

**“Your Story Reminds Me of Something”:  
Spectacle and Speculation in Aaron Carr’s  
*Eye Killers***

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**Spectacle** n. 1. a public display or performance, esp. a showy or ceremonial one. 2. a thing or person seen, esp. an unusual or ridiculous one. 3. a strange or interesting object or phenomenon. [from Latin *specere*, to look at]

**Speculation** n. 1. the act or instance of speculating. 2. a supposition, theory, or opinion arrived at through speculating. 3. investment involving high risk but also the possibility of high profits. [from Latin *specere*, to look at]<sup>1</sup>

In 1995, the Laguna/Navajo independent film director/producer Aaron Carr published his first novel, *Eye Killers*. Ostensibly, the narrative is a traditional tale, in the gothic vein, of vampires wreaking havoc in New Mexico and of vampire hunters battling to overcome evil and restore some semblance of order from chaos. The issues addressed by the novel are, however, highly complex, drawing upon a 500-year history of colonialism in the Americas and upon Carr’s own experience as a Native American of both Keresan and Navajo descent living in the United States at the close of the twentieth century. Despite the fantastic nature of the genre, the issues that Carr raises are both a response to and, more importantly, a dialogue with conditions that are very much contemporary and very much “real,” or apparent, in the ongoing social, economic, and political effects of colonization on an indigenous population. Notably, it is a colonization that is effected primarily by the overwhelming significance of *perception*: by America’s inability, or perhaps lack of desire, to perceive Native peoples; by the intrinsic connections between

perception and the legal and political connotations of both recognition and acknowledgement; and by the resultant widespread perception of Native American absence.

Carr's spectacular vampires embody not only the reality of evil, but also trace the specular presence of its (un)natural extensions in contemporary Native reality: exploitation, oppression, and inhumanity. This presence is traced by Carr's complex speculations upon a continued colonization of Native peoples that is achieved, in part, by the biological definitions of society and nation through blood and by the scientific measurement of blood's "racial" content. Carr's speculations also trace the role played by exploitation, oppression, and inhumanity in the contemporary re-colonization of Native peoples and lands, primarily in the actions and economic interests of global corporate enterprise, of resource exploitation, and of contemporary genetic science.

In *Eye Killers*, Carr exposes contemporary Native American political concerns by skilfully weaving multiple interactive dialogues with horror literature and film, contemporary U.S. cultural preoccupations, post-modern philosophies, traditional vampire lore, contemporary Native literature, and Native oral traditions. The concept of perception is a central theme of the text, immediately evident in Carr's choice of title; and a primary concern is the inherent danger of undetected simulation and of the inability to see. The novel examines the increasingly imperceptible borders between reality and artifice, as well as the importance and thus, inevitably, the potential inadequacy of human perception. Carr's vision of the contemporary United States resonates with Jean Baudrillard's suggestion that America has moved *beyond* reality to become a hyperreality, inextricably bound up with simulation, devoted to erasing the boundaries between reality and illusion. For Baudrillard, the ultimate icon of American hyperreality—Disneyland—is "presented as imaginary" with the sole aim "to make us believe that *the rest* is real" (12, emphasis added). The problem is, of course, that individual and collective perception becomes inevitably altered, transformed, elided: *unreal*. In this sense, Baudrillard's thesis is highly applicable to contemporary Native America, as the Anishinaabe (Ojibway/Chippewa) critic and author Gerald Vizenor has long argued. For Vizenor, the concept of

Native America exists only as a simulation in the twenty-first century: America recognizes only the simulation and fails to *recognize*, or even to *see*, the reality of Native peoples or of contemporary Native life.

Perhaps inevitably, one distinct problem prevents America's recognition of contemporary Native America: any recognition must entail an equal recognition both of a less heroic history of U.S. settlement and of the ultimate failure of an assimilation project that claimed the power to successfully elide Native cultures. Vizenor makes a clear distinction between two very different "Native Americas": the simulation palatable to U.S. history, and contemporary Native reality. In the context of Carr's vampiric spectacle, Vizenor's distinction between Native reality ("Indian"), and popular simulation ("*indian*"), is appropriately *visual*, through the use of small case italics. The lack of a capital letter is evidence of Vizenor's refusal to recognize or dignify the simulation. Vizenor comments quite categorically that "the *indian* is a simulation, the absence of natives; the *indian* transposes the real, and the simulation of the real has no referent" (*Fugitive* 15). The primary problem that Vizenor identifies is that the emphatic presence of the simulated *indian* is precisely what ensures the "absence of the tribal real" (*Manifest* 4). In accordance with Vizenor's concepts, Carr's Native characters are, initially at least, conspicuous by their very absence, emulating, and thereby making way for European intrusion into, the empty landscape imperative to imperial ideology.

In *Eye Killers*, Carr forces his readers both to recognize and to see the enforced absence of contemporary Native reality, as he clearly traces the multiple and far-reaching effects of colonialism, not just for the colonized but also for the colonizers. Representative of all forms of evil and oppression, Carr's vampires are a combination of European aristocracy and nineteenth-century American settlers, pushing destructively west into Indian country. As we learn only gradually, Falke, Carr's primary vampire, is more than nine centuries old. A former monarch, Falke has emigrated to the New World from his one-time kingdom near Vienna. His two female accomplices, Elizabeth and Hanna, are both American settlers. Elizabeth Mary Washburn, born in Sugartit, Kentucky, is

descended from first generation European immigrants, from “stolid frontier” folk (39). Younger than Elizabeth, Hanna is still more than a century old, a “warrior” with “rage in her laughter” (209), whose past remains shrouded in mystery. Having been almost destroyed by the power of Native ceremonies sometime in the late nineteenth century, Falke has been in hiding with Hanna in the New Mexico desert, tended by Elizabeth.

