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# There Will Be Oil: The Celebration and Inevitability of Petroleum through Upton Sinclair and Paul Thomas Anderson

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There Will Be Oil: The Celebration and Inevitability of Petroleum through Upton Sinclair and

Paul Thomas Anderson

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Undergraduate Honors Thesis

“Godspeed! Pope given a Lamborghini, replete in papal gold and white.”<sup>1</sup> This BBC news feed and the attendant video went viral in a matter of moments providing a glimpse of the intricate relationship between western culture and petroleum. Pope Francis blesses the custom Lamborghini, before it is sent to a charity auction. Excess, consumption, capitalism, petroleum, religion, culture—all combined during a blessing of an expensive automobile by the pontiff. This short video gives witness to how oil quietly soaks our world. I started this project with the intention of conducting a Marxist study of the novel *Oil!* (Upton Sinclair, 1927) and the film *There Will Be Blood*, (Paul Thomas Anderson, 2007) in the context of American Westerns and their relationship to capitalism. This investigation of the American West, however, soon led to oil. From the California oil boom in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to the Iraq War in the 21<sup>st</sup>, American capitalism has been linked to oil production and American culture to oil consumption. Oil has infiltrated every aspect of American life, from gasoline in cars and planes, to the petroleum used to fill cavities in our teeth. The oil-centric lifestyle is both entirely dominant and virtually unnoticed.

My decision to investigate oil’s role in American culture was due to my discovery of Stephanie LeMenager’s work and the newly emergent school of criticism, Environmental Humanities. The Environmental Humanities is an interdisciplinary school that concentrates on ecological crises through analysis of texts in the Humanities. One strain of Environmental Humanities addresses the role of fossil fuels, specifically petroleum, in ecological crises and the way texts can help us to understand that crisis and even imagine a world beyond it. My focus will be on oil and specifically petroleum, which is created from crude oil. I want to make a distinction between Environmental Humanities and Ecocriticism. Ecocriticism is concerned with the treatment of the relationship between nature and culture across a variety of different

disciplines including the Humanities but not limited to them. The Environmental Humanities is concerned with ecological crises and how texts in the Humanities can speak to what it means to be a human on the verge of these crises.

There are several important terms that will be central to my use of Environmental Humanities. The most important is petromodernity. In “The Aesthetics of Petroleum, after *Oil!*,” LeMenager argues that petroleum has made life as we know it possible. LeMenager defines petromodernity as “a modern life based in the cheap energy systems long made possible by petroleum.”<sup>2</sup> Another important term is “fossil-fuel futurity,” the assumption that fossil fuels, such as petroleum, will be plentiful and available into the foreseeable future. This assumption of never-ending oil is tied up with another term, “peak oil,” which refers to the peak of maximum oil production, which began in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and scientists estimate will peak (and thus begin to run out) somewhere between 2010 and 2040.<sup>3</sup> These assumptions about oil are so prevalent that Daniel Worden argues that fossil fuels are “a medium upon which is constructed a vision of normative family life.”<sup>4</sup> Sinclair was writing in 1927 during peak-oil discovery, while *There Will Be Blood* was released in 2007 around the time of peak-oil production. These texts represent the bookends of America’s petromodernity.

I aim to investigate the representation of oil in these two texts that specifically engage with oil. Upton Sinclair’s novel *Oil!* tells the story of Bunny, the son of an oil tycoon in California at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. *Oil!* details Bunny’s adolescence and adulthood, as he discovers the corruptions of capitalism through class struggles, higher education, religion and Hollywood. Bunny finds his vocation through a discovery of socialism and activism. Anderson’s film *There Will Be Blood*, based very loosely on *Oil!*, follows Daniel Plainview, a miner who achieves major success in the California oil industry, along with H.W., his adopted son.

Plainview finds his antagonist in Eli, the evangelist preacher in Little Boston, a town sitting on top of untapped oil.

Both these texts aim to critique the oil industry. There are several questions that I want to ask, including and most importantly how successful are they at these critiques. To what extent is it possible for Sinclair and Anderson to critique petroleum effectively when their lives and the institutions of which they are a part (publishing and Hollywood) are heavily indebted to oil? How do these text construct families on the basis of fossil-fuel futurity? How does petromodernity materialize in *Oil!* and *There Will Be Blood*? What implications are created by a film, that could not exist without petroleum and capitalism, that aims to condemn those industries and ideologies? Through a detailed analysis of *Oil!* and *There Will Be Blood*, I want to consider how petroleum production has been portrayed particularly during peak-oil discovery and peak-oil production. Using the methodology of Environmental Humanities with a focus on petromodernity, I aim to investigate both Sinclair and Anderson's treatment of oil in their texts. I will argue that despite Sinclair's best efforts, his radical, socialist novel cannot criticize oil capitalism in *Oil!* because he, as well as his characters, not only rely on but rejoice in oil consumption. Furthermore, I will argue that *There Will Be Blood* constructs a more solid critique of oil capitalism, but enacts a similar fascination with oil production. Ultimately, I argue that both the novel and the film are fully immersed in petromodernity and peak-oil futurity and cannot conceive of a world without oil.

In 1927 Upton Sinclair published *Oil!*, a radical novel that attacked capitalist industries and ideologies in the US. *Oil!* follows twenty-six previous novels by Sinclair that largely address injustices against humanity at the hands of industry. R.N. Mookerjee writes in *Art for Social Justice: The Major Novels of Upton Sinclair*, that for Sinclair, "writing a novel was not an end in

itself but a means for exposing the cruelty and injustice of the social system and for rousing the working classes to an awareness of their human dignity.”<sup>5</sup> Sinclair did not attempt to hide his agenda within plot or character; rather as Mookerjee explains, he “openly declared [his] aim of bringing about social change through [his] creative works.”<sup>6</sup> Many of Sinclair’s contemporaries embraced Darwinism and naturalism as explanation for the growing disparity between the wealthy and working class. Mookerjee explains that for many writers in the early twentieth-century, “the general trend was to accept ‘struggle’ as inevitable in the nature of things wherein only the ‘fittest’ survived.”<sup>7</sup> Sinclair rejected this notion, and sought his solutions elsewhere: namely socialism. In *Oil!*, Sinclair crafted a vicious attack on capitalist culture by utilizing current industry scandals, addressing issues of the working class, crafting authentic characterization of both capitalists and socialists, exposing Hollywood’s connection with oil capitalism, and directly connecting the horrors of capitalism with the horrors of World War I. However, despite Sinclair’s best efforts, *Oil!* is a novel that relies on and celebrates oil.

*Oil!* follows Bunny, the son of oil magnate J. Arnold Ross, as he grows up in Southern California during the oil boom of the 1920s. Bunny observes how his Dad enters the industry, and as he grows older, Bunny begins to understand how Dad maintains his massive wealth through bribery and corruption. When Bunny is still an adolescent, he meets siblings Paul and Ruth Watkins who introduce Bunny to socialism. This concept stays with Bunny as he juggles his feelings towards his father and his sense of justice. Despite Bunny’s apprehensions towards his father’s business, he continues to enjoy the mobility and freedom that oil money has given him. The novel veers into Bunny’s encounters with religion, higher education, World War I, the Bolsheviks, Hollywood, sex, abortion, industrial strikes and death. Through these experiences, Bunny ultimately abandons the lifestyle of an “oil prince” and embraces the socialist cause.<sup>8</sup> The

novel ends with the death of Dad and his business, and Bunny's marriage to fellow socialist Rachel Menzies, cemented by their commitment to opening a socialist labor college. However, Sinclair could not create a socialist "happy ending" in a capitalist context. Tragedy strikes as his friend Paul Watkins is murdered by a mob, and subsequently Ruth Watkins commits suicide. The final passage of *Oil!* articulates Sinclair's argument:

Some day all those unlovely derricks will be gone, and so will the picket fence and the graves. There will be other girls with bare brown legs running over those hills, and they may grow up to be happier women, if men can find some way to chain the black and cruel demon which killed Ruth Watkins and her brother—yes, and Dad also: an evil Power which roams the earth, crippling the bodies of men and women, and luring the nations to destruction by visions of unearned wealth, and the opportunity to enslave and exploit labor.<sup>9</sup>

