Continuing Trickster Storytelling:  
The Trickster Protagonists of  
Three Contemporary Indian Narratives

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Abstract

The Trickster is perhaps the most significant figure in all the North American Indian oral narratives. This thesis contends that the Trickster figure is alive and exists as the protagonist of many contemporary American Indian novels. The authors of three novels under study here--House Made of Dawn by N. Scott Momaday, Winter In the Blood by James Welch, and Grieving: An American Monkey King In China by Gerald Vizenor--with varying degrees of consciousness employ elements of traditional oral stories, especially the Trickster protagonist of those stories, to create new Trickster narratives that address issues relevant to the contemporary world. Critics of contemporary American Indian fiction have failed to recognize that the Trickster is always the protagonist of a narrative; once one recognizes this fact, one can understand the novels more completely. Although Vizenor's protagonist is clearly a Trickster figure, Momaday and Welch's protagonists are not apparently so. However, once we focus on the many subtle characteristics of the Trickster, as this study does with help from various Trickster experts, one can see that they are indeed Tricksters, accompanied by elements of the old tales: unexplained incidents, symbolic inversions, irony, tricking and being tricked, betwixt and betweenness, marginality, teaching and learning. All three novels demonstrate the continuing importance of the teachings of the traditional texts.
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Chapter 1: Introduction:  
The American Indian Trickster  
From the Oral Tradition to the Contemporary Narrative

The Trickster is known by many names in many different societies.¹ This study, though, will concern itself only with the North American Indian Trickster.² Sam D. Gill and Irene F. Sullivan suggest that the term "Trickster" was first used in 1885 by Daniel Brinton as a general category widely applicable to the principal protagonist in Native American mythology (308). Brinton cites an entry in Father Albert Lacombe's *Dictionnaire de la Langue des Cris* (1878): "the name of the Cree figure Wiskketjak (Wesucechak) [Wîsahkêcahk] means 'the trickster, the deceiver'" (308). According to Brinton, Trickster is a "complex character type known [not only] for his trickery, buffoonery, and crude behaviour, but also as a creator, culture hero, and teacher" (308). Gill and Sullivan note that Trickster is "a character with anomalous and contradictory roles...a figure elevated above human beings and a grossly erotic, gluttonous figure that seems to celebrate the most base human needs" (308). The various North American Indian tribes know Trickster as Wîsahkêcahk,³ Nanabush, Glooscap, Coyote, hare, raven, crow, jay, wolverine, loon, or spider (to name only a few). As protagonist of a great many of these tribes' oral narratives, Trickster has always been one of the key figures that has enabled Native North American Indians to examine the relevance of their cultures to their times. As an educational agent, Trickster
has served to question the validity of cultural and societal codes in a world always in flux. If the codes were pertinent to the survival and progress of a people, then they were reaffirmed through Trickster. However, if they were harmful, or shown as too restrictive, then Trickster revealed the danger of their continuance and prompted the people to change and adapt to current times. The Trickster tales were therefore repeatedly reorganized and reinterpreted to accommodate a changing world.

Brought up with Trickster tales told by my mother, members of my family continue to tell these stories. Some are new, but most of them are versions of the old traditional Trickster narratives. To illustrate some of the lessons inherent in, and characteristics of, Trickster narratives--lessons and characteristics that will concern this thesis--here is a tale told by my late mother, Alice E. Ratt.

Once Wîsahkêcahk was walking along when he saw some baby grouse on the ground. (Narrator will peer down as if looking at the ground.)

"Ho! Little brothers grouse, what are you called?" (Said in a loud voice.)

The baby grouse looked at one another for they knew who he was. They did not trust him for they knew he might do them harm or play some prank on them.

"We're called grouse, as you just called us!" (Said in a tiny voice.)

"Come, little brothers! Tell me your other name for all creatures are known by more than one name."

"No, we can't tell you that. Our parents told us never to tell our other name for fear of someone doing us harm."
"Well, you know my two names: Wîsahkêcahk and Older Brother. Don't you think that's unfair?"

The baby grouse looked at one another and discussed this amongst themselves. Finally they came forward.

"Startlers! That's our other name: Startlers."

At this Wîsahkêcahk laughed and laughed.

"You?! Ha! Ha! You!!" he said between breaths, "You? Startlers?! Ha! Ha! How can you startle somebody when you are so small?"

He immediately defecated on their heads and used the ones he missed for wiping himself. (Said in mock surprise accompanied by a chuckle. The narrator also does the appropriate actions: squats then wipes himself.) Wîsahkêcahk went on his way laughing at the joke he had played on the poor startlers.

When the grouse parents came back to the nest they were shocked and disgusted to find their children in such a condition.

"Who did this to you?" they asked.

"It was our Older Brother, Wîsahkêcahk. He convinced us to reveal our secret name then laughed at us then took a shit on our heads then walked away laughing," cried the babies. (Said fast, in a whiny, sniffling tone.)

"Just wait! We'll get our revenge," said the parents. They called all the startlers of the neighbourhood and together they formed a plan for revenge.

Wîsahkêcahk was walking along still chuckling to himself about the prank he played on the startlers. He came to a river which he usually jumped across. He took a running start to leap, then stopped.

"Kêkâc!/kay-catch/ (almost)" he said.

He backed up and took another run at the river. Again he stopped.

"Kêkâc!"
Again he backed up, farther than before and took another run. He stopped again.

"Kêkâc!"

He backed up again, and again he took a run. Just as his feet left the ground the startlers rose from the willows. Wîsahkêcahk was so startled that he couldn't complete his jump and fell right in the middle of the river, head first.

When he emerged out of the water he heard mocking laughter and a refrain from the birds.

"Make fun of us, will you?" they sang.

Wîsahkêcahk thought it a good joke and joined in the laughter.

From the above short tale one can see some common Trickster characteristics and traits. One is never entirely sure what is cause and what is effect--does Trickster wander because he is curious or do his wanderings provoke his curiosity?--but Trickster is typically seen as a wanderer whose crudeness, curiosity, and duplicity get him into interesting predicaments. He plays a trick on someone and he is invariably tricked in turn. Most of his adventures have a scatological element to them which serves to remind us that we are all still victims of our appetites and that we are all in some sense "uncivilized" beings. In fact Trickster is neither entirely human nor entirely animal. He exists between animal and human societies, on the edge of each: he is a marginal figure. In this tale, the fact that he ends up in the river, a natural boundary, underlines his interstitial place in the world.

The above tale is also typical in that it teaches. It
teaches lessons about respect as well as about patience, acceptance, and responsibility. The Trickster Wîsahkêcahk performs a taboo act which questions various cultural codes within Cree society and points to the arbitrariness of culture. For example, one of the cultural codes questioned concerns names, especially the need to keep secret names from people who might do one harm. Because the little startlers are humiliated after they reveal their name to the Trickster, his act reaffirms the people's attitude to names. Trickster's acts of defecating on, and wiping himself with, the birds, and his subsequent fall, also highlight other codes. One of these is the Cree belief about respect: respect is due to everyone regardless of size. When Wîsahkêcahk defecates on the birds the narrator says so in mock surprise and chuckles. The narrator's tone and the chuckle elicit laughter pointing out that Trickster's act is to be expected of him but also that treating someone with such disrespect is not acceptable behaviour. Trickster's lack of respect for others is further compounded when he wipes himself with the birds he had missed during his first taboo act. Another value stressed is patience. The waiting birds in the willows show that patience does have its rewards. Lastly, one's responsibility for one's own actions is effectively reaffirmed in the Trickster's response to the birds' revenge. Wîsahkêcahk shares in the bird's laughter, accepting responsibility for his own actions. The lesson, it is important to note, is taught and learned in
an inverted, ironic way: one learns from Trickster by doing the opposite of what he does. The audience knows that Trickster's actions are going to get him into trouble and they are amused by this and they learn from it. Paul Radin says that "Laughter, humour and irony permeate everything Trickster does" (xxiv). Since the narrator and audience share common beliefs and cultural codes, Trickster's actions, often tabooed, move toward irony. When Wîsahkêcahk shits on the birds' heads, he shows his utter contempt for their size. This act is tinged with irony for the audience because it is the reverse of the proper social custom of showing respect to everyone, and everything, in the Cree people's world. Part of the lesson, always, is that people can continue to learn and improve, even though they may do Trickster-like things.

Outsiders often find Trickster and his acts to be ambiguous and confusing. Most Indian people, however, respond to Trickster because of the combination of humour with morality. According to Karl Kroeber, "a story may be of significant moral value because it is delightfully amusing" (82). Kroeber says that the educative function of Trickster stories pivots on "a lesson of balancing and controlling oneself amidst life's exigencies" (82). Stories "permit fantasy indulgence in taboo behaviour" (82) and therein exists "both cautionary message and psychic release" (82). Kroeber explains that through Trickster and his acts "the subtle dynamics of a culture are realized, affirmed, and taught"
(83). Kroeber maintains that Trickster is not an ambiguous figure, dubious or uncertain; an Indian audience always knows how to respond to him. He confuses us [non-Indians] because he embodies capacities to change from one reality into another, demonstrating the power which makes possible transformation of one actuality into another, as when one passes from dreaming into waking. This capability binds him to essential cultural processes, which are specific fashions of defining and evaluating modes of reality and their interrelations. (83)

Through Trickster everything is made possible. Radin says that interpreting Trickster and his acts is a form of speculum mentis (mirror for the mind), and only when Trickster and his acts are viewed "as an attempt by man to solve his problems inward and outward, does the figure of Trickster become intelligible and meaningful" (xxiv).

Trickster is essentially a teacher in Indian society. Kenneth Lincoln writes that Trickster helps explain the world and people's place in the world. He says that Trickster "embodies the generative paradox of an ancient reality that won't settle down or stay put: the base curiosity and restlessness in man, snaking him into and...out of trouble" (143). Lincoln claims that narrators of Trickster stories talk "backward to look sensically forward, inverting things to right them" (142). The narrator "resolves the paradox of 'old' history recurrent" (142). In other words, Trickster gives people a sense of mythic origin which emerges, and re-emerges, in the present each time Trickster appears in a narrative. Lincoln states that "Trickster wanders around, from folly to
foolery, instructing by recreant exaggeration" (142). The audiences of Trickster narratives come to know their world physically, emotionally, psychically, and spiritually through Trickster's antics. Trickster celebrates human capabilities of overcoming any obstacle because, by depending on his human qualities to overcome problems, he teaches human beings about being human. Lincoln offers an all-encompassing definition of Trickster's function as a teacher who

  teaches comically, by negative example, that this shifting world bears careful study, that masking and duplicity remain basic to nature, and that we survive despite this trickery, perhaps even learning from it. We come to count on Trickster in this world of recurrent difficulties, stay clear of him, depend on him to keep us alert, laughing, and keen to the rules of survival. The unknowns in all this necessary tricking makes us conscious of the contingent variables and critical play in a deceptive natural world. The acted-out-dangers, comic or close to the bone, serve to wake us up. (126-127)

Lincoln's view of the Trickster's functions captures the essence of the Trickster as a playful wanderer and also as a transcultural figure who is a teacher for every nation. Trickster continues to play in today's world in the surviving oral tales, in the jokes, and in the written works of contemporary Indian writers.

Andrew Wiget proposes that Trickster tales make "available for discussion the very basis of social order, individual and communal identity" (94) through comic play:

  It is the humour of the telling...that delivers the truth. When a trickster tale opens, it immediately mobilizes the audience's sense of the cognitive system and the ethical system that supports it.
Because the story is told through the eyes of Trickster, whom we recognize, however guiltily, as a potential image of ourselves and with whom we are compelled to identify by the narrator's adoption of his point of view, we are brought to consider the possibility of altering or abolishing the categorical restraints that govern our behaviour. In the end, by manipulating us into laughing at a figure with whom we have just identified, the tale forces us to reaffirm the beliefs we have been momentarily permitted to question. (94)

Wiget says, however, that the crucial laugh may not be the last laugh, and that "the earlier, critical laugh that implicates the audience and sustains the trickster may be the most consequential" (94). Wiget implies that the role of irony in Trickster tales, where the audience and teller share common cultural codes which Trickster breaks through his taboo acts, makes conspicuous those codes which require change in contemporary society. Wiget illustrates that Trickster's play serves to free us from the burdens of our cultures, from the chains of our self-designed prisons, from our lack, or excess, of passions, from our unwillingness to take risks to succeed and even our unwillingness to dare to fail. Wiget explains that "Trickster speaks from some unbeaten part of us, for change and the possibility of a good laugh" (94-95).

Wiget also says that Trickster "functions not so much to call cultural categories into question as to demonstrate the artificiality of culture itself" (94). As cultures change Indian storytellers reorganize Trickster narratives to accommodate the changes. Wiget relates how the Winnebago introduced new Trickster stories to accommodate the movement
of the peyote religion into their lives (93). He also cites a Cree Trickster narrative which provides "a stinging attack on the relation between organized religion and the fur trade" (90). Another new Cree Trickster adventure tells how Wîsahkêcakh gets trapped at a bingo game, and yet another relates his misadventures while tackling a farting iron beast by the horns. As he grasps the beast by the horns it carries him far away from home following a black ribbon of stone with a white stripe in the middle. Each of these tales is an attempt to understand the new order of things in Indian society and to demonstrate that different cultures place value on different things.

Barbara Babcock contends that the lessons Trickster teaches come mainly from his precarious and perpetual position "betwixt and between categories" (154). Babcock illustrates Trickster's role in maintaining, if not creating, the reality of freedom, creativity, and responsibility. Trickster, says Babcock, "is positively identified with creative powers...and yet he constantly behaves in the most antisocial manner we can imagine" (153-154). Trickster and his tales exemplify the preoccupation which myth and other kinds of narratives have "with those areas between categories, between what is animal and what is human, what is natural and what is cultural" (54). "At the center of his antinomian existence," continues Babcock, "is the power derived from his ability to live interstitially, to confuse and to escape the structures of
society and the order of cultural things" (54). To be effective, Trickster "must remain marginal and peripheral, forever betwixt and between" (54) categories. Trickster as "paradox personified" (54) enables society to escape from its self-induced structures. When marginal figures such as Trickster become the central figure in a narrative, Babcock asserts, their acts serve as "symbolic inversions" (181). The first symbolic inversion in the narrative serves "to startle one into fresh views of his contemporary reality" (181), while the second symbolic inversion "leads to a rediscovery of essential truths, a transvaluation of values, and the affirmation of a primal order" (181). "The trickster tale," submits Babcock, "affords an opportunity for realizing that an accepted [social] pattern has no necessity" (181). Culture codes can change to accommodate changing times and Trickster serves to highlight those aspects of culture which are still relevant and those which are irrelevant and need changing.

Trickster helps Indian societies to accommodate changing circumstances. One of the significant changes in Indian societies in recent history is the decline in the use of the tribal mother tongue. Since the traditional Trickster stories were told in the specific languages of the North American Indians it would follow that Trickster too would diminish. However, in accordance with the elders' directive for the new generation to learn the "cunning of the whiteman" to ensure the Indian's survival in the present order of things, today's
story tellers use the English language (after all what is more cunning than the language of the whiteman?) to tell their stories of Trickster. Furthermore, in place of the old stories, and sometimes in conjunction with, or supplemental to them, some of today's storytellers have moved from the oral to the written form of storytelling. There are, of course, differences between any oral tale and the written story as Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg note:

The audience [of oral narratives] shares the narrator's knowledge and values, depending upon him at every point for judgements about the characters and events in the story. The audience adopts the narrator's god-like view, which accounts for the only fictional irony of traditional narrative: that the narrator and audience together know the characters of the story as they could not possibly know each other or even themselves. With the development of self-conscious tellers in non-traditional, written narratives, the ironies multiply. The disparity between the narrator's view of the characters and their views of themselves and each other, which is a constant in fiction, is augmented by the disparity between the narrator's view of his story and the audience's view of it. In any written narrative, therefore, there will be at least a potential, and usually an actual, ironic disparity between the knowledge and values of the author and those of his narrator. The traditional, oral narrative consists rhetorically of a teller, his story, and an implied audience. The non-traditional, written narrative consists rhetorically of the imitation, or representation, of a teller, his story, and an implied audience.

