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BLOOD AND OIL:
HOW VAMPIRIC LITERATURE BOLSTERS BIG OIL'S POWER

By

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Bachelor of Arts in English Literature, Florida International University, Miami, FL, 2020

Thesis

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Blood and Oil: How Vampiric Literature Bolsters Big Oil's Power

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This thesis examines the relationship between blood and oil, that is, the multitude of ways in which the petromodernity industries harvests and threatens vitality. The introduction of this thesis is concerned tracking how petromodernity is a byproduct, offspring, or extension of colonialism. In this way, petromodernity can be thought about as “petro-colonialism.” Ursula K. LeGuin’s “Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction” informs the argument that the way that petro-colonialism came to be and also maintains itself is by utilizing the “killer story.” This thesis also employs autorheoretical techniques informed by Lauren Fournier to show how petro-colonialism or “oiliness” sticks to its subjects. This thesis examines the metaphor of the vampire as just one example of a killer story which ultimately upholds petromodern and colonial sensibilities like white supremacy, gender inequality, and the valorization of innovation and expansion.

It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories.

—Donna Haraway, *Staying With The Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*

It is the story that makes the difference. It is the story that hid my humanity from me, the story the mammoth hunters told about bashing, thrusting, raping, killing, about the Hero. The wonderful, poisonous story of Botulism, the killer story.

—Ursula K. LeGuin, “The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction”

INTRODUCTION: THEORETICAL OVERTURES

Colonialism’s Ascent into Petromodernity

The story of the world for the past half-millennium has been determined by the colonizing structures of European empire. More recently however, the narrator’s torch has been passed onto its wicked and potentially more lethal offspring, petromodernity. To ground us in a critical survey of colonialism, in order to then track its transformation into petromodernity, I call on Nick Estes, indigenous scholar, activist, and author of *Our History is the Future: Standing Rock versus the Dakota Access Pipeline and the Long Tradition of Indigenous Resistance*. Estes details America’s devastating relationship to settler-colonialism specifically:

The history of the United States is a history of settler colonialism—the specific form of colonialism whereby an imperial power seizes Native territory, eliminates the original people by force, and resettles the land with a foreign, invading population. Unlike other forms of colonialism in which the colonizers rule from afar and sometimes leave, settler colonialism attempts to permanently and

completely replace Natives with a settler population. The process is never complete, and the colonial state's methods for gaining access to new territories change over time, evolving from a program of outright extermination to one of making Indigenous peoples "racial minorities" and "domestic dependent nations" within their own lands, and of sacrificing Indigenous lands for resource extraction (86).

What Estes is illuminating here are the lengths that settler-colonialism will go to in order to maintain its reign over a territory. As Estes' work suggests—in its focus on indigenous resistance to the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) which threatens to contaminate the sovereignty and sanctity of the Missouri River, subsequently endangering the (non)human bodies that rely on it for sustenance—the colonizer ensures his overrule by maximizing power and wealth via stolen land and stolen blood (I detail "blood" as it relates to this thesis more later on but in short, blood here is simply referring to autonomy or livelihood writ large). With that said, I add to Estes' definition of settler-colonialism by framing it as a force that's principal objective is to harvest vitality as fuel for its expansion.¹ Furthermore, vitality, I argue, is concentrated in both oil and blood, Earthly fluids whose propensity for energy production is immense. Before elaborating though, it's necessary to highlight the other important fixture of Nick Estes' explanation of colonialism: his emphasis on settler colonialism's ability to endlessly transform throughout its dominion, and how this metamorphosis is enabled by the energy extracted from the resources seized, of which are bodies and land alike. In other words, the colonizer is both insatiable and highly adaptable. Although not explicitly a work of

¹ My iteration of vitality is informed by Jane Bennet, scholar of New Materialism and author of *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. For her, vitality challenges the so-called inanimacy of things, where all matter has a degree of energy and liveliness.

critical colonial studies, Michele Alexander's *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* attests to how oppressive structures— like colonialism, which inherently involve a praxis of white supremacy, much like the justice system—are “preserved through transformation” (Alexander 21).² As colonialism's expansion and technological advancements reach new heights in our modern day, we find ourselves enmeshed in an increasingly industrialized world whose overlord *appears* to be vastly different from pre-industrialized colonialism. However, as Alexander and Estes imply, if we look closely at our contemporary society, we'll see that a series of sneaky augmentations has occurred to the methods of settler-colonialism, and the totalizing and pervasive structures of colonialism have not gone away at all, but rather, have spawned into a new kind of smothering regime: petromodernity.

In Caren Irr and Nayoung Kim's introduction to *Life in Plastic: Artistic Responses to Petromodernity*, they assert that petromodernity is a “culture and economy defined by its dependence on the energy provided by finite fossil fuels,” as well as a reliance on “global oil markets and the heaviness of large machinery” (Irr, Kim 1, 5). Petromodernity defined in this way indeed carries traces of settler-colonial methodologies. Big Oil's achievement of global occupation forcibly envelopes not only American territories and its peoples in its project, but Big Oil's depends equally on international lands and peoples as sites for extraction. Petromodernity's far reaching international presence implies that petromodernity has settled Earth in totality. In other words, petromodernity has entangled the entire planet within it. This entanglement leaves no alternative choice beyond our obligation to oil (even if the consequences of such obligations result in irreversible

² By Alexander and Estes logic, one could even argue that the justice system is itself a byproduct of colonialism.

damages to the health of Earth and their inhabitants). Pausing here, suppose then, as I have already argued, that colonialism is a force that acquires and harvests stolen vitality in order to sustain itself and fuel its evolution. In that case, it's productive then, to imagine colonial acquisition or extraction as being akin to vampirism, which is a principal argument of this thesis. If bodies and landscapes are containers that house vitality, thinking about extraction as a vampire prompts an understanding of Earth and their inhabitants as perpetual blood donors.³ The frightening reality of vampirism though is that there's only so much blood to go around, meaning that the energy at petromodernity's disposal is finite, and dwindling by the second.

