

“Trying to Remember the Ancient Navajo Way”:

A. A. Carr's Eye Killers

Dr. Svetlana Seibel
North American Literary and Cultural Studies
Saarland University
svetlana.seibel@uni-saarland.de

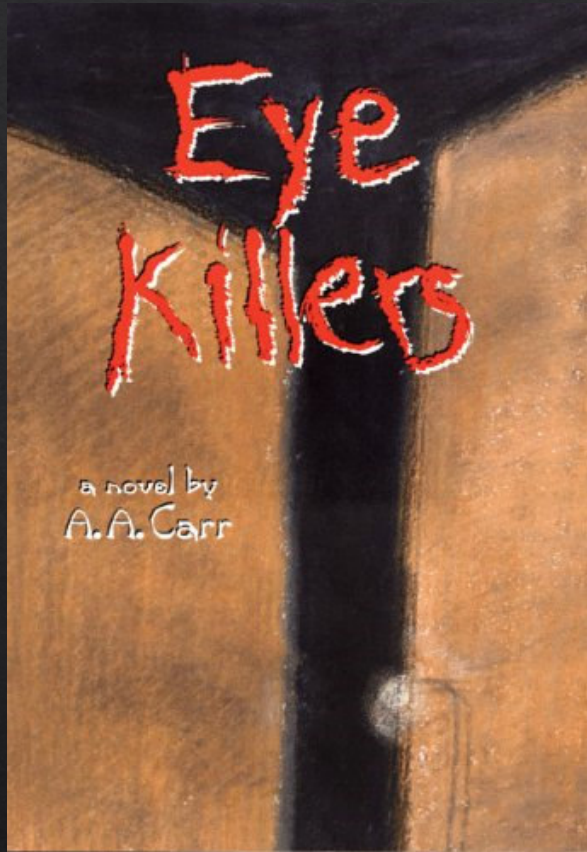


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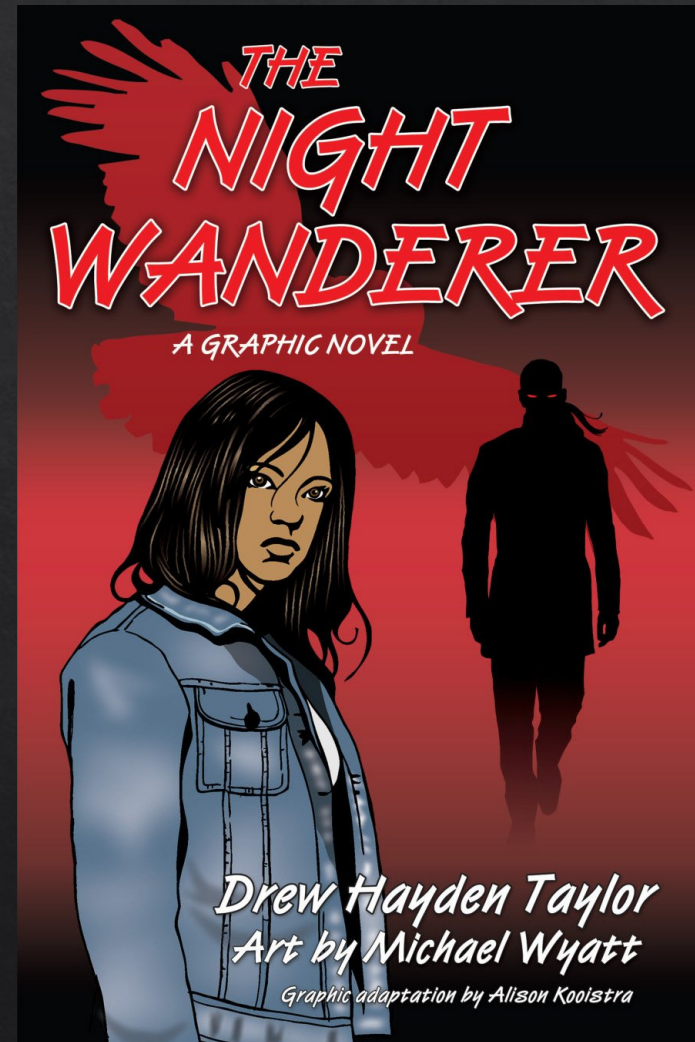
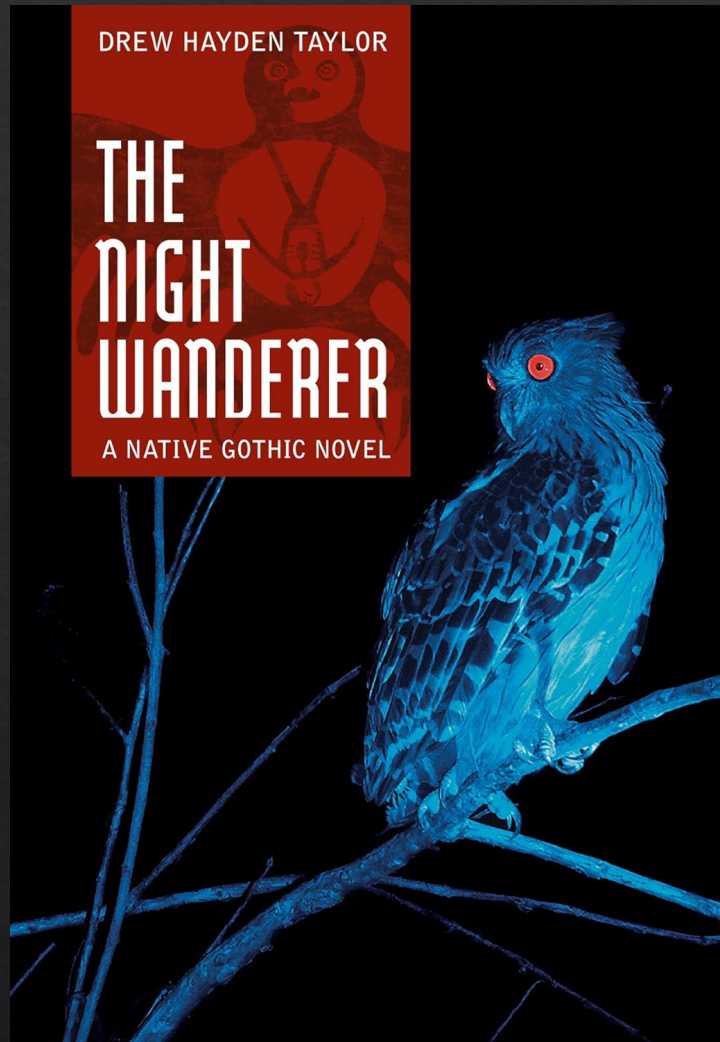