(52-53)

Perhaps in an effort to close the ironic gaps inherent in written narratives many non-traditional narratives written by American Indians incorporate elements of traditional tales into their narratives. Just as Trickster is the protagonist in the most significant traditional narratives, he frequently,
though sometimes unwittingly, appears as protagonist in some contemporary stories: frequently because most contemporary Indian writers grew up hearing Trickster stories; unwittingly because though most writers do not consciously set out to write Trickster stories they are unconsciously creating protagonists who have many characteristics of Trickster.

From this brief summary of some of the most significant material on the Native American Trickster, we can see that he is a relatively complex character. The two points that come out strongest are that Trickster teaches lessons in an indirect way and that he is always the protagonist of a narrative in which he appears. Perhaps it is because of their failure to recognize these two features of Trickster that critics of contemporary Native American narratives have identified characters other than the protagonists as Tricksters and therefore fail to appreciate both the complexity of the figure and of the particular work. Lawrence J. Evers, for example, says that in N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn*, Tosamah (a minor character) "has...all the characteristics of Coyote, the Trickster" (313). Although Radin has indicated that having two trickster figures in a narrative is consistent with oral Trickster narratives, it would be erroneous to see Tosamah as the main, and only, Trickster.

One of the main contentions of this thesis, then, is that true Trickster figures can only be the protagonists of their
narratives, and once we see these protagonists as Tricksters, we are able to comprehend the narratives more fully. This thesis suggests that the protagonists of N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn*, James Welch's *Winter in the Blood*, and Gerald Vizenor's *Griever: An American Monkey King In China* are Tricksters similar to Tricksters in the oral narratives. I chose these three narratives because they are influential and highly regarded American Indian narratives whose protagonists (particularly those of Momaday and Welch) have come under fire for being too close to negative stereotypes of Indian men. Those critics who have appreciated the characterizations still have, in my view, failed to recognize that the characters are the way they are largely because of their proximity to Trickster figures. No work of criticism has regarded these three protagonists together as being Trickster figures. All three have at least one thing in common: to show one how to adjust to the modern world without giving up the teachings of the traditional stories. Each of these writers is, with differing degrees of consciousness of it, working in the tradition of storytelling--Trickster storytelling--and incorporating characteristics of the old Trickster tales. Abel, the protagonist of *House Made of Dawn* and "Nameless," the narrator/protagonist of *Winter in the Blood*, do not have the lively exuberant qualities we associate with Trickster. On closer inspection, however, we can see that they have strong Trickster attributes including the often forgotten side of
Trickster—the self-pitying, despairing, ineffectual side. Vizenor's Griever is clearly a Trickster and he serves here to demonstrate the persistence of a figure whose general goals are similar to those of Abel and Nameless. Once these novels are recognized as Trickster narratives with Trickster protagonists, we can observe the workings of the old tales in them: unexplained incidents, symbolic inversions, irony, tricking and being tricked, betwixt and betweenness, marginality, teaching and learning.
Notes

1. African-Americans know Trickster formally as Esu, Elegbara, but informally as Monkey and also, in some circles, as B'er Rabbit. The Chinese know him as the Monkey King. The Greeks have three figures: Hermes, Odysseus, and Prometheus. The Euro-Americans have Robin Hood. The Germans have Till Eulenspiegel (Owl Mirror). The various European courts have had the court jesters as the physical embodiment of Trickster, much as the Cree have the Wihtikôhkân dancers.

2. Although this figure is often called "Trickster-Transformer," I will simply refer to him as Trickster. Incidentally, the Cree Trickster, "Wîsahkêcâhk," is both buffoon and culture hero.

3. The Trickster Wîsahkêcâhk is the protagonist in some of the most significant Cree narratives. His actions, like all Tricksters', convey lessons on life and often elicit laughter. He is paradoxical and contradictory, the epitome of imbalance. A morphological analysis of the name "Wîsahkêcâhk" reveals a character who must always be curious, amoral, footloose, and will indulge his appetites. "Wîsahkêcâhk" is a blend of two morphemes: "wîsaki-", a bound morpheme, denotes a "bitter taste" if referring to food and an "ache" if referring to some body part; and "âcahk", a free morpheme, means "soul"--the initial "â" changes to "ê" due to the phonological constraint caused by the preceding "i" in the prefix "wîsaki-" which in turn triggers the additional "h" before the "k". Thus the Cree Trickster figure has a name which can be translated as "bitter, aching soul" and as such he wanders about, existing on the fringes of society and cannot find a balance within his soul. His adventures are lessons on how Cree listeners can find that balance which is so elusive to Wîsahkêcâhk but is nevertheless one of the central tenets of Cree philosophy.

4. Others who see Tosamah as the Trickster include Vernon E. Lattin, Michael W. Raymond, and Bernard A. Hirsch. Unfortunately Evers cites passages connecting Tosamah with Coyote--the most well-known North American Indian Trickster--which in no way refer to him: "As coyote, a member of 'an old council of clowns' (p. 55), the Right Reverend John Big Bluff Tosamah speaks with a voice 'full of authority and rebuke' (p. 55) " ("Tail", 313). The passages Evers quotes are more closely associated with Abel, the protagonist, and his acts than they are with Tosamah (who does not figure in the narrative until p. 89).
In *House Made of Dawn* N. Scott Momaday integrates symbols from traditional stories to relate the adventures of a young American mixedblood named Abel, a disoriented individual who tries to make his way in a confusing world which he cannot accept. He eventually finds his way, after much hardship, by embracing the teachings of the traditional stories. Several critics have noted the importance of oral narratives in *HMD*. Lawrence J. Evers says *HMD* begins and ends in the traditional Jemez way of beginning traditional stories—"dypaloh" and "gtsedaba"—which places "it consciously in that oral tradition" (301). Michael W. Raymond believes that Momaday's reliance on traditional stories advocates "cultural pluralism, [which] emphasizes the potential for the individual to find a sense of place in contemporary life" (71). Carole Oleson, however, says that the old stories which Momaday uses in the novel are useless for those people not versed in the language and the symbols of the traditional stories:

There is, I believe, an entire level of the book that remains unseen by those of us who do not know the languages and legends of the people depicted. Mr. Momaday has given us some help in both his books, but much more is needed before outsiders can fully appreciate all the subtleties of *House Made of Dawn*. We can find the symbols by the emphasis given them, but we cannot read all the levels of their meaning once we have found them. (75)

Oleson is correct in that the symbols are easy to find but
their meaning is not. Also, the meaning of certain key scenes and characters in the novel is ambiguous. Knowledge of oral narratives helps, but only if one can come to terms with their most prominent character, the Trickster. An understanding of HMD, particularly of some of its most peculiar scenes and symbols, can come only when one regards Abel, the protagonist of HMD, as Trickster, the protagonist of the most important oral narratives.

The Trickster figure is the central character in many of the American Indian oral narratives and, I would claim, in recent American Indian novels. Alan Velie notes that "since the trickster is the most important mythic figure in most tribes it is not surprising that he would be a major archetype in contemporary Indian fiction" (121). Most critics focus on minor characters as the Trickster figure in contemporary Indian novels. For example, Tosamah, the self-named "Priest of the Sun," is often seen as the Trickster figure in HMD. In addition to Evers' claims about Tosamah (as noted in Chapter 1), Bernard A. Hirsch says that Tosamah "lives his day-to-day life as Coyote, the trickster who is both culture hero and buffoon" (311). Velie, however, cautiously notes that Abel bears some Trickster qualities. Abel resembles Trickster, Velie says, because he

is certainly footloose, amoral and fond of sex and wine. He doesn't play tricks, but the incident in which the Albino beats him with a rooster has resonances of the sort of humiliation that trickster customarily suffers in tribal tales when he is tricked. (122)
Velie hesitates to call HMD a trickster novel (122), but given the ludicrous quality of most of Abel's acts, and the fact that he is the protagonist, I believe that he is a Trickster. Before we observe how a knowledge of Abel as Trickster can help to better interpret some of the important aspects of the novel, I will demonstrate that we can indeed regard the rather glum and lifeless Abel as having most of the characteristics of the traditional Trickster figure.

Like Trickster, Abel is alone in the world, an outsider in his community. The only thing that he knows about his father is that he too was an outsider (11). Abel's mother and brother died, leaving him in the care of his grandfather Francisco. The adolescent and young adult Abel is a footloose wanderer who succumbs to his strong appetites for sex and liquor, yet he shows great resilience against powerful foes. He is defiant, irreverent, unyielding and even foolish. The curious passage describing Abel's big oversized shoes renders him clownlike:

...the shoes were brown and white. They were new, almost, and shiny and beautiful; and they squeaked when he walked. In the only frame of reference he had ever known, they called attention to themselves, simply, honestly. They were brown and white; they were finely crafted and therefore admirable in the way that the work of a good potter or painter or silversmith is admirable: the object is beautiful in itself, worthy of appreciation as a whole and for its own sake. But now and beyond his former frame of reference, the shoes called attention to Abel. They were brown and white; they were conspicuously new and too large; they shone; they clattered and creaked. And they were nailed to his feet. There were enemies all around, and he knew he was ridiculous in their eyes. (106)
Like the shoes, Abel is both ridiculous and admirable: Trickster characteristics.

Like Trickster, Abel is a liminal figure on the boundary between two worlds. The American Indian world on the reservation is changing and life in the city is a shattering experience for him. Life on the reservation, in Benally's words, is of "no use; you know if you went home there would be nothing there, just the empty land and a lot of old people, going no place and dying" (159). Abel sees himself as having lost his place for he "had been long ago at the center, had known where he was, had lost his way, had wandered to the end of the earth, was even now reeling on the edge of the void" (104). His return to Walatowa "had been a failure, for all his looking forward" (58). In the city, Benally sees that

[Abel] wasn't going to get along...You know, you have to change. That's the only way you can live in a place like this. You have to forget about the way it was, how you grew up and all. Sometimes it's hard, but you have to do it. Well, he didn't want to change, I guess, or he didn't know how. (148)

Abel is unable to adjust to the ways of Walatowa and the city. He lives, like Trickster, interstitially between two worlds; but, whereas the traditional Trickster lives between the social world and the natural world, Abel lives between the traditional world of his grandfather and the new world of modern America.

Abel is inarticulate, a characteristic which places him within a middle area that Trickster commonly occupies. Unfortunately for him, his inability to get the "rhythm of his
tongue" (58) denies him his humanity described by Tosamah's grandmother, who "had learned that in words and in language, and there only, she could have whole and consummate being" (94). Abel understands the importance of the old teachings in respect to language. In Walatowa he reflects that

Had he been able to say it, anything in his own language—even the commonplace formula of greeting 'Where are you going'—which had no meaning beyond sound, no visible substance, would once again have shown him whole to himself. (58)

However, it is not until he lies broken and beaten on the beach that he begins to get a glimpse of how to find his way back to the centre through language and the old stories.

The description of Abel at "the edge of the void" (104) when he is lying on the beach further identifies him as Trickster. On the beach he is placed at a physical boundary between the earth and the sea. He cannot "understand the sea; it was not of his world" (98). The implication here is that at one time Abel had had an understanding of his world on the reservation. However, he has lost his ability to understand even the land. Here on the beach he keeps thinking of the fish who are, much like himself, "helpless" (98). Here too his inability to understand the Word is augmented when he sees but "could not make out the words" (99) on a trailer beyond the fence. The fence further points out Abel's separation from the world in which he finds himself. This is a crucial passage because it is here that Abel begins to come to terms with the world.
Meanwhile, he is, like Barbara Babcock's view of Trickster, "betwixt and between" (154) the categories which define the boundary of what is human and what is animal. In fact, this boundary gets blurred in the descriptions of Abel at sexual play. In the passage describing Abel's encounter with Angela St. John, for example, Angela associates Abel with a bear. As she hears Abel at work she is reminded of once seeing

an animal slap at the water, a badger or a bear. She would have liked to touch the soft muzzle of a bear, the thin lips, the great flat head. She would have liked to cup her hand to the wet black snout, to hold for a moment the hot blowing of the bear's life. She went out of the house and sat down on the stone steps of the porch. He was there, rearing above the wood. (32-33 my italics)

The "he" in the last sentence above is deliberately ambiguous and connects Abel with the bear. This connection between Abel and the bear is strengthened when Angela and Abel make love:

He was dark and massive above her, poised and tinged with pale blue light. And in that split second she thought again of the badger at the water, and the bear, blue-black and blowing. (64)

Angela's relationship with Abel reconnects him with his mythic origins, particularly to the bear that we see before, during, and after their sexual affair. When she visits Abel in the hospital she recounts the story she tells her son "of a young Indian brave [who] was born of a bear and a maiden" (187). Angela's story parallels the origin story of the Navajo which Benally relates immediately after he gets surprised by a "white woman" telling such a tale "made...up out of her own
mind" (187). The story of the Indian's mythic origins, Tosamah tells us, "represents the oldest and best ideas that man has of himself" (97).

Angela's name further hints at this crucial return to the oral tradition and Abel's animal and mythic origins. "Angela St. John" highlights the importance of the Word since the "St. John" prepares us for the sermon on the Word by the Priest of the Sun. Just as St. John the Baptist heralds Christ's coming (and upon his arrival, the word is made flesh, according to the Gospel), Angela's last name signifies Abel's emergence from the animal world onto the human world. Abel's association with Angela St. John eventually brings him back to the centre. "Angela," like the Angelus in the church which calls people to service (25), calls our attention to Abel's mythic origins since she sees him as a bear. Although Evers sees Angela as a negative influence on Abel (he says her bear story is as "rootless as a Disney cartoon" (317)), seeing Abel as Trickster who is between animal and human in his association with Angela helps to understand that he is on the verge of becoming a part of the society which nurtures him.

Another of Abel's sexual encounters with a white woman also conflates Abel with an animal and further accentuates the Word in relation to Being. As he has sex with Milly his connection with the animal is further augmented as "his nostrils flared to the odor of her body and he was brutal with her" (109). It is difficult to see Abel as human because the
Milly's numerous blank forms augment Abel's Trickster existence between animal and uncivilized human being:

| Age and date of birth: |
|---|---|
| Sex: |
| Height: |
| Weight: |
| Color hair: |
| Color eyes: |
| Married: |
| Children (ages): |
| Religious affiliation (optional): |
| Education (circle appropriate completed years of schooling): |
| Father's name (age and occupation if living): |
| Mother's name (age and occupation if living): |

The sea reached and leaned, licked after him and withdrew, falling off forever into the abyss. And the fishes...

Abel cannot fill out the blank form on vital statistics because he has no grasp of the Word which can give him consummate being. Significantly, as one can see above, the reference to "fishes," which are "silversided" (89), and the indeterminate colours of the walls to Abel's prison cell border the blank vital statistics form to highlight Abel's Trickster existence between animal and human. The fish reference serves to emphasize Abel's animal nature while the walls are symbols of Abel's confinement. Both illustrate Abel's helplessness: the fish are referred to as "the most helpless creatures on the face of the earth" (89), and the walls impede Abel's development. Abel seems to have little self-control and so he succumbs instead to the whims of his instincts, much like an animal or a Trickster. Karl Kroeber
notes that Trickster "functions both as man and as animal because he is neither by being both" (78).

Abel's sexual encounters with Angela and Milly can further be seen as Trickster acts because in them Abel is breaking taboo: Angela is a married woman with child; and Milly is a social worker who has Abel as one of her clients. Because Abel regards white people as his enemies, his affairs with these white women can be seen as breaking another taboo: consorting with enemies. Just before the passage which relates Abel's walk to the Benevides house wherein he has his first liaison with a white woman (Angela) the narrative relates how the people of Walatowa "have assumed the names and gestures of their enemies" (58). Similarly, before Abel's second rendezvous with a white woman (Milly) comes the reference to "enemies all around" (106). In HMD sexual encounters between other male characters and women make no references to enemies, nor do the men take on animal characteristics. For example, the animal attribute is not present in the passage where Francisco mates with Porcingula (205) nor in the excerpt about the brief encounter between Benally and Pony (173). In Abel's other sexual encounter "with one of Medina's daughters... outside of the town, on a dune by the river" (14) there is no mention of Abel's animal quality. Abel breaks taboo, as Trickster would, by copulating with white women; but, like all taboos which Trickster breaks, Abel's acts bring out the arbitrary nature of culture. Abel's view of white people as
enemies, a view which the elders (Francisco for one) do not encourage, has disastrous consequences for him. The consequences--incarceration, severe beatings--suggest that he should not be making rigid distinctions between Indian and white.

