angie's gunshot should have taught him earlier, but that he had been too sick to understand. The version of Christianity that informs Jon's actions and the priests' behaviour demands that one become white, and no amount of belief in God, or following the rules set out by the priests at the residential school, will make David anything other than a piece of "dirty meat" and, thus, an object in the eyes of euro-westerners. The death of Bright Eyes, an event he tells Angela has "brought me back to earth" (117), severs his connection with the euro-western preoccupation with absence and grounds his physical and spiritual self to the land, to a world of presence, where he can be healthy once more.

David's battle to regain health, to re-contextualize himself in the face of the euro-westerners who vie to appropriate his identity, mirrors the struggle those who practise traditional indigenous medicine have in convincing euro-westerners of the validity of their

medical philosophies and practises. According to Chidi Oguamanam, traditional indigenous medical knowledge is only acknowledged as valid by euro-western medical ideology if euro-westerners control the medicine's context. For example, current attempts on the part of western medicine to validate and include traditional medical knowledge involve creating scientific and legal parameters that are placed around this knowledge which, according to Oguamanam, are examples of the euro-western tendency to erode indigenous culture (150). Philosophically, the premise of western biomedicine is that disease and illness are biological processes. To bring a sick person back to health, the biomedical practitioner learns to pinpoint the specific part of the body that is afflicted so that she can heal it (Oguamanam, 149). While this methodology may heal one specific section of the body, Schneider and DeHaven feel that this sort of "technologically dependent approach to managing patient problems frequently provides individuals with explanations of their problems without offering understanding in a way that makes sense of them" (421).

The differentiation between euro-western notions of medicine and indigenous ones is made quite clear in *The Moon and Dead Indians*. Angela's references to medicine are often ironic. For example, Angela's references to medicine are often references to alcohol, whose medicinal value, if there is any, is of a localized nature. For example, she calls alcohol a "medicine" to help cure "a palpitation of my heart" (95). The value of medicine for Jon is also localized in that the medicine's value is entirely monetary. Jon explains to Angela that the elixir they sell "won't cure nothing if them hicks don't buy it" (96). Medicine, for him, has no value if it doesn't generate profit. Angela and Jon's cynicism regarding medicine is, perhaps, a key reason why they remain unhealthy individuals, together but alone, suffering from the disease of rootlessness and fear of absence. David's understanding of medicine, however, is entirely different, and it is David—despised, almost dead, and running a fever—who, by the end of the

play, is the healthiest of the three. His escape from the degradation of the sexual abuse and the travesty of the medicine show indicates that, out of the three characters in this play, he is the one most likely to heal. The pathology of disease is demonstrated when Jon, who, like a parasite is dependent upon David's 'Indianness' for his own survival, forces David to wear the ghost costume and war bonnet, appropriating David's identity as a native person. It is precisely at this point, the point when Jon's consumption of David—both physically and spiritually—is almost complete that David finally escapes. Coloured smoke comes out of the feathers of the bonnet, which then ignites, signifying David's resistance to these symbols of his oppressor. Jon and Angela then hear hooves on the rocks and realize that David has taken Scout, the horse who, according to Jon "is in love with the Chief" (103). David's reconnection with this animal symbolizes his first steps towards reconnection with the natural world and his cultural traditions. By re-contextualizing himself within his own traditions, by returning to a world of 'presence', David increases the chance that his people's medicine will help him regain harmony between the physical and spiritual worlds. Angela and Jon, on the other hand, are left in the shambles of their own world, with Jon insisting that Angela is not 'sick' (131). That her sickness is actually her pregnancy is even more illustrative of how distorted a view of health and disease these two characters have: the ability to bring a life into the world is misunderstood as an illness. It appears, then, that David has finally understood the hard lessons discovered by the characters in *Brébeuf's Ghost*, characters who must survive not only cannibal priests but the violence of the Iroquois who, aligned with the English, desire Huron land so they can trap more furs and, thus, further the euro-western process of commoditizing the land. The hard-earned lesson is that cannibalism, another form of 'consumption', is an insidious and lethal disease stemming from euro-western fears of absence.

Thus, the predominance of absence in euro-western culture is seen, in these plays, to be a primary cause of physical, spiritual and psychological illness. The obsession with absence creates psychological uncertainty within the euro-western characters who, in response, attempt to objectify and commoditize the material world so as to anchor their senses of self and to mitigate their fears. The psychological and physical costs, however, of the euro-western characters' attempts to objectify the indigenous societies in the plays are devastating. In "The Dogs of Free Speech," Moses writes: "Imagine that the bones they chew are parts of you, that/You can hear each one break. How would you take being/ Chosen by teeth for the health of their dream?" ("Pursued," 135). David is lynched by a mob of white settlers so that they can continue believing in their cultural superiority over the indigenous subjects they have objectified. Father Noel, quite literally, feasts on the bones of those who refuse to convert to Christianity and, thus, makes them a part of a collection. In both of these cases, euro-western responses to their perceptions of absence function as a disease and force indigenous and white characters into conflict. In exposing how euro-western philosophy functions as a pathogen, these plays illustrate Naomi Adelman's assertion that ". . . health continues to be mediated by context, by history, and by culture; it is, in other words, deeply embedded within the language, practices, and processes of dissent" (116). If health as a social construct is mediated by all these things, then the performance of each of these plays, lodged firmly as they are within a language of dissent, becomes an avenue through which those whose bones have been chewed on and broken might begin the process of reclaiming them.

The play *Almighty Voice and His Wife* demonstrates how this process of reclamation might occur. Moses's first of the three plays, *Almighty Voice and His Wife*, examines the story of Almighty Voice, a Cree warrior from Saskatchewan who was part of the first generation after the Riel Rebellion. The Battle of Batoche had been fought in his territory and, according

to Moses, "his was the first generation of people who were confined by those nice humane treaties on reserves, the first generation for whom the buffalo weren't a major source of food and inspiration" ("Pursued" 70). In Act One, Almighty Voice's story is told over nine scenes in a poetic-realist manner. The basic plot is as follows: Almighty Voice proposes to White Girl, a young native girl who has spent time in a residential school and who, as a result, fears the white god will kill her husband because "he's a jealous god" (20). After Almighty Voice kills a cow to celebrate his marriage, he is caught and incarcerated in the guardhouse for this crime. A few days after he escapes, Almighty Voice is found by a Mountie and a Scout. Almighty Voice, after yelling several warnings, kills one of them. For the next year and a half, Almighty Voice and White Girl elude capture. Eventually, Almighty Voice, no longer traveling with White Girl because she has gone home to prepare to give birth to their child, is spotted by some farmers and is trapped in a stand of poplars by a group of villagers and Mounties until two cannons from Port Albert arrive. After a barrage of heavy fire into the trees, Almighty Voice is killed. The final scene shows Almighty Voice, mortally wounded and using his gun as a crutch, dying upon seeing his newborn son. Act Two takes place on the abandoned auditorium stage in the industrial school at Duck Lake. Almighty Voice's ghost is dancing alone when an Interlocutor (White Girl in a Mountie uniform) insists he is part of The Red and White Victoria Regina Spirit Revival show and it is time to perform, despite the fact that "there's still no sign of Messers Bone, Tambo, Drum, or anyone" (69). Both are in whiteface. Over the nine scenes of Act Two, Almighty Voice realises that the Interlocutor is his wife and that her spirit has lost her way. Due to the racism she has faced and the religious instruction she has undergone, she has learned to be ashamed of her people and has, thus, attempted to embody the spirit of her oppressor, the white male. By using the conventions of the racist minstrel show, Almighty Voice is able to convince the Interlocutor to play a majority of the native parts in the show.

With the Interlocutor increasingly questioning his/her identity, Almighty Voice is able to lead White Girl to an understanding of who she really is, so that she can reclaim her true identity.

As in Moses' other plays, the euro-western characters in *Almighty Voice and his Wife* (only one of which, the Interlocutor, is ever seen) are preoccupied with creating fixed and stable identities as subjects through their associations with material objects and things. The eventual killing of Almighty Voice is a result of this euro-western desire to objectify the phenomenal world so as to control the meaning of 'things' and, in many cases, commoditize them. Almighty Voice's view of the cow as 'meat', as something having a functional value in the world, is a view that directly conflicts with the euro-western concept of the cow as 'property,' as something with exchange value that belongs to "the Great White Mother" (25). The disagreement concerning the significance of the cow is the catalyst for the series of events that eventually lead to Almighty Voice's death. White Girl's description of euro-westerners also emphasises the importance these characters place on material things. When she recounts her time spent at the Duck Lake guard house, she talks about the power a silver coin holds over the Mountie — even though "a coin is not the moon" (39). White Girl also talks about the "bad look on [his] face, a blindness" that is caused by the Mountie's staring at two objects specifically: the silver dollar and her husband's bullet (40). In the end, to the Mountie at least, her husband's life is worth less than these two objects.

Conversely, the indigenous characters in the play do not have the euro-western preoccupation with objects and things. An example of this is the fact that, after having escaped from the guard house, Almighty Voice does not know where his Winchester is. Unlike Billy, from *The Moon and Dead Indians*, whose identity is intimately connected to his gun, Almighty Voice has not bothered to keep track of his own gun. In fact, most of the objects tied to an indigenous worldview are better understood as implements rather than as objects. In

Baudrillard's view, implements are "the subject's project of asserting practical control within the real world"(8). Implements are not, in other words, objects through which one mediates one's identity. The contrast between implements and objects is well-demonstrated in the staging differences between Act One and Act Two. In Act One of the 1992 production of the play, the props used were two trees, a dead rabbit, a gun, a knife, some animal skins, and a sleeping area with some bedding. In Act One of the 2009 production of the play, the stage contained bedding, a rabbit skin, a knife and a gun. Except for the trees, these props are best understood as implements, since they represent things that are required for survival, not for creating notions of fixed identities.