Returning to the convergence of settler-colonialism and petromodern vampirism, petromodernity, simply stated, has succeeded in colonizing the *entire world*. That is to say, that Earth itself has been completely and totally engulfed in petroleum byproducts that occupy the highest heights and the deepest depths.⁴ Virtually no Earthly place has evaded petromodernity's cold, undead touch. Carbon emissions from extractive industries, our dependence on gas-powered automotive transportation, and other fossil fuel derived energy are large-scale, atmospheric manifestations of petromodernity's global occupation and its praxis of vitality extraction. In other words, Big Oil has managed to settle into every single particle of air, rendering Earth and everything on them

³ My use of they/them/their pronouns when referring to Earth is purposeful. It's important to me to acknowledge Earth's agency as an actant, and one that houses all other lively animate beings. Earth's liveliness is at stake for me here in this thesis, and recognizing their animacy is an imperative when reconsidering how we interact with it. I also use gender neutral/fluid pronouns to subvert the popular "mother Earth" trope that carries with it a history of weaponized femininity used to justify violence against the land, as well as implications that Earth is only here to take care of/nurse us with no expectation of reciprocity.

⁴ Gibbens, Sarah. "Plastic Bag Found at the Bottom of World's Deepest Ocean Trench." National Geographic, 2022.
<https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/plastic-bag-found-bottom-worlds-deepest-ocean-trench/>

completely enveloped in oil. Perhaps oil's occupation of the atmosphere isn't enough to prove that Big Oil has evolved from settler colonialism. Even the most seemingly uninhabitable places have been colonized by Big Oil. For instance, the drainage from our washing machines, the bodies of insects, and human blood all contain traces of petroleum byproducts.⁵ Not to mention, plastic wrapped vegetables and other single-use plastics, beauty products and their packaging, the roads we drive on, smartphones, dish soap, paint, linoleum floors, spandex, CDs, grocery bags, shoes, clothes, toys, video game consoles, red 40 (yeah, wtf), pens, printer ink, explosives, sun tan lotion, aspirin, phone cases, fertilizer, credit cards, and virtually everything else is derived from petro-chemicals; meaning that (non)human bodies and how we eat, live, and breathe are inextricably bound to oil.⁶

To restate Estes' definition of settler-colonialism, the colonizer to this day is dedicated to imposing himself onto marginalized bodies and their lands for the purpose of obtaining power via energy extraction. The Dakota Access Pipeline is just one example of the colonizer's presence in the modern day. Considering this fact alone means that it is absolutely impossible to disentangle Big Oil from settler colonial methodologies. In other

⁵ Okamoto, Katie. "Your Laundry Sheds Harmful Microfibers. Here's What You Need to Do About it." New York Times, 2021.

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Bouldin, et al., "Concentrations in Human Blood of Petroleum Hydrocarbons Associated With the BP/Deepwater Horizon oil spill, Gulf of Mexico." National Library of Medicine, 2016.

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/25998020/>

⁶Bozel, Joe. "An Example of a Flow-Chart for Products from Petroleum-based Feedstocks."

Research Gate.

https://www.researchgate.net/figure/An-Example-of-a-Flow-Chart-for-Products-from-Petroleum-based-Feedstocks_fig1_235062870

words, every single oil derived product also contains a legacy of colonial violence because stolen land and stolen blood are prerequisites to the acquisition of oil and the manufacturing of petro-products. Petromodernity itself then is fundamentally committed to colonial acts of violence against marginalized communities and non-human entities in addition to the extraction of oil. In fact, this practice of colonial violence is precisely what enables petromodernity's expansion. Harkening back again to Alexander and Estes' sentiments regarding oppression's indefinite mutations, the colonial project (and white supremacy therefore) is *never complete* and its methods for "gaining access to new territories," to use Estes' term, are constantly mutating. Put another way, petromodernity can be witnessed as a byproduct of colonialism in the ways that Big Oil is *presently* occupying sovereign lands for the purpose sustaining itself on the vitality contained therein. The liveliness seized from such territories— which, in the case of DAPL, includes both the oil that runs beneath the Missouri River, and the blood (AKA autonomy) of the river's stewards—fuels petromodernity's global domination *through* colonial sensibilities. This implies that the colonizer's "methods for gaining accesses to new territories" extend from the devastation of environmental racism and genocide of marginalized identities to something as gentle and unassuming as a spritz of perfume.⁷ These infinite iterations of petromodernity establish Big Oil as the most successful and totalizing colonizing force in history. Ultimately, petromodernity is undeniably a mutation of settler colonialism. Moreover, its status as such is a result of Big Oil's ability to safeguard and retool colonial methods of harvesting vitality both from bodies (human and nonhuman) and land for the sake of building the world in its image. With all that

⁷ Reinhard, Chelsea. "Petroleum Products: Perfume." San Angelo Live, 2013. <https://sanangelolive.com/news/national/2013-10-14/petroleum-products-perfume>

said, it might be useful to reduce colonialism's ascent into petromodernity down to a simple term: petro-colonialism.

Story-making as World Building: The Petro-colonial Killer Story

Part of petro-colonialism's proficiency at transformation lies in its ability to tell and infinitely *retell* stories that are expertly crafted to maintain its oppressive power. In conjunction with brute force, petro-colonialism's global proliferation can be attributed to a methodology of cultural and social imperialism by way of story-telling. In other words, petro-colonialism relies on telling particular narratives that legitimize its reign. These narratives often center on individualism, bravery, gender oppression, cultural erasure/universalism, arresting violence, and grandiosity especially. However, as we know, petro-colonialism is both slippery and highly regenerative, so it's safe to assume this list goes on in perpetuity. This thesis aims to dissect the oily epistemologies that reinstitute petro-colonialism. In other words, the work is committed to developing a critical hyper-vigilance to the principle features of petro-colonial narratives. Becoming keenly aware of what constitutes an oily story allows us to sniff out even the most imperceptible traces of petro-colonialism that lurk about. More importantly, our awareness of petro-colonial epistemologies will undermine their efficacy and allow us to reject oiliness and all of its many iterations. In rejecting Big Oil and its petro-colonial stories, we decolonize our minds and create a space to imagine new worlds, ones that flourishes beyond Big Oil's undead grasp. That is, to *speculate* on what it means to live in a decolonized world; one that pays reparations to, heals relationships with, and facilitates the thriving of the environment.