Abel breaks other taboos. For example, in most Indian societies there is a taboo against speaking the names of the dead yet he calls out his dead brother's name (13) when Vidal dies. Another taboo he breaks involves the killing of the eagle, a bird revered by the Indian people. Killing a tribal member, the albino, is another taboo Abel breaks. Breaking taboo, Kroeber writes, is "both cautionary message and psychic release, but the crucial feature" of a story which has examples of breaking taboo "embodies a lesson of balancing and controlling oneself amidst life's exigencies" (82). Abel teaches by negative example. His breaking taboo creates imbalance and loss of control which lead to dire consequences.

In addition, Abel's indulgence in taboo behaviour--in killing the eagle and the albino--ostracizes him from his community.

The event which first drives Abel from his home begins: "He had seen a strange thing, an eagle overhead with its talons closed upon a snake" (14-15). This "awful, holy sight, full of magic and meaning" (15) rouses Abel's curiosity. He asks the old chief Patiésťa of the Eagle Watchers Society for permission to accompany them on their yearly hunt. Because Abel is a descendent of the Bahkyush, Patiésťa grants him
permission to join the Eagle Watchers Society. Abel has a
genealogical connection with the Bahkyush through his
grandfather Francisco. Francisco's connection with the
Bahkyush is clear because he partakes in the Bahkyush
controlled ceremonies like the Pecos Bull dance where he too
"had been the bull--twice or three times, perhaps" (80). The
Eagle hunt establishes Abel's strength. He waits in the trap
for the large female and in the "split second, when the center
of her weight touched down upon the trap, he reached for her.
His hands closed upon her legs and he drew her down with all
his strength" (21). This act establishes Abel as a potentially
respected member of his society. However, when he kills the
eagle, the act effectively alienates him from this world.

The entire eagle hunt scene is significant in that it
shows Abel, a young man here, as a skilful, sensitive, hunter
who knows the ways of his people: "There was something like
remorse or disappointment now that the rabbits were still and
strewn about the ground...He went to the river and washed his
head in order to purify himself" (20). At the shrine "he
placed a prayer offering" (20). Waiting for the eagles to come
for the bait Abel "began to sing, now and then calling out,
low in his throat" (21). As a young man, Abel, it seems, is
not only an accepted member of his community but he is also
articulate: "I think you had better let me go" (19) he tells
the old chief Patiesta. These qualities of Abel's seem to
disappear after he catches the golden female eagle only to
kill it later with his bare hands out of "shame and disgust" (22). After this he goes away to fight in the war only to come back home "ill" (9), totally out of balance.

Despite his seeming interconnection with his society, Abel is already recognizable as Trickster in the eagle killing passage. Abel's enormous strength, another Trickster attribute, in these passages is shown when he catches, and then later kills, the female eagle with his bare hand. Furthermore, since the eagle is sacred to the Indian people, Abel's act in killing one is a Trickster act, since he breaks taboo. The Tricksterian aspect of the entire eagle hunt passage is illustrated in a paragraph following a reference to the coyotes, "an old council of clowns, [who]...are listened to" (56):

Great golden eagles nest among the highest outcrops of rock on the mountain peaks. They are sacred, and one of them, a huge female, old and burnished, is kept alive in a cage in the town. Even so, deprived of the sky, the eagle soars in man's imagination; there is divine malice in the wild eyes, an unmerciful intent. The eagle ranges far and wide over the land, farther than any other creature, and all things are related simply by having existence in the perfect vision of a bird. (57)

Abel's act of killing the eagle symbolically cuts off this "perfect vision" which would enable him to imagine himself complete, whole, and related to all things in his circumambience. The eagle is kept in a cage in the town centre to remind the people of their tenure of the land. Although "they have assumed the names and gestures of their enemies,
[they] have held on to their own secret souls; and in this there is a resistance and an overcoming, a long outwaiting" (58).

The arbitrary nature of culture and culture's constraints on a people are regularly undermined by Tricksters, and Abel does this by breaking taboo in killing the eagle. His act inverts the notion of culturally accepted passivity in the face of obliteration by an alien force:

The people of the town have little need. They do not hanker after progress and have never changed their essential way of life. Their invaders were a long time in conquering them; and now, after four centuries of Christianity, they still pray in Tanoan to the old deities of the earth and sky and make their living from the things that are and have always been within their reach; while in the discrimination of pride they acquire from their conquerors only the luxury of example. (58)

However honourable and noble their quiet resistance to change and progress, the people of the town are not portrayed as being happy. Their reverence for a cultural way which does not bring them happiness questions the value of that culture. Abel's act reveals the absurdity of clinging to the past without making the necessary adjustment for changing circumstances. His act, however, places him, like Trickster, on the periphery of his society.

The second act which isolates Abel from his community is the killing of the Albino. In this case it is not his curiosity which gets him in trouble but his restlessness. Abel is restless since his return from the war. He knows that

[h]is return to the town had been a failure, for
all his looking forward. He had tried in the days that followed to speak to his grandfather, but he could not say the things he wanted...And yet it was there still, like memory, in the reach of his hearing, as if Francisco or his mother or Vidal had spoken out of the past and the words had taken hold of the moment and made it eternal. (58)

Abel, like Trickster, is restless, discontented, and frustrated because he feels he no longer has connection with his people. Trickster in the oral narratives often tries to settle down only to wander about again because he gets frustrated, discontented, and restless with his life.

Abel's break from the ways of the Walatowa people is evident in the rooster pull and Abel's beating. This event accentuates Abel's disconnection from the customs of his people. The rooster pull is part of the traditional ceremonial activities to bring forth a good harvest. Father Olguin relates that "the blood and feathers of the bird became cultivated plants and domestic animals, enough for all the Pueblo people" (39). Those who partake of it, and especially the ones who are in the actual pull itself, are honoured to be part of the festivities. As the albino rode "in among the riders...they...parted for him, watching to see whom he would choose, respectful, wary, and on edge" (44). The Albino picks Abel. However, "Abel was not used to the game, and the white man was too strong and quick for him" (44). Instead of grabbing the rooster Abel "threw up his hands, but the great bird fell upon them and beat them down" (44). The albino continues to beat Abel with the rooster even after the rooster
is dead. Afterwards he lets the rooster go whereupon "the townswomen threw water [on it] to finish it in sacrifice" (45). During the rooster pull Abel is frustrated and humiliated by his inability to partake in it adequately. However, after this scene we see no indication that his feelings of frustration and humiliation linger. In fact, on his way to the Benevides house after the rooster pull Abel reflects about other things and even wants to sing: "He was almost at peace" (59). Nor is there mention made of Abel going out for revenge as is explicitly stated in the scene with Martinez (183). Abel kills the Albino not because of the scene of the rooster pull but because the Albino is a symbol of evil: "A man kills such an enemy if he can" (103). The phrase "if he can" suggests that to kill such an enemy is no easy matter, especially, as we shall see, when that enemy is a part of oneself.

The Albino is simply the vehicle through which Abel vents his frustration with himself. The Albino is, like Abel, an outsider in the community but, unlike Abel, he is able to be part of the community by participating in the ceremony of the rooster pull. The rooster pull, the pecos bull run, and the dawn run were introduced to the community by the Bahkyush. Abel and the Albino share genealogic connection with the Bahkyush. Therefore, when Abel kills the Albino he breaks another taboo. He has killed a member of his society and symbolically tries to kill a part of himself. The parallel
between Abel and the Albino is made explicit just before he thinks of the trial while he lies broken on the beach: "his body, like his mind, had turned on him; it was his enemy" (101). After he kills the Albino, Abel is cut off from his community. However, this ostracization includes his grandfather Francisco who is also ousted. Francisco does not partake in the pecos bull dance and "never before had he been away from the dance" (86). Abel's symbolic act of trying to kill a part of himself is taboo; it disassociates him and his grandfather from the rest of the people of Walatowa. It is a blackly ludicrous act since its consequences extend to his family. Kroeber notes that

in laughing with others at ludicrous behaviour... one learns something more than to recognize absurdity, something more than to enjoy secretly desires which must be publicly repressed. From the experience of reacting with others one learns the feel of a civilized person's response to foolish, 'improper' behaviour. (83)

Trickster Abel's ludicrous behaviour is "improper" because one should not try to kill a part of oneself. A "civilized" person does not kill anyone, including himself, lest his actions affect his family and society.

The Albino's eye-glasses make the Albino's connection to Abel even more evident, particularly when Abel tends to his dying grandfather:

The room enclosed him, as it always had, as if the small dark interior, in which this voice and other voices rose and remained forever at the walls, were all of infinity that he had ever known. It was the room in which he was born, in which his mother and his brother died. Just then, and for moments and
hours and days, he had no memory of being outside of it.

The voice was thin and the words ran together and were no longer words. The fire was going out. He got up and struck a match to the lamp. The white walls moved in upon him, and the objects in the room stood out; shadows leaped out upon the white walls, and the windows were suddenly black and opaque, terminal as mirrors to the sight. (195-196)

The "white walls" and the "windows...suddenly black and opaque" are subtle associations with the Albino's skin and "small, round black glasses" (44). The correlation between the Albino and Francisco's home indicates the decline of the old way of life for the Indian people. When Abel kills the Albino he effectively inverts the notion that the best way of life is the traditional way. HMD shows us through Abel's struggles that the best way of life involves a merging of two cultures because knowledge from both cultures is better than knowledge from only one.

The Albino is also symbolic of evil, death, and the Snake which is part of the Navajo origin myth. In the description of the Albino's death we are reminded of this distant past: "He seemed to look...beyond, off into the darkness and the rain, the black infinity of sound and silence" (82). He is not only a connection with the past but he is also death and evil personified. He is described as being deathly white (50); and he looks like a dead man as "the small round glasses lay like pennies" (44) on the eyes of a corpse. The Albino has an "evil mouth" (81) and, furthermore, he is referred to as a snake--the base signifier of evil in Christianity. However, this
snake reference is not only to the snake of Christianity, but serves also as an intimation of the sacred origins of Abel's people wherein the Bear and the Snake figure prominently.

The sacred origins of Abel's people are related by Benally in "The Night Chanter" (188-189). Benally tells of the origin of the Navajo and says he and Abel are "related somehow,...The Navajos have a clan they call by the name of that place" [Walatowa] (153). Abel's genealogy is questionable, "His father was a Navajo...or a Sia, or an Isleta" (11), thus Benally's narrative conflates Abel's heritage with that of the Navajos. Benally's story sketches the fate of the elder sister who mates with the bear. The elder sister bore a female child and later a boy whom she abandons. The boy child is adopted by an owl who later wants to kill it because he was growing to be a hunter and the owl was afraid of him. The wind spoke to the boy and told him to run away. The boy runs away and when he comes of age he marries the elder daughter of a chief and medicine man. He also lies with the younger sister who has a child which she abandons because she was ashamed. The abandoned child was found by the Bear. The fate of the younger sister who mates with the snake is not told. Nevertheless, the ancient tale identifies the Snake as one of two central elements in the Navajos' origin myth. In the present narrative then, the Albino represents the Snake and Abel the Bear of the ancient narrative.
Abel's killing of the albino is symbolic of his attempt at killing a basic component of who he is in relation to his culture. In Benally's words Abel "hated everything, like he hated himself and hated being drunk and hated Milly and me" (182). Abel kills the Albino, a symbol of evil, but, through the conflation of traditional stories and Abel's actions, evil must be acknowledged as a part of the human condition. The Albino is part of Abel, a part which goes back to his people's sacred origins, a part which the dawn runners internalize in their "running after evil" (103).

Abel's act is a Trickster act because of its placement right after the eighth mention of the "clowns" in Francisco's reminiscence (80-81). The act severs the connection, however tenuous, Abel had with not only his community but with mainstream society as well. He is now a criminal, who, like Trickster, lives on the fringes of society. He is in between the old world of his fathers and the new world of the Euro-Americans. After killing the Albino Abel is incarcerated for six years. Upon his release he is placed in Los Angeles as part of the government's relocation program. Abel's relocation to Los Angeles, ironically, leads him to find his place in the world. His placement in Los Angeles is ironic because the idea is for him to be integrated into mainstream American society. Instead, through a series of adventures, he finds a place which incorporates the old ways with the new world. It is significant that the number of years Abel spends in jail
corresponds with the number of years it takes to harvest pinones, "six or seven years" (6). "That harvest," the narrator says, "like the deer in the mountains, is the gift of God" (6). The phrase "that harvest" hints at another harvest which is not a gift of God but one over which people have power and control for its success. Francisco says that the children he watches are also a type of harvest: "for they, too, were a harvest" (76). The success of this particular harvest depends on every individual in the community. "The three or four Navajos" at Pecos, one of whom is "passed out" (81), mentioned a few pages after Francisco's allusion to the children as harvest, shows that the harvest of the young is a failure. To avoid failure Abel must tend to his own growth and development through Francisco's early teachings. Through Abel's Trickster acts, the narrative suggests that people must also adapt to the new ways.

Abel's people consider their origins as central to their identity. Abel's confrontation with Martinez (the snake) leads him back to the oral narratives. Angela reappears as a reminder of the bear in the Navajo origin story. Just after Martinez hits Abel's hands with a club Abel and Benally go out on a delivery to a neighbourhood where they see Angela. Benally says that "Angela was going to help him...but then he got himself in trouble...When he got hurt [by Martinez] he mentioned her" (177). Angela's reappearance connects the snake imagery used with the Albino and with Martinez and correlates
the two instances of Abel's encounters with death and evil.

Martinez, nicknamed culebra (which means snake), brings to mind the snake in the same origin narrative which Benally relates to Abel. Abel must come to terms with evil and death. However, Trickster that he is, this resolution places him between two worlds. He must walk between two worlds just like his grandfather Francisco who is both sacristan and a kiva elder. Abel's experience with Martinez directs him toward a resolution of this conflict within himself. The two mid-sections of HMD, "The Priest of the Sun" and "The Night Chanter," frame Abel's confrontation with Martinez and his struggle to get back to the centre after the beating he gets from him.

The trouble that occurs with Martinez results from Abel's restlessness. His initial conflict with Martinez shows his courage. He is not afraid when Martinez asks him to turn his hands over: "they were almost steady. Then suddenly the light jumped and he [Martinez] brought the stick down hard and fast" (175). The episode leaves Abel seething: "He couldn't forget about it" (175) says Benally:

...after a while, after that night when Martinez [hit his hand with the club]...or maybe it was before that; I don't know. Maybe it was Tosamah, too, and that white woman [Angela], everything....he was just...sitting around and looking down like he hated everything, like he hated himself... (182)

After a while Abel goes "out to look for culebra,...he was going to get even with culebra..." (183). Abel does not
succeed in his revenge. Instead he gets a severe beating which leaves him, close to death, lying on the beach. This is a typical Trickster episode recurrent in the oral narratives where Trickster fights foes much stronger than himself. Trickster usually gets help from some other source in his conflicts with the stronger opponents. Abel, too, gets help from the outside forces.

The help from an outside source comes on the beach. He has a couple of visions which help him back to the ways of his fathers. He is totally helpless like the fish on the beach who are "among the most helpless creatures on the face of the earth" (89). In his physical helplessness, however, he has visions which help him understand his situation. The first vision harks back to the Navajo stories:

There was a faint vibration under him. Be quiet! He had to be quiet; something was going on. He peered into the night: all around the black land against the star-bright, moon-bright sky. So far had his vision reached that the owl, when he saw it, seemed to fly in his face and break apart, torrential, ghostly, silent as a dream. He was delirious now and gasping for breath; he hurried on in his mind, holding the owl away in the corner of his eye. The owl watched him without meaning, and something was going on. (103)

The owl, a recurrent figure in the narrative, bridges the present narrative with the traditional stories where the owl saves the abandoned child (188) only to try to kill it once the child grows to be a hunter. Since the owl tries to kill the young hunter and does not succeed it is clear that people, like the hunter, must be responsible for their own survival in
this changing world. In order to survive people must accept all that is part of them, the good and the bad.