Long before Falke and his vampire kin make themselves known to them, Carr’s human characters are all already “chased by monsters” (57), not least by the impact and reverberations of the imperial project upon both Native America and Ireland.<sup>2</sup> Falke clearly chooses his new “bride” carefully. Melissa Roanhorse is a high school student who is alienated from her family on the reservation through urban relocation to Albuquerque and equally estranged from her heavy drinking single mother, Sarah. Initially, Melissa is unprotected by family or community, and lacking in any kind of faith or belief: “I’m only a little bit Navajo, not really noticeable at all. What does all that bullshit magic matter to me?” (10). Friendless and unhappy, Melissa is especially vulnerable to the kind of kinship, family, and acceptance offered by Falke.

It is only when Melissa is lured away from her home by Falke that her predicament jolts her family—her Navajo/Keresan single mother, Sarah, and Navajo grandfather Michael—into recognition of the danger resulting from their alienation. Until he learns of Melissa’s disappearance, Michael shuns society, living with only his sheepdog in isolation on the borders between the Navajo and Keresan communities. Trapped in memories, bitter over the untimely or unjust deaths of his grandmother, brother, and wife, Michael has revoked his “Beauty Way,” the traditional Navajo faith. His daughter Sarah—Melissa’s mother—is equally alienated, drinking to ease the pain of her loneliness and failed relationships, perpetuating a verbally (and potentially physically) abusive relationship with her own daughter. We learn later in the novel that Sarah, missing for much of the text, has been one of the vampire’s first victims. Sarah’s early disappearance and ultimate death clearly signal her inability to protect her daughter from the evil that the vampires represent.

In fact, it takes a far wider and more disparate community to help Michael succeed in Melissa's recovery: the elderly Navajo Emily Sandoval, the Navajo/Keresan couple William and Doris Pacheco, the Keresan Samson White, and Melissa's Irish American high school teacher Diana Logan. The central vampire hunters, Diana and Michael, are themselves an intriguing blend of both Native American and Irish American characters. Both are haunted, if ultimately sustained, by the wisdom of their deceased but actively present ancestors: Diana's Grandma Patsy and Aunt Leslie; Michael's grandmother Nanibaa' and his wife Margaret. Notably, both the Native and the Irish characters correspond to the protagonists of much recent Native North American fiction that details the ongoing effects of colonialism:<sup>3</sup> they are disconnected, isolated from any sense of family; they live—either physically and emotionally—on the outskirts of community; and they are in need of healing and reintegration. Diana lives alone, attempting to recover from a devastating divorce and the sudden brutal death of her parents in a car crash; her memories “mass [...] like a cancerous tumour” and perpetually multiply, each nightmare “vomiting new ones” (17-18).

Initially, Carr's portrayal of Native characters emulates the absence ideologically imposed upon them. Melissa disappears after attacking Diana and another teacher; Sarah is missing for the majority of the text, appearing only in the opening and closing pages; and Michael's house is empty and deserted when Diana initially attempts to find him. When Michael takes Diana to meet Samson White at the Keresan village of Madrecita, Diana is conscious of the “dreadful silence [that] entered her heart” (193) and specifically comments on the conspicuous nature of Native absence:

“Is this a ghost village or what?” Diana prodded Michael's shoulder with her finger. “Everytime we come here, there's never anyone around.” (193)

It is perhaps pertinent that the only being that Diana can perceive, the old woman she sees sitting alone in an empty room, is almost immediately identified as a ghost. Despite her denials, Diana quite clearly

perceives the dead as opposed to the living native: "Of course there aren't any ghosts," Diana said sharply, thinking: Of course there were ghosts. In this room. Everywhere. (197)

Diana's perception is inextricably tangled with imperialistic notions of both the absence, and the demise of, Native America. Given the relatively numerous and conspicuous Native American population of the Southwest, it is highly significant that Melissa is the only indigenous student Diana has ever encountered in her classes. The implications are both numerous and complex: is Carr's critique directed at an education system that instinctively excludes Native students? At a failure in the education system to encourage or even to properly teach Native students? At a failure in Native students' own belief in their potential? At the inapplicability of mainstream education to Native life? Perhaps even at education as a pointless exercise for students who habitually return to widespread reservation unemployment?<sup>4</sup> If, as Veronica Hollinger suggests, one function of the fantastic is to trace what is absent (200), then Carr's choice of genre is particularly appropriate. The desired result of fantastical speculation is that a presence is actively marked, even actively perceived.

Carr's vampires—Falke, Hanna, and Elizabeth—are also simulations in the Baudrillardian sense: spectral, absented, an unseen presence. Like the Native characters in the novel, their presence most often goes undetected by a mainstream society that has shed its superstitions and relegates vampires, as it does Indians, to a distant, mystical, and irrelevant past. Unlike the Native Americans in Carr's novel, however, the vampires profit—and in this way they are linked to corporate enterprise—from their potential invisibility and are able to choose when, and how, to be visible or invisible. The importance of both visual perception and simulation is immediately evident in Carr's choice of title, *Eye Killers*. Obviously a reference to the vampiric trio of Falke, Elizabeth, and Hanna, the title nonetheless also exposes one of the keys to the vampire's success: the vampire can successfully simulate humanity; humanity is as blind to the vampire's true nature as the dominant culture is to the reality of contemporary Native America. The vampire's ability to subvert

human vision/perception is explicit in the scene in which Hanna attacks a group of youths who attempt to rape her and feeds until “glutted” and “engorged” (115-16). Hanna “adopt[s ...] an agitated walk, as if *she* were being hunted”, she “tremble[s ...] with hunger” in the knowledge that her would-be assailants “saw it as fear,” revelling all the while in the understanding that the “foolish masks” she adopts act to “seduce human prey” (111-12, emphasis added).