As Ursula K. LeGuin—who revolutionized speculative fiction by introducing a feminist sensibility to the genre—suggests, modes of petro-colonial story telling can be synthesized into what she calls “the killer story,” which champions violence via “bashing, thrusting, raping, killing,” as well as the so-called “hero” that effectuates such actions (6). The term “killer story” comes from her playful essay entitled, “The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction.” This essay’s title comes from anthropologist Elizabeth Fisher’s Carrier Bag Theory of Evolution, which claims that the first cultural instrument was most likely a receptacle such as a sling, shell, or, as it were, a carrier bag. Fischer’s findings greatly opposed the popular belief that humans’ first invention was one designed for violence (i.e. spear, club, arrow, etc). In her essay, LeGuin highlights that the “thrusting, poking” and frankly phallic nature of the killing implement was (and by the logic of this thesis, still is) widely favored, despite its senselessness, “for what’s the use of digging up a lot of potatoes if you have nothing to lug ones you can’t eat home in?” (4). Likening it to botulism, LeGuin notes that the heroic, action-packed grandeur of the killer story is infectious, irresistible, and “before you know it . . . the skills of the makers and the thoughts of the thoughtful and the songs of the singers are all part of it, have all been pressed into service in the tale of the Hero. But it isn’t their story. It’s his” (2). In other words, according to LeGuin, being a servant to the killer story entails both willful and enthusiastic engagements with it, even though the killer story only serves the benefactors of its violence. LeGuin goes on to say, “You just go on telling how Cain fell on Abel and how the bomb fell on Nagasaki and how the burning jelly fell on the villagers and how the missiles will fall on the Evil Empire, and all the other steps in the Ascent of Man” (5). This series of examples provided by LeGuin suggests how regenerative and self-effacing

the killer story can be, especially as it is narrated by petro-colonialism. In addition, LeGuin's sentiments imply that Big Oil's infinite mitosis is a result of our willingness to pass its killer story along. Moreover, "the Ascent of Man," (as do notions of expansion or progress) inherently requires violence, murder, and pillaging, much like petro-colonial sensibilities.

Furthermore, the self-aggrandizing nature of petro-colonial killer stories, paints its oily hero as inevitable and inescapable. It infuses oppression into our very consciousness and even if we are aware of the killer story's falsehood, we may feel as though overpowering it is an impossibility. This may truly be the case with the petro-colonial killer story that narrates white supremacy. For example, Nick Estes' conceptualization of settler-colonialism denotes the ways in which colonial structures historically and continuously assign BIPOC folx the status of "racial minorities," in order to justify, naturalize, and even glorify violence done to their bodies for the purpose of stealing their lands and resources. Both the violence and the narratives that permit it work to reestablish petro-colonialism's power.

Perhaps just as dangerous are the renderings of the petro-colonial killer story that delude Americans at least into believing we *want* Big Oil around. We are compelled by myths and propaganda dedicated to valorizing expansion, progress, consumerism, national protection, superiority, and innovation (perhaps such myths could be understood as "the Ascent of Man," as LeGuin would say). Our nation's flag exemplifies the kind of oily killer story that works to maintain Big Oil's power by disguising its insidiousness within intensely positive feelings associated with national identity. For Americans, the flag is the penultimate sign of national patriotism and pride; sentiments that eclipse

petro-colonial ideologies. Our blindness to petro-colonialism's malice via the American flag starts as early as kindergarten, where we are conditioned to value the overrule it symbolizes and pledge our little five-year-old hearts to its cause. Then, when we're older, we don't really think twice about why it's flown basically everywhere: on flagpoles in fast food parking lots, or on international territories, or the literal moon, a feat, might I add, that consumed an astronomical amount of petroleum⁸. This is all to say that the practice of injecting (forcibly or not) this hyper-American motif into every empty space, tells us the killer story of imperious American swagger everywhere we turn over and over and over again, a killer story that also undeniably contains an elusive subtext of petro-colonial expansion, re: international occupation and the moon landing. To indulge in this example more, consider what organizations coalesce under this insignia of petro-colonial expansion. Wearing it on their sleeve, the flag is the symbol that unifies U.S. Military, yet another substantial source of American identity, honor, comradery, and bravado. Also, not-so-coincidentally, the military is the largest global consumer of petroleum; reiterating that all it takes to shape the world is through telling a convincing story. Not to mention, this brand of petro-colonial storytelling is so overwhelmingly successful in indoctrinating us that we civilians act as foot soldiers in its service. Performing acts of free labor for the petro-colonial project, we happily surveil, estrange, and reprimand anyone who speaks against our beloved petro-colonial entities because we genuinely believe we are indebted to them when actually the opposite is true.

To reiterate, oily killer stories are crafted to be so enticing that our commitment to being subjects of petro-colonialism perseveres beyond the simultaneous awareness that

⁸ The amount of fuel it took to reach the moon comes in at just under 1,000,000 gallons. For context, an average American will use about 50,000 gallons of fuel in their lifetime.

extractive industries will inevitably kill us one way or another. This unfortunate and contradictory mentality towards petro-colonialism speaks to what Stephanie LeMenager, prominent feminist and energy humanities scholar, and author of *Living Oil: Petroleum Culture in the American Century*, would describe as “loving oil,” the phenomena of our unyielding affection for the comforts provided by petromodernity, despite being made aware of their ecological, social, and bodily consequences (101). The “loving oil” paradox, illuminates the irony of petro-colonial vampirism: it is ultimately unsustainable, ouroboric, a self-eating snake. Sun Yuan and Peng Yu’s heartbreaking and provocative sculpture entitled *Can’t Help Myself* poignantly symbolizes LeMenager’s “loving oil,” and makes explicit the reality of our compulsion to preserve our status as petro-colonial subjects.⁹ Encased in an acrylic room, *Can’t Help Myself*, currently installed at the Guggenheim, is a large industrial robot arm with a squeegee on the end. At the base of the arm is a pool of its own perpetually leaking lifeblood so to speak, which is this viscous, deep red motor oil. *Can’t Help Myself* is programmed to carry out one singular purpose: contain its life-sustaining fluid in its immediate, predetermined area. When its sensors detect that the oil/blood has strayed too far, the robotic arm swirls and whips around frantically in order to squeegee its vital liquid back into itself. In its fervency, *Can’t Help Myself* splatters and smudges its blood/oil all over the once



Fig. 1 Image of *Can't Help Myself* courtesy of The Guggenheim Museum.