Abel moves toward an acceptance of the good and the bad in him in his second vision at the beach. His second vision reveals to him that evil is not to be feared but rather accepted and respected:

The runners after evil ran as waters runs, deep in the channel, in the way of least resistance, no resistance...suddenly he saw the crucial sense in their going, of old men in white leggings running after evil in the night. They were whole and indispensable in what they did; everything in creation referred to them. Because of them, perspective, proportion, design in the universe. Meaning because of them. They ran with great dignity and calm, not in the hope of anything, but hopelessly; neither in fear nor hatred nor despair of evil, but simply in recognition and with respect. Evil was. Evil was abroad in the night; they must venture out to the confrontation; they must reckon dues and divide the world. (103-104)

Most of his life Abel is afraid of an unknown evil. On the beach we are told that "he had always been afraid...there was something to be afraid of, something to fear. He did not know what it was, but it was always there, real, imminent, unimaginable" (116). Francisco, however, is not afraid because "evil had long since found him and knew who he was" (66). When Francisco dies Abel ceases to be afraid (209) because by that time he had come to terms with his place in the world.

After the vision of the dawn runners Abel realizes that he "had lost his place" (104), that "long ago" he was "at the center" but had "lost his way, had wandered to the end of the earth, was even now on the edge of the void" (104). The
The passage concludes with a mention of the helpless "fishes" (104) and the sound of the sea. The fishes, as Ursula K. LeGuin tells us, have as their defense "the violence and power of the whole ocean" (7) to which they have entrusted their being, their going, their will. Abel too can entrust his being, his going, and his will to the violence and power of that which sustains him: his culture. And he does.

Like Trickster at the beginning and close of each narrative Abel moves along. By the end of HMD he accepts his place on the boundaries between two worlds when he runs toward the dawn, between darkness and light:

All of his being was concentrated in the sheer motion of running on, and he was past caring about the pain. Pure exhaustion laid hold of his mind, and he could see at last without having to think. He could see the canyon and the mountains and the sky. He could see the rain and the river and the fields beyond. He could see the dark hills at dawn. He was running, under his breath he began to sing. There was no sound, and he had no voice; he had only the words of a song. And he went running on the rise of the song. House made of pollen, house made of dawn. (212)

Like Trickster, he is betwixt and between worlds: animal and human, traditional and contemporary, uncivilized and civilized, Indian and white. Also, as is evident in the above passage, he is between silence and sound as "There was no sound, and he had no voice." He is not exactly inarticulate nor is he silent because he now has "the words." Abel is Trickster who surmounts all obstacles in his confusing world.

To see Abel as Trickster, then, is to understand many of the apparently incongruous passages in the novel. However, it
is important to note that Abel does not see himself as Trickster. He does not consciously set out to transform preconceived cultural notions. This lack of self-consciousness is typical of Trickster in oral narratives. Trickster's character and his actions, though, are recognizable by Indian people and, according to Kroeber, Trickster has never been an ambiguous figure for them (83). Another aspect of stories and Trickster acts, stressed by Babcock, is that Trickster acts permit people to transcend the "social restrictions we regularly encounter" (154). Trickster acts are almost always transformations; they can be ones which Trickster undergoes, or they can be the sort which transform preconceived notions of reality. Accordingly, HMD questions the sanctity of the eagle, the idea that the whites are the Indian's enemy, and that the whites are to blame for the drunken Indians' sorry condition. Abel challenges foes who are exaggerated character types (the eagle, the Albino, and Martinez) which he cannot, presumably, defeat because they are stronger than he is. Thus Momaday puts him in ludicrous and improbable situations. Abel's actions are simultaneously brutal, horrifying, blackly comic, and absurd but nevertheless, as Trickster acts, they exemplify the need to adapt in order to survive in a world which is always changing.

In HMD Momaday achieves a valid critique of life in contemporary Native America through the use of a Trickster figure as protagonist. While Abel has characteristics
strikingly similar to Trickster figures in the oral narratives, he is not as lively and mischievous as most of those figures. The other side of Trickster—the gloomy, despairing, ineffectual side that we see in Abel—is usually overlooked. Still, he is like Trickster because he is a liminal character on the fringes of his society and he is a wanderer who indulges his appetites. He is wily, curious, restless, irreverent, and foolish. The ludicrous nature of his acts—especially in tackling foes bigger and stronger than he is—and the absurdity of his actions (in killing an eagle with his bare hands) also indicate that he is a Trickster. As Trickster he breaks taboos by having sex with "enemies," killing a sacred bird, and killing a tribal member. Once we recognize that the protagonist is a Trickster and that HMD is a Trickster narrative many of these puzzling actions and incidents become understandable. Indeed, with a Trickster protagonist one can see that House Made of Dawn is finely crafted; it is "beautiful in itself, worthy of appreciation as a whole and for its own sake" (106).
Note

1. The walls figure again later in this Chapter.
Chapter 3: 
The Nameless Narrator 
as Trickster in Winter In the Blood

The nameless narrator in Winter in the Blood by James Welch has some of the key characteristics which identify Abel of House Made of Dawn as Trickster. Alan Velie notes that Nameless (we shall call him) "plays tricks" (122), is "footloose, amoral, fond of wine and women, and is sympathetic to the reader" (122). Moreover, Nameless, like Abel and Trickster of the oral narratives, is a curious, perceptive yet naive wanderer who struggles with forces stronger than he is. His mother's comment that she "is surrounded by fools" (9) and his own self-admonitions, "I felt like a fool" (90, 95), also align him with Trickster. Nameless and Abel, both slovenly and scruffy, resemble Coyote, the predominant Trickster in many oral narratives. Not only do they resemble Trickster in their appearance, but they also play tricks. Abel's tricks are obvious and verge on brutal slapstick while Nameless's are more subtle. For example, he does not correct his mother's assumption that he is married to the girl he brings home (2). He lies to Ferdinand Horn about bringing the girl back to the farm (165). Nameless also plays tricks with his narration, like introducing a seemingly irrelevant anecdote about the old man who falls face down, dead, on his oatmeal (88). Frequent scenes of urination and the scenes involving a mysterious "Airplane Man" puzzle most readers. I believe that many of the
peculiarities of narration and the incongruous passages can be accounted for if we regard the narrator and protagonist of the novel as a Trickster figure. Particularly helpful to understanding the Trickster and his role in *We* is Barbara Babcock's discussion of symbolic inversions.

In an attempt to understand and label the ambiguous and paradoxical nature of Trickster and his acts Babcock coins the term "symbolic inversions." Although Babcock does not clearly define symbolic inversions, she uses the term to refer to acts which invert preconceived notions of social custom by generating laughter, thus exposing the arbitrariness of social institutions. Thus symbolic inversions cause one to reflect on social custom. After the initial laughter at a particular inversion comes a reevaluation of the mocked social conditions. Babcock says that one of the key functions of Trickster narratives is evaluative,

contributing to a reexamination of existing conditions and possibly leading to change--as is quite likely with all social criticism and satire, whether humorous or not, if taken seriously. Any form of symbolic inversion has an implicitly radical dimension. (180)

The Trickster, says Babcock, symbolically "interferes with our normal schema of classification" (159) and "again and again one is confronted with the paradox that that which is socially peripheral or marginal is...central and predominant" (159). Nameless and Abel, shifty, lazy, good-for-nothing, drunken peripheral figures, are excellent examples of Tricksters because through their trials and their successes one can see
that they intrude on the stereotype of the drunken Indian. An existing attitude which undergoes inversion in WB, as well as in HMD, is that of the North American Indian overwhelmed by the encroachment of Euro-American society on his traditional world. Often the non-Indians are blamed for the Indians' deteriorating traditional lifestyles and the Indians feel justified in blaming the whites for destroying their cultural heritage. Both WB and HMD show, through the use of Trickster protagonists, that a person is responsible for recreating his own world and that no amount of self pity or blame directed at the non-Indians can lead to change.

Babcock claims that symbolic inversions are "at the center of any symbolic form" (161). She notes that

Symbolic inversions are not simply logical reciprocals; if you consider them as such you tend to neglect both the transformations which occur with such inversions as well as the comic dimensions of many such reciprocal forms. And you avoid the question: what happens when such marginal figures as fools and tricksters become central to the action and still retain the ability to 'dissolve events' [to quote Enid Welsford] and 'throw doubt on the finality of fact?' (161)

Babcock answers her own question about this "negative dimension of symbolic action" (161) and asserts that: "the first symbolic inversion [in a narrative] startles one into fresh views of his contemporary reality. The second inversion leads to a rediscovery of essential truths, a transvaluation of values, and the affirmation of a primal order" (181). In respect to WB and HMD, the first symbolic inversion questions the position of the drunken Indian straddling two worlds: one
world (the contemporary world) which both protagonists find confusing and the other world (the traditional world) which seems irrelevant to the present. The second symbolic inversion (i.e. the second of Trickster's taboo acts) leads to a "rediscovery of essential truths" by acknowledging and embracing the teachings of the elders. By seeing the relevance of the traditional teachings in the modern world, both Abel and Nameless achieve a "transvaluation of values" and "affirm the primal order" of man's place within the world.

Babcock contends that symbolic inversions are the ambiguities and paradoxes inherent in Trickster and his acts. Nameless, like Trickster, is paradox personified because he does not give us his name. Names, particularly in Indian country, are highly respected and a source of a person's identity; thus it is paradoxical that a narrator who does not identify himself expects a place in that world. Another paradox, akin to his namelessness, exists between the narrator's actual age and the numerous references to him as a "boy" (71): when Lame Bull calls him a boy he says: "'I'm thirty-two,'...Sometimes I had to tell myself" (71). The problem other characters have with the narrator's age combined with his namelessness suggest that he has yet to develop a firm sense of identity. Like Trickster in his tales, he must undergo a developmental journey. During this journey, he vividly describes everything he sees; yet, paradoxically, he does not understand their significance. He is perceptive and
naive like Trickster. The greatest paradox, however, is that he is a marginal figure who does not attempt to fit in any society, yet he longs to have a place in the world. But as Trickster who is paradox personified the nameless narrator nonetheless inverts things in order to right them, if not for himself, then at least for an attentive audience. As Trickster Nameless performs symbolic inversions which reverse preconceived notions of society: these symbolic inversions are best seen in the references to urination and in the ambiguities of his narration.

The numerous references to urination are symbolic inversions which recall some of Trickster's characteristics in the oral narratives. Trickster, Babcock notes, is "frequently involved in scatological and coprophagous episodes which may be creative, destructive, or simply amusing" (162). Trickster also possesses an oversized penis which he takes great pleasure in using in any given situation. Nameless, like Trickster, certainly is promiscuous and his preoccupation with urination reflects Trickster's obsession with his sexual organ. The opening scene where he urinates "in the tall weeds of the borrow pit" (1) is similar to the scatological episodes in the oral narratives. Urination is mentioned twice in Part two of the narrative: once before he leaves Malvina in Havre (84); another time in the men's room of a bar (92). These acts contrast with the other two instances of urination--in the opening scene and after reflecting on his "mementos" (38)--
which are Trickster acts.

The opening scene where Nameless urinates is the first symbolic inversion in the narrative. His act is irreverent, and clearly a symbolic inversion, given that the spot on which he urinates happens to be the place where Nameless and his mother found his father, First Raise, frozen to death ten years prior to the narration (19). This act, as well as the reference to First Raise as a "foolish man" (21) and a wanderer (20) just like his son, closely associates Nameless with his father. He remembers his father fondly, yet shows his disrespect by always referring to him by name rather than as "my father." Nameless breaks taboo when he uses his father's name (and his mother's too) since names in Indian society are highly regarded and seldom used to address or talk about someone (as we saw with "The Startlers"). Instead of using someone's name Indian people will use kinship terms, the vocative terms, if talking to kin. This close association between father and son, and the fact that the son remembers his father fondly but nevertheless shows his disrespect for him, is crucial to understanding the opening passage as a symbolic inversion. Nameless's contradictory attitude toward his father inverts the Indians' high regard for their relatives and their heritage. As a symbolic inversion (Nameless breaks taboo as he symbolically pisses on his father's grave) the passage questions the validity of his heritage in the modern world. This becomes clearer when one
considers the importance of urination as an act of defiance against death.

The narrator's attitude to death is revealed in the choice of the word "sleeping" when he relates how his dead father was found: "He [the father] had made them laugh until the thirty-below morning ten years ago we found him sleeping in the borrow pit across from the Earthboy's place" (6). Nameless cannot accept death as part of the natural cycle of things and thus has remained psychologically in adolescence since the death of his brother Mose, twenty years before the time of narration. Juxtaposed with his twenty-year imprisonment in immaturity is the image of the dilapidated Earthboy place which had been uninhabited for the same amount of time. He is sterile, imprisoned in memory, like the Earthboy place which is surrounded by "barbed wire" and parched land (1). However, the narrative suggests that Nameless will escape from his prison because in the next paragraph he turns his back on the fence which binds him: "The [barbed-wire] fence hummed in the sun behind my back as I climbed up to the highway" (1-2). The possibility of his escape is suggested again at the close of Chapter 1: "I dropped down on the other side of the highway, slid through the barbed-wire fence and began the last two miles home" (2).

The narrator's single-mindedness, another Trickster trait, hampers his eventual acceptance of death because it keeps him ignorant of the forces which try to help him. For
example, as he thinks about the identity of his grandfather "a low rumble interrupted [his] thoughts" (38). The low rumble of thunder suggests that there is something significant about his grandfather's identity which he ought to explore. Nameless stubbornly ignores this hint as he moves from his thoughts of his grandfather to thoughts of his older brother who had shared the room he now occupies:

When I was young I had shared it [the room] with Mose and his stamp collection and his jar full of coins. In one corner against the wall stood a tall cupboard with glass doors. Its shelves held mementos of a childhood, two childhoods, two brothers, one now dead, the other servant to a memory of death. Mementos. (38)

As Nameless looks through his mementos another rumble of thunder interrupts his thoughts. In spite of nature's insistence, Nameless continues to look around the room before he puts everything down and goes outside to urinate. Like Trickster, Nameless gets help from outside forces in his struggle with overpowering foes.

The next instance of urination is another Trickster act and the second symbolic inversion in the narrative. It is yet another act of unconscious defiance against his imprisonment (represented by the fence): "I peed on a clump of weeds beside the fence" (38). The narrator mentions sage as he relieves himself: "the smell of sage was heavy in the wind" (38). Many Indians use sage in their prayers, so it is taboo when the narrator mentions it in conjunction with an act not associated with prayer. His mention of urination and an incense used in
prayer fits with his Trickster need to do outrageous things. The narrator's taboo act reaches for a meaning beyond the literal one described in the text. Thus when the narrator pees, "something holy" (to borrow a phrase from HMD, 114) happens. To signify the sublimity of the narrator's act, nature celebrates the narrator's disdain for his stasis:

The tops of the thunderheads shone silver-white in the moon's glare. Below, the blackness was rent by jagged flashes that lit up the western horizon. In the valley to the east, I could see the silhouettes of the cottonwoods that marked the curving river. The coyotes had quit barking. It was going to rain. (38-39)

The narrator achieves this second symbolic inversion as he urinates and because of this the coyotes, "an old council of clowns...[who] are listened to" (HMD 56), have no further need to talk. Nameless is not just another drunken Indian, nor is he an Indian according to some ideal, but a Trickster who underscores the fact that adaptation and change are needed in the present order. After the narrator effects his second symbolic inversion, the rain signals a possible regeneration. The rain, which begins the next day, is the first since June and ends the summer-long drought. Similarly, when Nameless goes to town the next day with Lame Bull, he begins his journey of regeneration, rediscovery, and transvaluation.

The incidents chronicled and the characters described during the narrator's journey emphasize his feeling of distance from his world, a major prerequisite for his identity as Trickster. The distance he feels "came not from the country
or people" (1), the narrator admits, but rather "from within" (2). He explains: "I was as distant from myself as a hawk from the moon. And that is why I had no particular feelings toward my mother and grandmother. Or the girl who had come to live with me" (2). The novel deals ironically with bridging the distance the narrator feels from his mother, from his grandmother, from his past, and from himself. It is ironic that Nameless spends so much time and effort in closing the distance when in the end he accepts that a certain distance is necessary to live in his world. Ironically, the choice of "hawk" in the above passage suggests that the narrator's situation is not as hopeless as he thinks. Nevertheless, his feeling of alienation makes him an outsider, like Trickster, on the periphery of society.