What do you think about when you think about vampires?

- Vampires drink blood → violence, greed, consumption
- Vampires are immortal → time, especially the past

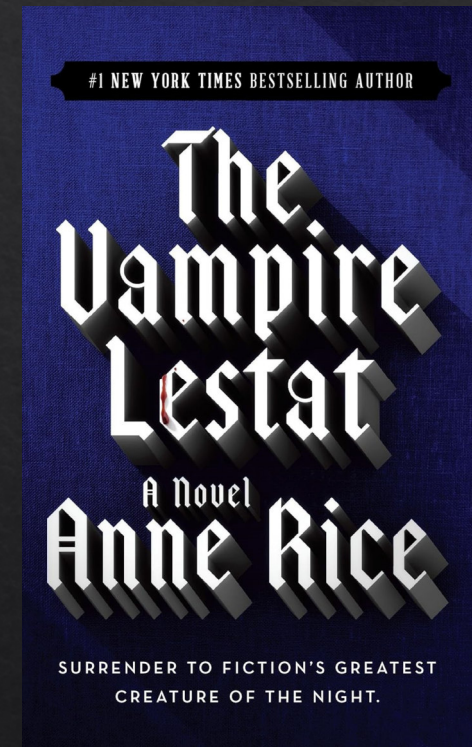
A.A. Carr, *Eye Killers*



- ◇ 1995
- ◇ A.A. Carr (Diné [Navajo]/Langua Pueblo): writer; producer and director of Prairie Dog Films
- ◇ First novel; a sequel planned, but never realized
- ◇ Indigenous vampire fiction