It is the spectacular nature of the vampire as spectacle that acts to kill the human eye, imperilling also the human “I.” The implicit danger is evident in the etymology of the terms “spectacle” and “spectacular”: the Latin *specere*, “to look at.” While the vampire provides a powerful visual spectacle that demands that its chosen audience look, at the same time it makes an equal demand that they do not truly see. Falke is, therefore, able to pick up, and subsequently to kill, numerous unsuspecting women at Albuquerque nightclubs. Falke’s victim Stephanie recognizes only that he is alien in some unrecognizable and unidentifiable way: “I’ve never seen anyone like you before” (98). Hanna’s victim Wendy not only invites her into her home, but has “trusting” eyes and is smiling seconds before she is killed (80). Hanna’s victims not only fail to truly see her, they see only what Hanna wants them to see and, ironically, only what they themselves want to see. The vampire’s demand is perhaps an easy one to make upon a world that clearly refuses to see anything that might unsettle its preconceptions. In the context both of American colonial history and of Carr’s largest American readership group, a white audience of European descent, the concept of being unsettled is particularly pertinent and disquieting.<sup>5</sup>

Yet Carr effectively transforms the fantastic, comparing real kinds of exploitation and oppression with those practised by the vampire. In this sense, Carr employs specularity—the vampire as a speculum—to successfully invert reality and simulation. By juxtaposing and therefore mirroring a wilfully imposed Native American absence—the supersession of the “real” Indian by its simulation—with the fantastical, but nonetheless “real” monstrosity that the vampire represents, Carr reveals the carefully hidden imperial impetus and the visible effects of

capitalism and corporate enterprise. Like the vampire, corporate enterprise demands that we look—at its profits, at its achievements, at its successful *speculations*—but ensures that we do not truly see its devastating environmental and human effects. In Carr’s text, the true colonial nature of capitalism and corporate enterprise is laid bare: our only real defence, from vampires or from real monstrosity, is that we look and actually see. In his study, *The Vampire Lectures*, Laurence A. Rickels makes an explicit comparison between western culture’s inability to believe in the vampire and the German public’s inability to accept that Nazi atrocities were being committed, often on the very edge of communities. Rickels offers us a powerful warning that to fail to see is to participate in the triumph of oppression: “Not see? Nazi!” (98).

The significance of looking and of actually seeing is of utmost importance to the concerns with which Carr engages, and these are inextricably linked to recognition. In the context of Native America, the significance of perception also resonates with the connotations of acknowledgement: to *acknowledge* is to “admit the existence of” a people and/or their situation; to *recognize* is to formally, even legally, acknowledge the “sovereign status” of a people (*CED* 13, 1295). Yet for most of the text, Carr’s characters—even some of the Native American ones—struggle with the impossibility of recognition and belief, emulating federal treatment of (and disbelief in) Native “Nations.” Despite the evidence of her own eyes—Hanna’s superhuman attack upon her car that rips through and peels off the steel roof (188)—Diana remains disbelieving, unable fully to accept Hanna and Falke’s true nature: “I don’t believe I’m going to say this [...] you’re describing a vampire. [...] only lunatics believe there are any vampires walking the earth” (221). When Michael repeats the story of his encounters with the vampires to the elderly Navajo Emily Sandoval, Carr emphasizes both Diana’s disbelief and her embarrassment at Michael’s belief:

The facts issued from his [Michael’s] mouth in pictures without colour: Weird dreams of some trotting coyote man; a supernatural woman’s attack on him; finding and guarding



Melissa at the hospital; meeting a blond witch-girl who flew out of a window with Melissa in tow; then a confrontation with an evil man-wolf creature, which ended with a corn pollen raincloud in a hospital lobby. Christ, Diana thought. [...] Diana felt sorry for him, but really, did he think they would believe him? (152)

Belying her reference to “facts,” Diana’s disbelief at the story that she finds utterly “bizarre” (153) is demonstrated in her description of Michael’s dreams as “weird.” Moreover, she dismisses the coyote as “some [...] man;” the woman is “supernatural;” the “witch-girl” flies; the “man-wolf” is some kind of “creature.” It is hardly surprising that, when asked by Emily if she believes Michael, Diana can only claim uncertainty in an attempt to lessen the potentially hurtful nature of her disbelief: “Of course, she didn’t believe Michael’s story. But she couldn’t just say it” (153). It is perhaps equally unsurprising that the blind Emily is the character who sees most clearly.

Western culture’s seemingly infinite capacity for disbelief is the second key to the vampire’s success. In her examination of the power of horror, Cynthia Freeland discusses the dangers of disbelief, arguing that the vampire “preys on our very skepticism and suspicion” (128). The dangers of disbelief are both physical and spiritual: Freeland comments that our “failure to come to terms with the possibility of evil might itself endanger us” (128). For Carr’s characters, the danger is immediate: recognition is linked, by extension, to comprehension, to knowledge, to power and, ultimately, to survival. The sheer power of disbelief, coupled with humanity’s propensity for blindness, are concepts that are also addressed by Rickels. In an essay that analyses Murnau’s *Nosferatu*, Rickels concurs with Freeland, suggesting that, “required to believe only what is believable, you cannot acknowledge or know even what you see before you” (98).