Sinclair found the source material for *Oil!* in the investigation of the government-owned Elk Hills oil reserves in California.<sup>10</sup> In 1912, President Taft had set aside 38,000 acres of land in Elk Hills for the exclusive use of the US Navy. The General Leasing Act, passed in 1920, allowed the Secretary of the Navy to lease these acres if necessary to protect the interest of the government. President Harding's Secretary of the Interior, Albert Fall, was able under executive order to transfer the oil reserves from the Navy to the Department of the Interior. In 1922, Fall leased the Elk Hills reserves in its entirety to his friend, Edward L. Doheny, of the Pan-American Petroleum and Transport Company. A Senate investigation revealed that Fall had received large sums of cash for this deal; Fall was sentenced to one year in prison and fined \$100,000.<sup>11</sup> While Sinclair certainly utilized this scandal for *Oil!*, Mookerjee points out that of all of his novels, this particular novel "has the maximum fictional element imaginatively created by Sinclair

himself.”<sup>12</sup> Sinclair accomplishes more than writing a novel that is “ripped from the headlines.” Rather, he addresses the corrupt nature of capitalism itself and the reality of unethical government in service to industry.

*Oil!* addresses the plight of the working class through a protagonist caught between two ideologies. American writers at the turn of the century, such as Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald, were almost exclusively writing about upper-middle class identities and issues. Sinclair was committed to the working class. As he himself noted, “Readers of my novels know that I have one favorite theme, the contrast of the social classes...and the plot is contrived to carry you from one to the other.”<sup>13</sup> In *Upton Sinclair*, William A. Bloodworth observes that “Sinclair chose to ignore the middle class, reveal the nature of the economic plutocracy, and explore sources of admiration in the working class.”<sup>14</sup> *Oil!* explored the anguish of class differences, personified by conflicted Bunny, pulled between the love and admiration he feels for his capitalist Dad, and the socialist idealism he comes to understand through Paul and Rachel. Bunny’s seemingly contradictory sensibilities crash down on him when he declares, “I’ve considered everything, Dad—considered till I’m sick at heart. I just can’t let my love for any one person in the world take the place of my sense of justice.”<sup>15</sup> Sinclair ultimately puts an end to Bunny’s purgatorial state—oscillating between flirtations with socialism and the attachment to his father—and forces Bunny to choose which path to take.

Although Bunny does deviate from his father, Sinclair resists the temptation to paint a portrait of Dad as a greed-driven oil tycoon. By creating a sympathetic character that fully adheres to a capitalist dogma, Sinclair could more coherently address a complex issue that many Americans were facing. Americans knew capitalists; Americans *were* capitalists. Dad was not a villain; Dad was a man that did not only what he thought was the right thing to do, but what he

was *taught* was the right thing to do. On Dad's rise to wealth, Mookerjee writes, "The story is in the typical fashion of the mythical rags-to-riches success story that had captured the American imagination so powerfully for nearly four decades of this century."<sup>16</sup> Dad was merely chasing the American dream, and additionally, he was extraordinarily successful in his chase. Mookerjee explains, "He [Sinclair] now could see some good in his capitalist characters too. Sinclair makes Dad an extremely sympathetic figure, a simple-minded person endowed with unusual skill and resolution. He follows single-heartedly the one purpose of his life, which is getting oil and making money."<sup>17</sup> Bloodworth adds, "His [Dad's] drive for wealth and his use of power are clearly understood as the result of a broken heart incurred when his first wife divorced him on the grounds of insufficient affluence."<sup>18</sup>

The opening chapter of *Oil!* designates Dad as "a man of order."<sup>19</sup> The narrator, an omniscient third-person voice, describes the experience of riding in the car with Dad at the wheel: "you were ethically entitled to several inches of margin at the right-hand edge; and the man approaching you was entitled to an equal number of inches."<sup>20</sup> While Dad feels that he is owed a portion of the road, he acknowledges that the man approaching him is also owed an equal amount. Capitalist ideology dictates that every man has an equal opportunity to achieve. Dad is characterized by fairness and hard work: a symbol of the successful capitalist. While the oil workers are on strike, Dad tells Bunny, "if they couldn't win, they'd have to lose—that was the law of strikes, as of everything else. Life was stern, and sooner or later you had to learn it."<sup>21</sup> Dad's initial reluctance towards an oil worker's union, the narrator explains, "what troubled him about unions was, they deprived a man of his personal liberty; he was no longer a free American citizen."<sup>22</sup> Dad's outlook on life is not so different from contemporary capitalist viewpoints; Dad is strict, but he is reasonable. This depiction of Dad creates a more challenging decision for

Bunny to make, but portrays a more realistic problem that readers of *Oil!* may be facing: How can I commit to the socialist cause if I love and admire my capitalist friends and family?

Bunny meets Hollywood screen actress Vee Tracy, who uses her sexuality to achieve wealth and fame. At her first meeting with Bunny, Vee recites a prayer, ““Our Movie, which art in Heaven, Hollywood by Thy Name. Let Koski come. His Will be done, in studio as in bed.””<sup>23</sup> Immediately, sexuality is tied to Vee’s position in Hollywood. She explains to Bunny, ““When I came into this game, I had my own way to make, and I paid the price, like every other girl.””<sup>24</sup> The text even equates films with “rapings.”<sup>25</sup> Sinclair is portraying Vee as a girl who would do *anything* for Hollywood’s fame and money. The narrator explains, “She [Vee] believed in her money; she had starved for it; sold herself, body and mind, for it, and she meant to hang on to it.”<sup>26</sup> Vee’s promiscuity has enabled her to become successful in Hollywood, but Sinclair makes sure to lay the blame on the industry, more than on Vee herself: “Vee had to fight for success; whereas he [Bunny] had never had to fight for anything. If he wanted a moving picture career, Dad would arrange it for him, the studio doors would fly open. And the same with any other sort of career he could think of. How could he afford to pass judgment on anybody?”<sup>27</sup> Sinclair is careful to hold capitalist industry responsible for the moral decay of Vee Tracy.

Vee is also utilized as a symbol of Hollywood’s destruction of socialism as well as its support of capitalism. Dad expresses to Vee, “Well, you take him under your wing and keep him there, and if you can get him loose from these reds, I’ll remember you in my will.”<sup>28</sup> Throughout the text, Vee is used by Bunny’s family as a distraction from socialism: “Dad appealed to Vee Tracy: couldn’t she possibly do more to keep Bunny out of the hands of these awful reds?”<sup>29</sup> Bertie, Bunny’s socialite, older sister “in her desperation, was appealing to Vee Tracy, begging her to make one more effort to get Bunny out of this hideous entanglement.”<sup>30</sup> Additionally, Vee

stars in a propaganda film that portrays Russians as wicked savages. Vee represents Hollywood in *Oil!* and Sinclair clearly describes Hollywood as a capitalist industry, that forces women to sell themselves for wealth. Sinclair illustrates Hollywood as a vapid distraction from the socialist cause. Furthermore, Hollywood portrays ideologies that encourage capitalism and suppress socialism.