The props used in Act One of both productions starkly contrast with the props used in Act Two. In the 1992 production, Act Two has three stools, a ladder, an easel with placards, and a cane. In the 2009 production, among the props used were a director's chair, an old gramophone, an old movie camera (all three of which were draped in cobwebs), and a placard and easel. All of the props from the 2009 production are clearly examples of objects that have been used to negatively mediate native identity. While the props from the 1992 production, as representations of the remaining detritus from the Duck Lake Industrial School, are implements for euro-westerners accustomed to viewing institutionalized education as a way to assert practical control of the world, these props are more accurately understood as objects in that they have been divested of their functions and "made relative to a subject" (Baudrillard 7).⁶ For native people, these stools are not practical tools to assist them in asserting control over the

⁶ While Baudrillard is contrasting only two terms here - implements, objects that cannot be possessed "since the object I utilize always directs me back to the world" (7), and possessions, objects that "constitute themselves as a system on the basis of which the subject seeks to piece together his world" (7) - I believe there is room to modify Baudrillard's idea that it is only possessions that "participate in a mutual relationship in so far as they each refer back to the subject" (7). As can be seen in *Almighty Voice and his Wife*, there are objects, like the stools, that cannot be possessed physically, but still create the **mutual relationship between subject and possession** of which Baudrillard speaks.

world; rather, they are material vestiges of euro-western attempts to control their identities and destroy their culture. In both the 1992 and 2009 productions, as Almighty Voice helps White Girl wipe off her face paint, lighting is used to excise these objects from the stage. The stage, whose entirety has been illuminated up until this point, becomes dark save for the spotlight centred on the two characters in the process of reclaiming their identities. The rest of the stage, and the objects on it, becomes blanketed in darkness, suggesting that White Girl's native identity can only be retained in a world without concern for materiality, in a world where people do not use objects and things to mediate their identities.

In Act Two, the Interlocutor, like the other euro-western characters in Moses' plays, is preoccupied with objects and things, a preoccupation which is a symptom of her fear of absence. Her fear of absence is demonstrated many times throughout Act Two. In order to begin the minstrel show, the Interlocutor tries to convince him to stop dancing by asking, "if you begin at the end, then where do you go?" (56). Her concern about where one goes after 'the end' suggests a fear of death. This fear is repeated throughout the act, especially in response to Almighty Voice's questions concerning how she feels. In Scene Five, after Almighty Voice has asked how she feels, she avoids the question by voicing her desire for the return of her "happy company": those members of the minstrel show whose inexplicable absence threatens the integrity of the performance. The Interlocutor's reluctance to accept their absence—and the consequences of it for the show—is also seen when Almighty Voice tells her that "It's curtains for all of us" and she, quite desperately, interjects with "No, the show must go on" (82). For the Interlocutor, the end of the show presents her with a nothingness, an absence, she cannot face. The Ghost is eventually able to rescue White Girl from the euro-western world of objects and alienation from the phenomenal world by explaining to her that the absence she perceives is, in actuality, presence. Towards the end of the play, the Interlocutor, who has been avoiding

answering the Ghost's question of "How do you feel?"—a question that forces the Interlocutor to detach herself from the world of objects by requiring her to use only her feelings (which are constantly changing) as a point of reference from which to answer it—attempts to use the moon as yet another object through which to stabilize an identity that has been (due to the fact that the Ghost has continually persuaded her to play parts that force her, as Other, to gaze into herself) exposed as a process, as something constantly shifting. Her answer, "I feel this evening like the moon . . . envious and pale of face and alone" (92) could apply to all euro-western characters in *Brébeuf's Ghost*, *The Indian Medicine Shows*, and *Almighty Voice and his Wife*. Her understanding of the moon reflects her fear of absence, as well as her recognition of the absence within herself. Almighty Voice, in response, provides her with the means through which to anchor the reality of the ever-shifting 'absent' self to the phenomenal world. He offers her a Cree understanding of the moon and, in the process, provides White Girl with a lesson about how one may be present, even while lacking a fixed self. While his healing song begins by describing the moon as a "very wise woman – She's made of light," he respectfully listens as the Interlocutor adds that she is "a very new woman made out of dark" (92). Together, they create an understanding of the moon as both young and old, light and dark, a mother who "watches over us, over the children" and who is "waiting for the light just as a child might" (92-93). The moon, in short, is something present in the world, something whose ontology is both fixed and ever-changing. Through this song, then, and the lessons it teaches about the intimate relationship between absence and presence, the Ghost is able to usher the Interlocutor back into a Cree understanding of the world as a place where absence *is* presence and, therefore, is not something to be feared.

According to Rob Appleford, a consistent aspect of Moses' plays is that they dramatize "how characters on stage continually struggle to negotiate between absence and presence, being

dead and alive, in their desire to matter, *to be matter*" ("Daniel David" 159). His implication is that, for these characters, one must *be* matter in order *to* matter: to be matter means one must be perceived as present, as having presence. To be absent, then, is not to matter at all. While Moses' indigenous characters are indeed struggling to matter (they are, after all, fighting to challenge the white-washed, ossified and homogenized perception of indigenous culture that euro-western culture perpetuates) it would be incorrect to posit that all of Moses' characters are struggling to be matter, as if being matterless and mattering are incompatible states of being. A common indigenous point of view concerning absence and presence holds that these two concepts are not dichotic. The common indigenous worldview does not view presence and absence, death and life, as opposing states of being: rather, presence and absence, the spiritual and the phenomenal, are intimately connected. This presence/absence connectivity is clearly demonstrated in each play through the indigenous characters who maintain strong connections to the spirit world. For instance, Black Star in *Brébeuf's Ghost* moves between the spirit world and the physical world. In one world, he can use branches from full grown oaks to battle *windigo* in the dead of winter without the need of clothes to keep him warm, while in the physical world he is a respected medicine man. His importance to the group is his ability to become matter-less. Only by achieving this state can he effectively battle the *windigo*. The idea that one only matters if one is physically matter is also countered by Lily Star who, in describing the spirit world where Sky Feather's baby wanders, talks of how the dead have "parts of their bodies missing," yet "they're laughing and drumming," "playing pipes far sweeter than any we will ever play" and "their dancing is happier than any we'll ever do with our bodies that are whole" (116-117). Clearly, the dead in this case don't need require materiality to matter, to exist, or to be happy.

Father Brébeuf, Joseph, Pierre, and Father Noel, representatives of the Christian faith in *Brébeuf's Ghost*, are unable to see the absence that they perceive in the physical world as anything other than a threat. In fact, the reason they harm so many of the Ojibwa characters in the play is because of these euro-western characters' struggles to remain matter throughout the plays, to stay alive at all costs. Even though Father Noel prays for death (suggesting that he believes in a better, purer, spiritual world after death) his actions clearly demonstrate an implicit belief in the notion outlined by Appleford that to matter, one must remain *matter*. It is clear, despite his prayers, that Father Noel is driven by an overriding desire to remain in the material world. This desire renders him blind to the spirituality and presence in the world; he chooses to submit to Brébeuf's ghost, a ghost whose body is rotting and losing materiality, or at least the façade of materiality, each time he is seen. In fact, contrary to the indigenous dead, who remain in the realm of spirits after having successfully completed their journeys to the spirit world, Brébeuf's constant reappearances indicate that even his ghost needs to cling to the physical. Father Noel's reverence for this spirit who desires 'presence' is a symptom of his inability to see the inherent linkages between the absent and the present. This blindness, in turn, causes him to create an utterly distorted reconciliation between the two states he feels are opposed. Eventually, he becomes a cannibal, a *windigo*, a wholly unbalanced spiritual, and material, entity who must feed on human flesh to survive. In becoming a *windigo*, he successfully maintains his two primary material drives: to keep from starving and to exert power over others.

According to Appleford, "the Windigo complex is the breaching of the thin membrane between what can and cannot be known, between phantasmal and material ontologies, and between subjective awareness and its unrepresentable limits" ("Daniel," 161). This is precisely true for characters like Father Noel, whose inability to negotiate between these two worlds

derives from a cultural mindset that tells him such negotiation is impossible. His culture has taught him that he is a subject and that phantasmal ontologies can only be understood if one sacrifices the self. The only way Father Noel believes he can maintain his subjectivity is if he denies, literally and figuratively, the other characters their subjectivity. Father Noel's actions contrast against the actions of Black Star, who is able to be both a material subject and immaterial spirit at the same time. Black Star is able to gain power from the spirit world so that he can battle those things that would harm his people. Black Star appears to have an understanding of power similar to the "Old Ones" in Migmaw stories: 'power' is the foundation of the universe and is 'everywhere at once, and yet it is also conscious, particulate' (qtd. in Ruffo 173). Black Star is able to control this power because he understands the nature of the universe's foundation. It is a part of him, making him both subject and subordinate simultaneously. In contrast, Father Noel's attempts to use power are so destructive and unbalanced because his euro-western worldview holds that in order to retain his belief in a subjective self, he must consume the subjectivity of others. As windigo, he is a collector, consuming the subjectivity of others so as to retain a sense of 'subject-ness' for himself.

The relative comfort Moses' indigenous characters have navigating the spirit world reflects, in part, Daniel David Moses' own views. As a person who was "brought up not giving in to, not giving value to, conflict," Moses writes that he was raised to "perceive engagement in conflict in life as dumb, as a symptom of a lack of imagination, of compassion, if not of humanity" ("Pursued" 161). Characters like Lily Star and Bear, unlike the euro-western cannibals in the plays, are not engaged in a struggle to be, or not to be, matter, for this is an existential conflict that originates from the high premium euro-western culture places upon the concept of the individual. A requirement of understanding one's self as an individual is that one must believe in the stability of the individual self that is knowable precisely because it is fixed.

Aligning one's self with matter, with things and objects whose physical structures are relatively stable, is an important way in which the philosophical primacy of the individual self can be maintained. In contrast, a traditional indigenous worldview, a worldview that places a high value on the communal, is founded on the premise that an individual's significance as subject is subordinate to the individual's significance as a member of his community. Characters like Lily Star and Bear are interested in saving their people, not themselves. Since they lack the euro-western need to continually construct themselves as subjects, as entities who must attach themselves to things and objects to provide the illusion of fixity, Lily Star and Bear penetrate more easily into the spiritual, matter-less, realm than do the euro-western characters.