⁹ If you've never seen *Can't Help Myself*, I can't recommend enough that you do, it is sure to break your heart. A clip of it can be found here: <https://youtu.be/ZS4Bpr2BgnE>

transparent walls, continually obstructing from view what lies beyond its own panicked attempt at self-preservation. Similar to petro-colonialism, *Can't Help Myself* once had an abundance of energy at its disposal, but as time goes on, its movements become sluggish, heavy, and depressed. We sad subjects of petroleum and this poor robot are essentially just compulsively staving off our inevitable demise.

Hyperobjects and Transcorporeality

Because of the vastness and incomprehensibility of petro-colonialism I feel it necessary to prime my analysis with an understanding of hyperobjects, as this concept is theorized by Timothy Morton in *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology at the End of the World*. He defines hyperobjects as having a multiplicity of characteristics in common:

They are viscous, which means that they “stick” to beings that are involved with them. They are nonlocal; in other words, any “local manifestation” of a hyperobject is not directly the hyperobject. They involve profoundly different temporalities than the human-scale ones we are used to. ...Hyperobjects occupy a high-dimensional phase space that results in their being invisible to humans for stretches of time. And they exhibit their effects interobjectively; that is, they can be detected in a space that consists of interrelationships between aesthetic properties of objects (1).

In other words, hyperobjects are entities that are so epically stupendous that they exceed human comprehension. Although their vastness transcends time and space they are also incredibly pervasive. Morton's description of the “non-local” is significant when thinking about Big Oil as a hyperobject because any effect of petro-colonialism that we can bear witness to, including the effects of climate change, fail to encompass Big Oil's enormity.

However, perhaps by collecting localized manifestations of petro-colonialism that we are aware of, and taking inventory of their characteristics, Big Oil might be made more comprehensible. Accumulating expressions of petro-colonialism is so important because Big Oil relies on us remaining ignorant to its ubiquity. Moreover, hyperobjects' non-locality and inter-objectivity, following Morton, imply that Big Oil's many iterations, harmful as they might be, often fail to signal their petro-colonial origins because our intimacy with petroleum and its by-products subsequently curate their invisibility. Much like a scar simply becomes a part of one's skin and isn't granted a second look by its owner. Morton affirms the invisibility that results from our closeness to hyper-objects, stating, "Immediate symptoms of hyperobjects are vivid and often painful, yet they carry with them a trace of unreality... The more I struggle to understand hyperobjects, the more I discover that I am stuck to them. They are all over me. They are me" (28).

Morton's imagery of stickiness and viscosity is especially poignant when considering the materiality of oil, which itself a highly viscous and sticky substance. Moreover, Morton's hyper-objects in their ability to stick to a body, or make-up a body in themselves, call to mind Stacy Alaimo's term "transcorporeality." Alaimo writes in *Exposed: Environmental Politics in Posthuman Times* that transcorporeality is "a material manifestation of the human body in constant interchange with its environment" (77). Moreover, transcorporeality—like Morton's notion of the interrelationality of hyperobjects—posit oil and bodies (or our blood contained therein) as being distinctly inseparable from one another. In other words, Big Oil as a hyperobject is as dependent on our bodies as we are with it.

Petro-Performative Life-Thinking: Autotheory and Petromodernity

With the understanding that petro-colonialism has implicated our very bodies via its hyperobjective stickiness, contemplations of the self as it relates to Big Oil become paramount. I conclude my introduction by noting how integral autotheory is to this thesis, particularly as autotheory and feminist scholar Lauren Fournier conceptualizes it.

Fournier defines autotheory in *Autotheory as Feminist Practice in Art, Writing, and Criticism* as a unique blend of memoir and critical thinking:

Autotheory is the integration of theory and philosophy with autobiography, the body, and other so-called personal and explicitly subjective modes. It is a term that describes a self-conscious way of engaging with theory— as a discourse, frame or mode of thinking and practice alongside lived experience and subjective embodiment, something very much in the *Zietgeist* of cultural production today— especially in feminist, queer, and BIPOC— spaces that live on the edges of art and academia (7).

For Fournier, autotheory is what emerges from the intersection of self-consciousness and critical theory. According to her, autotheoretical approaches work to destabilize oppressive ways of knowing that have traditionally relegated certain communities and their voices to the margins. Another way to understand autotheory according to Fournier is as a mode that calls into question “colonial, white-centric, and patriarchal” histories (5). Interrogating these oppressive structures *through* one’s own experience within them is what makes autotheory so ripe for decolonizing our ideologies. Autotheory undermines limiting beliefs by inviting a method of expression to the discourse of critical theory that has historically been devalued for its adjacency to womxnhood and lack of seriousness,

therefore.¹⁰ Fournier’s theoretical approaches are deeply invested in feminism and assert both the femme experience (or other marginalized experiences for that matter), and the art/writing/storytelling/modes of world-making that emerge out of those subjectivities as *absolutely necessary* when considering how to build equitable futures for humans and nonhumans alike in times of ecological and social destruction. Under white supremacy, patriarchal dominance, and petro-colonialism especially, it is essential to welcome folk that are intimately and pervasively subjugated by oppressive structures in order to most efficiently dismantle them. Furthermore, this blend of the self with social criticism describes what Fournier calls, “performative life-thinking,” where the personal is inextricably tied to the political (14).

