

Eye killers and navajo myth: an analysis of a modern native american novel



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Vampire tales, Navajo mythology, and contemporary life in New Mexico, come together in Aaron Carr's multifaceted, novel, *Eye Killers*, juxtaposing contemporary elements with the traditional. This juxtaposition of traditional and contemporary is played out among the two protagonists, Michael Roanhorse and Diana Hogan, who live in different cultural worlds. The younger Diana, lives in urban Albuquerque, works with youths as an English teacher, and is from the Euro-American tradition. Michael Roanhorse is an old Navajo Indian living in an isolated home among the mountains outside of Albuquerque. Although they come from different worlds, the characters share a sense of loneliness and loss.

Carr writes of Diana's first impression of Michael at his home, "everything indicated the most loneliest existence she could imagine" (Carr, 67). Carr depicts Diana at home with a heart that "...remained frozen; an ice cube or a fish steak. The walls of her apartment offered enough protection from hurt" (Carr, 40). Diana laments the divorce of her husband who has since started a new family, and Michael mourns the loss of his wife, Margaret. Michael also laments the distance between himself and his daughter and granddaughter. The fusion of Michael and Diana as forces against the vampires, resembles the Navajo warrior twin myth that Carr weaves into the novel and also mentions in the video segments. Although Carr does not reveal a direct or blatant correlation between Michael, Diana, and the warrior twins, I would argue that it exists within the text and is an essential traditional piece of the story woven into a contemporary context. In the warrior twin Navajo myth, the twins, Tobadsistisini (Born From Water) and Nayenezgani (Monster Slayer) are born to White-Shell Woman and The Sun God (Henderson,

Schevill, 33). They kill monsters who roam the earth terrorizing and murdering the earth's people (Herderson, Schevill, 33). The last monsters they encounter are the Binaye Ahani, who use their glaring eyes to kill people (Henderson, Schevill, 34). The title of the novel draws a connection between the myths brutal monsters, the Binaye Ahani, and the vampires living in the contemporary time the novel takes place in. Carr's vampire Falke's evil glare is given immense power. It is how he overcomes Melissa's fear and steals her away from her human life. The Binaye Ahani are the most dangerous and vicious monsters the twins battle, just as the vampires in Eye Killers are vicious beyond any comparison. In the end, Diana comes face to face with vampire, killer eyes, describes as "...two luminous red pools starting out of the dark" (Carr, 318). Falke alludes to Michael's identity as a warrior twin when they confront each other and speak of the evil creatures and monsters that were destroyed by the twins. Falke tells Michael, " a warrior such as yourself could only have come from a race who knew of such beasts" (Carr, 247). In saying this, Falke acknowledges that Michael is a " true adversary," like the warrior twins, who were capable of defeating beasts long before (Carr, 220). Further conversation reveals Michael's weapons to be the same as the warrior twins. Falke says to Michael, " I see no weapons," to which Michael responds, " an old warrior's song" (Carr, 247). This weapon of song is something Michael has been handed down from his ancestors, and in the warrior twin myth, the twins travel among their elders and Gods and are given ancient and traditional wisdom to make them strong. The Binaye Ahani are eventually defeated when the twins use " arrows of lightening" to kill them (Henderson, Schevill, 34). These arrows resemble the prayersticks Diana uses, which are described as having an " arrow painted on" them and <https://assignbuster.com/eye-killers-and-navajo-myth-an-analysis-of-a-modern-native-american-novel/>

a “ yellow-white brilliance” shoot out of them towards Falke, engulfing him in “ hot...sunlight” (Carr, 328). Falke is conscious of the potency of Diana’s weapons when he tells her, “ the weapons you carry are not to be played with. They contain a power that is strange to me. I have lived nine hundred years and still do not understand such might” (Carr, 317). The similarities in the type of weapons used to defeat Falke and the Binaye Ahani are significant. The prayer sticks use a lightening-like light to kill Falke and have arrows painted on them, representing the warrior twins arrows. Another similarity between Carr’s story and the warrior twin myth is the preparation for battle using sacred and traditional methods. In the myth, Tobadsistisini is instructed by his brother, to stay behind in order to prepare ceremonies, say traditional prayers and songs, and ready themselves for battle (Henderson, Schevill, 33). Diana experiences this when she is told by Doris, “ we will take you to a ...ceremonial hogan...you will hear and learn one of these stories and its songs...we will teach you those things to give you strength and power” (Carr, 244). As the twins do in the Navajo myth, Diana and Michael seek knowledge from their elders, gods, and community members.