David from *Angel of the Medicine Show* also demonstrates that to live a balanced life, one must not cling so tightly to one's own materiality. His dream, something immaterial in itself, shows him a truth that, up until that point, he has been unable to see. To reclaim his independence from Jon, to escape and to get back to his community, he makes himself essentially matter-less. He disappears in a cloud of smoke and a conflagration of brightly burning feathers. Before his escape, David's suffering can be seen as a symptom of his inability to understand anything other than the phenomenal world. He has forgotten his people's traditions and, in the words of White Girl, forgetting everything means "You're not a man then. You're like a ghost. You're lost" (45). David's healing begins only when he is able to harness and use the power that is the basis of the universe to make himself, for a time, matter-less.

Almighty Voice's struggle is similar to David's: he has to restore his identity, to reintegrate his physical and spiritual self in order to complete his journey to the spirit world. Not only this, but he must guide White Girl through this process as well. At the end of the play, with the symbolic removal of white paint from their faces, the restoration of their personal and cultural identities is signified. It would be incorrect, however, to understand this act as a

restoration to materiality as well. While the whiteface worn by these two characters, on one level, does suggest "ghostness" in that both characters have been ghosted—their identities as individuals existing in a larger Cree culture have been spirited away and forgotten by colonialist histories—the eventual removal of the whiteface does not symbolize a material return to the world. While these two characters, with the removal of the whiteface, are no longer ghosts in the euro-western sense (malcontent spirits wandering the earth), they remain as spirits, albeit spirits who have found balance between their world and the material one. In Moses' view, "white as a colour only exists because some of us get told we're black or yellow or Indians. I think my ghosts exist to probe this white problem, this tonal confusion, to spook its metaphors" ("Pursued" 81). The removal of white suggests that Almighty Voice and White Girl have escaped from the colonial preoccupation with defining cultures based on skin colour. Rather than struggling for materiality, these characters are struggling for balance to counter the imbalances colonial racist attitudes have perpetrated upon them and their communities. The balance they find is achieved somewhere between the physical world of the abandoned stage in the abandoned Duck Lake industrial school and the spirit world. The struggle of Moses' native characters to regain identity is, thus, seen to be something that transcends matter. While immaterial, Moses' native characters remain present; they *matter*.

Rather than viewing Moses' characters as struggling with how to become matter, it might be more useful to understand these characters as navigating, with varying degrees of failure and success, through a process of embodiment. Each of the characters in *Brébeuf's Ghost*, *The Indian Medicine Shows*, and *Almighty Voice and his Wife* struggles with the problem of how to organize and negotiate his way through a world of bodies that constantly modifies and transforms how he understands himself. According to Phillip Zarrilli, "we organize 'the world' we encounter into significant gestalts and, thus, 'the body' I call mine is not

a body, or the body, but rather a process of embodying the several bodies one encounters in everyday experience" (655). Andy Clark's explanation of the 'active externalist' theory of embodiment explains how the body can be understood as a process of embodying. The active externalist theory suggests that human cognition is constantly coupling with relevant-to-the-moment features of the phenomenal world. This coupling occurs specifically at times when the external world with which any given body interacts plays an active role in governing the cognitive behaviour of the subject. Imagine a person playing the game of Jenga. In this game, a player must remove one rectangular block from the bottom of a wooden tower and balance the recently-removed block on the top of the tower. The game continues until the tower collapses. While playing this game, a player's brain performs mental calculations to determine which specific blocks may be removed without severely compromising the structural integrity of the tower. The active externalist would argue that the physical act of moving the block is an "epistemic action", an action whose performance actually aids the cognitive process taking place. According to Clark, not only does the external world aid in a subject's cognitive process when the subject performs an epistemic action, but the external world actually *becomes* part of the cognitive process. Put another way, if a player moving a block in Jenga were only to imagine which blocks would be most effective to remove and replace, all would agree that this imagined act is a cognitive one. Yet, a study done by David Kirsh and Paul Maglio found that when players rotate a shape when playing Tetris, they are often rotating it to "help determine whether the shape and the slot are compatible" (Clark 222) and not purely to verify an already completed cognitive act. In other words, as players increase in skill, they combine both internal (by thinking) and external (via rotating the shape) computations in order to increase their efficiency at the game. A successful relocation of a block in Jenga is similar. Thinking about which block to move, then testing pieces before they are pulled, then checking for tower

balance before letting go of the block works in a similar way, computationally speaking, as does rotating the shapes when playing Tetris. The cognitive act, therefore, has both internal and external agency. Essentially, this interaction between the material world and a player's cognition creates what Clark calls a "coupled system" (222). If a Jenga player, for some reason, were not allowed to move the blocks and so tried to play the game just by thinking about her next move, while someone else moved the pieces only after she had committed to a move, the lack of external input would most likely affect her proficiency in the game. This is because external input is a vital component of cognition.

The phenomenal world, then, is an active partner in the creation of the self's cognitive development and understanding of the world. In the words of Stanton B. Garner, "the forms of ambiguity that characterize the phenomenal realm represent experience in flux, oscillating within and between modes of perceptual orientation" (51). The phenomenal realm, according to Garner, is ambiguous because the ontology of the body experiencing this realm is also ambiguous and ever-changing. Key euro-western characters such as Father Noel and Jon live entirely imbalanced lives due to their inability to understand the body as a process of encounters, an entity as ambiguous as the rest of the phenomenal world. Instead, these characters try actively to stabilize and fix the phenomenal world, and their sense of self, through their constant objectification of it. Embodiment, an inevitable process that helps humans to extend cognition, and thus the self, is a threat to these characters and their attempts to anchor the world to the meanings they wish the objects in it to have. The fear of embodying the Other, since it threatens the euro-westerners' need for a stable and fixed individual identity, is what makes the euro-western characters so destructive, especially in contrast to the indigenous characters in the play. The indigenous characters in these plays, because they do not view the world as a series of binary opposites, tend to navigate through the physical world's

inherent ambiguities with a higher degree of success—meaning they are more able to 'be alive well'—than do the euro-western characters.

Jon and Father Noel's relentless need to define themselves as subjects (thus empowering them to objectify others) results in their consistent performing of actions that contradict what they believe their motivations to be. Jon tells Angie that he needs David because "I need him to forgive me. For what we did to the Indians" (123). Here, Jon, through the use of the word 'we', absolves himself of personal responsibility for the extermination of the Apaches whose land he, and others, have stolen. At the same time, he craves personal absolution. His abuse of David appears, however, in no way to be the actions of a man seeking forgiveness. Jon's inability to accept that his own sense of self is a product, in part, of the embodying of others keeps him from empathizing with and recognizing the humanity of David (and, arguably, Angie) but it also keeps Jon from understanding that David, a living symbol of the two-spirit he both scalped and embodied, cannot return the "truth of self-certainty" (Hegel qtd. in Drichel 33) Jon had as a younger man. In recounting the murder of the two-spirit, Jon tells Billy three times that "he looked at me" (66). What the gaze of the victim did was make it clear to Jon that his victim was not a passive object existing only to verify Jon's status as subject. Instead, the two-spirit's gaze can be seen as one of resistance. Such a gaze, according to Rachel Drichel, "ensures the viewing subject is annihilated insofar as it is brought face to face with the limits of its own representational power" (34). Staring into the eyes of his suffering victim tied Jon everlastingly to the person he scalped. In that moment, he experienced not only the pain of his victim and his victim's status as subject, he also continues to experience regret about who he, as a settler, really is. Jon's insistence that David dress and act like a native stereotype can be seen as an attempt by Jon to re-establish (in vain) his prerogative as subject: to represent others as he sees fit. His belief that only matter *matters*, explains why he is unable

and/ or unwilling to understand the absence in his core which drives him. He, thus, is unable to both forgive or understand himself, or forgive anybody else, and so he continues to live an imbalanced and unhappy life.

The lesson Jon's character provides for the audience is that the embodiment of another's pain can be a powerful catalyst for seeking healing. Unfortunately, in Jon's case, his attempts to heal himself are ineffective because he cannot see the sacred in the phenomenal world, end up harming others and himself. He is, in essence, taking the wrong medicine. Father Noel from *Brébeuf's Ghost* also embodies the suffering of another character—Father Brébeuf—and the result is that he cannibalizes the very Ojibwa who have ensured his material existence up until this point. Like Jon, Father Noel's fear of the Other distorts his perceptions of his experiences with the Ojibwa. What he sees, instead of a group of people who feed him and look after him while under no obligation to do so (a group whose very existence is under threat due to the material rapaciousness of his own culture), is a group of heathens and witches, all of whom are irredeemable unless they agree to believe what he believes. Their pain and their fears are of no interest to him. His descent into cannibalism is a result of his literally embodying (at one point eating the heart of) Brébeuf's ghost. His embodiment of Brébeuf is a symptom of Father Noel's inability to understand the inherent ambiguities of the phenomenal world. His embodiment of Brébeuf also reflects the way in which he has been instructed through the Eucharist—the symbolic eating of Christ's body—to embody the spiritual realm. It is possible, from his perspective, that Father Noel, as *windigo*, believes he is saving Ojibwa souls through the act of forcing their bodies to merge with his. However, his actions cannot be considered true embodiment because to embody someone else requires that one sees the Other being embodied as a subject. Father Noel's 'embodiment' of others is reflected in his need to cannibalize others, to embody them materially, to add to his own material and subjective self in the process. This

material embodiment of others demonstrates not empathy and understanding towards the Other but, rather, a need to reinforce a 'truth of self-certainty.' Father Noel's literal, rather than spiritual, embodiment of others serves to mirror and reinforce his own sense of self as material subject.