Nameless the Trickster protagonist plays tricks because he is duplicitous by nature. Since he lies to other characters, it is to be expected that his narration is equally deceptive. His deceptions are the many ambiguous passages in the narrative. For example, the passage where Lame Bull and Nameless ride into town is full of ambiguity:

Lame Bull had decided the night before to give me a ride into Dodson. From there I could catch the bus down to Malta. We left early, before the gumbo flat could soak up enough rain to become impassable. The pickup slipped and skidded through the softening field as the rain beat down against the windshield. There was no wiper on my side and the landscape blurred light brown against gray. Patches of green relieved this monotony, but suddenly and without form. I had placed a piece of cardboard in my side window--the glass had fallen out one night in town last winter--to keep out the rain. I could have
been riding in a submarine. At last we spun up the incline to the highway, and now I made out the straight ribbon of black through the heart of a tan land.

'Looks pretty good, huh?'
Lame Bull was referring to the rain and the effect it would have on the new growth of alfalfa.

'Not bad,' I said. I didn't even want to think of haying again, not after we had struggled through that last field of bales.

'You know it.' He hunched forward over the steering wheel. 'I think we need a new rig, pal--the windshield wiper is slowing down on this one.'

We passed Emily Short's fields, which were the best in the valley. They had been levelled by a reclamation crew from the agency. Emily was on the tribal council.

'Look there!' Lame Bull slowed down.

Through his side window, I could see a figure in black shovelling a drain in one of the shallow irrigation ditches. A lonely moment--that man in the green field, the hills beyond and the gray sky above. His horse stood cold and miserable, one back leg cocked, the others ankle deep in mud.

'Poor sonofabitch.' (39-40)

The first instance of ambiguity in the above passage is when Nameless watches the country side and Lame Bull comments

"'Looks pretty good, huh?'' Nameless tells us, as if we had a sense that Lame Bull is reading his mind, that Lame Bull is not referring to the landscape but rather "to the rain and the effect it would have on the new growth of alfalfa." Another example of ambiguity comes when they "see a figure in black shovelling a drain in one of the shallow irrigation ditches" whose "horse stood cold and miserable, one back leg cocked, and the others ankle-deep in mud" (40). One of them, whether it is Lame Bull or Nameless is not clear, comments: "Poor sonofabitch" (40). Equally unclear is to whom the comment refers: is the "Poor sonofabitch" the horse stuck in the mud
Ambiguity serves a reflective-creative function. Ambiguous passages often induce laughter which in turn precipitates reflection on their purpose in the narrative. For example, in the restaurant scene where the Airplane Man enlists Nameless's help, an old man walks in and immediately the Airplane Man whispers: "We've got to get out of here" (87). Nameless concludes that the old man is following the Airplane Man and agrees to meet him elsewhere. The Airplane Man leaves and Nameless watches the old man roll a cigarette then asks him if he had known of anyone to catch fish in the Milk River. The old man admires his cigarette, chuckles, then falls face down, dead, on his bowl of oatmeal. At his rendezvous with the Airplane Man Nameless tells him that the old man is dead and that he does not have to worry about him any more. When the Airplane Man tells him the old man was not trailing him and that he had never seen him before, Nameless says: "I felt like a fool" (90). This feeling recurs as he walks through town with a purple teddy bear clutched to his bosom. Nameless remarks: "I felt like a fool carrying the purple teddy bear through the streets of Havre" (95). In effect this scene highlights his immaturity on the one hand, but on the other hand, it aligns him closely with Trickster. Both passages are comical yet upon reflection serve to emphasize the narrator's gullibility. The puzzling passages with the Airplane Man are examples of a Trickster tricked,
The passages with the Airplane Man highlight the Trickster narrator's duplicity. The narrator doubts the Airplane Man: "The man was from New York. He had shown me his credit cards when I said I didn't believe him" (44-45). The Airplane Man asks if he looks "like the sort [not "type" or "kind"] who would run out on a wife and two beautiful daughters" (45), suggesting that his wife is very much alive. The choice of phrasing here suggests that the reader "sort" through the narrative with care because later the Airplane Man claims that the wife "is dead now" (50) and repeats it at another instance: "my wife is dead" (51). To further complicate the situation the Airplane Man explains that it was his wife who had put the Federal Bureau of Investigation onto him. Nameless questions him:

'Then that business about tearing up your airplane ticket and leaving your wife was all a lie?'

'Not at all! In fact, it was my wife who put the federal men on me.' He laughed. 'She was burned!'

I pondered this. It seemed a little coldhearted for a wife to squeal on her husband, but then he had run out on her. (93)

The Airplane Man remains a mystery. The reader has no way of knowing if his wife is alive or dead or if he has two daughters or one or none at all or even if "the barmaid from Malta" (98) could be his daughter or just someone he had known from before:

'Remember that barmaid?'

'How could I forget? Lying, vicious little
'She claimed you knew her—from before.'
'Not bloody likely.' But he glanced at me.
'But why would she say it if it wasn't true?'
I asked.
A semi truck throttled down behind us. The noise of the tires on the gravel made us jump to the side. As it passed, the airplane man clamped his hand down on his head, as though he were wearing a hat. The cloud of dust obscured the first part of his sentence. '...about the wiles of the world!' (99)

The two key phrases in the above passage, "'why would she say it if it wasn't true?'" and "'the wiles of the world,'" are significant. The reader questions why the narrator would tell us certain things if they were not true. Because he is being candid we think he is being reliable, but we do not know for sure. Even though he is drinking at this time his narration is nevertheless quite credible because he highlights passages where he is not sure of what happened on previous nights: "Deep inside, I felt uneasy about the barmaid, a feeling almost of shame. But why, what had I done?" (57) and "I couldn't figure out how I ended up on the couch with a rubber rug over me" (82). Thus the incongruous passages dealing with the Airplane Man serve to emphasize the narrator's contradictory narrative: on the one hand he appears to be reliable since he honestly relates everything he remembers, and yet, on the other hand, he seems unreliable because his narration is duplicitous, a Trickster act. This contradiction is consistent with Trickster who is himself contradictory.

Another example of the narrator's tricky narrative involves the references to the fish. The fish imagery which
runs as a refrain in the first part of the book creates an ironic gap between Nameless as narrator and character. It is ironic that Nameless, as narrator, says that the secret to catching fish in the Milk River is perhaps in calling the fish in their own language when he, as a character, has trouble reading the signs nature lays out for him. Nevertheless, the references to fish are intricately woven with references to the Airplane Man, Mose, First Raise, Teresa, in short, with everything in Nameless's life as indicated by his dream:

I awoke the next morning with a hangover. I had slept fitfully, pursued by the ghosts of the night before and the nights past. There were the wanted men with ape faces, cuffed sleeves and blue hands. They did not look directly into my eyes but at my mouth, which was dry and hollow of words. They seemed on the verge of performing an operation. (52)

The dream reveals the magnitude of the narrator's twenty years of arrested development. The "wanted men" refers to an earlier reminiscence of faces hung on the Post Office wall which Nameless had memorized years ago (41). That the wanted men do not look at his eyes but at his "mouth, which was dry and hollow of words" indicates that the narrator's words are sterile. Yet, because the wanted men seem "on the verge of performing an operation" this passage suggests that it is through memory that one can heal after first performing an operation to purge "the ghosts" of the past. The fish imagery, on the one hand, shows that the narrator's words are indeed "hollow"; after all he seems to be the only one who claims there are no fish in the river (45-48). On the other hand, it
warns of the dangers of being a slave to memory. As a warning the dream reveals, through the emphasis on Teresa's words and her giving birth to Amos who flies into the sun, that Nameless needs to grasp his heritage in order to escape his predicament. The traditional male-dominated Blackfeet society is reversed in the narrator's story: Teresa is head of the family and the other women characters also dominate the narrator. The dream inverts these man-woman relationships portrayed in the narrator's dreams.

The fish imagery also highlights one source of the narrator's alienation, his grandmother's story. It is significant that the medicine man partly responsible for the grandmother's ostracization from the tribe is named Fish. Nameless recounts his grandmother's story of how Fish had, on the one hand, played a part in the survival of the people: "Fish had warned them. Fish, the medicine man. The Long Knives will be coming soon, he said, for now that the seasons change there is a smell of steel in the air. A week later the soldiers did come, but the camp was abandoned" (35). On the other hand, however, through Fish's reading of signs the grandmother gets ostracized from the community, "having brought them bad medicine" (154) since the death of her husband Standing Bear.² The grandmother tells her grandchildren that the people ostracized her because of her beauty (37). Yellow Calf, however, gives an alternative reason:
'When you are starving, you look for signs. Each event becomes big in your mind. His [Standing Bear's] death was the final proof that they were cursed. The medicine man, Fish, interpreted the signs. They looked at your grandmother and realized that she had brought despair and death. And her beauty--it was as if her beauty made a mockery of their situation.' (155)

The people abandon her to survive alone in a most bitter winter and in the spring they were driven by the army to the newly created Blackfeet reservation (157). Again they leave her behind:

Because they didn't care to take her with them, the people apparently didn't mention her to the soldiers, and because she had left the band when the weather warmed and lived a distance away, the soldiers didn't question her. They assumed she was Gros Ventre. (157)

The grandmother reveals only part of the story of her people; Yellow Calf fills in the rest. In his search for the truth about his heritage Nameless reveals that his grandmother had withheld an important element of his family history. Thus we come to see that the Trickster narrator is again tricked. Furthermore, he breaks taboo since he contradicts an elder, his grandmother, in his eventual discovery of another version to his family history. This contradictory act, typical of Trickster, undermines, somewhat, his grandmother's story, someone whom he respects (which he shows by never mentioning her name--she too is nameless). Nameless's discovery shows that truth is indeed relative, subject to the whims of those who tell their versions of reality. The references to fish, then, lead to an examination of the narrator's family history
and his discovery shows that only the animals speak the truth with disinterest.

Nameless has an intuition early in the novel that perhaps through conversations with animals his feelings of distance from his fellow man will lessen if not altogether disappear. He tears off a coupon advertising a "fishing lure that calls to fish in their own language" (12) because he thinks that perhaps "that was the secret" (12) to catching the fish in the Milk River. However, there is a contradiction here because while he intuitively senses that talking to animals may have its merits he, like Trickster, actually does talk to the animals he encounters. For example, he calls out to the cow who hangs around her calf: "Don't you know we're trying to wean this fool?" (10). The animal he talks to most, however, is old Bird, the cow horse with whom he shares the memory, and perhaps the guilt, of his brother's death.

The narrator's talk with Bird helps him come to terms with death. On his way for his second visit to Yellow Calf he has a long talk with Bird, and he exonerates Bird of any blame: "No, don't think it was your fault--when that calf broke, you reacted as they trained you. I should compliment you on your eyes and your quickness" (146). Later when he asks Yellow Calf about who had stayed with his grandmother, Bird rewards him with an answer by letting go a fart which reveals that Yellow Calf is his grandfather. Nameless says that it is "as though Bird had it in him all the time and had passed it
Nameless's talk with Bird also enables him to come to terms with his brother's death. The first reference to his brother's death shows his denial:

I couldn't have seen it--we were still moving in the opposite direction, the tears, the dark and wind in my eyes--the movie exploded whitely in my brain, and I saw the futile lurch of the car as the brake lights popped, the horse's shoulder caving before the fender, the horse spinning so that its rear end smashed into the door, the smaller figure flying slowly over the top of the car to land with the hush of a stuffed doll. (142)

This depiction of his brother's death as an "exploded" "movie" (142) and the body of his dead brother as a "stuffed doll" (142) shows his denial of death which has kept the narrator "a servant to a memory of death" (38).

The picture he paints of his brother's death after he absolves Bird of any guilt seems to free him from his arrested development. The scene here merges the past and the present:

I didn't even see it [the calf] break....

'What use,' I whispered, cried for no one in the world to hear, not even Bird, for no one but my soul, as though the words would rid it of the final burden of guilt, and I found myself a child again, the years shed as a snake sheds its skin, and I was standing over the awkward tangle of clothes and limbs. 'What use, what use, what use...,' and no one answered, not the body in the road, not the hawk in the sky or the beetle in the earth; no one answered. And the tears in the hot sun, in the wine, the dusk, the chilly wind of dusk, the sleet that began to fall as I knelt beside the body, the first sharp pain of my smashed knee, the sleet on my neck, the blood which dribbled from his nostrils, his mouth, the man who hurried back from his car, his terrible breath as he tried to wrestle me away from my brother's broken body. (146-147)

There is no "exploded" "movie" here, no "stuffed doll," but
rather we are presented with the event in its actuality. He finally accepts death as a part of life. Thus he absolves Bird, and himself, after he discovers that death and life are closely linked. He realizes the connection between death and life when he discovers that his grandmother had died: "Perhaps it was the suggestion of death, but I smelled it, dark and musty, as surely as one smells the mother's milk in the breath of a baby" (131). The close association of death and "mother's milk" prepares us for the narrator's development from immaturity to adulthood.

The narrator's immaturity and his eventual growth is closely associated with the calf who appears regularly in the narrative. The calf appears for the first time in the narrative "snuggled against the fence, between the poles, sucking its mother" (9), and in other passages close to the fence. As mentioned earlier, the fence is symbolic of the narrator's imprisonment, and combined with the references to the calf reveals how that imprisonment keeps him between maturity and immaturity. The reference to the calf coincides with the first memory he mentions of his brother (10). Such an image effectively places the narrator, like the Trickster, between childhood and adulthood.

Not only does the narrator live between the interstices of adulthood and childhood, he also exists between the town and the farm. He continually leaves the farm in search of a life which offers fulfilment. After a horrendous spree in the
town he walks away because

I had had enough of Havre, enough of town, of walking home, hung over, beaten up, or both. I had had enough of the people, the bartenders, the bars, the cars, the hotels, but mostly, I had had enough of myself. I wanted to lose myself, to ditch these clothes, to outrun this burning sun, to stand beneath the clouds and have my shadow erased, myself along with it...I walked down the street, out past the car lots, the slaughterhouse, away from Havre. There were no mirrors anywhere. (125)

His sojourn in town, however, is a turning point for him. After he slides off Marlene he feels "a kind of peace that comes over one when he is alone, when he no longer cares for warmth, or sunshine, or possessions, or even a woman's body, so yielding and powerful" (123). His resignation at this point is ironic since the state he describes is exactly that for which he searches. The narrator considers this state of acceptance as a defeat. Thus he goes back to the farm where he discovers that his grandmother has died. It is then that he begins another leg of his journey as he burns his clothes (132). The act is like the snake shedding his old worn out skin for a new skin. He is in the house alone with his memories of Mose as he washes the dust of the town off of himself (132). When he leaves the house he believes he has changed considerably because Bird and the red horse "all watched [him] with interest" (133) as if they are not sure who he is. At this point it seems that he has come to accept that he must forever be betwixt and between categories. His initial acceptance of this state comes during his second visit with Yellow Calf, during which he comes to understand that there
There is nothing wrong with a certain distance, that perhaps the secret to serenity is to view the world as it is, "cockeyed" (68), something he denies when he first visits Yellow Calf. After the narrator comes to terms with his brother's death, Yellow Calf fascinates him. He now appreciates Yellow Calf's earlier teaching that "sometimes...one has to lean into the wind to stand straight" (69).

The narrator comes to understand that there are at least two types of distance which one can attain. One is clearly a physical distance: "So much distance between them" he says of his grandmother and Yellow Calf, "and yet they lived only three miles apart. But what created the distance?" (160). There is the other distance which Yellow Calf has, a distance which not even a pestering mosquito can disturb: "A mosquito took shelter in the hollow of his cheek, but he [Yellow Calf] didn't notice. He had attained that distance" (158). The narrator does not have that distance early in the narrative: "I slapped a mosquito from my face and the calf bawled" (10). Nonetheless the narrator wonders if his father had found a way to "narrow that distance" (151) which is permanent in Yellow Calf (151). He remembers what he felt that time his father took him to see Yellow Calf:

Yet I had felt it then, that feeling of event. Perhaps it was the distance, those three miles, that I felt, or perhaps I had felt something of that other distance; but the event of distance was as vivid to me as the cold canvas of First Raise's coat against my cheek. He must have known then what I had just discovered. Although he told me nothing of it up to the day he died, he had taken me that
Although he might have had that distance at that early age he had lost it during the intervening years in which "nothing of any consequence had happened" (21-22).