So how does autotheory serve this thesis, and more broadly, intellectual discourses invested in challenging petromodernity and/or other modes of colonial oppression? To speak first to the latter, Stephanie LeMenager, engages in what I would call, *petro*-performative life-thinking in *Living Oil*. LeMenager’s prologue is a personal account of her life as it has been “shadowed,” by oil or rather, her father’s wealth as a result of oil (1). LeMenager herself even circles around sentiments that are akin to Fournier’s work on autotheory. LeMenager states, “Even those of us who are not great writers, thinking in print, whether on paper or on screen, compensates for what doesn’t happen elsewhere.” She goes on to say, “Certainly I can’t think about oil without thinking about [my father]” (1). Here we see that, for LeMenager, it is *impossible* to understand

¹⁰ My use of womxn carries sentiments born out of second wave feminist discourse. I adhere to the sentiments that “womxn” is an active linguistic and ideological rejection of men/manhood/patriarchal oppression. Moreover, my conception of womxnhood ALWAYS, always includes transwomxn. I’m aware that alternative spellings of womxn (womyn, wom*n) have sometimes been used to delegitimize and exclude transwomxn, but I absolutely denounce those implications from my use of womxn. To reiterate, womxnhood comes in all different forms, and transwomxnhood is irrevocably included in that.

petromodernity without first considering one's place within it. In other words, disentangling the self from oil would not render an accurate representation of petromodernity, let alone create a space to critique it. Furthermore, Jennifer Wenzel, a postcolonial, environmental, and energy humanities scholar might describe LeMenager's testimony as an "oil inventory." Reflecting on her time teaching a course entitled "Literature and Oil" at the University of Michigan, Wenzel details the origins of the term "oil inventory" in her essay "How to Read for Oil," published in *Resilience: A Journal of the Environmental Humanities*:

Each student writes an "oil inventory," an assignment inspired by Edward Said's quotation of Antonio Gramsci in the introduction to *Orientalism*: "The starting point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, and is 'knowing thyself' as a product of the historical process to date, which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory." This open-ended assignment asks students to trace the presence (and absence) of oil in their lives and to consider what it would mean to "know themselves" in relation to oil (Wenzel 158).

To restate, "knowing thyself," in one's relation to oil in this case, is an imperative step not only towards understanding petro-colonialism, but also towards thinking critically about Big Oil and beginning to undermine its reign over the world. Furthermore, the articulation of "infinite traces" further gets at the smothering, circumambient, hyperobjectivity of petro-colonialism. Also, what's illuminated here in Wenzel's work is that the oil inventory joins autotheory and the energy humanities. Additionally, as a practice, the oil inventory is also intrinsically in dialogue with critical colonial studies

given that its existence is attributed to the father of postcolonialism himself, Edward Said. The oil inventory being in conversation with critical colonial studies confirms my claim that petromodernity is in fact a byproduct of colonialism.

As to how autotheory can serve my thesis specifically, I arrive at a brief oil inventory of my own. During my research in petromodernity, these small, ephemeral glimmers of my gxr/womxnhood have bubbled from the depths of my consciousness.¹¹ That is to say that thinking critically about petromodernity, feminism, critical colonial studies, etc., has unearthed memories of mine that I wouldn't normally grant a second thought, or ones that I had forgotten about altogether—further iterating Big Oil's invisibility via intimacy. Continuing, the genesis of my own petro-performative life-thinking comes again from LeMenager's *Living Oil*. Her meditations on the DeepWater Horizon spill revealed to me my own relationship to petromodernity and militarization. I grew up in Milton, Florida, a small military, Southern Baptist community nestled between two of the largest military bases and aviation training facilities in the South. My town, located in the Panhandle, was hugged warmly, fiercely, tenderly, by the Gulf of Mexico, and when reading LeMenager's work regarding DeepWater Horizon, I realized, *wow... I experienced this disaster. I was like... literally there when it happened.*¹² LeMenager allowed me to reckon with my life as it became entangled with militarization, petromodernity, and hetero-patriarchy. My engagement with autotheory allows me to understand how the forces aforementioned continue to shape my

¹¹ The autotheoretical elements in this thesis are indicated by three asterisks (***) and italicized text.

¹² This thesis is a part of a larger body of work in production. As this thesis denotes, I'm very interested in liveliness as it is contained in particular liquids, and I have engaged in autotheoretical and critical analyses of water as a site for petro-colonial extraction. There I explore my experience of the Deepwater Horizon disaster and petro-colonialism as it shaped my relationship to the ocean.

relationship to, and perception of myself, my beloved Gulf of Mexico, my community and my family especially.

My autotheoretical musings are inextricable components of my thesis, because they continue to signal the enormity of the petro-colonial project and its infinite iterations. My thesis' focus on vampires was born out of my complicated relationship to the pop-culture monolith *The Twilight Saga*, the five-part film franchise adapted from Stephanie Meyer's book series by the same name. *The Twilight Saga* grew to the height of its popularity in my adolescence, and its influence on me and pop-culture history was and is quite substantial. Moreover, thinking about how I experienced this cultural phenomenon in real-time and reflecting on it years later became so important to making sense of my critique of petro-colonialism as it is represented by vampires. Before reading Fournier, my personal reflections appeared to be discontinuities to my analysis, and still, I knew that they belonged here on an intuitive level, even if I couldn't quite discern why yet. However, a large aspect of autotheoretical practice, according to Fournier, is exactly what I have described, intuitive, "open-ended, scrupulous and rooted as much in scholarly research and sober reflection as in gut-based understanding and critico-synchronistic happenstance" (Fournier 4). In all, my personal accounts don't always explicitly inform the sections they pre/proceed but do in fact belong exactly where they are all the same. In other words, these moments might deceptively appear not to be petroleum byproducts, but remember, oiliness has a way of hiding in plain sight.