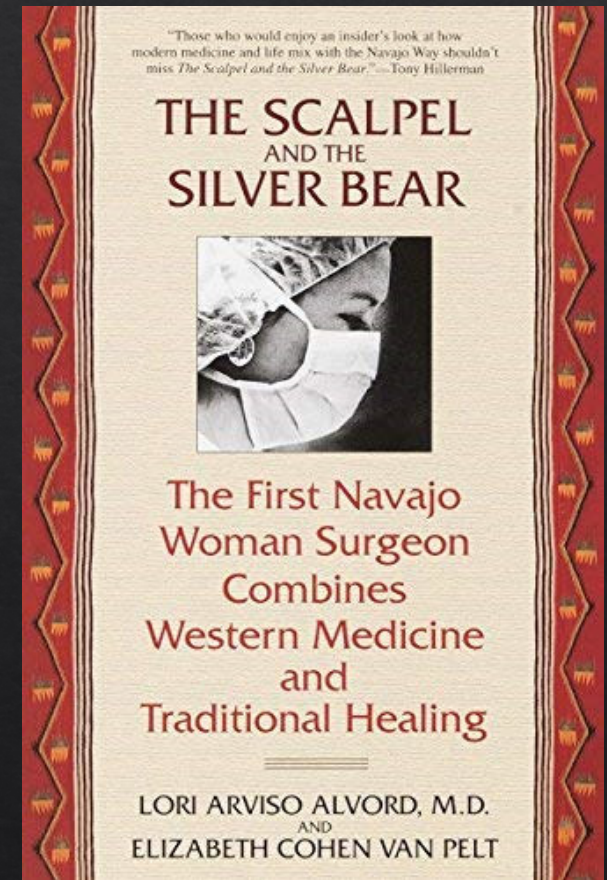
“I am a continual awareness onto myself [...].” (Rice 66)



Historical Grief

“My sister and I did not inherit our spoken language, as English was the primary language in our home, but we did inherit the grief of our people. It is often referred to as ‘historical grief’—coming into this world with the burden of centuries of suffering behind you. Grief for crimes committed hundreds of years ago that as you grow older and learn of it, becomes your own. [...] Navajo children are told of the capture and murder of their forefathers and mothers, and then they too must share in the legacy of grief. In addition to dealing with the stories of the past, each new generation must also deal with the effects of this grief on the previous generation—poverty, depression, and alcoholism. It snowballs. As I grew older and learned more about the history of my tribe, I too grieved—and became angry. (12)”

Alvord, Lori Arviso. *The Scalpel and the Silver Bear: The First Navajo Woman Surgeon Combines Western Medicine and Traditional Healing*. New York: Bantam Books, 2000.



The Vampire Project

“In January 1994, John Liddle, director of the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress, protested, ‘If the Vampire Project goes ahead and patents are put on genetic material from Aboriginal people, this would be legalized theft. Over the last 200 years, non-Aboriginal people have taken our land, language, culture and health—even our children. Now they want to take the genetic material which makes us Aboriginal people as well.’ (157)”

Whitt, Laurie Anne. “Cultural Imperialism and the Marketing of Native America.” *Natives and Academics: Researching and Writing about American Indians*. Ed. Devon A. Mihesuah. Lincoln: Nebraska UP, 1998. 139-171.