By the end of the narrative the narrator acquires that certain distance. Like Trickster who also discovers his identity during his developmental process, Nameless's increasing awareness of himself allows him to accept that a certain distance is necessary to survive in his world. In a revealing passage he says: "Some people, I thought, will never know how pleasant it is to be distant in a clear rain, the driving rain of a summer storm. It's not like you'd expect, nothing like you'd expect" (172). The image of the "driving rain of a summer storm" is an excellent one to bring to mind how people are powerless over the forces of nature no matter how they love to complain about the weather. The best one can do, and the only action over which one has control, is to accept the rain. Similarly, the narrator has come to accept another thing which he is powerless over, the deaths of his brother and father. He is serene as he reflects about them one last time: "At least the rain wouldn't bother them. But they would probably like it; they were that way, good to be with, even on a rainy day" (172).

In his move forward the narrator is able to act positively. One positive act relates his ironic struggle to rescue the cow from the mud. Although he tries to save the cow
it nonetheless dies. The cow reminds him of the old "wild-eyed spinster" (166) whose actions had caused his brother's death. Having come to terms with death, however, he fights to save the cow. It is, ostensibly, a losing battle as the cow, and Bird, die from the strain. However, it is the positive action which shows that the narrator moves from the imprisonment of the past to the freedom of the future. During this struggle he plans the course of his new life (169). He is weaned off the past much as the calf is effectively weaned from its mother who dies in the struggle.

The final scene, Nameless standing over his grandmother's grave, is reminiscent of the opening scene as he stands between life and death. In the opening scene Nameless turns his back on the symbol of his imprisonment, the fence, and begins his journey of regeneration. The narrator acknowledges and accepts his culture as he throws his grandmother's medicine pouch into the grave (176) and he begins to adapt to the changing world. Through his grandmother's story and especially Yellow Calf's version, he sees that the old stories do not have to be ignored since they do have relevance in the contemporary world. He sees that a combination of the old cultural stories and the new order of cultural things is possible. However, he is still wary. On the one hand he says that he will "go to the agency and see the doctor" about his knee, but on the other hand he hates the idea of ending up "in bed for a whole year" (175). Nevertheless, in spite of his
hedging, Nameless as Trickster shows the possibility of transcending psychic restrictions such as fear. He has overcome his fear of death by accepting it as part of the natural order. This acceptance permits him to move away from his imprisonment and adapt to the world.

Although Nameless, somewhat like Abel, does not always strike us as being the wily, exuberant creature that is Trickster, he is one nonetheless. His curiosity, his stubbornness, his deceitfulness, his irreverence, his confusion, and his love of wine and women coupled with his wandering on the fringes of society suggest that we are dealing with a Trickster figure. Like all Tricksters he undergoes a developmental process, a process that shows that he has much to learn and most lessons come the hard way as Trickster is regularly tricked. Nameless learns from his mistakes, which seem to be endless, and he learns respect, after having shown little respect for most things sacred--these are difficult lessons learned. Trickster narratives are typically learning experiences and in most oral narratives, as Babcock contends, we can witness Trickster's symbolic inversions as he begins his journey of regeneration, rediscovery, and transvaluation. Nameless's inversions come in such varied ways as peeing on his father's "grave" and questioning the story of his grandmother, an elder who would be considered a keeper of tribal knowledge in Indian society. Thus Nameless inverts the notions of the sacredness of
heredity and the unquestionable wisdom of elders. As with Abel in HMD, Nameless learns that cultural and social restrictions are just restrictions—they are not truths, nor are they unchangeable. As he travels through his world he is like Trickster because he develops a sense of self by trial and error; he demonstrates the constant human activity of making guesses and modifying them in light of experience.

Some of the tougher lessons Nameless learns are perhaps closer to home. The deaths of his father and brother have weighed heavily on him all his life, have stunted his psychological growth, and have been a cause of the distance he feels. With some help from the animals and a gradual understanding that there are elements of his cultural past that can sustain him, he, symbolically at least, begins to accept death and makes a connection with his cultural past by tossing his grandmother's tobacco pouch into her grave with her. Standing on the edge of her grave, he is between the world of the living and the world of the dead. He accepts that he will always stand betwixt and between categories because from that place he can perhaps gain the necessary perspective to transcend the many confining cultural and social boundaries which are, after all, a part of life.
Notes

1. Babcock uses the term to refer to the marginal figure's ability, "temporally and spatially,...to confound the distinction between illusion and reality, if not deny it altogether. In fact, [the presence of a marginal figure, like Trickster, who is central to the action] casts doubt on all preconceived and expected systems of distinction between behaviors and the representation thereof" (159).

2. Perhaps the "purple teddy bear" which the narrator clutches to his chest is a sly reference to this Chief's name. It can also refer to the Bear Paw Mountains, the home of the Blackfeet, and to "White Bear," the name of the irrigation ditch which borders Teresa's farm and acts as a boundary between the farm and Yellow Calf. All these possible references, incidentally, highlight the narrator's distance from his heritage and his clutching the purple teddy bear signifies his yearning to close that distance.
Like *House Made of Dawn* and *Winter in the Blood*, *Griever: An American Monkey King In China* abounds with unexplained incidents, symbolic inversions, and ironies. The protagonist is a marginal figure who is regularly tricking and being tricked. He often finds himself betwixt and between categories and he is always learning and teaching. Griever, the Trickster protagonist, differs noticeably from the protagonists of *HMD* and *WB*. In contrast to Abel and Nameless who are surreptitious Tricksters, Griever is blatantly a Trickster. However, deviating somewhat from the traditional Trickster who, as Paul Radin states, "wills nothing consciously" (xxiii), Griever sees himself as a Trickster and consciously tries to transform his world. He is "proud to be a mixedblood trickster" (72) who

resolves his bother and concern in the world with three curious gestures: he leans back on his heels and taps the toes of his shoes together; he pinches and folds one ear; and he turns a finger in search of a wild strand of hair on his right temple. The third habit, he wrote to a former teacher, was his search for one 'metahair, the hair that transforms impotencies, starved moments, even deadends.' (31)

Griever regards himself as Trickster who can transform the world. He shows an arrogance and self-delusion similar to traditional tricksters. His view of himself has ironic implications, particularly in a society where arrogance and pride in one's skills are discouraged through trickster
stories. One of Grievers's former teachers ridicules him when she says, "'Griever has an unusual imaginative mind...and he could change the world if he is not first taken to be a total fool'" (49). Ironically, while Griever tries to change the world and right the wrongs he sees, he is ultimately powerless to effect much change at all. It is especially ironic that, instead of changing conditions for the better, he often makes things worse for all concerned. Nevertheless, Griever is a Trickster who consciously and actively attempts to subvert the foundations of accepted modes of thought and experience. Even with his differences, Griever is similar to Abel and Nameless as he struggles with various forces and relies on stories to understand his place in the present world.

Like Abel and Nameless, Griever is a footloose wanderer with strong sexual appetites. He plays tricks, is tricked in turn, and he speaks to animals. Moreover, he is fatherless; his closest associations are with women; and he lives interstitially in the world. In contrast to Abel and Nameless who are both essentially unemployable, uneducated derelicts, Griever is a university professor. Nevertheless, he too is an outsider. He is outside the social sphere of his colleagues and even "at home on the reservation he [is] a foreigner" (42). His tenure in China further highlights his being on the periphery of society. The Chinese refer to him as "the wai quo ren, the foreign devil, the outside or external person" (41). He describes himself in China as being "alone on the line"
(13), "at some alien border...[between] the teachers, the decadent missionaries of this generation and...the invented traditions, [and] broken rituals" (13) of the Chinese. He is an alien among the "aliens" (68) who are his fellow teachers at the university. They tolerate "his stories about unusual events on the streets" (79) of China but dismiss his critiques of a demoralizing socialist administration. As a marginal figure, thus not affiliated with any specific society, Grievers condemnation of Chinese bureaucracy extends to American and North American Indian societies as well.

As a peripheral figure Grievers functions betwixt and between categories of race distinction, and between past and present, East and West, animal and human. Grievers is a mixedblood of Chippewa and Gypsy extraction, something which intensifies his marginality since both races are on the fringes of American society. One of Grievers former teachers views him as a mixed-blood "given to racial confusion of two identities, neither of which can be secured in one culture" (49). As a mixedblood tribal Trickster he transcends racial boundaries. Through his interest in oral stories and the affinity he feels with the Chinese peasants, he also transcends temporal and spatial boundaries. His fascination with traditional stories--both Chinese and American Indian--bridges past and present, and East and West. He sees a correlation between the bears in the tribal stories of his people and the bears in the traditional stories of the
Chinese. The similarities in these peoples' stories can unite them and help to break down racial barriers. That the stories have been in these societies for centuries, handed down to the present day so that they are still relevant for these people, also merges the past with the present.

Griever's affinity for the bears of the traditional stories sometimes places him betwixt and between what is animal and what is human. One of his colleagues comments that his habit of covering his "panic holes" is "like an animal" (71). On the train, like a bear foraging for his food, Griever "foraged the courtesies of the audience" (91) and when

[the train lurched to the right on a curve and he pawed one moist breast and the curve of her [Hester's] stomach when he leaned to hold his balance...She heard the trickster shout from the mountains and when he rolled his bear shoulders, she turned to answer but he had moved his stories to the other end of the coach. (92)

Griever is not only described as a bear in the present world but his dreams of bears also link him with the bears of his past and his mythic origins. His dreams of bears give him a kind of universality since the "descendants [of the old stone man and a bear woman] became healers in tribal cultures around the world" (17). Griever, "a mixedblood tribal trickster, a close relative to the old mind monkeys" (34) who are also mixedbloods, is an "American Monkey King in China," a universal Trickster figure who transcends time and culturally imposed boundaries.

Griever corresponds with Barbara Babcock's view of
Tricksters, whose "creative cleverness amazes us and keeps alive the possibility of transcending the social restrictions we regularly encounter" (54). Some of the social restrictions which Griever mocks deal with the Chinese administration's view of the old stories. Since the liberation, the Chinese state has censored the meaningful words which come through the telling of the old stories. Some of the old stories are still remembered and sometimes told. For example, in the chicken liberation scene Griever's actions cause the "people in the crowd [to] whisper...about scenes in the other mind monkey stories" (41). In another instance Griever dreams of a mute child who follows him around. Upon waking he asks Egas Zhang, the director of the foreign affairs bureau, about the mute boy. Zhang tells him that no one can see this child, who is from the old stories before the liberation, stories that were told by "superstitious peasants" (61). When Griever tells Zhang that China is a "nation of peasants" Zhang retorts that the stories were told by "old superstitious peasants" (61). However, these peasants who believe in the old stories seem the happiest in their world. Wu Chou, for example, the warrior clown gatekeeper to the University where Griever works, "imagines the world and pinch[es his] time from those narrow scratch lines dashed between national politics and traditional opera scenes" (19). The residents of Obo Island also seem to be comfortable with their world. The first to arrive and live on the island was Shitou, the stone man; "others lost and
dissociated in the revolution, curious and nonesuch wanderers, arrived and declared a new sericulture, swine, stone, birth control, and rat production unit, named Minus Number One" (165). The name "Minus Number One" given to the new "sericulture" on Obo island by its residents reflects their wish to break off from China.

In spite of attempts to censor them, the old stories persist in the new China. For example, in the chapter "Stone Shaman" we see that the old stories are still told by some people:

Shitou breaks stones with one hand late in the afternoon three times a week at the entrance to the free market in a close near the campus gate. Between the breaks he tells stories about bears and the old stone cultures that came down from the mountains and settled near the sea. (72)

The people's response to the stories is not complacent: "the men and children there seemed more desperate, either to discommend the simple rituals, or to believe in the spiritual power of the stone and the humor in the breaks" (72). The stories Shitou tells "about the old stone cultures, and the heat that flashed from his one good eye, separated him from the experiences of the audience and from the tame public images of socialism" (74). Shitou is alone and his occupation is seen by the cadres as serving "no collective purpose, [but] to entertain tourists, and receive gratuities [that] were not considered pertinent service to the new state; moreover, the cadres would not provide medical care or housing for the old man because he did not have a permanent work place" (74).
However, ironically, Shitou earns "more through his imagination in three afternoons a week than the state could provide in a whole month" (74). Shitou's "motions and appearance" remind Grieaver "of the old shamans on the reservation" (74). The two soldiers who appear in the scene along with other people watching Shitou represent the State's view of people telling the old stories. Like Zhang, who belittles the stories of the mute boy, the soldiers try "to discommend the simple rituals" by calling Shitou a "broken monkey" (74). Defending Shitou, Grieaver raises "his small hands behind the soldiers and cracked them hard on the shoulder...and shadowboxed around their heads" (75).

What Grieaver perceives in the state's attitude to the old stories is an absence of an ethos. In a nation which represses its stories there are no unifying attitudes to the world which the people share. A shared belief in stories creates an ethos for a community, without which comes the end of a society, or in Hannah's words, "the end of the goddamn world" (76) as we know it. Although Hannah's statement refers to "Jingle Bells" being played in the height of summer, it nonetheless has ironic implications given that Grieaver mocks her. For one thing, Hannah reminds Grieaver of "the social workers on the reservation" (75). For another thing, the Chinese men watch her breasts bounce beneath the wide sleeves...the ultimate in spiritual pollution" (76). Grieaver's ridiculing Hannah, however, serves to further implicate the audience: in sharing
Griever's laughter about Hannah the audience is tricked once again into taking a serious look behind the scenes involving her. The scene taken is a whole—with Shitou breaking stones while telling the old stories, Griever shadow boxing around the heads of the soldiers who mock Shitou, Hannah's critique of the scene at the free market, including her statement about "Jingle Bells" being played out of season—highlights the confusion and decadence of the present society which lacks a common belief. Hannah's statement prepares us for the ultimate irony at the close of the narrative: the United States and the Chinese government sign an agreement which "allows the People's Republic of China to buy American reactors and other nuclear technology 'designed for the peaceful use and only the peaceful use of nuclear materials'" (238). It is unlikely that the Chinese would use nuclear technology just for peaceful purposes. If we don't want the world to end, Griever seems to suggest, we need to return to the Chinese Monkey King stories and the North American Indian Trickster stories. Through "Griever meditation," we can approach what Babcock calls "a rediscovery of essential truths, [and] a transvaluation of values" (182).

A rediscovery of essential truths in Griever comes through the comic critique of existing social conditions in China. As in WB and HMD the use of irony in Griever secures what Andrew Wiget defines as the most consequential "earlier critical laugh that implicates the audience and sustains the
This critical laugh occurs when Grieaver mocks the director of the foreign affairs office, Egas Zhang. Zhang's first name, which, as a translator he chose himself (89), comes from the "Portuguese who is the father of the lobotomy" (15). Even though lobotomy has long been regarded as ineffectual and inhumane Zhang is proud of his name. Yet while we laugh with Trickster Grieaver at Zhang we are later shocked (and thus tricked into seeing the serious implications of such a person in power) by his influence over the fate of his daughter. Zhang represents the corruption in China which persists after the Cultural Revolution. Zhang's power over his charges, the foreign teachers, manifests itself in his covetousness over the English language. Although he hates foreigners he has no qualms about asking the foreign teachers, "within a few hours of their arrival at the guest house,...to record language tapes, which he duplicated and then sold to students at other institutions" (65-66). Zhang is a pernicious opportunist who exerts his influence for personal financial gain. In his zeal to get samples of actual English language usage Zhang collects the notes Grieaver and Hester Hua Dan write to each other at the reception and dinner held in the ballroom of the Friendship Club (179). From these notes Zhang discovers that Grieaver has made Hester, Zhang's daughter, pregnant. It is a discovery which leads to tragic consequences.

One of the essential truths which is rediscovered and
highlighted is the immorality of a totalitarian state. Hester, as Zhang's daughter, represents the next generation of citizens of the new China. She is scared of being seen with a foreigner outside of the university because of her father's orders. She refuses to escape with Grieaver on an ultralight, giving him a flimsy excuse: "Never fly in airplane," she told the Trickster but held back the real reason: her fear, resignation to paternal power, and her dedication to the nation" (200). She commits suicide because her father orders her to have an abortion (199). Grieaver and Shitou drain the pool to retrieve her body. They discover little "blue bones of babies" (225). Hester, thus aligned with the small bones of babies, becomes a symbol of the end result of the new order which imposes strict rules on its populace.