VAMPIRES, BLOOD STEALERS AND BIG OIL

Blood is a recurring motif in many cinematic representations of the oil industry. *There Will be Blood* (2007), *Black November* (2012), and *Blood and Oil* (2015) are just a few examples of oil films that are abundant in bloodshed. Blood appearing as often as it does in cinematic renderings of the petroleum industry is especially noteworthy because it makes explicit the ways that petro-colonialism poses continuous threats to vitality. If blood is a symbol in oil films that calls attention to the violence wrought by Big Oil, taking a closer look at texts where blood is a significant motif could make clearer our entanglement with petromodernity as well. In other words, texts that concern themselves with blood stealing or other forms of vitality extraction might also elucidate petromodernity's global dominion. This chapter is particularly interested in an examination of the material and symbolic relationships between blood and oil, whose viscosity, darkness, stickiness and liveliness mean that the two liquids bear an uncanny resemblance to each other. Also, this chapter argues that these lively liquids under petro-colonialism are as inextricably bound to one another as clouds are to rain. Moreover, vampires or other blood stealing entities in speculative fictions can illuminate the intricacies of petro-colonialism—which is simply the result of exponential growth by colonial methodologies that have transformed into the totalitarian global energy regime and capitalist monolith we are subjugated by today.¹³ Both vampiric or otherwise bloody cinematic renderings and the oil industry alike, in their recurring emphasis on blood stealing and vitality extraction, can be understood as reiterations of petro-colonial epistemologies or more broadly, the killer story.

¹³ *Twilight* fans will pick up on the “clouds and rain” allusion. ;)

October 2008

I'm watching TV in my living room when a mysterious, blue-tinged movie trailer plays during a commercial break. I notice that mega-hottie Kristen Stewart and some other mega-hottie are starring in a new vampire flick called Twilight. Because I'm a huge fan of Kristen Stewart I beg my mom to take me to see it when it comes to theaters. In hindsight, I think my ability to recall this moment so clearly shows that my emo, barely cooked eleven-year-old brain was somehow aware that this franchise would alter my life forever.

Ursula K. LeGuin's term, the killer story, can be understood as a mode of storytelling—and world building thereby—that glorifies violence committed by a rugged hero. However, I'd like to add another layer to this understanding of killer stories, as they relate to petro-colonialism, using Rob Nixon's conceptualization of violence. Nixon, a distinguished ecological theorist, authored *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, a contribution to the ecocritical consciousness that revolutionized how we understand violence as it pertains to climate change. He calls for a “political, imaginative, theoretical” re-thinking of what he calls, “slow violence.” This term works to nuance the common conceptualization of violence as an instantaneous act. Moreover, Nixon defines “slow violence” in the introduction of his book:

Slow violence is a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all. Violence is customarily conceived as an event or action that is immediate in time, explosive and spectacular in space,

and as erupting into instant sensational visibility. We need, I believe, to engage in a different kind of violence, a violence that is neither spectacular nor instantaneous, but rather incremental and accretive, its calamitous repercussions playing out across a range of temporal scales (2).

Put another way, Nixon's term, "slow violence" is the accumulation of small, incremental methods of harm. In addition, because slow violence is gradual, perceiving it as violence is incredibly challenging. The difficulty to perceive slow violence is due to how it is diffused across temporalities and landscapes alike. Also, slow violence's ability to transcend "space and time," has a lot in common with Timothy Morton's hyperobjects as well. Both forces are non-local, and their manipulation of time hinders our ability to understand their effects.

Combining the notion of killer stories and this definition of Nixon's slow violence makes room to imagine petro-colonial epistemologies in themselves as acts of slow violence. By this, I mean that Big Oil has amassed such globalization over time through the incremental telling and retelling of stories that laud the violence wrought by petro-colonial epistemologies. Furthermore, understanding slow violence is significant to this chapter as it relates to what vampires as a symbol have in common with Big Oil. The first is, in Nixon's words, how slow violence occurs "out of sight." Petro-colonialism is adept at evading scrutiny. Its slipperiness obstructs our ability to see it. Amitav Gosh's essay, "Petrofiction: The Oil Encounter and The Novel," speaks to the invisibility of oil, stating, "a great deal has been invested in ensuring the muteness of the Oil Encounter: on the American (or Western) side, through regimes of strict corporate secrecy; on the Arab side, by the physical and demographic separation of oil installations and their workers

from the indigenous population” (Gosh 30). Gosh and Nixon both argue that a significant aspect of petro-colonialism’s reign lies in its ability to stay hidden for the sake of maintaining its commitment to energy acquisition. I argue that the glorification of killer stories is precisely the cloak that inhibits bearing witness to petro-colonialism’s harm.

Gosh and Nixon’s contributions signal just how essential it is to pay close attention to how tenants of oily epistemologies show up in our storytelling. Big Oil fundamentally relies on remaining “out of sight” or invisible. The opacity of oil is just one element of petro-colonial killer stories. Other, more insidious principles of petro-colonial killer stories justify the violation of entities that Big Oil devalues, including those belonging to BIPOC folx, womxn/femme identities, employees of oil, and non-human landscapes. Also, in the event that spectacular violence proves ineffective, Big Oil utilizes methods of slow violence like coercion and seduction. These features are the means by which petro-colonialism extracts vitality. In addition, the elements of petro-colonial killer stories can be seen in the representations of vampires I examine in my work. To reiterate the goals of this thesis, I’m most interested in interrogating fictions that retell the killer story, in order to garner an awareness that prevents them from being retold. Vampires as symbols that are fruitful for making sense of petro-colonialism for the purpose of destabilizing its power. For example, returning briefly to the invisibility of oil, the mythos of vampires often depicts their remaining out of sight as well, moving under the cloak of darkness and shadows, only coming out at night in order to maintain their secrecy. If we were able to see petro-colonialism coming for our jugular with clear eyes, we might do more to fight against it, but because of its invisibility, we don’t. Thinking about vampires as a metaphor for extraction is useful in

making sense of such a massive and inconceivable entity like Big Oil. Ultimately, examining how vampires have been crafted in contemporary Western fictions allows us to see into extractive industries because these creatures, by mistake or design, adhere to the same killer story methodologies as petro-colonialism itself.