What Jon and Father Noel are doing, ironically, in their quest to remain subjects is treat themselves as objects, since this is what their cultural mythologies tell them being a subject is. The creation of this subject is a result of 'suturing', a process Gilbert Reid says stems from a subject's "fear of loss, or desire for Self" (52), which Robert Lapsley and Michael Westlake write "prompts him or her to seek compensation in an idealised image." This image "whose prototype is the image in the mirror, produces a misrecognition of the self . . ." (qtd. in Reid 76). In other words, the inability of these characters to accept the absence necessary to embody, and thus experience, the phenomenal world around them blinds them to the variety of perspectives from which the phenomenal world can be examined. The result is an inability on the part of characters like Father Noel and Jon to accept that there are valid alternate perspectives as to what constitutes truth and reality. To accept that the phenomenal world is ambiguous is to accept that this world is, therefore, ultimately unknowable and uncontrollable. This type of worldview challenges the very notion of self to which these characters so desperately cling. Rather than give up this idea of self, these characters choose to inflict pain and suffering upon those who challenge the existence of a stable self. The violence Jon and Father Noel perpetrate, however, cannot and does not restore a sense of wholeness to them. Father Noel has his throat slit and his body is devoured by black flies, while Jon—who has lost his show and source of income—lies in Angie's lap, demoralized and unable to sleep as she sings songs in memory of Billy, a dead man with whom she is still in love. Without the ability to embody others, to give up their sense of self in order to understand the perspectives of others, both Jon and Father Noel

demonstrate that the inability to participate in the process of embodiment ensures one cannot be cured of the psychoses that accompany feelings of rootlessness and cultural alienation.

In contrast, the indigenous characters, who understand better how to transform acts of embodiment into processes that heal, are much more successful at 'being alive well.' For example, Almighty Voice is so successful at negotiating the ambiguities, the absences and presences, in the world, that he is able to manipulate the conventions of racist minstrel shows not only to maintain a sense of who he is, but also to restore White Girl's rightful identity to her. To do this, he must embody the cultural values and racist beliefs of those who created and watched these minstrel shows, as well as embody those who played a part in killing him, so that he can ground White Girl back within her rightful culture. By using the conventions of the minstrel show, by embodying these conventions and stock characters through performance so as to subvert their meanings, Almighty Voice is able to bring White Girl back to a sense of her indigenous self. White Girl consciously constructs the Interlocutor's body so that she can control others (like Almighty Voice) through her objectification of their bodies. Almighty Voice's triumph is his ability to bring her back to her centre by being both a subject and a performer of conventional stock characters in a minstrel show. Through the variety of characters he plays (and forces the Interlocutor to play) Almighty Voice helps the Interlocutor to recognize the inherent ambiguity of the phenomenal world and, thus, the self. In other words, he exposes the fixed self as something that doesn't really exist. In the end, Almighty Voice helps White Girl enter an eternal present, where there is no need for a material body, where she can look after their child and he can perform his dance. According to Drew Leder, one aspect of living in the present in the world is that "the surface body tends to disappear from thematic awareness precisely because it is that *from* which I exist in the world," (Leder 53). As the Interlocutor, White Girl does not live in the present; rather, she is stuck in a perpetual past, a

purgatory in the auditorium of an abandoned residential school. The embodiment of a white-skinned euro-westerner, White Girl-as-Interlocuter is very concerned with time: she consistently brings up both the lateness of Tambo and Bones, and voices a strong concern that the show keep moving forward. However, when the superficial trappings of her constructed Interlocutor body are shed, White Girl moves into a present in which she no longer needs her surface body to be the thematic unifier of her experience. She regains her identity not only when she sheds the need to believe in her own materiality, but when she is able to embody, rather than try to control, Almighty Voice. Only when she relinquishes a fixed sense of body and of self, does she gain a true awareness of who she is.

David from *Angel of the Medicine Show*, as someone who is very much a part of the material world, escapes and finds his path home only when he (dis)embodies the spirits, becoming momentarily matter-less. Achieving this immaterial state is what allows him to escape from Jon. Like Almighty Voice, David's freedom is won once he decides to rebel against the roles imposed upon him, as is shown by the fact that it is the ghost costume and headdress which facilitate his escape in the end. The original uses for which these costumes were intended are circumvented by David's own subversive machinations. David's successful escape, interestingly, means he becomes an 'absence' for the audience; neither we, nor Jon, can pretend he embodies our perception of 'Indianness' any longer. In other words, once David disappears, the audience can no longer impose their own selves upon him. His absence, made possible through an act of embodiment, thus clarifies his 'presence' and makes him matter as a person. Like Almighty Voice and White Girl, David is able to create presence from a core of absence, and it is this process that allows for his healing to begin.

Healing is, according to Moses, one of three key functions – along with entertaining and instructing – of native art. Moses also writes that these three functions of art are also the three

main purposes of indigenous ceremony (“Pursued” 91). Through the performance of these plays, Moses reclaims native identity via the breaking of stereotypes and his structural and textual resistance to euro-western attempts to ossify native culture. According to Appleford, Moses is involved in the practise of nothing less than "staging the return of the living dead" (“Daniel” 151). This process of resurrection about which Appleford writes is accomplished through the exposition of absence as presence. Native culture, perceived as dead, or 'absent,' by euro-westerners is, through the performance of these plays, made present through the articulation of a culture that is present and very much alive. While the trope of haunting in the text of Moses' plays does clearly elucidate a worldview where absence is presence—where materiality need not be the only prerequisite in order for people to recognize something as existing—the physical performance of the plays is what makes the articulation of Moses' cultural viewpoints into something material, tangible, and immediate. Like more traditional native healing ceremonies, these plays, in essence, strive to manifest that which is 'absent' to the senses into something present. The aim of this process is to restore balance and harmony—two things that “are fundamental laws of the cosmos” (Gunn Allen 168)—to the ‘patient’ for whom the ceremony or play is being performed as well as to the community.

Two things in particular are essential to healing in an indigenous ceremony: the participation of the community and the process of embodiment. One example of the necessity of both community and embodiment is seen in the Navajo healing ceremony of the Mountain Chant, a ceremony used to cure a variety of illnesses. The foundation of this Chant is a story: in particular, the story of Reared Within the Mountains. This character is separated from his family and is made to live as a slave until he eventually escapes with the help of the gods. He then goes to live with the gods. When he eventually returns to his people, Reared Within the Mountains requires a purification ritual to clear away the vestiges of memories he retains from

his time living with the gods. The ceremony is needed because he is having trouble integrating back into human society, being unable to reconcile the world of the gods, where he has lived, with the world of human beings. In the story, the ceremony is successful and Reared Within the Mountains finally feels comfortable living among his people. The story ends with the Holy Ones inviting Reared Within the Mountains back to live with them. Thus, the message in this story is one of renewal and a sense of proper place within a larger cosmic order (DeHaven and Schneider 420). The Mountain Chant begins with four days of ritual preparation. During these four days, the patient is purified by emetics and sweats in a special lodge where a fire, made from four different kinds of wood, burns. Over the next four days, sand-paintings depicting various aspects of the story are drawn and invoked so that they may draw off illness and offer the patient some of their power (Hall qtd. in DeHaven and Schneider 421). The ninth day involves intricate dances (usually these dances are performed publicly, at the request of the patient) aimed at ritualistically curing the patient's whole body. Through the songs and stories used by the Chanter, who uses the sand-paintings to invoke the story's power, the 'patient' is assisted in embodying the vicissitudes of Reared Within the Mountain's life and is, as a result, brought to a deeper understanding of how to achieve balance in his/her life and, subsequently, in his/her community.

Another Navajo ceremony which uses story, sand-painting, and performance to heal is the Red Ant ceremony, which begins with the story of the emergence of the Red Ant people, followed by a second story: the Coyote Transformation story, in which a young hunter trades skins with Coyote and almost dies as a result. Both of these stories lay the foundation for the Hoop Transformation rite, a ceremony that—through use of a sand-painting depicting (and thus, invoking the power of) the Holy People and key characters in the story—is designed to "identify the patient with the Holy People" so that he/she can become "one with them by

absorption, imitation, transformation, substitution, recapitulation, repetition, commemoration, and concentration" (qtd. in Selinger 66). The sandpainting rites are, thus, "meaningful curing acts because of the Navajo's recognition of the performative powers of symbolic representation" (Gill 49). These symbolic representations have such power because of the way traditional Navajo understand time. According to Selinger, these stories contain their healing power because "for the Navajo, once an event takes place its effects may be repeated at any time in the future, so a primary lesson is that past occurrences, no matter how distant, still affect the present" (66). Thus, the ceremonial, ritualistic nature of the story's retelling functions as a medium through which past events are shown to be intertwined with events of the present. The patient's embodiment of the 'medicine man', who in turn is re-enacting the hero's story, *is* the medicine that cures. Thus, the aim of the Red Ant ceremony, as well as of the Mountain Chant ceremony, is to facilitate, using the medicine man as an intermediary, the patient's embodiment of the hero whose story gives the most appropriate lessons about how he can restore balance to his life. Through the active extension of self, the patient embodies the hero and learns about balance through his visceral participation in the story. In this way, the 'patient' learns from the story, as it becomes a part of who he is. Thus, the patient can begin healing.

It is not only the Navajo who use embodiment as a technique for healing. Embodiment is also a key element of the *kachina* ceremony in Hopi culture. The *kachina* ceremony, while not aimed specifically at healing someone who is currently not 'alive well', is a crucial ceremony for maintaining the overall health of the community. According to Emory Sekaquaptewa, the foundation of the ceremony is the requirement that "a person project oneself into the spirit world, into the world of fantasy, or the world of make-believe. Unless one can do this, spiritual experience cannot be achieved" (39). Sekaquaptewa, who was brought up in the traditional ways of the Hopi, was taught to understand the *kachina* as a "symbol of ideal

goodness," as a "spiritual being which is real" (36). A child's belief in the reality of the *kachina* is perpetrated not only through stories, but also by material interactions with Hopi adults who dress up as, and embody the spiritual essence of, the *kachina*. Through the various physical manifestations of the *kachina* (one example being the *kachina soya*, who has the power to deprive poorly behaved children of their bodies) Hopi children are made to feel secure, a security which, according to Sekaquaptewa, "comes from knowing one's place within the prevailing kinship relationship; within the community. But it also involves learning the cultural norms or the community ethic" (38). Once children demonstrate a certain level of responsibility, they are invited to participate in a ceremony which reveals to them that the *kachina* as they know it is actually an impersonation and, most importantly, that this impersonation has, as its basis, a spiritual centre. The ceremony thus helps the child begin a process of discovering the spiritual essence of the *kachina* so that, as the child grows up, he can participate in the adult world, since one of his tasks as an adult will be to perform the *kachina* dance and to impersonate *kachina*. In order to truly impersonate this spirit, adults must try to lose all sense of individual identity—they must try to subordinate their own sense of self, if they are to physically manifest the spiritual world with any degree of success. Masks are one important tool in this regard in that they enable adult dancers to embody the spiritual essence of the *kachina* more thoroughly. Sekaquaptewa writes that "what happens to a man when he is a performer is that if he understands the essence of the *kachina*, when he dons the mask he loses his identity and actually becomes what he is representing" (Sekaquaptewa, 39). It is through the performance—a performance requiring the performer's honest attempt to embrace the absence at the centre of the self so as to embody and thus invoke the spirit world, with the aim of making this world sensibly present—that both dancer and audience are reconnected with their community. This process of embodiment demonstrates how one can live a healthy life, a life

effectively balanced between the phenomenal and spiritual realms.