Rickels succinctly embodies the problem: to survive, we must see, recognize, know. In Carr’s text, the problem is both linked to, and compounded by, white America’s inability to see or to recognize Native

America. For white America, the alien nature of the vampire is inseparable from the alien nature of the native, exposing the common perception of contemporary Native America as equally fantastical and unreal. I would argue that the fantastic and unreal Native is none other than the simulated, and therefore dehumanized *indian*; in stark contrast, the vampire derives its power, even when deemed outcast, from its ability to “pass” as authentically—and acceptably—human.

Through a careful juxtaposition of the two simulations—*indian* and vampire—Carr demonstrates the tensions between reality and the fantastic, revealing the ongoing cultural and political battles over the very nature of Native reality in the United States. In this context, it is crucial that, with the exception of Melissa and Sarah, who are perhaps the most alienated characters, the Native characters are far more predisposed to believe not just in vampires—they accept that vampires are in some way related to Navajo concepts of witchcraft and skinwalkers, those who steal identity by stealing skin—but also in the reality of evil. Despite his own cultural and personal alienation, it is Michael’s instinctive recognition of Hanna’s true nature that prevents her from killing him: “I know what you are” (125). Despite his lack of knowledge of vampires, Michael instinctively throws the contents of his medicine bundle—the corn pollen representative of the sun—at Hanna. Michael not only prevents his own death but, in recognition of the power of knowledge, demands Hanna’s name, which she is forced reluctantly, compulsively, and painfully to “disgorge” (126).

These concepts are echoed in two scenes with Melissa’s mother, Sarah, which prefigure the reader’s explicit knowledge of her death. After her disappearance, Sarah first appears to her father, Michael, as a child crying: “I forgot my name.” Significantly, Sarah has no eyes, just “torn, empty sockets” that are stark visual evidence of her lack of perception (93). When the dead Sarah appears to Diana at the close of the text, she makes a clear connection between names and power: “I had forgotten my warrior name, and I paid for it” (281). All three scenes are starkly juxtaposed with the encounter between Michael and Elizabeth, who willingly gives her full name in the knowledge that Michael will have

power over her, that names are “filled with secret, dangerous powers” (172).

While names clearly have a supernatural power in Carr’s text, they also have, moreover, a political power. In speaking of “the special power a name possesses” (232), Elizabeth comments on her status as a settler, observing that her “true name”—and so her true power—lies “far across the ocean” (233), in the land of her forebears. It is a concept that actively questions and undermines the success of the imperial project, while simultaneously exposing the fact that names and naming are inextricably linked to the ongoing problems of colonialism in the Americas: the imposition of Western consciousness upon indigenous space. It is a concept that is equally inextricable from the problems of recognition in the United States. One immediately identifiable problem is America’s celebration of itself as a postcolonial nation: its refusal to recognize that it exerts any form of colonialism, external or internal.

The interrelation of names and recognition is a concern that is also addressed by the Laguna author Leslie Marmon Silko in her 1991 novel *Almanac of the Dead*. Silko interprets the problem as one of signification, ultimately deriving from the ramifications of colonialism and from a contemporary American reality that resides in essentially false simulations, which are entirely without a referent. In *Almanac*, Silko wryly comments that:

The tribal people here were all very aware that the whites put great store in names. But once the whites had a name for a thing, they seemed unable ever again to *recognize* the thing itself. (224, emphasis added)

Thus Diana can recognize and even use the term “vampire,” but finds it almost impossible to apply that term to the reality that she experiences. Recognition is problematized by the vampire’s strange ability to blend the alien with the familiar. In his analysis of *Eye Killers*, Eric Gary Anderson comments that Carr deliberately accentuates this vampiric feature, “situat[ing] the monstrous in strong relation to the familiar” (192). Thus the entire landscape of Carr’s text becomes somehow alien,

as our perceptions of the real are both subverted and questioned. Trying to find Michael's address, Diana finds that he can be located only by a hand-drawn map; driving to meet him, Diana is disconcerted by that the road on the reservation is "mostly dirt track" (56), that the landscape is potentially foreign:

Thirty-eight miles from Albuquerque. The area could have doubled as Mars in a cheap sci-fi movie, complete with purple and orange mesas, black volcanic cones, and flat valleys of red sand. (56)

One might argue that the landscape is foreign precisely because Diana belongs to an invading and invasive settler culture: Diana clearly distinguishes the "civilization" represented by Albuquerque from the "savagery" of the reservation.