November 2008

My mom and I go see Twilight in theaters. I leave the theater buzzing with instant obsession. On our next grocery run my mom buys me the novel it was adapted from by Stephanie Meyer. Now, in 2023, this book is worn to bits and yellowed from years of sun exposure. When I was a kid, I meticulously highlighted all the moments that the book had in common with the film adaptation. It's the copy I reference to this day.

Pausing here, I'd like to briefly detail what I mean when I talk about stolen blood. Strictly speaking, blood, as I conceptualize it, represents vitality and autonomy writ large: freedom to live, to own and be in charge of one's own body, which petro-colonialism in its numerous ways forbids— for both humans and non-humans alike. When thinking about petro-colonialism as a blood stealer I am at once thinking about a multitude of violent acts committed against Earth's land and waters, as well as human and non human bodies, particularly those that are especially subjugated by white supremacy and patriarchy. These acts can be both slow or spectacular in nature. In regard to petro-colonialism's methods of slow violence, it has succeeded in co-opting our autonomy by forcefully coercing our engagement with it. In doing so, we act without self-interest because it kills us individually and as a planet overtime through its

incremental contributions to climate change, to include bodily and environmental pollution, of which BIPOC, womxn, and poor folx get the brunt of. Furthermore, we have no autonomous choice to live in separation from petro-colonialism because we are under its spell. Our toxic romance with Big Oil—despite the immense harm it inflicts—harkens back to Stephanie LeMenager’s “loving oil” paradox. To restate, loving oil describes our quasi-Stockholm Syndrome victimhood under oil and our resistance to forsake the pleasures it provides. Vampires as they are depicted in Western speculative fictions are equally as alluring, hypnotizing and seductive to their victims as oil is to us in such ways that we are willing to betray our own well-being and that of the Earth. Even if they we managed to evade its allure, it is so powerful that it forces our hand in the matter.

This means then, that petro-colonialism is also fundamentally committed to those immediate and explosive modes of traditional violence that Morton describes. The most direct form of petro-colonial blood stealing is seen through the bodies of victims of extraction. Big Oil’s safety standards are notoriously and purposefully inadequate.¹⁴ Rig operators, mechanics and engineers, refinery workers, underwater welders or any other body that works intimately with oil, or rather the dangerous machinery used to extract and process oil are just simply another means of acquiring vitality. Moreover, because Big Oil is inherently tied to colonialism, as I have already and will continue to argue, oil acquisition inherently entails stealing blood from minorities. White supremacy, patriarchal red-lining and the destruction of the environment are methods that have been distilled from colonialism to serve Big Oil today. In all, the bodies and landscapes in

¹⁴ Pierre, Thomas. “BP’s Dismal Safety Record.” ABC, 2012.
<https://abcnews.go.com/WN/bps-dismal-safety-record/story?id=10763042>
<https://www.osha.gov/sites/default/files/publications/OSHA3843.pdf>

proximity to extraction are faced with constant threats of violence, indicating that oil's existence is absolutely necessitated by blood stealing.

The comparison of vampirism and extraction is a common one. Karl Marx even made a connection between vampirism and industries that are committed to resource acquisition in *Capital*: “the vampire capitalist will not lose its hold on him so long as there is a muscle, a nerve, a drop of blood to be exploited” (266). Marx’s articulation posits capitalism—and petro-colonialism as its current largest incarnation—as leaving no trace of vitality in its labor source. In other words, the goal of capitalism, and Big Oil subsequently, is to drain even the most minute of its possible resources even if the result is exhaustive. In other words, oil is capitalist progress and blood is its means. Moreover, Marx’s conflation between capitalism and vampirism reiterates the life-draining structures of extraction. Not only does petro-colonialism entail the draining of finite resources—of which include fossil fuels and thus the remaining vitality of Earth and their inhabitants—but as capitalism’s golden child, Big Oil drains the life force of those elicited in its acquisition through pervasive vampiric practices. This chapter in particular will highlight these practices as they intersect with white supremacy, patriarchal violence, labor force exploitation and militaristic imperialism.

Jessica Hautsch makes similar arguments to Marx, comparing Big Oil and vampirism in her essay, “Fossil Fuel Extraction, Green Neoliberal Consumption, and Crude Optimism in the Vamprocene.” Hautsch states, “humans, fully aware of the damage they are doing to the planet, are unable to disentangle themselves from fossil economies and imagine a decarbonized future, but instead continue to drain the earth of its natural resources, just as the vampire drains its victim of blood” (Hautsch). I agree

with Hautsch's claim that we aren't able to disentangle ourselves from petro-colonialism and imagine "a decarbonized future," as she so aptly says. However, I don't think the equation of humans to vampires is entirely accurate. Assigning blame to each other is as unproductive as it is dangerous. Blaming one another for the consequences of petro-colonialism keeps our eyes averted from Big Oil, ultimately ensuring its invisibility. It's important to understand that most humans' subjugation by petro-colonialism is unwanted, meaning, we are victimized by the vampiric, oily entities doing the subjugating. In other words it is *because* of our subjugation that we endlessly consume fossil fuels. This consumption is precisely how petro-colonialism has succeeded in colonizing the planet wholly. Furthermore, based on Hautsch's assessment, under capitalism, blood and oil serve as sources of vitality that are extracted solely for the enrichment of vampire capitalists. She says, "capital is undead, sustained and prolonged by the lifeblood of the workers it exploits" (Hautsch). According to Hautsch, vampires work to symbolize petro-colonialism in their undead-ness. In other words, without an external source of vitality both vampires and Big Oil would cease to exist. Moreover, Hautsh's argument articulates how vampire capitalists are bolstered by the lifeblood of Earth and that of labor. She goes on to cite Franco Moretti's *The Dialectic of Fear*, stating, "this vampiric exploitation is purposeful, mindful; the vampire's 'aim is not to destroy the lives of others according to whim, to waste them, but to *use* them'" (Hautsch). This particular emphasis on the purposeful use of life-force energy, rather than the mindless consumption of it is an important one. This distinction illuminates the calculating strategies of victimization by extractive forces. In fact, according to Hautsch, petromodernity, as a by-product of colonialism, *requires* the transformations of "both

humans and nonhumans into labor and commodities to be bought and sold”(Hautsch). In other words, Big Oil flourishes in tandem with the infliction of systematic blood stealing.