Another ceremony that teaches how to 'be alive well,' and requires the process of embodiment to make present the spiritual realm, is the Eastern Oklahoma Delaware tradition involving the *Misinghali'kun* (or Living Solid Face), a spirit who instructed three men to inform their chief to stop holding meetings until the fall, at which time the *Misinghali'kun* promised he would live with them and help in the Big House. He instructed the men to carve a face like his—painted half black and half red—out of wood. *Misinghali'kun* then put his power into the mask and said "when a man who takes my part puts the face on, I will be there, and this is how I will live among you" (Grumet 76). Similarly to how masks are used by the Hopi to facilitate the successful embodiment of the *kachina*, the *Misinghali'kun* mask assists whoever wears it to complete the negation of self necessary to truly embody the spiritual realm. Since teaching his people how to live spiritually well ensures their earthly lives will be balanced and lived well, it is not surprising that another of *Misinghali'kun's* functions, besides being an important god for hunters, is as a healer. According to Grumet, the Delaware with whom he spoke said that when children are sick or disobedient, "it does not take the impersonator [of *Misinghali'kun*] long to frighten the weakness, sickness, or laziness out of such children" (Grumet 77). This example demonstrates how embodiment of a spiritual entity or essence (a process that requires the embodier to learn how to create a centre of absence where a notion of self existed previously) is the most crucial aspect of ceremonies intended both to heal and to maintain individual and community health over time.

The same sort of process takes place during a theatrical performance, and it is for this reason that the theatre is uniquely positioned among the arts media as a means through which to explore issues of embodiment and the relationship between absence and presence. This process is also what allows performances of *Brébeuf's Ghost*, *The Indian Medicine Shows*, and

Almighty Voice and his Wife to function as types of healing ceremonies. Similarly to how Hopi, Navajo, and Eastern Delaware healing ceremonies require both the healers and the 'patient' to embody key heroes and spirits in order to internalize a harmonious existence between the spiritual and physical worlds, the audience of a theatrical performance, when embodying a character onstage, becomes, if only for a short time, intimately connected to that character. Not only does the performance onstage facilitate opportunities for the process of embodiment to occur between the audience and the actors but it also facilitates this process between actor and character. While the theatre is not the only medium through which the process of embodiment can be used to heal, theatre is well-positioned to effectively explore issues of embodiment due to its ability to meet physical and performative requirements for successful embodiment.

To understand how Moses' plays function as healing ceremonies, one must be aware of the ways in which characters and moments are constructed so as to provide increased probability that these characters, in these particular moments, will be embodied by the audience, rather than be used by an individual spectator to perpetuate her 'truth of self certainty.' An investigation into moments of suffering onstage is worth pursuing in this regard because these types of moments create a high likelihood that audience to actor embodiment will occur. While this argument is speculative, there are many reasons to believe in its merit. One of the reasons this is so, according to Efrat Ginot, is that "throughout adulthood, regardless of the actual situation . . . the amygdala [the part of the brain that modulates the formation of explicit memories in the hippocampus and stores our implicit memories of fear and threat] and its related circuits will continue to nonconsciously focus on and react in repetitive ways to perceived interpersonal threats and discomfort" (7). A staged moment of suffering, therefore, since it has increased potential to create feelings of discomfort and threat in an audience member, is likely to activate non-conscious reactions that can neurally link audience members

to the represented suffering onstage. Scenes of suffering, if performed well, enact pain believably, and pain (along with disgust) are two experiences that “engage the same limbic, paralimbic, or sensorimotor systems that are active when perceivers themselves experience similar states or perform similar actions” (Zaki, 11382). In other words, mirror neurons are provoked into action when pain and disgust—feelings that a scene of suffering is likely to provoke—are experienced. Even a theorist such as Joel Krueger, who does not believe that mirror neurons are the sole basis for humans’ ability to empathise, nonetheless writes that, “the socially expressive body, by extending certain mental states beyond the skin and skull, ensures that aspects of these states are present out in the world, directly available to be perceived by other subjects” (690). Staged moments of suffering, therefore, as highly expressive events enacting pain and as moments likely to cause discomfort and/or disgust in an average audience member, provide emotionally unambiguous events that greatly increase the chances that audience empathy towards, and audience embodiment of, a character will take place. Since the embodiment of any given character necessarily requires that one relinquish their sense of self, these moments in Moses' plays, in essence, force audience members to accept the absence at the centre of their selves. As well, these moments of suffering teach how one may be 'alive well,' of how one (regardless of the cultural mythologies she carries) can learn to see the world as a place infused with both physical and spiritual presence, not as a place of lack.

There is reason to believe that mirror neurons are what allow this process of embodiment between spectator and actor to take place. Amy Cook writes that "mirror neurons themselves do not discriminate between an act performed and a witnessed act. Since watching is - at least for some neurons - the same as doing, drama *inspires* the imitation of action rather than *being* an imitation of an action"(591). Thus, at certain points in a play, audience members will undergo what Gallese calls "embodied simulation" (qtd. in Cook 590) which, according to

Cook, "allows the subject to feel 'as if' he/she were doing what the observed was doing" (590). A dramatist must understand, however, that the stimulation of mirror neurons is not necessarily a result of mimetic versimilitude on stage; rather, the action must be visually evocative if it is to inspire simulation (Cook 591). One way to create an evocative image, to inspire audience members to feel, and thus undergo the process of embodiment, is by evoking images of either physical and/or emotional suffering and pain. An evocation of suffering creates an opening, a space, for a form of embodiment Malcolm MacLachlan calls "Body Emotion," a type of embodiment where "the immediacy of emotional experience produces physical reaction beyond the ability of rational reflection" (174). According to Garner, in his discussion of Beckett's *Catastrophe*, the representational display of a body has the effect the two-spirit's dying gaze had on Jon in *The Indian Medicine Shows*. The character suffering onstage, according to Garner, "asserts itself as subject and reorients the field of performance in relation to its own, vulnerably embodied gaze" (165-66). The traumatizing presence of the suffering body represented onstage forces audience members into recognizing an alternate subject outside of themselves. The reaction of their mirror neurons to such an evocative visual image exposes the audience member's own vulnerability via his embodiment of another's pain. In essence, representations of the suffering of others cause audience members to involuntarily subjugate their own perceptions of self, making it possible to experience the represented world vicariously through the traumatized subject onstage.

In *The Moon and Dead Indians*, Ma is terrified of Indians she can't see and is scarred by the loss of her family; however, although she is suffering, she is not a character easily embodied by an audience. This is because she is a character who is not fully cognizant of reality anymore. This makes it very difficult for an audience to assign her subject status. While she is indeed vulnerable psychologically, she is not physically in danger. It is clear to the

audience that what she fears, what makes her vulnerable, does not exist. On the other hand, her son Jon—who is initially presented as a sensitive, dutiful, and lonely young man—is experienced differently by the audience. He is a character who is vulnerable and who has enough of a grasp on reality for an audience to empathize with him. The first evocative image of pain involving Jon is shown when he thrusts his hand into the fire in an attempt to burn away his scar. The stage directions state that he is to cry aloud before Billy pulls him away (61). This evocative image of suffering functions as an opening for the audience member to embody Jon and his pain. Watching the traumatic act of self-mutilation, and hearing his cries, helps the audience literally connect to Jon as subject: his suffering reorients the viewer so the viewer can now see from Jon's gaze. This invests the viewer, emotionally and physically, in Jon's suffering and in how it can be healed and the suffering stopped. When the cause of suffering is finally revealed, euro-western audiences are forced to confront their visceral connection to Jon and his pain. Embodying his suffering before finding out what he has done causes, once the crime is revealed, the audience to confront their empathy with a monster: a racist who has wilfully murdered somebody else and wishes to forget about it rather than take responsibility for the crime. Jon's psychological imbalance becomes, if only temporarily, shared by the audience.

While embodying the character of Jon may not appear to teach an audience how to 'be alive well,' a reason why Moses would facilitate the audience's embodiment of Jon can, perhaps, be understood by looking at how the Evilway ceremony (part of the Navajo Red Ant Ceremony) functions as a curative for psychosis. Bernard Selinger writes:

The medicine man enacts his cure in the Evilway ceremony through the expulsion of Coyote—who represents evil and madness—from the hunter/patient and thereby, temporarily at least, from the community as well. But an essential element

of the medicine man blurs into that of Coyote, the original magic man, sacred and accursed until his sacred side was repressed and his accursed side made prominent. In the story Coyote "attacks" the hunter, reduces him to madness, while in the ceremony the medicine man identifies the patient overtly with the hunter, covertly with Coyote, and thereby acts as a "curative agent" against that attack. The patient must take the poison—the datura, the experience of psychosis—in order to be cured. (86)

In the Navajo tradition, psychosis is treated much like bio-western medicine treats bacterial diseases: through a form of vaccination. The medicine man expels Coyote, and the madness he causes in the story, by having his 'patient' experience this madness. At the same time, the medicine man assists the 'patient' in embodying the role of the hero, a character who eventually has his madness expelled. The patient, as hunter (who goes mad while trapped in Coyote's skin), is guided through his/her madness in order to emerge with an understanding, shared with the revitalized hero, of how to 'be alive well.' The facilitation of our embodiment of Jon serves a similar purpose. Up until the point Jon puts his hand in the fire, the audience understands him as the hero, the "hunter," of the story. As the hero, Jon struggles against the madness both Billy and his mother carry within them. When Moses has his audiences embody Jon's suffering, it sets up a situation where there is a strong possibility that, when Jon's crime is exposed, the audience member will take the 'poison' and actively extend his self to experience some of Jon's psychosis as his/her psychosis. The audience's embodiment of Jon, in this way, provides an opportunity for them to understand his disease and, perhaps, to recognize this disease within themselves.