Violence is a major aspect of *Oil!* and through violence, Sinclair explicitly connects capitalism with brutality and death. Bloodworth explains that while writers such as Hemingway and Fitzgerald were absorbed with “the image of American life...properly genteel,”<sup>31</sup> Sinclair himself set his gaze on the grittier and more dangerous lives of the lower working class. The on-site death of Joe Gundha, an oil worker not personally known to Bunny and Dad, triggers an emotional response from capitalist Dad, “‘My God! My God!’ exclaimed Dad. ‘It makes me want to quit this business!’”<sup>32</sup> Bunny imagines how the workers will pull Gundha’s body out of the hole he fell into:

In his mind he saw the men screwing the ‘grab’ onto the drill-stem—a tool which was built to go over obstacles that fell into the hole, and to catch hold of them with sharp hooks. They might get Joe Gundha by the legs and they might get him by the face—ugh, the less you thought about a thing like that, the better for your enjoyment of the oil game!<sup>33</sup>

But Bunny does not forget Joe Gundha, and his death continues to haunt him throughout the novel. Gundha’s death is overtly connected to the violent nature of capitalism in industry and further connected to the horrors of war. Bunny thinks:

Dozens and perhaps even hundreds of men had been hurt in other wells all over the country, and that didn’t trouble you a bit. For that matter, think of all the men who were

dying over there in Europe! All the way from Flanders to Switzerland the armies were hiding in trenches, bombarding each other day and night, and thousands were being mangled just as horribly as by a grab in the bottom of a well; but you hadn't intended to let that spoil your Thanksgiving dinner, not a bit! Those men didn't mean anything to you as the quail you were going to kill the next day!<sup>34</sup>

Here, Sinclair is directly linking the violence of capitalism to the violence of World War I. Not only does Sinclair equate and condemn the violent natures of war and industry, he attacks the indifference of society to these cruel realities. Gundha's death and Bunny's subsequent realization of capitalistic violence is a crucial component to Bunny's commitment to socialism. Sinclair's emphasis on the working class and explicit connection of capitalism, war, and violence was entirely radical for early twentieth-century American writers.

*Oil!* is a novel that attacks major cornerstones of American life to reveal the bloody consequences of capitalism. Sinclair had shaped a realistic landscape, inspired by contemporary scandals to create a credible narrative to support his socialist cause. He had greatly improved his characterization to address the dilemma of Americans sympathetic to socialist causes in a capitalist society. Sinclair was profoundly radical to focus on the working class in a novel, while contemporaries like Hemingway and Fitzgerald were singularly concerned with upper-middle class provinciality. He drew an unapologetic link between capitalism in industry and death and destruction in World War I. These achievements in *Oil!* are tremendously important and cement Sinclair as a revolutionary socialist writer. After *The Jungle* was published in 1906, The Meat Inspection Act went into effect to prevent the atrocities described in the novel. Oil continues to persist as the fuel of choice for the US and the world. Oil production and consumption has consistently continued since the oil boom, creating petromodernity. *Oil!* made significant strides

in Sinclair's work, from better characterization to a radical accusation of capitalism's direct connection to the evils of war. What was different about *Oil!* from *The Jungle*, that seemingly produced no social change?

I want to argue that *Oil!* is rife with contradictions that Sinclair cannot reconcile because he is a peak-oil writer. Sinclair attempts to create the plight of the oil workers against the capitalist oil barons, but his argument is undercut by Sinclair's own absorption in petromodernity, and finally he is unable to fully critique the oil industry. *Oil!* was problematic from the start because Sinclair could not understand the iron grip of petromodernity on himself, his characters, and the peak-oil world in which they both exist. Sinclair's argument against the evils of capitalistic oil production are undercut by his reliance on, and fascination with oil and oil-based products. These contradictions can be understood through an examination of fossil-fuel futurity, illustrated by Bunny's attachment to driving cars. Additionally, Bunny's elation for the physical properties of oil replaces his connections to other human beings in the novel, signaling the strength of peak-oil production and petromodernity.

Sinclair, as well as myself, exist in a world that is entirely supported by oil, and neither of us can imagine living in a world without oil; this petromodernity leads to Sinclair's ultimate failure in critiquing the oil industry. In "The Aesthetics of Petroleum After *Oil!*" Stephanie LeMenager argues that "*Oil!* is a type of peak-oil fiction, since it was written as a warning against global petromodernity from the moment of peak-oil *discovery* in the US—again, the late 1920s. The novel strives to imagine curtailing petromodern development in a manner complementary to the fictional post-petrol futures offered by recent peak-oil novels."<sup>35</sup> Although *Oil!* was deeply committed to exposing the terrors of capitalistic oil industries, LeMenager contends "also generates a series of aesthetic images and environmental emotions that valorize

driving and even the process of oil extraction, showing both of these industrial-era activities as modes of facilitating the body's capacity for self-extension toward *other* life.”<sup>36</sup> Sinclair is writing during an oil boom, and he argues against the expansion of this industry right as it is just beginning to grow. Nonetheless, Sinclair’s characters exhibit an intense dependence on oil, as well as genuine excitement and support for oil and its commodities.

Sinclair has been praised for his realistic and vivid descriptions in the first chapter of the novel, “The Ride,” yet these descriptions reveal Bunny’s dependence on petroleum. The opening lines of the novel reinforce the positive attributes of a petromodern world: “The road ran, smooth and flawless, precisely fourteen feet wide, the edges trimmed as if by shears, a ribbon of grey concrete, rolled out over a valley by a giant hand.”<sup>37</sup> Here, the introductory statement in *Oil!* emphasizes the benefits of the technological precision present in the road, as well as amplifies its amazing and supernatural qualities by invoking an image of a “giant hand” rolling the concrete out. Sinclair repeats the phrase, “magic ribbon” five times in the first five pages, magnifying the mystical appeal that the road possesses. As Dad and Bunny drive down the roadway, the narrator asks, “What magic had done all this?”<sup>38</sup> Bunny answers:

Dad had explained it—money had done it. Men of money had said the word, and surveyors and engineers had come, and diggers by the thousand, swarming Mexicans and Indians, bronze of skin, armed with picks and shovels; and great steam shovels with long hanging lobster-claws of steel; derricks with wide swinging arms, scrapers and grading machines, steel drills and blasting men with dynamite, rock-crushers, and concrete mixers that ate sacks of cement by the thousand, and drank water from a flour-stained hose, and had round steel bellies that turned all day with a grinding noise. All these had come, and for a year or two they had toiled, and yard by yard they had unrolled the magic ribbon.<sup>39</sup>

Sinclair's emphasis in this passage is on the machinery responsible for the roadway's construction. The diggers are "swarming"—a verb that dehumanizes the physical effort made by the men, relegating them as insects. The remainder of the passage is a lengthy description that projects living qualities onto the machines: "lobster-claws of steel; derricks with wide swinging arms...concrete mixers that ate sacks of cement...drank water...had round steel bellies."<sup>40</sup> These descriptors elevate the machines and denigrate the workers involved in highway construction. Sinclair never connects the abuse of labor to the actual products of the labor. Despite Bunny's discomfort and eventual rejection of the oil industry, Bunny consistently enjoys its benefits.

*Oil!* attempts to act as a voice for the working class, but Sinclair cannot escape his fascination with commodities only available to him because of the exploited working class. "The Ride" introduces Dad as a man of power through his explanation to Bunny of the dangers and bravery of driving:

Each time, you were staking your life upon your ability to place your car upon the exact line—and upon the ability and willingness of the unknown other party to do the same. You watched his projectile in the instant of hurtling at you, and if you saw that he was not making the necessary concession, you knew you were encountering the most dangerous of all two-legged mammalian creatures, the road-hog.<sup>41</sup>

Driving is characterized by as dangerous and thrilling, and Bunny's fascination with the automobile persists throughout the novel. After hearing about a "gusher" that just erupted, "Bunny ran out and shouted to Dad, and leaped into the car, and gosh-almighty, the way they did burn up that road across the desert!"<sup>42</sup> Once Bunny begins to lose interest in his first adolescent relationship and resolves that he will "not take Rosie driving so often."<sup>43</sup> Bunny weighs out the

value of his girlfriend versus that of his car, thinking, “Eunice was driving at forty-some miles an hour, and it would be better to hurt her feelings than to upset the car.”<sup>44</sup>

Bunny equates driving with power, excitement, and pleasure. At no point in the novel does Sinclair draw a correlation between the oil industry he is condemning and the benefits of oil that his characters consistently take advantage of and enjoy. LeMenager also points out that,

The ink that creates the words on the page of my edition of *Oil!*, words that direct my imagination and activate my senses, is largely a mixture of petroleum-based resins and oils. I literally enter an immersive literary environment through petroleum-based language. My critical reflections upon this literary environment will also take form as petroleum-based language.<sup>45</sup>

This concept identifies a crucial problem with *Oil!*; not only are Sinclair’s characters freely enjoying the benefits of petroleum-fueled vehicles, Sinclair’s novel itself, made possible through petroleum-based products, is a component in the success of the oil industry.