Passages that verge on irony show the near futility of setting people free from their oppressors. One such section occurs when Grieaver frees the "Peking Nightingale" (32-33). He frees the bird but, perhaps ironically, the bird comes back "to her secure keep in the dead tree" (33). The chicken liberation scene also seems ironic as the freed chickens hang around the market rather than escaping: "several birds scurried through the crowds with their heads down, back to the cages" (53). It is also ironic and comic that they are released to a hungry mob which would no doubt slaughter them. The ultimate irony of the whole scene, however, is that it is the "cutthroat" chicken dealer who is the "free man in the
middle of the morning" (54), freed by no other than Griever who buys all the chickens. Parallel to the chicken liberation is the irony involved when Griever frees the condemned prisoners in "Execution Caravan" (138-157). Ironically, Griever frees three rapists, a heroin dealer, one murderer, a prostitute, a robber, and "an art historian who exported stolen cultural relics" (153). The liberation is ironic, not only because these are all criminals, but also because they get killed after their release. Like the chickens and the Peking Nightingale, the art historian, the only prisoner to survive, chooses to stay in his cage in the back of the truck rather than escape. The references to cages recall scenes of confinement in Dawn and Blood; like those narratives, Griever emphasizes how society literally and metaphorically imprisons its people. The value placed on freedom thus undergoes a transvaluation as Griever attempts acts of liberation to no avail. It seems futile to emancipate people (and chickens) if they do not desire or do not know what to do with that freedom and if the society at large is not willing to grant them their freedom.

Griever tries to reaffirm man's place in the world through his reliance on the imagination, on tribal stories, and on the power of the word. Like all Tricksters Griever is preoccupied with the power of words in society: he exposes how the authoritarian Chinese state manipulates language to subjugate its people. This preoccupation with words and their
power is highlighted by the epigram to Part 2 of the narrative. It states that Chinese intellectuals "use and misread Bertolt Brecht...They are missing, however, Brecht's message that all truth is temporal, changeable, according to the needs and circumstances of its proponents and its opponents" (63). One of the ways to control truth, or one's view of reality, a recurrent theme in narrative since Don Quixote, is through the manipulation of words. In an attempt to control a version of truth the Chinese state mocks the old stories. The manipulation of truth through language is also indicated by the changing of place names in accordance with each successive colonial concession. The attempt to obliterate all remnants of the old colonialism by changing place names is, however, ironic because even common street maps become state secrets:

The river bears the same name, which means 'ocean river,' but the roads have been renamed the Jianguo and Chengdu. The Astor House is now the Tianjin Hotel and Victoria Park has become a number. The hedgerows and imperial gardens, once sculpted with the same dedication as a hand tied carpet, were razed during the revolution. Colonial names were removed from directories, and common street maps became state secrets. (111)

During the Cultural Revolution the Red Guard tried to destroy all remnants of colonialism. They destroyed the "hedgerows and imperial gardens" and closed "thousands of restaurants" (208). Ironically, they left open those restaurants where "the high cadres gathered...to drink and tell stories about the barbarians" (208).
What the Cultural Revolution accomplished, Griever suggests, was merely to oust foreign colonialism and replace it with an internal colonialism. Griever says to the waitress, who is practising her "verbs and pronouns" (110), while he eats, "Arenas, where millions of children are buried in unmarked graves, have been renamed, but colonialism, that worm in the muscles of the heart, persists in more than memories and printed words" (110-111). Wu Chou, the warrior clown gate keeper to the Zhou Enlai University, explains how colonialism persists in the new China after the Cultural Revolution:

'Tianjin is a broken window,' he announced with one finger on his ear. 'Dreams retreat to the corners like insects, and there we remember our past in lost letters and colonial maps, the remains of foreign concessions.

'Look around at the architecture, the banks and hotels, the old names have disappeared but we bear the same missions in our memories'....

'We surrendered to the first missionaries,' he said and then paused to hail a government official who was chauffeured through the gate in a black limousine. 'We were students at the Nankai Middle School with Hua Lian and Zhou Enlai, but now we speak a rather formal and footsore language.'

'Premier Zhou Enlai?'

'Indeed, and we practice new words on the run,' he said. 'We followed visitors to the parks and picked on their best euphemisms and colonial metaphors, and we even dared to pursue unusual phrases into forbidden restaurants'....'But now, since the revolution, we talk back on hard chairs and wait to translate new verbs from the trick menus.' (22-23)

Thus China after the Cultural Revolution fell to the rule of the "new masters and shadow capitalists" (111) who attempt to establish a new order by manipulating words.

In the free market scene Griever denounces the
pretensions of the Chinese socialist state. Although the Chinese cadres, like Zhang, expound the harmonious conditions since their "liberation" we find out that their idea of "liberation" is a mockery of the concept. For example, when Griever asks for a translator to help him free the chickens at the free market he finds that there is no such word in the tourist phrase book:

'Jack, can you translate liberation?' he asked in a paternal tone of voice. He did not look at the blonde' he spoke to the audience.
'Liberation?'
'Yes, liberation, one word.'
'The concept?'
'No, the word,' he said, 'we are the concepts.'
'Oh dear, but we thought you were trying to buy a chicken,' said the second woman....They were industrial management consultants, invited to lecture at a special institute on the future of capitalism.
'This is liberation, not a meal,' he barked and strutted his cock down the blood soaked counter. 'This is real, this is freedom, not some precious recipe.'
'Liberate chickens, are you serious?'
'Serious?'
(43-44)

Yes, he is serious. However ridiculous his acts may seem, they nevertheless address a serious situation. Griever wants the translation of the word "liberation," not its concept. However, the tourist phrase book which Jack and Sugar Dee use is inadequate for Griever's purposes. This passage shows how a ruling state can manipulate language to its advantage. Because of the exclusion of the word "liberation" from the tourist phrase book the foreigners cannot possibly discuss the concept of "liberation" with the Chinese people.
Indeed it seems the Chinese people are given little chance to talk openly or even have a moment of free thought. In the chicken liberation scene, the free market, a place normally characterized by a cacophony of human and animal sounds, is eerily silent. The people "whispered [to each other] about scenes in the other mind monkey stories" (41) during Griever's bartering with the cutthroat chicken seller. Curbed tongues and hushed tones in a market place suggest fear of reprisal, so Griever "mocked the whispers...and burst into wild laughter" (41). Although they are amused by Griever's antics the people nevertheless fear to speak openly about their traditional stories of the Monkey King. The fear is understandable given the fact that from the time they wake to the time they sleep they are constantly bombarded with propaganda about the harmonious social conditions in which they supposedly live. The constant assault of propaganda leaves little room for private thought. On a whim Griever decides to substitute the tape usually played to "one out of five people in the world" (133), "The East is Red," with "The Stars and Stripes" and "Semper Fidelis" (135).

Griever regards the conditions in China as being detrimental to the people so he tries to disrupt the social order. One of the new rules Griever mocks is the one child policy. In one of Griever's dreams, the refrain "one child" is inserted between the slogans of other national policies: "death to cats and dogs,...death to criminals,...death to
venereal disease,...death to capitalist roaders,...death to spiritual pollution,...no spitting,...no ice cream with barbarians,...no sex on the road,...no bright colors,...no decadent music,...no telephone directories,...[and] the east is red" (57). If asked to explain some of these policies, a Chinese person would probably reply like Hester Hua Dan: "our leaders will report on that soon" (95). The repetition of slogans is another attempt by the Chinese government to get the people to toe the party line through the use of words. The one child policy is again referred to in a passage dealing with conditions in China:

Egas Zhang chews bear paws, one child, aphrodisiacs are promoted on state television, one child, women paint their nipples in the cities, one child, light bulbs and bicycles are rationed, one child, students learn to swim to freedom in brackish water, one child, piglets are rented as contraceptives, one child. (132-133)

The one child policy is juxtaposed here with the results of the other new policies in place. From this passage it seems that the Chinese seek escape from the reality of their world. China is a poor country where even light bulbs and bicycles are rationed. The students are disgruntled and desperate measures are taken to follow the strict rules of the one child policy.

The conditions in the new China strike fear and cause insecurity amongst the Chinese as well as the foreign teachers. In another example of the power of words, the foreign teachers deal with their new surroundings by using
euphemisms as they "conceal their uncertainties with cultural catch phrases: the moon cakes are marvellous; street crimes are uncommon here; the architecture is splendid" (132). They find that "The classrooms are locked at night, some doors even chained, others padlocked twice, three times...The teachers could not decide if they were prisoners, or if the rooms and buildings were locked for their protection" (132). They wonder "how a civilized nation could execute thousands for minor crimes" (132). The cadres themselves do not feel secure in a system which they strive to uphold as they "bear the emblems of their new cultures--the devices and revised virtues of socialism, harmonious espaliers on loose brick barriers--with caution; the wise count locks and pockets to survive the political shell games" (132). The reality of China in which the foreign teachers find themselves is far from their "romantic idealism" (66). The Chinese are distrustful of their own people: the padlocks on the doors "have a separate key held by three different cadres who must all be present to open the room" (132). In the event of fire the people locked in the building would have very little chance of escape because it would be difficult to find all the key holders to unlock the doors in time.

Against the backdrop of this authoritarian world, Griever plays his Trickster games of liberation. Behind his first significant Trickster act lies a serious inquiry into conditions in China, especially on the concept of liberation.
On his first day at the free market Griever liberates "seventeen hens stowed in four crude wire cages and one proud cock tied to a short tether" (35). In liberating the chickens Griever plays out his own comic opera which he had painted earlier. The painted scene is an example of "Trickster meditation," another irony, since in order to accomplish anything, Griever must do more than meditate, he must act: "Griever pinched his ear and spat near the cages. Frustrated, his humor turned sour, he demanded, in his loudest voice, the liberation of all the chickens" (40). Griever is frustrated because to him "no one seemed to notice the rash turn to meditation" (40). Contrary to what Griever thinks, however, "the audience was drawn to the trickster and his imaginative acts:...Mind monkeys...would have done no less than emancipate the birds in a free market. Those who liberate, in traditional stories, are the heroes of the culture" (40). Griever's appeal for the Chinese equivalent to "liberation" from his colleagues is in itself a Trickster act which attempts a liberation, a liberation of the concept from a culturally imposed meaning. It is an imaginative act as is indicated by the appearance of Sugar Dee who thinks the crowd surrounding Griever is all part of a movie set (44). Sugar Dee and Jack "would rather not get involved in this idiotic scheme" (44) of chicken liberation.

Along with Griever's criticism of the Chinese socialist state are subtle reminders that the American state is perhaps no better. When Griever tries to buy all the chickens we are
informed that the American system is also in question. As he pays out his money for the rooster, which he names Matteo Ricci, "he soughed and whistled a tune from 'The Stars and Stripes Forever.' The cock marched in place and shit on his wrist" (37). The act mocks the United States. Another instance of mocking America comes through Grievers attitudes and impressions of his American colleagues. They are portrayed as having the same colonialistic attitudes which his public school teachers held. For example, when asked once again for the concepts of "chicken liberation" the blonde retorts, "For the record mister chicken king... what the hell are you doing with all these people?" (47). The label "chicken king" reminds Grievers of the day in public school he liberated frogs and got called "the frog king" (49). The elimination of the squeamish girls from the classroom, sickened by an experiment with frogs, is described as the "first level in the scientific colonization of nature" (48). The phrase "all these people" shows the same colonial need to group people into "us" and "them," an attitude which one of Grievers teachers had shown in his public school days.

Grievers mocks the attitude of self-importance and the racist views held by Zhang and by Grievers cigar-smoking blonde teacher. We do see Chinese people who are unlike Zhang and, in the passage where the cigar-smoking blonde teacher critiques Indians and mixedbloods, we notice the absence of approval of her views from the other teachers:
One teacher, a tall blonde who dared to smoke narrow cigars, said, 'The cause of [Griever's] behavior, without a doubt, is racial. Indians never had it easier than now, the evil powers of settlement are out, but this troubled mixedblood child is given to racial confusion of two identities, neither of which can be secured in one culture. This disruption of the soul,' she continued as she laboured over the cigar, 'become manifest as character disorders. He is not aware of his whole race, not even his own name.' She inhaled too much and choked. The other teachers were silent in the thick blue smoke. (49-50)

Moreover, Griever is aware, not only of his name, but also the origin of that name (50). The views of the blonde cigar-smoking teacher are without substance yet they persist.

The portrayal of many of Griever's American colleagues shows that the colonial attitudes which existed when Griever was a child continue in the present. Griever's colleagues are described in a mocking tone:

Luther Holes, the valetudinarian and guest house sycophant; Hannah Dustin, the computer separatist; Carnegie Morgan, also known as Carnie, the tallest teacher with the widest mouth and a rich name; Gingerie Anderson-Peterson, place name consumer with a peculiar accent; Jack and Sugar Dee, the inseparable industrial management consultants; and Colin Marplot Gloome, the retired time and motion scholar. (66)

Each of these foreign teachers bears a tell-tale name which reflects his or her character. Hannah Dustin is given the harshest treatment; her racist insecurities are depicted in two recurrent dreams. In the first, she is haunted by dark children who claim she is their mother; in the second, columns of silent immigrants stand in public welfare lines around her house, and when she tries to enter, hundreds of hands touch her clothes and examine the labels and seams. In both dreams, the children and immigrants are mixedbloods, their hands soiled and covered with mold. (77)
Hannah's attitudes towards mixedbloods parallel those of the blonde cigar-smoking teacher (Hannah also smokes cigars) of Griever's childhood: like the blonde teacher "she believes mixedbloods are inferior" (77) but her "racial bone of contention is based on distorted demographic information" (77).

Although Griever derides his fellow Americans for their colonialist racist attitudes he by no means idealizes life on his reservation. In fact he scorns the life on the reservation because colonialist attitudes exist there just as much as they do elsewhere. There is possibly as much corruption on the reservation as there is in China. The letter from Mother Whiteman which Griever reads to his colleagues shows the extent of the corruption on tribal land:

When you went over there you know what happened well they cut the juice at the electric can opener plant and the bingo hall that the tribe opened last year with our land claims money because they went broke and never paid the bill and we all got dumped out in the cold same as the old times and they closed down the can opener plant to keep the bingo going and the lake froze early and so we got unemployment now and Pink Babe got a new job selling shoes with no heels those new ones that are made that way and Miser Mae she washes new clothes in town to make them look worn down for sale and nothing else now. By By Mother Whiteman. (125)

Things on the reservation, even under tribal control, are just the "same as the old times." However, this form of corruption is more insidious than that which existed in the old days because now the tribal leaders are the ones who exploit their own people instead of outside colonialist racists of former
days. Conditions on the reservation, therefore, are not any different from those Griever finds in China.

If there is any cure at all for the social conditions Griever describes, it perhaps involves a return to the non-material world. Such a return involves the imagination. Griever sees a strong connection between dreams, imagination, stories, and words. He discloses the correlation between dreams and words early in the narrative as he writes to his cousin China Browne:

The new sounds of this place hold me for ransom...Here, now, alone on the line, huge beetles maul the rusted screen with their thick brown wings and small mosquitoes wail behind my neck and then bite me on the ears and knuckles, nowhere else.

In the bedroom and near the wide window there are hidden sounds, hollow whispers from the cool concrete. Even the silence bothers me, no whacks from the summer wood, no motors at night, no sirens. Dreams and the urban wither haunt me the most this first hot and humid night. (13-14)

The "new sounds" which are "hidden" and emerge as "hollow whispers" in a "silence" which "bothers" him are suppressed voices in the foreign land which demand to be heard. They hold Griever for ransom until he tells of his experiences in the new land. Griever explains the relationship between these voices and dreams and their ties to history and the mythic past:

...the voices came to me in dreams, and then later at the window.

We were on the desert silk roads, surrounded by mountains. You buried your toes in the hot blue sand and then the scene turned cool and we were at a glacial stream with luminous animals and birds.

Actually the dream started much earlier on the plane while I was reading a book about the first
explorers on the old silk roads who looted the temples and ruins in the ancient cities on the rim of the Taklamakan, and somehow, over the ocean, the words became a real desert scene. I was there, amused at first, but when I tried to hold the words down, a voice echoed from the page. The plane was transformed into a mansion, then a mountain, and the passengers became bears. The wind howled over the white poplars and the camels shuddered until the woman in the seat next to me asked me several personal questions.... She hauled me back from dream scenes with her narrow realities, back at the moment a secret was about to be revealed to me. She held me down to the words, a good tourist.... Time crowds me now, but these words need me here to hold down this place. (14-15)

The above shows the relationship between words and dreams as the voices "came to [him] in dreams" (14). Furthermore, it demonstrates the link between the dream world and the real world because Griever hears these same voices "later at the window" (14). In addition, the bears, which we later see in the same letter as a central motif in tribal stories, include the contemporaneous world since Griever's fellow passengers on the plane "became bears" (14). Thus Griever's letter to China Browne discloses an affinity between words, dreams, traditional stories, and the imagination.