Diana is also distinguished from Michael by the map: unlike Diana, Michael has no recognizable address or location; and he can be found only by the use of a hand-drawn map, which itself suggests the unofficial or illegitimate, the uncharted or unknown. Carrying the connotations of imperial exploration and categorization, the map marks a clear differentiation between colonizer and colonized, to the extent that Diana "wonder[s ...] if she had any right to be here" (57). In this context, it is significant that Diana's first reaction to the map is to question if it leads to "buried treasure" (26). Yet the reservation is a landscape that, while also alien to Falke and his kin, nonetheless holds a fascination for them: both vampire and land remain strange yet familiar. I have already noted that Falke's victim, Stephanie, recognizes that he is alien but in a way that is unidentifiable. Her comments are particularly pertinent: "You seem very strange.[...] I've never seen anyone like you before. Even in the movies" (98). Unlike Diana, who derives all of her vampire lore from what she has seen in the movies and physically survives because of it, and in spite of Stephanie's own recognition that the movies are the true location of the strange, she has nonetheless failed to pay due care and attention to what has become the primary source of popular folk knowledge in the late twentieth century: Hollywood.<sup>6</sup>

The vampires of *Eye Killers* are particularly difficult to recognize or to know because of their complicated natures, which both illustrates and illuminates Carr's complex speculation upon the nature of evil in the United States and upon the links between evil and exploitation, oppression and inhumanity in all of their manifold forms. Thus Carr's vampires are, interestingly, familiar in part because they are associated with the human characters: they too are isolated and alienated, they too are subject to the pain of memory. Falke finds Melissa in his compulsive and endless search for his ancient true love Christiane; Elizabeth is trapped in painful recollections of the death of her former lovers and her own complicity in the deaths of her family. Even the sadistic Hanna is momentarily overwhelmed by memories of the sexual abuse inflicted upon her in her former pre-vampiric life. But despite this humanization of evil, *Eye Killers* contrasts sharply with the sympathetic and romanticized vampires of recent fiction and television. Examples abound: the philosophical Louis and desirable Lestat in Anne Rice's novels, further glamorized by the casting of Brad Pitt and Tom Cruise in the 1994 film version, *Interview with the Vampire*. A more recent example is the popularity of the compassionate and conscience-stricken guardian Angel in the highly successful ongoing television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.<sup>7</sup> Contemporary figures such as these are, Sandra Tomc argues, exponents of an increasingly popular "vampire chic," representative of "the journey of the vampire from monster to yuppie" (96). Indeed, the popularity of the romantic vampire has become such that Nina Auerbach concludes that the contemporary vampire now "require[s] the protective legislation of an endangered species" (176).

In *Eye Killers*, Carr quite clearly positions himself against this concept of vampire chic. With the exception of the semi-human Elizabeth, who retains the reader's sympathies and has the courage not only to kill Hanna but to end her own miserable non-existence, Carr's vampires are truly monstrous. As a wolf, Falke has a "flat, murderous stare" and claws that "tore up tile and cement" (142-143); in her attack upon Michael, Hanna exposes "long teeth like steel spikes" and exudes the "putrified stink" of decomposition (125). Most striking are Carr's descriptions of

Hanna's attack on the group of youths who attempt to rape her. This scene, which I have already analyzed in part, is notable not merely for the sheer brutality of Hanna's attack, and the satisfaction that she derives from it, but also for the allusions that reach beyond traditional vampiric lore. As Hanna begins to kill, she announces "Unlock the gates [...] the Queen has come" (113). It is a statement that powerfully reverberates with Mesopotamian mythology, with the Queen of Heaven, Ishtar's, threat to open of the gates of Hell to unleash the dead so that they may "eat the living" (*Myths from Mesopotamia* 155). The allusion emphasizes the consuming, incorporating, and colonizing nature of the vampire. As Stephen D. Arata has commented, this is the true horror of the vampire, that it "appropriates and transforms" human bodies (630). Arata argues that the most influential vampire narrative, Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, was terrifying to late nineteenth-century Britain largely because it depicted "a narrative of reverse colonization" in which "the colonizer finds himself in the position of the colonized, the exploiter becomes exploited, the victimizer victimized" (623). The concept is particularly problematic for the Native and Irish characters of Carr's text: what of those who are already colonized? In contrast to Arata's vision of reverse colonization, I would argue that Carr writes against the direct threats of perpetuated colonialism and of the all too often imperceptible forms of *re-colonization*.

Carr's Mesopotamian allusion also highlights the notions of contagion, corruption, and pollution traditionally associated with the undead. Significantly, these traits are also comparable to the excesses, lack of conscience, and lack of humanity exhibited by corporate resource exploitation in the American Southwest. And it also emphasizes the sheer power—potentially godlike—of global corporate business. In this context, in spite of the true monstrosity of Carr's vampires, there is a very real sense in *Eye Killers* that vampirism is merely a symptom of evil rather than its cause in the American Southwest, set loose by the real forces of evil: global corporate enterprise. In his influential essay "Dialectic of Fear," Franco Moretti argues that the vampire is traditionally a "ruthless proprietor," a symbol of capitalism with "accumulation

[...] inherent in his nature” (83, 91). By extension, in the twenty-first century, the vampire is also representative of global corporate enterprise. I have already noted that Carr’s Native characters are predisposed to believe both in vampires and in the reality of evil. I would argue that this is a direct consequence of inherently colonial corporate practices, which continue to oppress, corrupt, contaminate, and pollute the Southwest and Southwestern Native peoples through federally encouraged and unrestrained resource exploitation. In other words, state sanctioned environmental racism.

Accordingly, Carr’s Southwest is portrayed as bleak, a “lunar landscape” (56) of emptiness, whose Native inhabitants have been elided and absented. Falke’s first appearance in the Prologue affirms this perception. Awakening from a long recuperation period, Falke surveys the “barren land” (3) that surrounds him, placing emphasis upon the deliberately desolate nature of the majority of the lands reserved for the use of the Southwestern Native peoples. Yet Falke, emblematic of corporate exploitation, almost immediately also scents the intoxicating combination of pollution and blood, illustrating the irony that the majority of America’s domestic energy reserves are located upon these barren Native lands. Ward Churchill has estimated that US reservations hold 60% of all uranium, 33% of low-sulphur coal, 25% of oil, 15% of natural gas, plus vast resources of minerals (gold, copper, bauxite), water (highly significant in arid Western/Southwestern areas), pastureland, and commercial forestry (16).