*Oil!* explores Bunny’s relationships with his family, friends, and women, all of which are ultimately uninspired and flat, when compared to Bunny’s sincere excitement and engagement with oil. Sinclair has been criticized for his lack of nuanced character development in his novels. Many scholars such as R.N. Mookerjee and William A. Bloodworth argue that *Oil!* represents one of Sinclair’s best attempts at characterization, with well-rounded characters such as Dad, Bunny and Paul. While Sinclair may have featured more complex personalities in *Oil!*, ultimately he cannot reconcile them with his socialist cause. Paul (the socialist-turned-communist) and Dad (the capitalist) are killed off because Sinclair cannot have sympathetic characters on behalf of ideologies competing with socialism. More importantly, Sinclair struggles to create meaningful relationships between Bunny and others, focusing more on

Bunny's relationship with oil. LeMenager argues that oil itself becomes a character: "In the novel *Oil!*, oil itself returns, with almost every representation of its discovery, as an excessively embodied figure, the viscous medium of unregulated play."<sup>46</sup> LeMenager continues to point out the excitement portrayed in Bunny's interactions with oil, writing that in the novel,

Narrative point-of-view assists oil's capacity to stimulate excitement. Moments of oil discovery in the novel are filtered through the preadolescent consciousness of the oil magnate's son, Bunny. 'There she came! . . . [T]he spectators went flying to avoid the oily spray blown by the wind. They let her shoot for a while, until the water had been ejected; higher and higher . . . she made a lovely noise, hissing and splashing, bouncing up and down!' (78) For a 13-year-old male narrator, industrial-scale pollution and waste translate into arousal and premature ejaculation."<sup>47</sup>

The most sexual and genuinely exciting moments in *Oil!* exist in Bunny's captivation with oil gushing from the ground. Bunny has numerous interactions with women in the text, but every relationship is exceptionally bland and unfulfilling. Bunny's first sexual experience with a woman is characterized by his confusion and indifference, "Bunny had not realized that this was exactly a petting party. . . . He began to kiss her, but she wasn't satisfied—he didn't mean it, she said. . . . 'I've always known you were a queer boy' . . . And Bunny must share in this delirium, she would not have it otherwise."<sup>48</sup> Later, Bunny adapts to the sexual expectations set for him: "Bunny learned something from this incident. He knew that he had only to stretch out his arms and take her; and he knew what to do—Eunice Hoyt had taught him how to love a woman."<sup>49</sup>

Bunny's relationship with Vee Tracy is the best attempt at creating a sexual relationship in the novel, but still Bunny's initial attraction to Vee is ignited from her "sparkling black eyes."<sup>50</sup> Vee's eyes echo the physical properties of oil that Bunny felt intense elation and fondness for at

the start of the novel; the narrator describes oil as staining the landscape “a lovely dripping black,”<sup>51</sup> as well as remarking, “everything in sight was all black; there was a high wind blowing, and it was a regular thunder cloud, a curtain of black mist as far as you could see...staring at the great black jet that came rushing up out of the ground, a couple of hundred feet into the air, with a sound like an endless express train going by.”<sup>52</sup> The novel continues, “then shot a geyser of water, and then oil, black floods of it, with that familiar roaring sound—an express train shooting out of the ground!”<sup>53</sup> Bunny’s sexual gratification is entirely found within the ejaculatory experience of oil gushing from the earth. His marriage to Rachel Menzies at the conclusion of the novel is completely void of passion, ““We ought to go and get married...I don’t see any other way—really.””<sup>54</sup> The narration continues, “So to make her believe it, he began to kiss her...yes, it was worth while making a girl like that happy! To mingle love with those other emotions, that appeared safe!”<sup>55</sup> Sinclair is able to create an effective and vivid characterization of a relationship between Bunny and oil, but unable to reproduce the relationship between Bunny and any woman in the text.

Sinclair’s *Oil!* is particularly interesting because Sinclair so explicitly attempts to fight the evils of capitalist industry while submitting to them. Sinclair’s characters are reliant on and fascinated by oil. Beginning with the car ride, Bunny and Dad exhibit great pleasure in oil products that does not diminish during the novel. Bunny’s personal relationships continuously reflect his indifference to other people, but highlight his genuine affection for oil. For a novel that sets out to speak for the exploited laborers, *Oil!* fails spectacularly at authentic characterization of those workers. While Sinclair successfully presents many revolutionary ideas in *Oil!*, he entirely ignores the problems associated with the extraction and production of oil, and in fact celebrates the commodities of oil culture.

*There Will Be Blood* (2007) directed by Paul Thomas Anderson shifts focus from the son of an oil tycoon, to the magnate himself, renamed Daniel Plainview (Daniel Day-Lewis). *There Will Be Blood* portrays a family unraveling within the nexus of the oil industry and evangelical religion. The film is loosely inspired by *Oil!*, but it is hardly a retelling of the novel's central narrative, Bunny's story. *Blood* disregards the novel's focus on socialism and Hollywood entirely, and instead points its lens on the dangers of evangelicalism, capitalism, and the destruction they wreak on family. While *Oil!* positions socialism as the cure for America's capitalism and Hollywood as the site of its worst manifestation, *Blood* depicts a more nihilistic situation: US dependence on oil capitalism, defined by violence, is inescapable. Unlike *Oil!*, *Blood* does not unknowingly celebrate petroleum; rather, *Blood* aggressively portrays the devastating and violent consequences of oil capitalism by portraying bleak and violent visuals that invert the classic Western narrative, highlighting the capitalist avarice present in industry, evangelicalism, and even socialism, and examining Plainview's manipulation of resources and family. However, *Blood* is not able to escape petromodernity: it ultimately accepts oil capitalism by drawing a line between "good oil" and "bad oil"; decries ecologically unsustainable production but accepts ecologically "sound" production; and ignores Hollywood's relationship to oil. Indeed, its very existence as a film is only possible because of oil-based technologies. While *There Will Be Blood* constructs a successful critique of oil capitalism, the film cannot entirely escape petromodernity or imagine a world beyond oil.

*There Will Be Blood* chronicles the story of Daniel Plainview (Daniel Day-Lewis), a hard-working silver miner in 1890s California, who transforms himself into a self-made oil magnate. The film does little to explain the transition from silver to oil, but the audience quickly finds Plainview striking oil on a modest rig. One of Plainview's employees is killed on the job in

an accident. Plainview decides to adopt the man's infant son, who Plainview names H.W. Plainview becomes an "oil-man" who takes advantage of townspeople and drains their land of its resources. Paul Sunday (Paul Dano) comes to Plainview to ask him to drill for oil in his town, Little Boston, because he believes there is an ocean of oil under the ground. Plainview journeys to Little Boston and meets Paul's twin brother, Eli (Paul Dano). Eli is the town preacher, and wants to ensure that Plainview's oil drilling will benefit his new Church, and himself. Plainview pitches the drilling to the town, claiming that the profits from oil will fund education, agriculture, and allow Little Boston to thrive. Plainview begins to drill, and Eli begins to plan the construction of the Church of the Third Revelation.

A massive oil strike in Little Boston leads to a colossal oil fire. During the strike, a violent explosion causes the young H.W. (Dillon Freasier) to lose his hearing completely. Plainview can no longer manage caring for H.W. and sends him away to a school for the deaf. While H.W. is away, Plainview continues his climb to the top of the oil game. He meets a man named Henry (Kevin J. O'Connor) who claims to be his brother. At first suspicious, but then won over, Plainview invites Henry to work with him. Once Henry is exposed as an imposter, Plainview murders him. The final scenes of *Blood* take place in 1927 in Plainview's mansion. The adult H.W. (Russell Harvard) comes to tell his father that he plans to start his own oil company in Mexico because he was so inspired by Plainview's ambition. Plainview responds that now H.W. is no longer his son, but his competitor and reveals that he is not H.W.'s biological father. Eli Sunday comes to Plainview to sell the drilling rights to one Little Boston property that held out against Plainview's company initially. Plainview wildly explains that he has already acquired the oil from that property from draining it through the nearby drilling sites. Plainview then beats Eli to death with a bowling pin and declares, "I'm finished."