The cause of Jon's suffering, when it is revealed, is not represented through image. Rather it is represented by some evocative verbal descriptions which, while a different mode of representing suffering, are still capable of facilitating embodiment in much the same way as images. According to Garner, "dramatic language draws upon modes of embodiment inseparable from language itself" (123), while Cook argues that "language is less a system of *communicating* experience than actually being experience" (589). In other words, language is experience. Language used dramatically also provides openings through which listeners can be made to embody the speaker's experiences. In *The Moon and Dead Indians*, the most dramatic language used to describe the murder of the two-spirit comes from Billy, who reminds Jon that the skin of the victim's scalp "peels off easy as any hide" (65) and the victim's screams sounded "like a chicken in a coyote's jaws" (67). These descriptions, for the audience, *are* the experience; the evocative use of language facilitates the audience's embodiment of the character who has suffered. The dead two-spirit becomes the embodied subject through whose eyes (and skin and screaming voice) the audience member will view other characters, as well as himself. Through his embodiment of this character, the audience member physically brings this native victim back to life. Not only this, but by empathising with and understanding the plight and suffering of the two-spirit, the audience member effectively internalises the central absence around which the play revolves. The evocations of suffering in this play, therefore, help bring forth presence from absence: realigning, or reminding us of the link between psychosis and euro-western inclinations to place too high a value on the phenomenal world at the expense of our ability to live harmoniously with others.

When we first see David in *Angel of the Medicine Show*, he has been shot, is weeping, and is described as "dirty, beaten, barefoot, and bloody in ragged trousers"(79). Shortly thereafter, in full view of the audience, he is hit with a frying pan (81), has his gunshot wound

probed with a knife (85), screams in his sleep (98), vomits profusely (115-117), has a bottle broken over his head (114), and suffers personal degradation when Jon forces him, via threat of another bullet wound, to wear a war bonnet (128). David, it should be noted, is not the only one suffering in this play; yet he clearly suffers the most and his suffering is the most affecting out of all the characters onstage. As 'patients', the audience's embodiment of David facilitates healing in that his eventual escape demonstrates an important pathway towards living more harmoniously in the world. By embodying aspects of the spiritual world, David is able to extricate himself from the tools of objectification with which he has been saddled. He recovers himself and rejects colonial expectation by embracing absence and allowing himself to become, at least momentarily, immaterial. If he has been embodied by the audience through representations of his suffering, his escape will resonate bodily with those who can now internalize the absence David has used to regain balance in his life. His physical absence, facilitated by his acceptance of absence at his core, ironically, shows—since he is outside the audience's gaze and so no longer reflects audience members back to themselves—an audience how one may regain one's status as subject and live a more balanced life through merging the phenomenal and the material, the absent and the present.

In *Brébeuf's Ghost*, all of the characters are cold, starving, and under attack from the Iroquois. Despite the physical hardship each character is enduring, there is surprisingly little pain and suffering explicitly and evocatively represented onstage. Only two characters suffer visibly onstage: Pierre and Hail Woman. Pierre, a euro-westerner is seen perpetually shivering and complaining about his hunger and how cold he is. Like Ma in *The Moon and Dead Indians*, Pierre's suffering is real; however, like Ma, his mindset, his clear alienation from the realities of the world, acts as a barrier between his character and the audience. The opposite, however, is true for the death scene of Hail Woman. The suffering of Hail Woman after she unwittingly

becomes a cannibal by eating the sturgeon that “glows with a spectral light” (68) is an occurrence of trauma that stage directions clearly indicate is to be represented onstage. The actor playing Hail Woman is instructed to writhe and scream in pain. Such an emotive rendering of suffering invites the audience to be moved, to have them embody and thus empathise with her pain. The embodiment of her pain by the audience, highlights a key lesson the play teaches. This lesson is a warning about the absolute destructiveness of the colonial cultural mindset, how its transgressions against indigenous culture are akin to the transgression of cannibalism. Through the audience's visceral association with the death throes of Hail Woman, the pain caused by physical and spiritual imbalance is brought sharply into focus.

In *Almighty Voice and his Wife*, the most powerfully evocative image of suffering occurs at the end of Act One. Almighty Voice is wounded and lying by a dead fire when a spectral tipi appears. His wife and child are within it. Seeing the tipi, Almighty Voice “rises and uses his Winchester as a crutch to come to the tipi. White Girl comes out and shows him the baby and the baby cries. The moon turns white. Almighty Voice dies” (52). His physical movement across the stage, staggering towards his first encounter with his child only to die immediately afterwards, creates a strong potential for simulated embodiment to take place. The audience, through witnessing this image of suffering, is subjected to and connected to Almighty Voice’s physical pain and sense of loss. Through the process of embodiment, the tragedy of his ending is experienced viscerally and emotionally. In Act Two, however, it is White Girl and her struggle to restore an identity she hasn’t realised she has lost that creates opportunities through which the audience may embody her character. In Scene Five, Almighty Voice, the Ghost, convinces the Interlocutor to sing a song that is not on the program. As the Interlocutor sings lyrics like “How beautiful/ A man the moon./ I am what I am./ I’m not above/ A buck for love./ What good is it? Sioux me?”(81), she begins to outwardly demonstrate her psychological

turmoil. In the 2009 run of the play at Theatre Passe-Muraille, the Interlocutor sang the song weakly, hesitatingly, as if struggling with the meaning of the words. The double layers of the puns represented what the character of the Interlocutor who, while she sings, appears to realise for the first time that she is White Girl, a Cree, beneath the whiteface and mountie uniform. After the song, the Ghost asks “Is this a tear here, washing the warpaint?” (82), indicating that Moses intends this song to be sung with notes of sadness and pain. In the 1991 production at the Great Canadian Theatre Company, the Interlocutor sang confidently at first, but with each verse, her voice became progressively thinner and more vulnerable until the end of the final verse. In both productions, the singing of this song provides the audience an opportunity—through watching the interlocutor’s pain and growing confusion—to embody her loss and anxiety as to who she is, who she has become, and why. The emphasis placed on this moment sets up the ending of the play. In the final scene, Almighty Voice helps White Girl remove her gloves and, in both the 1992 and 2009 productions, they caress each other while looking deeply into one another’s eyes. In this way, White Girl remembers who she is and so ends her suffering. In such an evocative and intimate moment (while not an image of suffering but, rather, of suffering ended) the audience is given a platform from which to embody these characters and experience the necessity of love and community if an individual is to be alive well. Something well worth noting is that this pivotal moment is expressed in Cree. Thus, the Cree language—language being a mode of embodiment—becomes a part of the experience, helping the audience literally feel the restoration of Almighty Voice and White Girl’s cultural identities before these characters say goodbye and complete their journeys to the spirit world. The characters’ release from pain releases the audience from White Girl’s dis-ease and trauma as well.

Understanding how Daniel David Moses uses evocative moments of suffering within

intimate theatre spaces to encourage spectator embodiment of the indigenous subject onstage provides insight into Rob Appleford's response to Yvette Nolan's *Child*. In his article, "Introduction: Seeing the Full Frame" Appleford writes that he "hadn't foreseen the intensely emotional affect of the work in performance, its evocation of an Aboriginal child's experience of being lost and found." He goes on to write that the intensity of the emotional effect the play had on him, and the audience, reminded him "quite graphically of the power of Aboriginal drama to combine emotional honesty with self-conscious critique in surprising ways" ("Introduction," viii). The combination of the words "graphically" and "evocation" suggests that embodiment is at least part of the reason for his strong emotional response to the play. If one understands how and why audiences embody characters onstage, intense emotional responses to the combinations of critique with "emotional honesty" in aboriginal drama should not really be surprising at all. The reason Moses' plays can "move" people both literally and metaphorically is due to his understanding of how to effectively create evocative images onstage as openings through which an audience can embody a specific character in a specific moment, allowing the audience to 'feel' and thus internalize key ideas, emotions, and themes in his plays.

In fact, the combination of critique and emotion functions as a tool of resistance, since this combination makes it very difficult for euro-western audience members to use the representations of native cultural affirmation and resistance represented onstage as a template for what constitutes authentic native culture. It is important for the play's performance as a healing ceremony to counter any tendency an audience member might have to focus mainly on the social critique in the play because such a focus can lead a euro-western viewer to re-inscribe her cultural viewpoint upon the play, essentially re-colonizing (by labeling it as Other) what should be not only an act of resistance, but an act of education and healing. In other words, the

euro-western viewer's tendency to recast as a part of herself what she sees onstage, if left unchecked, will negate the healing function of the play. This particular viewer will leave the theatre no closer to achieving balance than she was before the play began. If a euro-western spectator re-colonizes the play, he/she will have essentially been given bad medicine, since the play will be interpreted as supporting the very imbalances that cause all the conflict in the stories they are watching. What the combination of critique and emotional honesty does is create spaces where an audience can embody the actions and words spoken and performed onstage, making it very difficult for a euro-western audience member to maintain a semblance of an objective 'self'. The social critique accomplishes this by forcing a 'suture' in the euro-western viewer, a state of being which "develops from the attempt to avoid an uncomfortable self-recognition made doubly difficult by its expression in a 'lexicon' of images and through a grammar that is unfamiliar" (Gilbert 52). The instability of the sutured identity—unstable because the viewer's attempts to temper her conception of self clearly demonstrates that the concept of an 'essential identity' is illusory—creates a need to anchor identity somewhere. This need, in turn, increases the potential of a spectator to merge identities with and embody a character onstage. Moses, by representing suffering indigenous characters onstage, offers his audience a subject, a 'hero' like the hunter in the Coyote Transformation Story, with whom the audience member's sutured identity can connect and be stabilized. Thus, the combination of critique and emotion in Moses' plays functions as both a barrier, obstructing euro-western attempts to colonize the play via value judgments as to its degree of representational 'authenticity', and an opening through which audience members can create a shared neural state between themselves and specific characters: in other words, the "objectual other becomes another self" (Cook 590) whose stories teach audience members (native, euro-western, or any other culture) about how to live in a state of balance between the phenomenal and spiritual

realms.