For America, the ramifications are both economic and political: the potential of vast profits, the realization of national energy self-sufficiency. Corporate resource development of Native lands has little federal regulation, with the effect that the “four corners” area, where Arizona and New Mexico meet Colorado and Utah, has been so badly damaged by corporate exploitation of natural resources—through uranium mining, water pollution and scarcity, strip mining, atomic testing, nuclear contamination—that governmental advisory bodies have suggested that it should be informally designated as a “national sacrifice area” (Churchill). The term is itself highly suggestive, reiterating not just

popular perceptions of *indian* victimry, but also exposing the racism inherent in America's intrinsically imperial concept of Native peoples. To designate the reserved lands of the Southwest in such a way would be both politically and economically expedient, allowing corporate activities to continue and the United States to achieve its proclaimed goal of energy self-sufficiency.

The relevance of these issues to contemporary Native lives, and thus to contemporary Native writers such as Carr, is immediate. In 1979, the Navajo reservation was the site of the largest radioactive spill in US history—ninety-four million gallons of contaminated effluent and 1,100 tons of slurry sands—that directly affected the sole source of reservation water: the Rio Puerco (Jaskoski). Helen Jaskoski gives a vivid illustration of the immediate effects on Flora Naylor, a Navajo shepherd—like the fictional Michael Roanhorse—who inadvertently waded across the Rio Puerco the morning after the spill:

Not even a month later her feet started getting sores; open sores, with pus, in between her toes. She went to the Indian Health Centre in Gallup. [...] They amputated below her ankle. [...] A month later they amputated again, above the ankle. Then a year later below the knee. (1)<sup>8</sup>

This is the reality to which Carr responds: like Falke's victims, Flora Naylor was literally *consumed*, in this case by the effects of corporate pollution. The reality today is that the land, water, livestock, and crops continue to suffer from the effects of pollution, resulting in a disproportionately high incidence of birth defects and cancer amongst the Native population. It is a reality that Carr exposes by his descriptions of the predatory "shark teeth" of corporate enterprise that bite deep into the surface of Native land to "corrupt [...] the red rock" (61).

I would argue that Aaron Carr's *Eye Killers* is an examination of reality itself: of real evil, of real oppression, of real inhumanity. As the horror writer Suzy McKee Charnas comments in her essay on vampire literature, it is "in the 'real' world, [that] real monstrosity rampages unhindered at every level" (64). To aid our perception, there are explicit



comparisons within the text between real and vampiric forms of exploitation and oppression. When Falke emerges from his long period of healing—after an unsuccessful attempt by a previous generation of Native peoples to destroy him—he immediately associates his prey with the resource extraction around him: “Stench of petroleum waste. And the timorous scent of blood” (4). It is evident from Carr’s terminology that contemporary resource extraction is, like Falke himself, a pollutant. And Carr depicts a similar incident in Hanna’s feeding scene: as she kills the final youth, Hanna stands in a sea of waste that gives off the “stench of gasoline” (114). Significantly, Carr refers directly to resource exploitation at Laguna, linking it to the destruction of vampirism. It is when Diana looks at the Laguna landscape that she finally sees:

Below this odd sky and the oil-tanker form of Mesa Gigante far away was a white-sheeted valley dominated by three unnaturally smooth mesas. Their sides were stippled and striped with red and black sand. Ice-flecked surfaces glittered, as if the whole area were sprinkled with shattered glass. Diana saw an image of Hanna smashing through [... her] windshield.[...] (253)

Mesa Gigante, home to Falke, Hanna, and Elizabeth—and to the shark teeth of enterprise—is appropriately oil tanker shaped, dominated by three unnatural, and destructive forms.<sup>9</sup> Corporate resource extraction, like the activities of Falke and his kin, feeds upon and drains natural assets—quite literally bleeds them dry—tainting and poisoning in return. If the vampire is a symptom of evil, it is also a symptom of a world dangerously out of balance.

Emblematic of rampant, uncontrolled consumption, the vampire is also a particularly powerful and persuasive symbol of Native America’s relationship to a voracious, insatiable, and literally blood-sucking Euro-American technology. In the same year that Carr published *Eye Killers*, the US National Institute of Health acquired the blood and patented the DNA of an indigenous man of the Hagahai people of Papua New Guinea. Controversially, the patent “establishe[s a] claim” on Hagahai male cells (Cunningham and Scharper 54). The patent is merely one

small aspect of a much larger global undertaking that has culminated in the Human Genome Diversity Project (HGDP), the project that recently (July 2000) announced that it had “mapped” the entire human DNA. The connotations of mapping, the act of imposing ownership and possession, expose the intrinsically imperial nature of contemporary science. Hilary Cunningham and Stephen Scharper comment that one of the aims of the HGDP is to eradicate “ethnocentric bias” in genetic research by focusing on indigenous groups that are considered to be “endangered” (54). Perhaps not surprisingly, the HGDP has been publicly condemned by the World Council of Indigenous Peoples for feigning scientific altruism in research that is little less than “genetic imperialism” (56). As Cunningham and Scharper suggest

the patenting of indigenous peoples’ DNA is seen [...] as yet another manifestation of First World exploitation [...] the “mining” of indigenous communities for raw materials which now include their DNA. Indigenous people [...] have become the target of gene “prospectors.” [...] (54)