*There Will Be Blood* emphasizes the importance of its visuals, which diverge from the classic Western. *Blood's* visuals depict a nihilistic approach to American oil capitalism. The first image presented in the film is a black title card, reading “*There Will Be Blood.*” Not many contemporary films begin with a title card, and thus the visual choice here is significant. The film declares from the start that violence is imminent. Given that this is a film about oil, the title card then, explicitly links oil to blood, capitalism to violence. Through the first visual, the film could not be clearer about its attitude toward oil capitalism. This acknowledgement of the violence of oil capitalism diverges from the motifs of law and order found through land conquest featured in classic Westerns. *Blood* illustrates an inverted Western narrative, with bleak and empty landscapes—drastically different from the picturesque red rock deserts in Western classics such as *The Searchers* (John Ford, 1956). William C. Siska argues in “*No Country for Old Men* and *There Will Be Blood*: Classic Western Values Eclipsed by Modern Capitalism” that “New West films focus on avarice, loneliness, and separation. In the classic Western, the protagonist defeats evil, allowing a healthy society to flourish; in the revisionist Western, evil abides, and the visual style of these films supports this downbeat view.”<sup>56</sup> *Blood* blatantly constructs a “New West.”

The loneliness of rugged, American individualism is portrayed through stark visuals in the first scene of *Blood*: Plainview is alone mining for silver; the only sound is diegetic. We watch him repetitively and tirelessly strike the rock walls until he has found a small amount of silver. The intensity in Plainview’s striking, paired with the vaginal appearance of the cave, suggests a rape of the environment. Again, this emphasizes the violence inevitable with capitalism, particularly in the extraction of product, such as oil. In leaving the mine, Plainview falls back down into it and breaks both his legs. He then drags himself back up and across the desert, entirely alone. Gregory Alan Phipps notes in “Making the Milk into a Milkshake:

Adapting Upton Sinclair's *Oil!* into P.T. Anderson's *There Will Be Blood*" that "the film consigns itself largely to scenes of isolated structures (derricks, ranches, rail stations) on an empty landscape."<sup>57</sup> The lonesome visuals in *Blood* reveals the individual struggle that is obscured by the notion of individual triumph in conquering the West. Furthermore, classic Westerns utilized violence as a means of maintaining or restoring order in a lawless arena. *Blood* portrays violence as a devastating and destructive force.

Despite the shared motif of American individualism, *Blood* departs from Western's glorification of industry and capitalism; instead, it illustrates the hopelessness of even the successful American dream. Plainview depicts the ultimate ideal for American capitalism: a hard-working individual overcoming obstacles in severe circumstances to achieve success. In "*There Will Be Blood: Captain Ahab in the Oil Fields of California*," Leonard Engel argues that the film "dismantles mythologies of our success stories and deeply undermines the notion of the American Dream, especially as it is seen in the expansion of the West."<sup>58</sup> Engel points out that Plainview achieves all the goals set out for him, but "to what end?"<sup>59</sup> The film's visuals highlight teleology and straightforwardness, devices that allow for a linear path: such as, train tracks, pipelines, and two lanes of a bowling alley. Plainview moves from the silver mine to his mansion, mostly alone. Those he surrounds himself with are typically utilized for a purpose, and he disposes of them when they are no longer useful. His journey is isolated and direct, without much deviation from hard work to wealth. Yes, *Blood* creates a strong and successful capitalist protagonist, but his triumph is marked by devastation and sorrow. Phipps writes that the film depicts "a linear pathway in which oil capitalism has become steadily more powerful and more destructive."<sup>60</sup>

*Blood* portrays two oil strike scenes that visually emphasize the violent nature of oil capitalism. Both scenes are markedly different from a typical Hollywood oil gusher, seen in films such as *Tulsa* (Stuart Heisler, 1949) and *Giant* (George Stevens, 1956). Both *Tulsa* and *Giant* feature oil strike scenes that portray oil erupting from the ground and falling back down to earth like a powerful rain. *Tulsa*'s Cherokee (Susan Hayward) appears in ecstasy as oil drenches her gown. She even displays every dress she has worn to a gusher, each heavily stained in black oil. *Giant*'s Jett Rink (James Dean) builds an oil rig on a small property on the Benedict's cattle ranch. Once he strikes oil, he holds his arms out to embrace the jet-black rain exploding from his oil rig. Covered in black, Jett drives to the Benedict house to boast about his success.

Compared to these earlier oil films, the first oil strike scene in *Blood* is anticlimactic. Oil slowly begins to bubble out from the cracks in the mud. Plainview and his crew rejoice as they pour buckets of the black substance into a large murky puddle that appears as a gaping hole. Oil even splashes on the camera, as a dark smear, so the audience can even further experience the grotesqueness of oil. As two laborers work in the well to bring the oil up, a piece of equipment breaks and strikes one man, the father of the infant H.W., dead. In the second oil strike scene, the audience experiences more of a Hollywood gusher. Pressure from the earth shoots oil straight up Plainview's rig in a violent manner, as it deafens H.W.. Plainview rushes to the derrick to pull H.W. out, and in the process, becomes drenched black with oil. The oil shooting up the derrick then catches on fire and blazes for hours as Plainview watches, entirely enamored with the amount of oil he now owns. The fire reflects off Plainview's oil-stained face, creating a visual that marries Plainview's success with annihilation. Both oil strike scenes are punctuated with destruction, particularly involving H.W. He loses his father in the first oil strike, and his ability

to hear in the second. In both strikes, Plainview gains something from the destruction, which echoes Plainview's journey throughout the film: ruthlessness leading to success and wealth.

Sinclair pitted capitalism against socialism in *Oil!*, so where is the socialism in *Blood?* Socialism never makes an appearance by name, but there is one scene where Plainview utilizes the characteristics of socialism to convince the people of Little Boston to allow him to drill. Plainview walks into a crowded hall of worried citizens. He declares, "I'm an oilman, ladies and gentlemen." He continues, "As an oilman, I hope you'll forgive just good old fashioned plain speaking." The scene cuts between close ups of Plainview speaking and wide angle shots of men going to work in the dry oil fields. Plainview conjures up images associated with community and socialism. He states: "I work side by side with my wonderful son, H.W.... I encourage my men to bring their families as well. Family means children, children means education. Let's build a wonderful school in Little Boston. These children are the future that we strive for so they should have the very best of things." Here, Plainview is not invoking the individualistic work ethic associated with capitalism, instead he is disguising his capitalist endeavors as a socialist proposition. Plainview continues:

Please don't be insulted, if I speak about this bread, let's talk about bread. Now in my mind, it's an abomination to consider that to any man, woman, or child in this magnificent country as ours should have to look on a loaf of bread as a luxury. We're going to build water wells here, water wells means irrigation, irrigation means cultivation. You're going to have more grain than you know what to do with...New roads, agriculture, employment, education: these are just a few of the things we can offer you. This community of yours will not only survive, it will flourish.

Plainview is careful not to offend the townspeople of Little Boston by outright arguing that they need his help to feed themselves. Instead, Plainview appeals to the pride of country and community. Sinclair's socialist promises are manifested in Plainview's speech which is intended to camouflage Plainview's individual-focused capitalist business practices. The scenes of men working alone, only surrounded by oil derricks and dry land, no bread or schools in sight, insist that these promises will never be fulfilled. The film is suggesting that alternatives to capitalism in the US are merely concealing capitalist ideologies.

Sinclair offered socialism as the answer to the capitalism problem, but *Blood* presents a different equation, positioning industry and religion as combatants. *Blood* does not champion one over another, but rather portrays them as mutually destructive agents in the American experience. Both Eli Sunday and Daniel Plainview actively exploit and attempt to annihilate each other. *Blood* illustrates the entanglement of industry and evangelicalism in the blessing of the oil well. This scene mirrors one in John Ford's 1946 *My Darling Clementine*, the dedication of the church, a familiar scene in a classic Western. The church represents stability and prosperity for a new settlement in the American West. Interestingly, *My Darling Clementine*'s unfinished church bell tower bears a striking resemblance to an oil derrick. *Blood* perverts this image by portraying a blessing of an oil well, as if to say that Americans can no longer rely on faith but instead must submit their spirit to oil and industry. In Plainview's oilman speech, Eli Sunday asks, "Will the new road lead to the church?" Plainview responds that, "That is the first place it will lead." The pleasantries in that exchange can easily read as superficial. Phipps notes that with "the question of where the 'road leads,' Eli marks himself as Daniel's chief rival."<sup>61</sup> The tension between Eli and Plainview builds throughout the film as each man works to manipulate and annihilate one another.