“Carr’s *Eye Killers* reworlds the conventions of its generic context in order to disrupt and displace the binaries that separate modernity from tradition in order to imagine Indigenous futurities out of the incestuous, predatory death of vampire continuance.” (352)

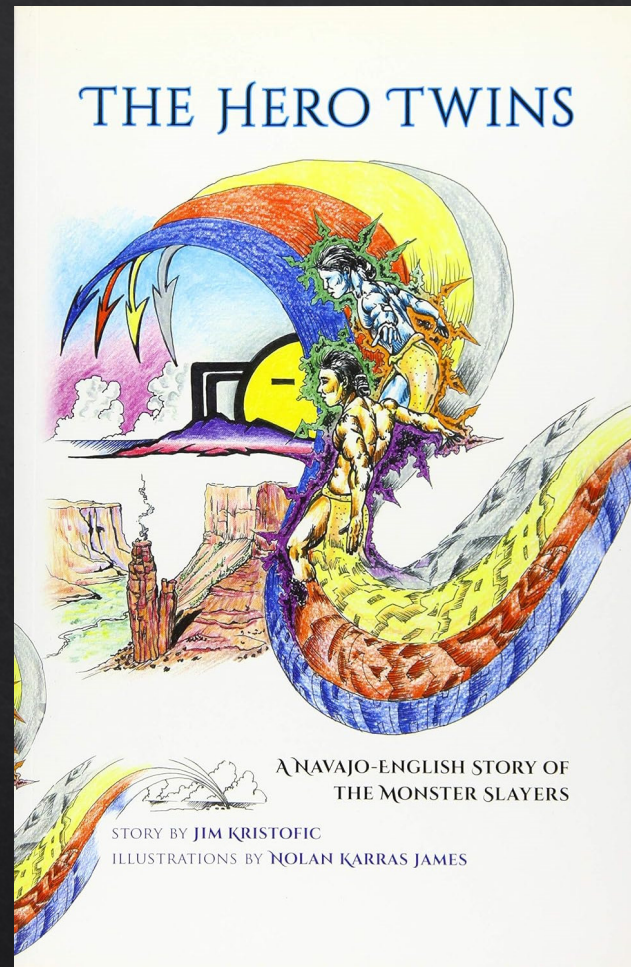
Byrd, Jody A. “Red Dead Conversations: American Indian Transgeneric Fictions.” *The Oxford Handbook of Indigenous American Literature*. Eds. James H. Cox and Daniel Heath Justice. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2014. 344-360.

“The moon, a pale eye, glared above a barren land. Blocky, buttressed towers rose above an ocean of sand and shattered rock. He remembered fragments of crossing the still, dead sea: a turning bowl of alien constellations; shifting sand hills; twin star-imprinted masked heads emerging from red boulders and white sands, sleepless eyeholes watching and hunting. A freezing wind numbed his eye. He remembered a lithe, dark-eyed girl; how he howled her name when the sun’s fire descended. He remembered his name.” (*EK** 1)

* *EK* = *Eye Killers*

“Michael Roanhorse felt the October winds eating at his body, removing whole chunks from his legs, mind, and heart, carrying them in clouds to the domain of old man Moon-bearer. Stars flew in the black water sky, whirling shapes that reminded Michael of the ancient Navajo stories told only after the first snowfall. The living stories his granddaughter, Melissa, should be learning and keeping secure in her heart.” (*EK 5*)

““You know about me, too, the way Margaret used to. I’m just a dreaming old man. [...] Help me to remember my grandmother’s stories, old man,’ he said to the moon. ‘Come down and sit with me and Lee’” (*EK 5*).



Kristofic, Jim. *The Hero-Twins: A Navajo-English Story of the Monster Slayers*. University of New Mexico Press, 2015. Illustrations by Nolan Karras James.