Cunningham and Scharper’s terminology jostles uneasily with both corporate resource development and with a history of indigenous genocide that is inseparable from the history of the Californian Gold Rush. Perhaps most suggestive, in the context of this paper, is the transformation of the HGDP as a popular indigenous concept. Since scientists rely upon the donation of blood for DNA profiling, it is perhaps inevitable that the HGDP has become popularly entitled “the vampire project” (55). In a world in which there are constant insistent demands that we live longer, a global economy that is fortified by its ability drain and feed, and a scientific project devoted to eradicating disease, cryogenically preserving “life”<sup>10</sup>—are the frozen alive or un-dead?—and desirous of the ultimate achievement of immortality, it is little wonder that the vampire and vampirism hold such fascination. If the vampire is a symptom of evil in the form of environmental exploitation, it is equally a symptom of evil in the form of feigned scientific altruism.

I have suggested that vampirism acts to kill the human *I*; in Carr's text it is noticeable that it also acts to kill the human *we*: society. In this context, *Eye Killers* concurs with Moretti's suggestion that horror literature "is born *precisely out of the terror of a split society*, and out of the desire to heal it" (83). Yet Carr's notion of society is far more complex than Moretti's depiction of a united, even national, community which successfully battles and expels an essentially foreign threat. Carr is not only writing in response to Moretti's notion of national society, but also in response to American ideas of society, illustrated in both the conjunction between religion and politics, and in the vampiric tradition. Like recent British politics, U.S. politics is fascinated with the nucleus of society: the family. On both sides of the Atlantic, "normal" families and family values are identified and endorsed; anything deemed "abnormal"—for example, single parents—is demonized, alienated. It is notable that, in both Britain and the United States, single parents—in particular single mothers—have been identified as specifically vampiric: a drain on national economic resources. Several vampire films of recent years also responded to the issue of the dysfunctional family as an analogy of a dysfunctional society. In Kathryn Bigelow's 1987 film *Near Dark*, the vampires themselves comprise a family unit that is out of control and potentially threatening to the social order. Depicted as a foil to an acceptable family unit from which they appropriate the eldest son, the vampiric family represents a social threat and so must be destroyed. The same year, Joel Schumacher directed *The Lost Boys*, which also contrasted vampire and normal families. Notably, Schumacher blurs the boundaries between "normal" and "abnormal." As Auerbach states, it is the "careless sexuality" of the normal mother which "exposes" that family and more specifically the sons to vampiric danger (168). Despite the sexual discrepancies, the family wins the day and the vampires perish.

In *Eye Killers*, Carr writes against this accumulated tradition in both politics and the vampire genre. In the context of race in the Americas, it could be argued that the vampire—and, indeed, the vampire families in both *Near Dark* and *The Lost Boys*—represents a threat through blood, effectively through miscegenation and assimilation. *Eye Killers* is

written against a background of Native blood: against genocide and assimilation, against the scientific categorization evident in federal tribal recognition policies and in the blood quantum of tribal affiliation, against the genetic imperialism of contemporary science. Yet it is the concept of “mixed” blood that is particularly pertinent to vampirism: as Falke comments to Elizabeth, “we are joined forever by the self-same blood flowing in our bodies and hearts” (262). Yet Carr attempts to move beyond a purely biological definition of society or, by extension, of nationality. Indeed, Carr moves beyond normal constraints of society to depict an alternative and necessarily hybrid community. Carr’s text struggles with the complexity and magnitude of contemporary evil: the depicted tensions and animosities between Native and vampire mirror contemporary battles over the nature—and power—of representation and reality.

The novel also struggles with the ways in which evil can, like Falke, be eradicated. The eventual triumph over Falke and Hanna is by a hybrid community of vampire hunters: Diana, Michael, Melissa, Emily, William and Doris Pacheco, even Elizabeth. Falke is only finally defeated by the combined knowledge of Diana and of Navajo ceremony: the ritual prayer sticks act in accordance with Diana’s own knowledge to become highly effective and powerful stakes. Deftly inverting imposed absence, Carr invokes Native presence through the spectacle and spectacular nature of ceremony. As the prayer sticks pour sunlight in “hot, soothing streams” into the darkness of Falke’s lair, Diana’s shirt is burned away “in molten strips” by the body painting between her breasts: the sun which spreads “white beams of sunlight” to irradiate “the entire cavern in sharp relief.” Defenceless against the spectacle, Falke bursts into flames, as the prayer stick becomes “a living weapon,” cracking his rib cage in two, and burying itself deep within his chest (328). Falke’s final defeat, by Melissa, is equally spectacular:

A black, distorting fire crept over Falke’s face and covered his eyes. Snaking flames danced out of his boiling skin, wove

around his body. Bones snapped as his skeleton was crushed.  
(334)

It remains for the newborn vampire Michael to dispose ritually, and therefore correctly, of Falke's remains. Left dying by Hanna, Michael is himself transformed into a vampire by Elizabeth in an attempt to save him.

Michael's transformation is equally spectacular: his hair grows into "a black sea," his skin becomes "silken, smoothed by invisible fingers" (301). As Michael begins to understand his new nature, he feeds as "viciously" as Hanna, wrenching an animal whose name he can, significantly, no longer remember, from the earth, ripping it limb from limb, and drinking "its steaming blood" (312-13). It is only through the admonitions and teachings of Changing Woman, mother of the twin elements embodied in the prayer sticks, that Michael remembers "those who came before" him (313), recalls his true self, and realizes that he is not Eye Killer but "First-Warrior," and "First-To-Hurl-Anger" (314).