Nayenezgani searches and slays monsters while his brother prepares (Henderson, Schevill, 33). This mirrors Michael’s instruction for Diana to stay behind with Emily and partake in the preparation rituals, while he seeks out the vampires. Michael reveals himself to be more like Nayenezgani because he initiates the battle, even confronting the vampires without tangible weapons. He is “ Monster Slayer” while Diana possesses similar qualities to “ Born From Water.” Diana’s name carries a meaning embodied in classical Greek and Roman mythology. “ Diana” is the Roman Goddess (Artemis in Greek mythology) of the Moon; a huntress leading her nymphs through <https://assignbuster.com/eye-killers-and-navajo-myth-an-analysis-of-a-modern-native-american-novel/>

forest and wilderness while protecting them (Cotterell, 23). She is also associated with water and many of her stories occur near water, for instance her punishment of Actaeon (Green, 26). Diana embodies characteristics of strength and the images of water and light, just as Tobadsistisini personifies water and light. Furthermore, in classical mythology, Diana has a powerful twin brother, Apollo, the God of the Sun and Archery among other things (Cotterell, 18). Michael and Diana can be recognized as twin warriors within multiple mythologies. Diana's first name is traditionally a name from Western culture and Carr gives her a last name with a strong association to traditional Navajo culture. "Hogan" is the term for a customary Navajo dwelling, or home, where ceremonies traditionally took place (Kent, 89). This Navajo affiliated surname suggests Diana is a home for Michael's granddaughter, Melissa, whom she fights for and protects. She is told by Doris, "You are the one who must seek out this creature, find its shelter, find Melissa, and bring the captive girl home" (Carr, 243). Diana is being chosen to not only fight for Melissa, but to bring her home. Diana's strength and power are developed as she proceeds on her inner quest for family. In the end, Melissa becomes her family. Diana says to Melissa, "let's go home, sister" (Carr, 342). Carr balances different cultural mythologies in his novel, however only one of these is truly instrumental in conquering Falke. Falke is aware of the power of Navajo spirituality and questions Diana's ability to use it effectively. He says, "All of the old witches you talked to, Diana, the stories you heard, the songs you learned...and you still don't understand...you're belief is hard to fathom...do you believe in yourself Diana?" (Carr, 317). Of the Navajo methods she uses to fight Falke, Diana says, "I believe them" (Carr, 317). In the face of doubt, Diana is unwavering in her stance, <https://assignbuster.com/eye-killers-and-navajo-myth-an-analysis-of-a-modern-native-american-novel/>

believing in the power of the prayer sticks and their ability to save Melissa. By choosing Diana as the deliverer of Falke's final blow, Carr allows Diana to demonstrate the equality of power between her and Michael. This equality shows a level of acceptance and openness from Carr, but also exposes that spiritual power doesn't have to be exclusive to certain people. Diana makes a choice to believe in the power of her spiritual tools and it saves her and Melissa. This important choice illuminates the stereotypical assumptions that exist when considering another culture's spirituality. The juxtaposition of traditional Navajo spirituality and the contemporary Western character, Diana, merge in this scene in which Diana submits to knowledge she does not completely understand.

Because Diana's power comes from that choice, and not using the traditional songs and stories, Carr demonstrates that true faith is within and doesn't get caught up in the logistics of spiritual practice and routine, in order to be effective. Moreover, both Diana and Michael are able to reclaim power for themselves by killing Falke. Michael's power comes with the rescue of his granddaughter, the future of his family, and the person who will carry on his traditions and stories. Diana attains personal power, the role of the protector, and gains a family. This family is a continuation of the juxtaposition of two cultures, and these culture's potential to coexist peacefully and harmoniously. Moreover, the differing mythologies reveal a multidimensional perspective, sharing a peaceful, simultaneous existence within the text.