The battle between Sunday and Plainview is marked by two scenes that reflect one another. Plainview agrees to a public baptism at Sunday's church so he may build a pipeline in one area of Little Boston. Sunday leads the crowd with, "You will never be saved if you," and the crowd answers "reject the blood!" Sunday asks, "Is there a sinner here looking for salvation?" Plainview stands up and walks to the stage, with a large, white, glowing crucifix behind him. Sunday demands, "down on your knees" as he circles the shrunken Plainview. Sunday leads Plainview through his confession, "So say it now, 'I am a sinner.' Say it louder, 'I am a sinner!'" Sunday passionately recites Plainview's confession while Plainview sternly repeats: "I am sorry lord!" / "I am sorry lord." "I want the blood!" / "Want the blood." Sunday exclaims, "I have abandoned my child!" Plainview glares at Sunday, his face becomes contorted, he looks at the floor, and he cries, "I have abandoned my child! I have abandoned my child! I have abandoned my boy!" Sunday screams, "You will beg for the blood!" The confession quickly turns into exorcism, as Sunday slaps Plainview's face, shouting "Get out of here devil! Out!" Sunday is part performing for the Church of the Third Revelation, and part exercising his power over his rival. Plainview is also performing. To move forward with his goals, he must be a part of the community, and the community must believe that he is saved. Water is poured over Plainview as a man sings, "There is wonderful power in the blood!" Plainview shakes Sunday's hand, as his back is turned to the camera. The audience does not know what Plainview says to Sunday, but Sunday's face becomes sunken and worried as Plainview walks down the aisle of proud Little Bostonians. Engel observes, "Daniel subjects himself to this abuse as part of his own manipulation to gain the favor of these avid evangelicals and to get their land, but Daniel is furious at having to submit to Eli's power, and he does not forget the humiliation."<sup>62</sup> The frequent references to blood speaks to the film's argument: the violence inherent in capitalist

industry is deeply tied to evangelicalism, as they both are integral properties in the decay of US morality and society.

The final scene of *Blood* echoes Plainview's embarrassing defeat to Sunday. Eli has come to Daniel's mansion to sell the oil drilling rights to Bandy's land (Bandy being the one Little Boston citizen to hold out from the initial drilling). Plainview agrees, but first he demands Eli must declare that he is a "false prophet and God is a superstition." Eli concedes, but Plainview does not stop there: he continues, "I broke you and I beat you.... You're just the afterbirth, Eli, slithered out from your mother's filth... Where were you when Paul was suckling at his mother's teat? Who was nursing you poor Eli?" Eli begs, "If you would just take this lease, Daniel..." Plainview growls, "Drainage! Drainage, Eli!" Unbeknownst to Eli and Bandy, Plainview had been able to extract oil from Bandy's property by draining oil from the areas surrounding it. Plainview erratically explains, "If you have a milkshake, and I have a milkshake, and I have a straw, there it is see? Are you watching?" Plainview lifts his finger and walks across the room, away from the sniveling Eli. Plainview continues in a bizarre and volatile manner, limping back to Eli with his finger in the air, "And my straw reaches, across the room, and starts to drink your milkshake, I drink your milkshake! I drink it up!" Plainview begins to throw bowling balls at the jumping Eli, declaring "I am the Third Revelation! I am smarter than you!" Plainview hurls bowling pins at Eli, as they mirror each other's movements, seemingly dancing around the bowling alley. The motions of Plainview and Sunday are very choreographed and eccentric, echoing the performance of Sunday's exorcism and Plainview's baptism. Plainview catches Eli, and he slams the bowling pin down on Eli's skull. The promise of blood has been fulfilled, as Daniel sits down next to Eli's bashed corpse. Plainview's butler arrives, asking, "Mr. Daniel?" and Plainview replies, "I'm finished."

The film's attention to material manipulation emphasizes Plainview's own manipulation to achieve success. Phipps notices the connection between Plainview's stress on liquids (mother's milk, milkshakes, water, blood) to oil capitalism:

The symbolic milkshake straw is yet another example of teleology: an object that leads from point A to Point B and fills a single purpose. Just as the milkshake (Daniel's victory) is the derivative product of the milk (Eli's failure), Daniel's mansion is the material product of his control over the capital that Eli mistakenly believes he still holds in his possession. As the metaphor of the straw suggests, the pipeline not only leads to the mansion, but also serves as a drain that soaks up the resources of others, feeding a self-perpetuating cycle of production and transformation.<sup>63</sup>

Plainview manipulates oil, earth's material, into success and wealth. There is a heavy focus on natural liquid products throughout the film and how Plainview controls them for his capitalist benefit. He taunts Eli for his lack of strength, claiming that his twin Paul received the mother's milk entirely. Plainview controls his pipelines to steal oil, like the straw in a milkshake. He utilizes the baptism water to get what he wants from the citizens of Little Boston. Blood, of course, is invoked in religious awakenings, the threat and actions of violence, and as a tie between Plainview and others. The "blood" between Plainview and H.W. is used to sweeten Plainview's image. The blood tie between them is severed whenever Plainview chooses, because H.W. is not Daniel's biological son. When Henry convinces Daniel that he is his brother, Plainview exploits his body and energy because of their blood tie. The blood between Daniel and Henry is used until Daniel learns he has been tricked, that Henry is an imposter, and Daniel severs the tie with violent blood – killing Henry. Here, Plainview is constantly manipulating

these products to get from Point A, hardworking oilman, to Point B, individual wealth and success.

The theme of product manipulation cannot be ignored in a text that is an adaptation; *Blood* is using, changing, and benefitting from *Oil!* Phipps argues that the texts create “a symbolic pipeline between 1927 and 2007.”<sup>64</sup> Sinclair warned of US dependence on oil capitalism, and *Blood* confirms the worst-case scenario: “the triumph of the oil industry as inevitable.”<sup>65</sup> Siska agrees, writing that *Blood* offers “powerful critiques of capitalism at a time when the ideologists of money were at the height of their ascendancy, peaking before the plunge from the precipice of 2008.”<sup>66</sup> He continues, naming *Blood* a “cautionary tale” and concluding that if *Blood* tells us “something new about the American West, it is that greed is a powerful force, and is not soon going away.”<sup>67</sup> *Blood* succeeds in portraying a linear and bleak trajectory from Sinclair’s source material. The film forcibly argues that the competitive and individualistic nature (“I want no one else to succeed,” claims Daniel) found in oilman capitalism dominates in US culture. Daniel Plainview embodies the desires and fears of a capitalist laborer. He sets out to be a self-made man. Plainview adopts H.W., some argue entirely for Plainview’s own benefit, but I disagree. The tranquil focus of the lingering shot on serene Plainview, arm around infant H.W. on the train, is portrayed as perhaps one of the only moments of an authentic Daniel Plainview. Plainview is a transformed man after his endeavors in the oil industry. He has lost his family, exerts the last of his power over Eli, and is then “finished.”

*Blood* depicts a nihilistic situation: US dependence on oil capitalism, defined by violence, is inescapable. Sinclair attempted to portray socialist activism as the answer, while Anderson seems to illustrate a darker reality. While the film attacks American capitalist practices, *Blood* is not able to escape the entanglement of oil. What is there to learn about the

perils of oil capitalism from an oil capitalism product? To what extent is it possible for Anderson to effectively critique petroleum when his life and the institutions of which he is a part (Hollywood) are heavily indebted to oil? Although the film appears to critique the oil industry in early 20<sup>th</sup> century California, it ultimately accepts oil capitalism by drawing a line between “good oil” and “bad oil,” decries ecologically unsustainable oil production, and ignores Hollywood’s relationship with oil. Indeed, its very existence as a film is only possible because of oil-based technologies. While *There Will Be Blood* constructs a successful critique of capitalism, the film cannot imagine a world beyond petromodernity.