Griever believes that the correlation between dreams and the imagination is strong. In fact they are the same thing undertaken during different psychic states: asleep, Griever dreams of how the world is, was and could be; awake, he imagines the world as it could be, as it is and as it was. He believes that imagination is the only reality which is worthwhile. On the plane to China he tells a woman: "'Listen,
imagination is the real world, all the rest is bad television" (28). Later at the University he informs his students that "Imagination...is what burns in humans. We are not methods to be discovered, we are not freeze-dried methodologies. We remember dreams, never data, at the wild end" (32). Dreams, however, can be stolen unless one takes precautions:

Once a night, no matter where he rests, at hotels, guest houses, berths on trains, with friends or relatives, the trickster turns the mattress over and loosens the sheets before he sleeps. Grieve learned this unusual practice from an old shaman who told grim stories about the dream thieves and the children who lose their dreams. "Turn the mattress," she told the children on cold winter nights, "because lonesome white people with no shadows hound the tribes and capture our dreams." Tricksters and mixedbloods, she said, 'lose their dreams when they talk too much in bed, their stories are sacked in the blood.'

The white dream thieves had double trouble in the guest house because the maids there turned the mattresses over in the morning and never tucked the sheets. (56)

For Grieve, a world illuminated by nothing but reason seems rather horrible. In China "dreams retreat to the corners like insects...[where the people] remember [their] past in lost letters and colonial maps, the remains of foreign concessions" (22). The Chinese people are not defeated but are rather in a retreat from the forces which would dehumanize them. Their dreams are likened to insects in corners and in a cryptic phrase Grieve writes, "imagine a dream world where pests could be distracted with ideas and spiritual energies" (59). The dreams are in the corners, in shadowy places, in hiding
and not totally absent. Grieaver believes that once the dreams emerge from the shadows they would once again be effective weapons against the mind control of totalitarian states. Consequently, in the remainder of the narrative, Grieaver attempts to mobilize everyone "with ideas and spiritual energies" (59). These ideas and energies come to the Trickster by way of dreams, traditional stories and the imagination.

Grieaver's obvious role as Trickster is crucial in establishing his socio-cultural role. His interstitial existence gives him the same function as the Trickster of the oral tales, who Barbara Babcock states, serves "to confuse and to escape the structures of society and the order of cultural things" (54). Tricksters warn of the dangers involved in rigid societal structures by embarking on adventures which point to the obduracy of social and cultural codes in which people believe. Grieaver attempts to overturn "cold cultures and the wiles of socialist bureaucracies" (79) with his imagination and meets with frustration. He realizes that "some situations...demand more than paint and creases to understand the cultural calendars" (202). He is practically powerless over the forces he challenges. He is, however, victorious in one substantial way: he gives Egas Zhang, "a strong dose of estrogen [which] he thinks is bear paw" (233). The estrogen will give Zhang "the big tits he always wanted to see, his very own tits, and raise his voice in less than a week" (233). Grieaver's little victories, like those of Abel and Nameless,
are personal: the "cold cultures" and "bureaucracies" remain while Griever escapes. In his final letter to his cousin China Browne he is exultant as he describes his flight:

No more panic holes for me because the air has become the place to release my rage. I roar at the dawn, I roar at the wind, I roar at nothing and everything seems fine now, I am my own painting over the mountains. So far, the ultralight engine has been louder than my voice. Do you suppose people hear me on the ground? (233)

This is a facetious question since the ultralight is louder than his voice, but does it matter? It seems that the only freedom worthwhile and necessary comes once an individual realizes the limits of his powers to change things in this world of recurrent difficulty. Griever's adventures help to reexamine existing social conditions in China as well as in America. In a more overt and lively manner than HMD or WB, Griever demonstrates that the real freedom comes through the use of imagination, dreams, words and tribal stories. Through tribal stories people get a sense of who they are and how to escape the binding social creeds which imprison them and thus they are able to strike a balance with the world.
1. Dorothy Van Ghent says in *The English Novel* that "Quixote is supremely a man animated by 'the word'--creating reality for him by determining what he sees and what he feels and what he does--so Quixote in turn has a similar effect upon people, subtly changing their outlook, creating in them new forms of thought and activity. *Don Quixote* may be looked on as an extensive investigation of the creative effect of language upon life" (318).
Momaday, Welch, and Vizenor employ elements of traditional oral stories, especially the Trickster protagonist of those stories, to create new Trickster narratives that address issues relevant to the contemporary world. The protagonists of *House Made of Dawn*, *Winter In The Blood*, and *Griever: An American Monkey King In China*, like all Tricksters, learn lessons that help them come to terms with themselves and their worlds. Abel comes to understand his place in the world through the stories of his mythic origins which his friend Benally tells him. Nameless comes to realize the truth of his heritage through the discovery of his grandfather, Yellow Calf, who tells him a version of his family history that differs from what his grandmother had told him. Griever, who appreciates and understands oral narratives, especially Trickster narratives, eventually discerns that the oral narratives can be abused and misrepresented; this becomes clear to him as he prepares to leave China, "a culture that pretended to understand the monkey king and trickeries" (228). All three novels show that one can adjust to the modern world without giving up the teachings of the traditional stories.

Trickster, always the central character in the oral narratives, is likewise the protagonist in the above mentioned novels. Once we regard the protagonists of these novels as Tricksters, which this study does, then we can see that each
of these novels, Trickster fashion, teaches about living in the modern world. The Trickster protagonists in these narratives eventually integrate the teachings of traditional narratives into their lives. This study has focused on some of the more obviously ambiguous parts of these narratives as instances of Trickster acts. They include Abel killing the eagle and the Albino and challenging Martinez; Nameless meeting with the Airplane Man, his preoccupation with fish, and his acts of urination; Griever releasing chickens and convicts, his preoccupation with Trickster stories and the power of language, and his attitude towards himself as a Trickster who believes he has the power to change the world. Each writer of these narratives--with varying degrees of consciousness--works within the tradition of Trickster storytelling, incorporating elements of the old Trickster tales, particularly marginal figures betwixt and between categories, unexplained incidents, symbolic inversions, irony, tricking and being tricked, teaching and learning.

Trickster's interstitial stance--betwixt and between animal and human, natural and cultural, physical and spiritual--is essential to remind us that we are all unfinished creatures. The protagonists of the above novels are all marginal figures who exist at the periphery of their societies. Abel, "caught between two worlds"--the traditional world of his grandfather and the contemporary world--is also sometimes only indistinctly human, especially in passages
relating his sexual activities during which he is described as a bear. Nameless is not aligned with any particular animal (unless we count the fish), but he does talk to animals and he exists between the farm and the various towns surrounding it. Like Abel, he is at the crossroads betwixt and between the traditional world and contemporary society and feels secure in neither the white world nor the Indian world. Griever, like Abel, is often described as a bear. He is between the natural and the "civilized" world since he talks to animals. As well he is between the West and the East as an American teacher in China; his affinity with Trickster stories transcends the temporal boundaries of past and present. His mixed-blood heritage shows him to be between and beyond racial distinctions. All three live interstitially and therefore escape to some degree the structures of society.

Each of the novels offers lessons that are similar to those offered by the story of the little startlers. Abel shows a total disregard and disrespect for people's beliefs as he strangles a bird sacred to the people. Like Wîsahkêcahk he pays for his actions by being ostracized, but he also eventually takes responsibility for his actions. Nameless's acts of urination recall Wîsahkêcahk's scatological act and they show, perhaps unconsciously, his disregard for his heritage. Nonetheless, by the end of the novel he is taking responsibility for his actions and is gaining a high regard for his heritage. Griever consciously performs ludicrous acts
in order to live up to his self-image as a Trickster; these acts demonstrate his arrogance, like Wîsahkêcahk's, something that gets himself and others in and out of trouble. All are persistent in their endeavours to find a balance in the world—just as persistent as the little startlers in their quest for revenge. Their acts are symbolic inversions which generate laughter—more so in WB and Griever than in HMD—and invert cultural notions of respect, humility, and tolerance. The Trickster as protagonist in these contemporary Indian narratives serves the same purpose as he does in the oral narratives: with (occasional) comic twists and turns he teaches how to adapt to changing times.

Symbolic inversions in HMD play a central role in highlighting Trickster's lessons. The first of Abel's acts which is a symbolic inversion occurs when he kills the eagle. As the first symbolic inversion Abel's Trickster act momentarily questions the importance of cultural codes, like the need for the traditional reverence for the eagle in the contemporary world. The second symbolic inversion in the narrative occurs when Abel kills the Albino. In this inversion we rediscover an essential truth in the conflation of the Albino and Abel which points to Abel's mythic origins and to his symbolically trying to kill a part of himself. When Abel undertakes the dawn run he undergoes a "transvaluation of values"—the values of the contemporary world which encourage a disregard for tradition—and reaffirms man's place in the
natural world. Abel moves from the self-hatred caused by his inability to relate to his world in the beginning of the narrative to regeneration and gains a certain wisdom and understanding as he runs on behalf of his grandfather at the close of the narrative. As Trickster he highlights the importance of the traditional teachings in today's world.

Symbolic inversions are also key elements of WB. The first of Nameless's inversions is his symbolic desecration of his father's "grave." This act momentarily questions the cultural notion of heredity and the respect due to the father. Nameless's second symbolic inversion, his pissing against the fence just after he reminisces about his family history, leads him on a journey of rediscovery. During his journey the nameless Trickster undergoes a "transvaluation of values," the values of respect and tolerance, as he comes to understand that he is not at fault in the death of his brother. He also affirms man's place in the world as he comes to realize the truth of his family history. His story teaches responsibility for one's own future as he moves from blaming the land for the distance he feels at the beginning of the narrative to an awareness that the world is cockeyed and that man has little power to change forces of nature like death and storms, but he does have some power over cultural codes.

Trickster Griever performs symbolic inversions which also offer fresh views of reality, a "transvaluation of values," and an affirmation of man's place in the world. His first
symbolic inversion is the ambiguous greeting "Dear China" in his opening letter to his cousin China Browne. "China" can refer to both his cousin and to the country, and while the "Dear" is certainly an endearment for his cousin, given his eventual disillusion with China it becomes an instance of sarcasm. Its ambiguity symbolically inverts the common western romantic notion of an ancient oriental culture and thus prepares us for a fresh view of reality. The second symbolic inversion comes when Griever signs off with "Griever de Tianjin" (18). It is a symbolic inversion because it is typed not written like the "Griever de Hocus" (235) at the end of the narrative proper. Both symbolic inversions highlight the creative and destructive effects of language on life, especially its influence on one's view of reality. While Griever critiques traditions which are "invented" through the manipulation of language, he is nevertheless a character whose arrogance and pride serve to remind us that there needs to be a balanced view of the world. Because of Griever's view of himself as a Trickster who can change the world through his imagination, he is given to extremes, extremes which have disastrous effects on those he would help. In his insistence on his Trickster powers, Griever is like a born again Indian\(^1\) who makes absurd, erroneous claims about the culture he has once denied but one which he has now embraced blindly and zealously. While Griever expounds the virtues of the oral tales, his own story warns against extremes: the stories have
great value but are not likely capable of the kind of monumental change that Griever suggests.

Although Abel and Nameless's glum outlook on life seems to diverge from the well-known and generally accepted (perhaps stereotypical) figure of Trickster as a fun-loving, carefree individual (which Griever is), their self-pity and despondency are actually aspects of Trickster. Trickster, at one time or another, exhibits all traits of being human. Paul Radin notes that Hare, the Winnebago transformer, is sad and weeps for the people (90). Other Trickster tales contain passages where Trickster mourns loved ones and pities himself for his misfortunes, but most proponents of Trickster tales say very little about these episodes, concentrating more on Trickster's lively, wild, and ludicrously appealing behavior. In the Cree Trickster narratives with which I am most familiar Wîsahkêcahk mourns the loss of his loved ones and shows self-pity in the face of impending doom. In the last tale of the Cree Trickster cycle, Wîsahkêcahk indulges in self-pity, and is despondent because Wihtikô, intent on eating him, has ordered him to gather firewood so he can cook the hapless Trickster. The point of the story, particularly relevant to Abel and Nameless, is that in times of despair and desperation it is wise to seek help to overcome one's difficulties and not submit totally to self-pity and despair. A skilful storyteller usually relates Wîsahkêcahk's self pity in mocking tones, generating a laughter which seems cruel and out of place in
the face of the Trickster's predicament. Such a mockery of the protagonist that generates laughter is evident in *House Made of Dawn* when Abel emerges from the bus in a drunken stupor. Similarly in *Winter in the Blood* the nameless narrator describes his homecoming after a drunken spree in one of the surrounding towns.

Abel and Nameless, then, are not stereotypical drunken Indians but Tricksters who would naturally over-indulge their appetites. They over-indulge their appetite for liquor, a relatively modern introduction to Indian society. The drunken Indian Trickster and some of the horrible things that happen to him offer a black uncertain humour similar to that found in many oral narratives, and especially evident in the above story where Wíshâhkêcahk is sure to meet an untimely horrible death. It is a subtle humour at best but the subtlety is necessary; if it were too obvious it would be less challenging, less crucial. Trickster's presence in these narratives indicates that the stereotype of the drunken Indian overcome by the changes in his traditional world need not remain. Abel is in the depths of despair but he gradually pulls himself out and undertakes the dawn run of his people, thus embracing the old ways. Nameless, not quite as despondent as Abel, views his drunken sprees with some humour but he too comes to see the importance of the traditional ways to his world. As Trickster, Abel's actions are simultaneously comic, brutal, horrifying, and absurd. Nameless's actions are
similarly comic and absurd, though less brutal and less horrifying. While Grievers does not conform to the drunken Indian stereotype, understandably since he seems to be the next generation of Trickster, he nevertheless partakes in acts similar to Abel and Nameless's in their absurdity—it is absurd to think, for example, that releasing the heavily guarded prisoners would secure their freedom, yet Grievers sets them loose anyway. As Tricksters, all three exemplify the need to adapt, while keeping to the old ways, in order to survive in a world which is, by nature, always changing.

Each of the narratives under discussion, in its own way, shows the relevance of tribal stories to the modern world. House Made of Dawn reveals that self-denial of one's heritage can only lead to one's total alienation from the world. Winter In The Blood discloses that it is necessary to question, and explore for one's self, the true history of a people, regardless of strict societal codes. Grievers: An American Monkey King In China demonstrates the dangers of pride and arrogance—on the part of both the Chinese and Grievers—in the face of a new found freedom. All the narratives display the significance of traditional stories in the modern world and employ Tricksters as protagonists to teach lessons about how to accommodate a world always in flux. As Tricksters, Abel, Nameless, and Grievers serve to remind us that we must respect the teachings inherent in Trickster stories, show patience in the face of adversity, and take responsibility for our own
House Made of Dawn, Winter In the Blood, and Griever: An American Monkey King In China are the continuation of trickster stories in the modern world. These novels are weapons against authoritarianism and stasis. They underline the importance of cultural pluralism. They also suggest that Indians are not static cultural artifacts to be studied and mourned over for the loss of their traditional worlds. Rather, they are survivors who, in Momaday's words, "have held on to their own, secret souls; and in this there is a resistance and an overcoming, a long awaiting" (58). So Trickster and his tales continue. To laugh at and with Trickster we take ourselves less seriously and are less quick to take offence as we trudge along the road with him to a new freedom.
Notes

1. A "born again Indian" is a person who once denied his heritage but who, upon a rediscovery of his Indianness, makes absurd claims about the culture which he once denied and tends to be ardently pro-Indian and anti-white--a "radical," I suppose.

2. Edward Ahenakew recounts the tale in "Cree Trickster Tales" although he sanitizes the narrative when the ermine climbs into the Wihtikô's mouth instead of going through his anus to get at the cannibal's intestines. Radin cites a similar episode in the Assiniboine Trickster myth (102).

3. The motif of the drunk is used quite extensively in comedy routines.
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