[Falke:]

“It is a bitter song that should be remembered, kept hidden, not to be sung twice.” (*EK* 45)

“Michael sung snatches of his grandmother’s song, deciphering the words and remembering their meaning, so that he could give the complete song to Melissa, for her unborn children” (*EK* 63-64).

“A story about Changing Woman. Michael searched through fifty years or so of crowded memory, but he couldn’t find it. He had lost the story” (*EK 15*)

“[...] myths live or die through people.” (116)

“Myths and their enactment in every form were the way a tribe remembered to remember their shared experience as a people.” (115)

Cajete, Gregory. *Look to the Mountain: An Ecology of Indigenous Education*. Skyland: Kivaki Press, 1994.

“Only a tiny portion of those powerful Navajo songs and stories was left here on earth, if he could believe what Nanibaa’ had told him before she died. And those few elders who held the remaining wisdom and stories and knowledge in their hearts were dying like butterflies in a freak spring frost.” (*EK 7*)

“[Michael] had sat all the Navajo curing chants aside after Nanibaa’ had died from cancer. Nothing, now, could have gotten him to a sing even if not showing meant life or death for him. [...] After Nanibaa’s death, he had flung away his charred prayer sticks, eagle feathers, and bits of dried sage over the snowy edge of Canyon de Chelly. [...] He would never return to the old ways, the ancient ways of his people. Some Navajos would say he had forsaken his Beauty Way and would shun him. He didn’t care. In his heart, there was nothing beautiful about the Navajo medicine anymore. It was a dark and fierce power, powerful and frightening, something that should have never been born. He believed in its potency, but that part in which he had trusted, the beauty of it, had spoiled.” (*EK 62*)

“You’ve seen much more than what we’ve seen, Diana. You know of these vampires. You are not Pueblo or Navajo, but you’ve told a story that Emily recognizes. And it’s not only Melissa that needs healing. It is you too.” (*EK* 245)

“It’s time to heal the wounds that the government soldiers caused us, time to heal the hurt, the weeping, and distrust that still lives between our people. Emily has seen this in ceremony. You must accept it now.” (*EK* 245)

“[...] zone of uncertainty brought about by transcultural contact is a positive space in which positive growth and change occur” (184).

Peters, Jesse. “A Multitude of Routs, Roads and Paths: Transcultural Healing in A.A. Carr’s *Eye Killers*.” *Native American Literature: Boundaries & Sovereignities*. Ed. Kathryn W. Shanley. Spec. Issue of *Paradoxa: Studies in World Literary Genres* 15 (2001): 184-197.

A. A. Carr:

“[...] I think there is more to vampire that people do not understand either, which is very exciting to me. They have a depth to them because there is a sense of the ancient world of our ancestors which we all share. We don't really know what they are, or where the idea comes from. It is traced, culturally and historically, but why? Why do so many cultures have this particular tradition?” (11)

Arrivé, Mathilde. “Interview with Navajo-Laguna Novelist and Filmmaker Aaron Albert Carr.” *Revue de Recherche en Civilisation Américaine*, vol. 2, 2010, pp. 1-17.

[Michael to Diana:]

“I’m not through with this Eye Killer. Long ago, the first chanter sang a powerful song of fire, which destroyed it; but didn’t break apart its body. That first chanter didn’t understand the vampire way. And didn’t have a warrior helping him who understood the vampire’s chant. [...] That’s why Eye Killer came back . . . grew again. But Emily remembered that first chanter’s song, and where it was born. She gave it to you, *shi’yazhi*. You have broken Falke. And you helped me understand him too. Helped all of us. You have brought Melissa back home. I don’t know what to say, except—you are a fine, strong woman.” (*EK* 340)

“They appeared over the crests of the hills and mountains; the Old Ones who had vanished long ago. They raised thundering, rolling chants to the clouds, unafraid. They swept around Michael, surrounding him, and he raced them, keeping his beat steady. They recognized his song.” (*EK* 343)

“The truth about stories is that that’s all we are.”

- Thomas King



Thank you!