Petromodernity often materializes in a binary of “good oil” and “bad oil” in texts that aim to discuss oil. Daniel Worden argues in “Fossil-Fuel Futurity: Oil in *Giant*” that “petroleum underlies the normative vision of family, work, and social belonging in the late twentieth-century United States.”<sup>68</sup> Hidden in plain sight, oil acts as the backbone for deciding which industries are wholesome, and which are malevolent. In *Giant*, Worden notes that the automobile is pitted against technologies such as the airplane, creating a sense of tradition and humility around the automobile, and a sense of excess and luxury around the airplane.<sup>69</sup> In the same way, the Benedict family’s oil industry is marked as helpful and modest, while Jett Rink’s indulgence is portrayed as an oilman who has gone too far. *Tulsa*, even more obviously, illustrates the binary of “good” and “bad” oil. Cherokee becomes greedy and the precious land of the Native Americans become destroyed in the process of extracting oil. *Tulsa* states in its introduction that oil was meant to be retrieved from the ground, but Cherokee learns that she must strike a balance between oil extraction and maintaining the land. This compromise adheres strongly to good/bad oil dichotomy. This idea is an integral part of oil’s ubiquitous yet invisible nature: Cherokee

discovers that oil is useless if it is obvious that the land has been destroyed to obtain it; the oil must remain invisible in pipelines and gas tanks.

While *Blood* seems to attack the oil industry as a whole, the film submits to the good/bad oil binary in the final scene between H.W. and Plainview. H.W. arrives at Plainview's mansion to tell his father that he admired his ambition in the oil industry so deeply that H.W. himself plans to search for oil in Mexico. Enraged, Plainview exclaims "Bastard from a basket!" The audience has witnessed Plainview (bad oil) transform into a monster, isolating himself from any semblance of family he had. H.W. (good oil) has come to display how well-adjusted he has become in the world, in fact so well-adjusted, he can accomplish all Plainview had accomplished even with a disability. The audience has been rooting for H.W. since his infancy, and his moment of walking away from his father is both melancholic and triumphant: he has escaped Plainview. But to what end? H.W. is about to exploit Mexico for oil to succeed in American capitalism. Worden writes, "the oil business is not subsumed into the family but remains visible and irreducible to 'natural' family relations...oil becomes the only family relation"<sup>70</sup> He continues to assert, "only by rejecting oil's claim on family can H.W. hope to escape the control of his father."<sup>71</sup> Clearly, this is not the path that H.W. chooses. Oil films, even when critiquing oil, cannot escape the universality of oil production. The film does not imagine familial bonds beyond oil; oil and family are locked together.

The emphasis on physicality and bodies in *Blood* conveys a glorification of manual labor. LeMenager argues that "Fundamentally, *There Will Be Blood* enacts a mourning for production, oil production specifically and manufacturing more broadly."<sup>72</sup> The first scene of the film not only stresses the lonely and individual nature of Plainview's character, but aligns the audience with him. The fulfillment of Plainview's success is shared with the audience through the visceral

visuals and satisfying sound of his pick-axe. The stress on bodies can be felt throughout *Blood*, from the loud clunk of Joe Gundha's death, to Plainview's punitive baptism, to the intensity in the bowling alley murder of Eli. Plainview himself becomes extreme and eccentric as the film progresses, his body, voices, and movements becoming one of the main focuses. LeMenager observes, "The excessive Plainview becomes a body double for oil itself."<sup>73</sup> Plainview is no longer just a man; he has transformed into a manifestation of oil and oil capitalism, a series of contradictions as LeMenager explains "me/not me, inside/outside, alive/dead"<sup>74</sup> which helps to explain his bizarre behavior that completely separates him from being human. The color palette in *Blood* is almost entirely muted browns and greys—except for the blazing bright oil fire and the stark blackness of oil covering Plainview and his men. These notable exceptions to the blandness of the film invoke a visceral, exciting response from the audience, reinforcing the curiosity and attraction the US feels towards oil, and therefore oil capitalism and manual labor. LeMenager states, "the film gives almost too much sensory information, as if it mourns not only its earlier industrial setting, petroleum 'made by hand' in southern California, but also the film medium itself, its dream of a virtuality in which body effects break free of actual, situated matter."<sup>75</sup>

In this mourning for oil production, *Blood* also enacts a mourning for an older sense of film production. In order to portray an older cinematic style, reminiscent of the 1930s and 1940s, Anderson utilized filming techniques that are particularly indebted to oil. (81) The on-location filming in Marfa, Texas required new roads to be built to film, essentially, in the middle of nowhere. The UCLA's *Report on Sustainability in the Motion Picture Industry* in 2006 noted that these types of on-location shooting are a major component of environmental degradation.<sup>76</sup> LeMenager observes "A great deal of fuel enabled this film's sensory bonanza."<sup>77</sup> Anderson

desired to make a film that had the appearance of a twentieth-century film. To achieve this, he used twentieth-century film-stock and photochemical processes both based in petroleum, as opposed to newer “arguably more sustainable digital technologies,” according to LeMenager.<sup>78</sup> The only scenes that required digital enhancement were the oil fire and Eli Sunday’s bloody, bashed head. Interestingly, these scenes of natural product (oil, fire, blood) are intended to draw out a primal and natural response from the audience, but they are indeed digitally manipulated to look more “real.”

Hollywood was able to thrive as a capitalist industry due to the money made from oil drilling, but *Blood* refuses to address its own tie to oil. In Jonaki Mehta’s “Before Hollywood, The Oil Industry Made LA” Chief operating officer of Signal Hill Petroleum, David Slater points out, “Los Angeles was a sleepy pueblo that became LA, and Hollywood and the studios all popped up and people got wealthy because of oil.”<sup>79</sup> Oil was fairly easy to extract from LA because it was so close to the surface. After the invention of the automobile, it became simple to transport goods, such as oil, in and out of California. Mehta states, “It’s difficult to overstate just how much oil was being produced in LA back in the 1920s.”<sup>80</sup> *Blood* appears to be aware of its identity as an adaptation, and does not fall into some of the petromodern traps that Sinclair found himself in with *Oil!* So, why does *Blood* miss an opportunity to comment on Hollywood’s debt to oil capitalism?

Considering recent revelations of rampant sexual predation by Hollywood heavyweights, it does not seem like a stretch to argue that Hollywood chooses to ignore its own flaws.

Anderson specifically selected certain components of *Oil!* to construct his narrative for *Blood*, and in this selection, the tie between oil and Hollywood has been virtually erased. This omission helped bolster *There Will Be Blood* in awards season, enabling it to be celebrated in an industry

that is founded on oil capitalism. The film is a text that criticizes oil industry, but relies heavily on oil products and is exalted in an industry that thrived only because of its connection to oil production. *There Will Be Blood* is a glaring argument that petromodernity is inescapable.

Like Sinclair, Anderson aimed to critique capitalist practices in the US. Despite using oil as the vehicle for his criticism, Sinclair was unable to navigate oil's governance over American ideology and life. *Blood* repeats mistakes made by oil films *Giant* and *Tulsa*, reinforcing the dichotomy of "good/bad oil" with H.W.'s desire to drill oil as a positive opposition to Plainview's decay. The film focuses on physicality, manual labor, and hard-work—essentially enacting a mourning for the production it aims to be criticizing. *Blood* was created using particular techniques and materials that heavily relied on oil and petroleum. Furthermore, the film itself is a capitalist product, crafted with the intentions to be nominated by the Academy Awards: an organization built on the funding of oil industries. *Blood* ignores the bond between oil and Hollywood to achieve a level of success that would not be available to a film that disparages the system it exists within. *There Will Be Blood* is not able to effectively express a criticism of the petromodernity that defines American life. Peter Hitchcock writes that the "American imaginary" needs to articulate "the prospect of the end of oil itself."<sup>81</sup> *Blood* is not that text. The film's insistence on utilizing oil, but not quite being able to escape it, reinforces oil's invisible and unshakeable grasp on American ideology.