The idea that audience/actor embodiment can bring about shared understanding between cultures is an idea considered by Moses himself when he writes that "The reason I persist in writing for the theatre, I occasionally think, is because every night it gathers an audience that embodies that valued harmonious community" ("Pursued" 161). This idea of theatre as a catalyst for creating a strengthened community is echoed by other native writers as well. The "core of contemporary Native theatre," according to Geraldine Manossa, is the "collective manner through which knowledge, images, symbols, actions and humour are shared from listener to listener and from storyteller to listener" (129). Craig Howe, in discussing the importance of performance and the role of the warrior to indigenous communities says that the warrior's "highest calling was to contribute to his community's act of being and becoming on its own terms. In some sense, those brave acts and dramatic re-enactments were unique community-based, theatrical expressions, setting the stage, perhaps, for contemporary Native theatre" (Howe, Markowitz, and Rader 47). Floyd Favel Starr writes that "the theatre is where a lot of our dreams, fears and visions live and dance in the living present" ("Theatre of Orphans" 33). In other words, the performance of stories is how native cultures have perpetuated themselves over time.

A challenge for a playwright like Daniel David Moses, whose plays are intended to be tools for healing, is twofold: how can he successfully represent these dreams, fears, and visions onstage in an urban theatre for a culturally variegated audience, some of whom will have been brought up learning the cultural mythologies his plays critique? The second question is how can a performance of *Brébeuf's Ghost*, *Almighty Voice and his Wife*, or *The Indian Medicine Shows* create the community so necessary in indigenous healing ceremonies? The process of embodiment answers both of these questions. The communal sharing of experience through

embodiment is one way by which the 'poison' of euro-western cultural dictates can be 'safely' exposed for all audience members. The openings for embodiment act as a welcome, a chance for audience members to understand, to integrate with, to be literally moved by, those characters espousing a balanced view of the world and how to live well in it. The characters who suffer are, inevitably, the ones who demonstrate how, or how not to, 'be alive well.' For the euro-western viewer, the process of embodying particular indigenous characters provides a way to mitigate the disruption of the spectator's belief in his/her 'fixed' identity. This disruption is mitigated via the creation of spaces through which the audience member is made to share experiences with those usually seen as 'other'. In this way, the poison of which Moses speaks, racism and fear of absence, is exposed. The critique of euro-western culture is clear, but the shared experiences of audience and actor and character helps to ensure the critique does not necessarily alienate those whose thoughts and beliefs have been formed by it.

It is important that audience members, regardless of culture, not be alienated by the story presented onstage, because any kind of distance created between spectator and character will be an obstacle that makes it difficult for audience/character embodiment to occur. One aspect of a performance that assists in keeping spectators from feeling alienated by any social critique is the actual theatrical space in which the play is performed. Theatres like Theatre Passe-Muraille, where the 2009 production of *Almighty Voice and his Wife* took place, and The Great Canadian Theatre Company, where the 1991 production took place, are relatively small theatres. They both provide examples of how the intimacy of a small theatre assists in the effective creation of evocative images and/or descriptions that promote audience to character embodiment. Theatre Passe-Muraille's relatively small size provides an intimate experience for the audience by virtue of the fact that they sit in such close proximity to the stage. As well, Theatre Passe-Muraille's lack of proscenium arch creates two more opportunities for spectators

to embody the characters onstage. A proscenium arch, according to Catherine Belsey, constructs the “readers” of a performance as “passive consumers” rather than as “active producers of meaning” (qtd. in Knowles, “Reading Material” 61). Without an arch to frame the action - which creates what Knowles calls “a model of pictorial illusion and depth perspective” (61)—smaller theatres like Theatre Passe Muraille situate their audiences as active producers of meaning—the ‘objectivity of self’ is more easily challenged in an intimate setting where the ‘self’, unable to perceive visual boundaries that continually re-inscribe the fictional nature of the presentation onstage, must more actively engage with what neurologist Antonio Damasio postulates is the “interactive, relational process between brain, body, and environment” (qtd. in Riley, 452). A theatre like Theatre Passe-Muraille, where both *Almighty Voice and His Wife* and *The Indian Medicine Shows* have been staged is a performance area that, since it does not frame the action onstage via a proscenium arch or symmetrical stage, facilitates embodiment and, thus, healing more easily.

The fact that Moses' plays are performed in small theatres emphasises the importance of haunting, a key trope of Moses' plays that Appleford feels is "central to discussions of theatrical space and uneasy relationship between absence and presence within it" (“Daniel” 155). While the presence of ghosts blurs the clear distinctions euro-westerners tend to make concerning the phenomenal and spiritual worlds, their presence also raises questions about the material reality of the performance itself. The physical performance of these three plays (as well as others such as *Coyote City*) situates the audience in a space where the interplay between presence and absence is dynamic both within the performance of the text and in what Juli Jackson calls the “multistability” of theatrical space. Any theatrical performance, according to Jackson, involves the “play between the onotological modalities of representation (seeming) and actuality (being)” (135). This constant interplay among modalities creates, according to Marvin Colson,

a “multiple perception of presences” which is “unquestionably a central feature of the particular power of the theatre” (98). On the one hand, there is the performance space: the theatre itself (including all material aspects of the theatre experience such as playbills, programs, the entrance to the theatre, audience amenities, the stage etc). These aspects of a theatrical performance are all considered modalities of the real, since they are material and serve to designate the space as an area of performance. One of the key ‘modalities of the real’, according to Colson, is the physical differentiation of space between the viewer and the viewed because it creates a ‘spatial dialect’ premised upon the opposition of these two spaces (43). However, while an audience may be engaged in a dialectic with the semiotics of the materiality and spatial ‘realities’ of the theatre space, the audience is also watching a representation on stage. Material actors move onstage while appearing, through their words and behaviour, to be somebody else, representing their particular characters through a process of embodiment which, as has been explained earlier, is only made possible if the self is treated as a process of encounters, not as a fixed object. Thus, the performers on stage are both materially present, as is the theatre and all the material objects within it, and absent at the same time, due to the fact that a performer embodying a character cannot be clearly identified and known by the audience based solely on the actor's performance.

Phillip B. Zarrilli discusses this notion of actor as empty space when he writes that “the actor’s body is a site through which representation as well as experience are generated for both self and other” (664). According to Shannon Rose Riley, to create such a site, an actor must learn to “merge image, movement, and text in ways that are palpable” by “using one’s breath and all of one’s senses” (454). One way an actor can do this is by focusing on what Zarrilli calls the “bodymind” (663). To understand this concept, it is important to understand the various ways in which humans perceive their interactions with the world. There are three ways images

are formed by the human body: *proprioception* (the perception of touch and the movement of muscle and joints), *interoception* (the perception of the state of the organs and viscera) and *exteroception* (the perception of one's relationship to one's environment). While an audience creates perceptual images, and embodies characters mainly through the process of *exteroception* (an audience sees representations of suffering in their immediate environment and so participates neurally in that suffering), an actor who focuses on bodymind uses all three processes. For an actor to convincingly embody another character, he must perceive the world as that character would. This means using all three perceptual processes. Most people perceive interoceptively only when they are in pain. To increase one's ability to embody interoceptively, acting methodologies, like embodied perception, place a focus on breathing. According to Zarrilli, focusing attention on the relationship between the body and breath "provides one means by which to both work against the recessive disappearance of the breath in order to cultivate the breath and our inner awareness toward a heightened, 'ecstatic' state of engagement in a particular practise and/or relation to a "world" (663). As an actor learns to make something as recessive as breath into a tangible form or image, he develops his "aesthetic inner-body mind," a state that is perceived as existing in a "fundamental state of absence" (Zarilli 663). Through focusing on how the body interacts with the world – how it moves, how it breathes, how it digests, etc. –an actor increases his/her ability to lose his/her sense of self. By focusing on the material processes of their bodies, actors embody "a presence constituted in the moment by means of attention to the processes of the organism and its relationship with its environment" (Riley 448).

Some such actor-training methods that focus on developing this inner bodymind include Pochinko, Japanese noh, Lecoq, Butoh, and Meyerhold's biomechanics (Zarrilli 663), all of which have influenced an acting methodology, developed by people like Floyd Favel Starr, that

is premised upon this interplay between absence and presence, an interplay that is brought to the fore in any dramatic performance and that is so textually prominent in the plays of Daniel David Moses. The acting methodology that Favel Starr discusses (developed between 1991 and 1996) requires that actors develop a sophisticated understanding of the relationship between presence and absence in order to free the presentation of their characters from the strictures of the hegemonic euro-western acting traditions. For Favel Starr, training for native actors is about creating a “process of decolonization.” This process leads actors to find “the hidden life beneath the words” which, in turn, guides them to “the inner freedom from strictures imposed by the foreign language” (“The Theatre of Orphans” 34-35). Actors following this method are, in essence, allowing for the character they present to be constructed from a centre that Favel Starr says “should be invisible” (“The Artificial Tree” 71). According to Ric Knowles, “these methods [Lecoq clowning and Pochinko] attempt in various ways to bypass cerebral, learned actions, reactions and emotions in order to draw on the actor’s natural or neutral voice and body” (“Reading Material” 64). In other words, these methods have similar goals to the practise of Embodied Perception, which is a practise where development of the 'bodymind' is crucial so that actors learn to focus on being aware of the perceptual modes of the body and so learn to relinquish an awareness of self. However, whereas actors use methods like Lecoq, Pochinko, and Embodied Perception to attenuate the cultural mythologies that they unconsciously bring to the representations of the characters they portray, Butoh (developed specifically for Japanese actors who perform in western theatre) is a method specifically created to cleanse western cultural dictates from the bodies and minds of Japanese actors, in order to replace these dictates with Japanese ones. Thus, while the Butoh method teaches actors to locate absence within the self, this invisible core from which characters, dances, and/or songs will be embodied can only be accessed if the actor understands himself as a member of a specific cultural community. A

key lesson to be taken from Butoh is that an actor can only truly embody a character if he negates his 'certainty of self' through understanding who he is as a member of a specific culture.