Echoing the concerns of many mixed blood Native writers, Michael is able to accept the dual legacies in his blood to overcome his latent sense of alienation from both human and vampire. Carr's examination of the nature of evil thus merges also with an examination of the nature of good: the eventual, and perhaps partial, Native victory challenges and subverts the nature of reality, with the result that the Native characters break free from their fantastic simulation, the *indian*, to emerge as the "real," the Indian. It is perhaps appropriate that, when Michael spectacularly shapeshifts, he becomes the trickster Coyote, the benefactor and the bane of humanity:

A glassy pain tore through his skeleton as his joints separated and rearranged themselves. His legs drew up and bent themselves into a strange angle. The muscles whipped furiously, forcing him onto the ground on all fours. His fingers, clenching into the snow, shortened and sprouted claws and pads. His ears lengthened into large, furry cups. His body shifted and

moulded itself into a streamlined, bullet-shaped animal—not a wolf. Coyote. (314-15).

Rosemary Jackson has suggested that modern fantasy literature traces our “desire for something [that is] excluded from the cultural order” (176). I would argue that what is excluded from the white American cultural order is, quite literally, Native America. The suggestion in *Eye Killers* is that what is excluded is imperative for the successful eradication of evil: a healthy respect for and an accommodation of alternative life forms and knowledges. In a story of his youth told to Diana, Michael gives evidence for the existence of both witches and skinwalkers from his own experience of the destruction of the witch Sweet Bread. Despite his own identification of Elizabeth as a witch and Falke as a skinwalker, Michael is open to Diana’s speculation that they might be something else: “Vampire [...]. Explain these things to me. Maybe they’re not skinwalkers after all” (221). Not just Michael, but also Emily and the Navajo/Keresan couple William and Doris, recognize and respect the value of Diana’s experiences of Falke and Hanna, and her popular knowledge of the Hollywood vampire: “You’ve seen much more than what we’ve seen. [...] You know of these vampires. You are not Pueblo or Navajo, but you’ve told a story that Emily recognizes” (244-45). It is ultimately the power of knowledge based upon collective pan-ethnic memory that overcomes Falke and Hanna.

Carr’s hybrid community is an effective form of reintegration and healing. Diana is clearly embraced into an alter/Native form of community: by the dead Sarah’s appeal, “be my child now” (281); by Michael’s declaration that she is Melissa’s “sister” (340); by Michael and Diana’s final acceptance of each other as “grandfather” and “granddaughter” (341). As Doris comments to Diana: “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” (245). This acceptance derives, in part, from Diana’s own role as a cultural mediator: her newly discovered ability to see beyond the ostensible similarities between the fantastical vampire and Native, and to see beyond the ritualized battles fought at the level of the fantastic, in order to perceive contemporary

‘reality.’ As Richard K. Mott concludes, *Eye Killers* is, above all, an “extended metaphor of weaving community.”

## Notes

- 1 Definitions from *Collins English Dictionary*. Subsequently abbreviated parenthetically as *CED*.
- 2 It could be argued that Carr draws a direct comparison between the colonial treatment of Native America and of Ireland. The comparison, which draws upon the essentially racist foundations of early anthropology, is unfortunately far too complex and large a topic to be analyzed in full. For an analysis of colonial interpretations of the Irish in both Europe and the United States see Noel Ignatiev. See also Stephen Arata’s argument that *Dracula* can be read both as an Irish work, and as a symbol of the reverse-colonization of Britain by the Irish.
- 3 Well known examples are Abel in N. Scott Momaday’s *House Made Of Dawn* (1968), Tayo in Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Ceremony* (1977), Jim Loney in James Welch’s *The Death of Jim Loney* (1979), and Ephanie in Paula Gunn Allen’s *The Woman Who Owned The Shadows* (1983).
- 4 Reservation unemployment in the Southwest is a very real problem, and figures for unemployment on reservations in general are exceptionally high in comparison to national averages in the United States. Robert White estimates that unemployment on the Navajo reservation is as high as 50% (272).
- 5 For a discussion of this “unsettling” aspect of Native literature, see Dee Horne. Horne uses the term to suggest a sense both of subversion and of decolonization.
- 6 The importance of vampire knowledge that is derived from popular culture also features in Stephen King’s novel *Salem’s Lot* (1977) and Joel Schumacher’s film *The Lost Boys* (1987). Both, interestingly, feature young boys: Mark survives because he reads vampire stories and makes models of monsters; the Frog brothers survive because they work in—and read the products of—a comic store. All have the ability to recognize and to know both the power and the weaknesses of the vampire.
- 7 Unlike the original film version, *Buffy* the series has enjoyed enormous success. Interestingly, the character of Angel has proved so popular that an equally successful spin-off series—*Angel*—has evolved.
- 8 Jaskoski is citing Steve Hinchman.
- 9 In this context, it is interesting that Hanna’s true appearance—and so her true nature—is finally exposed to the reader as she meets her death: the simulation

literally stripped away to disclose “rancid flesh” that is nothing more than “putrescent meat” (323).

- 10 In the context of cryogenics and simulation, see Dean MacCannell and Juliet Flower MacCannell for a discussion of Baudrillard’s suggestion that Walt Disney, like his “frozen, childlike world” (*Simulacra and Simulation* 12), was cryogenically preserved (139).

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