Sinclair's *Oil!* and Anderson's *There Will Be Blood* actively engage with oil and petromodernity to critique US capitalist industry. Sinclair was able to write a groundbreaking novel that mirrored contemporary oil scandals, offered working class perspectives alongside nuanced characterizations of capitalist characters, uncovered Hollywood's connection to the oil industry, and explicitly related the horrors of World War I with oil capitalism. Despite Sinclair's

experience in social justice writing and position as a peak-oil discovery writer, he was still ensnared by petromodernity. Bunny is infatuated with automobiles and the novel frequently celebrates cars and driving. Although Sinclair attempts to challenge oil capitalism, he does not seem to have a problem with the petroleum that fills up American cars. Furthermore, Bunny's most passionate and visceral experiences come from watching oil erupt from the ground. Bunny is unable to connect with the various women in the text; the most erotic passages come from connecting Vee Tracy's darkness to the darkness of crude oil. Sinclair wrote *Oil!* during peak-oil discovery, but could not foresee oil's ubiquity and authority in American life.

Anderson's *There Will Be Blood* comes eighty years later, during peak-oil production. The distance between the two texts allowed Anderson more understanding of oil's presence in American culture. Anderson effectively crafted his film as a critique of brutal American capitalism. Anderson utilized visuals that inverted the classic American Western ideal, portraying a monstrous capitalist protagonist whose life is defined by violence and greed. Additionally, *Blood* depicts capitalism, evangelicalism, and even socialism as equally treacherous, emphasizing their individualistic and selfish nature. As an adaptation, *Blood* focuses on how Plainview manipulates the earth for oil, tying this to how he manipulates his family for personal gain. However, *Blood* manifests its critique by separating "good" oil from "bad" oil through H.W.'s desire to drill. The film emphasizes physicality and manual labor, effectively glorifying the production it's aiming to criticize. *Blood* fails to realize its own debt to oil, as it utilizes techniques that are particularly based in oil production. Finally, the film entirely ignores the close relationship between oil capitalism and Hollywood.

Both the novel and the film are unable to articulate a world beyond oil. These two texts are actively engaging with oil yet seem unaware of their own connection to the industry. In

petromodern culture, it is crucial for texts to begin to imagine past oil. The world has been running on fossil fuels since the early twentieth-century, with seemingly little regard to its inevitable end. Very few texts engage with the possibility of the end of oil, even those that aim to critique oil capitalism. *After Oil*, an interdisciplinary research project by the Petrocultures group that aims to address the movement beyond oil, describes the importance of “the process of energy transition through social transition.”<sup>82</sup> Additionally, *After Oil* explains, “We will not make an adequate or democratic transition to a world after oil without first changing how we *think, imagine, see, and hear.*”<sup>83</sup> The importance of articulating a culture beyond oil cannot be understated. Although both *Oil!* and *There Will Be Blood* construct successful critiques of capitalist culture, they fail to change how we understand oil.

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## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> BBC News, “Pope swaps popemobile for Lamborghini” (video), posted November 15 2017. Accessed November 16 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-europe-42003039/pontiff-swaps-popemobile-for-lamborghini>.

<sup>2</sup>Stephanie LeMenager, “The Aesthetics of Petroleum after *Oil!*,” *American Literary History*, 24 no. 1 (Spring 2012): 60.

<sup>3</sup> R.W. Allmendinger, “Peak Oil?,” Cornell University: Energy Studies in the College of Engineering, 2007, accessed November 15, 2017, [http://www.geo.cornell.edu/eas/energy/the\\_challenges/peak\\_oil.html](http://www.geo.cornell.edu/eas/energy/the_challenges/peak_oil.html).

<sup>4</sup> Daniel Worden, “Fossil-Fuel Futurity: Oil in *Giant*,” *Journal of American Studies*, no. 46 (2012): 441.

<sup>5</sup> R.N. Mookerjee, *Art for Social Justice: The Major Novels of Upton Sinclair* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1988), 4.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>9</sup> Upton Sinclair, *Oil!* (London: Penguin, 2008), 548.

<sup>10</sup> R.N. Mookerjee, *Art for Social Justice: The Major Novels of Upton Sinclair* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1988), 77.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>13</sup> Joseph Blotner, *The Modern American Political Novel 1900-1960* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1968), 114.

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<sup>14</sup> William A. Bloodworth, *Upton Sinclair* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1977), 108.

<sup>15</sup> Upton Sinclair, *Oil!* (London: Penguin, 2008), 430.

<sup>16</sup> R.N. Mookerjee, *Art for Social Justice: The Major Novels of Upton Sinclair* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1988), 85.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> William A. Bloodworth, *Upton Sinclair* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1977), 108.

<sup>19</sup> Upton Sinclair, *Oil!* (London: Penguin, 2008), 2.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 192.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 169.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 330.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 349.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 355.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 398.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 351.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 365.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 412.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 492.

<sup>31</sup> William A. Bloodworth, *Upton Sinclair* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1977), 108.

<sup>32</sup> Upton Sinclair, *Oil!* (London: Penguin, 2008), 152.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

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<sup>35</sup> Stephanie LeMenager, “The Aesthetics of Petroleum After *Oil!*,” *American Literary History* 24, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 63.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>37</sup> Upton Sinclair, *Oil!* (London: Penguin, 2008), 1.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 202.

<sup>45</sup> Stephanie LeMenager, “The Aesthetics of Petroleum After *Oil!*,” *American Literary History* 24, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 64.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Upton Sinclair, *Oil!* (London: Penguin, 2008), 200-201.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 309.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 328.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 520.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 522.

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<sup>56</sup> William A. Siska, “*No Country for Old Men* and *There Will Be Blood*: Classic Western Values Eclipsed by Modern Capitalism,” In *Contemporary Westerns*, ed. Andrew Nelson (Metcheun NJ: Scarecrow, 2013), 99.

<sup>57</sup> Gregory Alan Phipps, “Making the Milk into a Milkshake: Adapting Upton Sinclair’s *Oil!* Into P.T. Anderson’s *There Will Be Blood*,” *Literature-Film Quarterly* 43, no. 1 (2015): 41.

<sup>58</sup> Leonard Engel, “*There Will Be Blood*: Captain Ahab in the Oil Fields of California,” In *New Wests and Post-Wests: Literature and Film of the American West*, ed. Paul Varner (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), 80-81.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>60</sup> Gregory Alan Phipps, “Making the Milk into a Milkshake: Adapting Upton Sinclair’s *Oil!* Into P.T. Anderson’s *There Will Be Blood*,” *Literature-Film Quarterly* 43, no. 1 (2015): 44.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>62</sup> Leonard Engel, “*There Will Be Blood*: Captain Ahab in the Oil Fields of California,” In *New Wests and Post-Wests: Literature and Film of the American West*, ed. Paul Varner (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), 85.

<sup>63</sup> Gregory Alan Phipps, “Making the Milk into a Milkshake: Adapting Upton Sinclair’s *Oil!* Into P.T. Anderson’s *There Will Be Blood*,” *Literature-Film Quarterly* 43, no. 1 (2015): 43.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>66</sup> William A. Siska, “*No Country for Old Men* and *There Will Be Blood*: Classic Western Values Eclipsed by Modern Capitalism,” In *Contemporary Westerns*, ed. Andrew Nelson (Metcheun NJ: Scarecrow, 2013), 103.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 103-104.

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<sup>68</sup> Daniel Worden, “Fossil-Fuel Futurity: Oil in *Giant*,” *Journal of American Studies*, no. 46 (2012): 441.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 449.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 458.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 459.

<sup>72</sup> Stephanie LeMenager, “The Aesthetics of Petroleum After *Oil!*,” *American Literary History* 24, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 80.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 80-81.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> Jonaki Mehta, “Before Hollywood, The Oil Industry Made LA,” NPR.org, April 5, 2016, <https://www.npr.org/2016/04/05/473107378/before-hollywood-the-oil-industry-made-la>.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> Peter Hitchcock, “Oil in an American Imaginary,” *New Formations* no. 69 (Spring 2010): 97.

<sup>82</sup> Petrocultures Research Group, *After Oil* (Edmonton: University of Alberta, 2016), 11.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

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