Appleford recounts a story Floyd Favel Starr tells about Hijikata, a Japanese Butoh master. Starr says “when Hijikata dances he feels his sister who lives inside him and he dances for her. Think about the people in your past. Then the work will be lifted up and have another dimension” (“No, The Centre” 171). For those who practise Butoh, it is their ancestors and spirits that form the centre of the performance, and these spirits dwell in the intervals and pauses of the music and of the dance. Favel Starr explains how this understanding of one's culture and history creates the absence necessary for actors to embody the characters they play when he writes that “the spirit of the [Round] dance and singing is actually contained in the spaces between the waves of the water and the movement of the duck, between the drum beats and steps, between the dancers” (“The Artificial Tree” 70). A native actor using the methodology of which Starr speaks trains him/herself to create images of absence, to use the intervals between sound and movement to inform their performances onstage. Thus, native actors following Favel Starr's methodology parallel the processes inherent in a healing ceremony within their performances of Moses' texts. They create presence from absence through their embodiment of the characters they portray onstage.

Paula Gunn Allen tells a story about Spider Grandmother that provides insight into how an actor can use absence to create presence onstage. In the story, Spider Grandmother sings two entities (Ic'sts'ity and Nau'ts'ity) into creation and asks them to begin sharing the song to create new beings. “As they spiralled outward, they grew larger and brighter. Around and around the still, invisible center where Spider, Ic'sts'ity and Nau'ts'ity sang. They whirled, the outer ones flinging themselves farther and farther from the center, great arms forming in the spiral dance, following the lines of the song, the lines of the power, reaching farther and farther into the

mystery, carrying the song in their light . . . “ (36). From the absent centre—a centre so enormous and profound it is unfathomable to the human intellect—comes everything that is present in the world. The actor, through the rituals and music of her own culture, carries her cultural song, thereby creating a presence onstage that emanates from a centre of absence. Favel Starr, then, is talking about an acting methodology that grounds an actor in her own culture and in the spirits of her ancestors. Actors who use this method not only embody absence in order to be present onstage, but also become repositories of native ceremonial life. According to Favel Starr, however, the ceremonial life that informs the presence onstage must never be represented onstage. Favel Starr writes that “we can preserve the heart of our ceremonial life, by never revealing or showing it, yet be revitalized and transformed by it” (“The Artificial Tree” 71). In other words, keeping the heart of ceremony absent from spectators will ensure its continued presence, an idea well demonstrated by how David in *Angel of the Medicine Show* increases his presence as subject when he disappears at the end of the play. Traditional ceremony, in Favel Starr’s view, should be present in everything the actor does. Traditional native ceremonies should be used to infuse the entire physical performance with an invisible, spiritual core that is very much present. Craig Womack voices the same idea when he writes that “native artistry is not pure aesthetics, or art for art’s sake: as often as not Indian writers are trying to invoke as much as evoke” (16). In order to evoke so as to facilitate healing via audience/character embodiment, artists like Moses manifest presence from absence by invoking the spirits of their ancestors and the traditional ceremonies of their people.

In discussing *Coyote City*, his first play, Moses writes that the character of Johnny, a ghost "was the embodiment of certain values, certain emotions I saw leading toward death. He was a Trickster for me, showing me the limits of my understanding and my spirit, and in the process, I hope, helping both grow into life" ("Pursued" 16). The character in the written text is

thus an agent of healing for Moses: in the context of the theatrical performance, this character embodied on stage becomes a healing agent for community of audience members. Craig Womack suggests this link between the theatre and healing ceremonies when he writes that “language, spoken in the appropriate ritual contexts will actually cause a change in the universe” (16-17). The openings for embodiment found in Moses’ plays—openings created by language as well as movement—serve as spaces through which individuals in the shared ritualized context of the theatre can fuse into a community and so heal together. Through the process of embodiment, the community of audience members is taught about traditional indigenous views concerning presence and absence: how absence infuses everything that is present, including ourselves, and is thus an integral and familiar part of the material world. Such lessons serve to remind native viewers of a more traditional indigenous view while exposing other cultures to examine the violence and disease that result from the euro-western trait of treating the self as an object to be defended at all costs. The integration of these texts, the actors performing them, and the material realities of the theatre in which the play is presented, all teach a lesson that absence does not separate us from the physical world; rather, absence connects us to it, and it is absence that makes both embodiment and, therefore, healing possible.

However, even though *Almighty Voice and his Wife*, *The Indian Medicine Shows*, and *Brébeuf’s Ghost* may function in ways similar to traditional native healing ceremonies, the extent to which these particular stories are effective cures for euro-western fears of absence, feelings of rootlessness (and the resultant desire to fetishize and commoditize both people and objects) has yet to be explored. According to Guillermo Verdecchia, a Latino playwright and director, theatre-makers must “write our own way towards something that we didn’t already know” because, in his view, plays that contain neat and easy closures fail to encourage

“potentially productive ideas and feelings” (199) from both the playwright and the audience members. The stories that form the basis of healing ceremonies, however, have different requirements. The stories of the healing ceremonies discussed in this thesis have endings with what Verdecchia would call ‘easy closures’ in that the lessons being taught are not ambiguous. In the three plays examined in this thesis, *Almighty Voice and his Wife* has the ‘easiest’ ending: both characters help each other to restore their identities. The ending of *The Indian Medicine Show*, however, has an ending that is not as neat and easy in its closure for a multicultural audience. While David has escaped, clearly suggesting that a cure for euro-western fears of absence is avoidance of euro-westerners in general, the euro-western characters remain lost and alone and there is little to show that redemption is possible for them. This fact implies that this play functions, at best, as a healing story only for a native audience.

Of the three plays, *Brébeuf’s Ghost* offers the bleakest, most ‘difficult’ ending. While the main characters are able to paddle away from the ghost in Black-Robe rags, Bear tells them that “the cannibals won’t get there for years” (117). In other words, the Ojibwa characters will be safe only temporarily since, eventually, the cannibals will reach the “place where the lake tastes of salt” (117). *Brébeuf’s Ghost* is, therefore, the only of the three plays that represents a character of European origin who finds meaning and belonging within the Ojibwa community. So, while the ending does not provide an ‘easy closure’, it is the only one of the three plays that offers a map suggesting how a euro-westerner might be cured of his fear of absence and the resultant need to objectify people this sort of fear creates. The increasing complexity of the lessons concerning how to ‘be alive well’ in each of these three plays raises a question concerning whether, due to the differences in the ‘difficulty’ of their endings, each play can function equally well as the basis for a healing ceremony.

A second potential problem arises if we understand these plays as healing ceremonies.

In many of the healing ceremonies discussed in this thesis, either the patient's family or the patient himself is a willing participant in the healing ceremony. The stories used in native healing ceremonies derive from mythologies that bind the patient not only to his cultural group, but also to the land. Can a theatrical performance really be considered a type of healing ceremony if the audience members/'patients' are from a variety of cultures and are unaware of: 1) The cultural contexts behind the ceremony and 2) The fact that they are being healed in the first place? The start of an answer to the first question is suggested by a story N. Scott Momaday tells of his friend who is married to a Navajo woman. This friend was suffering back problems, so his father-in-law called in a seer, who then administered a red-ant ceremony. The friend's limited understanding of the ceremony, even after it had proven successful in healing his pain, was demonstrated when he asked his father-in-law whether he had ever truly believed that there had been actual red ants in his system. The father-in-law "looked at him for a moment, then said, "Not ants, but ants" (85). While the distinction between ants and 'ants' is not understood by Momaday's friend, his back was still healed, implying that a deep understanding of the cultural contexts behind a healing ceremony is not necessary in order to facilitate effective healing. One thing Momaday's friend had understood, however, was that he was a patient. Most euro-western theatre-goers viewing Moses' plays do not fall into the same category. Even if we agree that the disease targeted by these plays is the euro-western fear of absence and the subsequent materialism, object-fetishization and feelings of alienation from the land such a fear engenders, is it possible for the play to function as a healing ceremony if the 'patient' is unaware that they need healing? The inclusion of euro-western characters in *The Indian Medicine Shows* and *Brébeuf's Ghost* suggests that these plays are not solely for native audiences. How effectively, then, is the lesson of how to 'be alive well' communicated to an audience of 'patients' who may not wish to be, or even believe they need to be, healed? Does

the willing participant experience the same quality of embodiment as the blithely unaware ‘patient’ who believes the story is only for entertainment?

Further study into the process of embodiment is another issue well worth pursuing in the future. The debate over whether empathy is the result of mirror neurons or of the ‘extended mind’ is an area of study that, however it becomes resolved, will have implications for the conclusions of this thesis. While there are many theories as to how exactly the ‘extended mind’ makes it possible for humans to generate empathy, Joel W. Kreuger writes that each differing theory begins with “an implicit theory about how minds work, and [that] we use this theory to ‘read’ other people’s minds in order to understand what they think, feel, and do. More simply, we implicitly adopt a detached theoretical stance and rely on an inner knowledge structure to interpret another’s behaviour” (680). In this view, people use the understanding of their own minds as the basis for understanding the minds, and feelings, of others. While this process states that we move outward from ourselves in order to empathise, simulation theories (such as those that assert the fundamental role of mirror neurons in our ability to experience empathy) state that this process is something that is completely internal in its occurrence. However, even if it is proven in the future that ‘extended mind’ theorists are closer to the truth, my contention that studying moments of suffering as openings for empathy would remain a salient point as far as the presentation of Moses’ plays as healing ceremonies is concerned. If empathy comes from our attempts to impose our theories of mind on others, then moments of suffering would still be worth studying because, regardless of how a member of a specific culture is taught to understand the physical gestures of others, our reactions to pain are understandable across cultures, so scenes of suffering are far more likely to create feelings of empathy on the part of all audience members. As well, while it is possible that the process of embodiment for which I have argued might actually be a process of ‘mind extension’, this process would still parallel

the process a patient undergoes in any of the healing ceremonies discussed in this thesis.

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