To briefly map the trajectory of my analysis, I will first make note of the material and symbolic similarities between blood and oil, and illuminate their homogenization under petro-colonialism. Later on, to do the work of disentangling the killer stories told by Big Oil, I look to the popular culture monolithic franchise, *The Twilight Saga*.¹⁵ *The Twilight Saga* is one of the most contemporary manifestations of vampires that in turn retells the petro-colonial killer story. In other words, this series reveals the methods of petro-colonial vitality extraction that Big Oil utilizes in the modern day. Also, *The Twilight Saga* as a pop-culture phenomena greatly impacted my life (and continues to). Most of my autotheoretical reflections focalize how I experienced this special moment in pop-culture history, providing a first hand account of the ways this oily narrative stuck to me personally. Also, I’ll also be examining representations of serial killers depicted in the HBO series, *Dexter* (and the later spin-off *Dexter: New Blood*), because, although not vampires in the traditional sense, these killers engage in vampiric, petro-colonial blood stealing all the same. These snapshots of popular culture are relevant to this analysis because they adhere to the narrative structure that petro-colonialism has set forth. In other words, these fictions retell the killer story by replicating modes of petro-colonial violence. Such killer story modalities represented in *The Twilight Saga* and *Dexter* include ideological representations of white supremacy and patriarchy which work to naturalize violence wrought by Big Oil. In addition, these fictions both glorify

¹⁵ *The Twilight Saga* was originally a series of novels written by Stephanie Meyer. The series consisted of these four installments: *Twilight*, *New Moon*, *Eclipse*, and *Breaking Dawn*. Paramount Studios later adapted these novels into a wildly successful film franchise. The installments premiered from 2008-2012. My analysis will be referencing both the novels and the film adaptations.

petro-colonialism. To restate, these modern renditions of blood stealing hold space to examine the methodologies of extraction, and the killer stories that maintain Big Oil's power. Following a template of petro-colonial harm, these texts contain representations of violence against femme bodies, the arbitrary relegation of certain communities to the margins to justify their disposability in Big Oil's acquisition of liveliness. Also, *The Twilight Saga* and *Dexter* valorize oily aesthetics that allow petro-colonialism to remain both hidden and in power. Ultimately, these contemporary iterations of vampires and other blood stealers provide a glimpse into the petroleum industry through their metaphors.

Early December 2009

I haven't been able to stop thinking about Twilight since I saw it in theaters. I read every book in the Twilight Saga in the span of a couple of weeks. There's a poster from Hot Topic depicting Robert Pattinson as Edward Cullen, and clippings from Twilight issues of Tiger Beat and other teenie bopper magazines plastered on my wall.¹⁶



Opening Moves: How Petro-colonialism Homogenizes Blood and Oil

Under petro-colonialism, blood and oil are homogenized. What I mean by this is because of the methods of violence Big Oil employs, the acquisition of oil necessitates bloodshed or the inhibition of autonomy more broadly. Furthermore, the two fluids are strikingly similar to one another; both in their appearance and their ability to make

¹⁶ Fig. 2 Poster of Robert Pattinson as Edward Cullen. Image sourced from Ebay. This is the actual poster I had in my childhood bedroom. Major nostalgia.

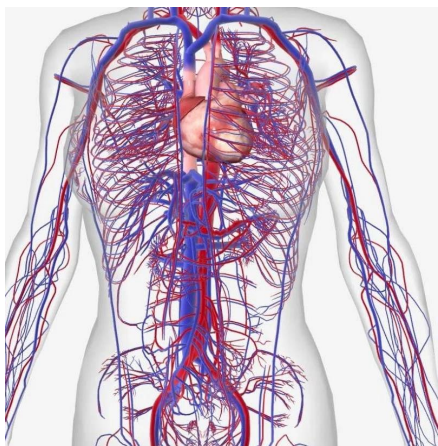


Fig. 3 Human circulatory system. Image sourced from Wikipedia.

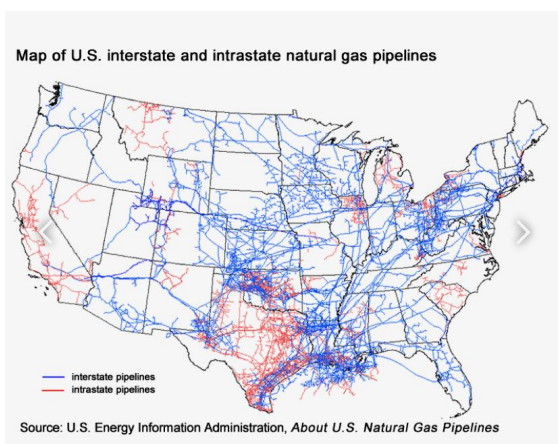


Fig. 4 American oil pipeline circulatory system. Image sourced from Wikipedia.

energy. The language used to describe the circulatory system is virtually identical to petro-colonial terminology. For example, pipelines and crude oil's subterranean resting places are often referred to as veins. Ben Jervey, writer and researcher specializing in climate change and energy systems policy, attests to the etymological and symbolic similarities

between blood and oil I am calling attention to here. His article, "Pipelines 101: An Introduction To North American Oil & Gas Pipeline Routes and Safety Concerns" states that pipelines are, "veins that carry crude oil from the source to refineries. Just like our veins, they get thicker as they get closer to

the spot they dump their contents out". He goes on

to say, "these metal tubes are truly the blood vessels of the oil and gas industry" (Jervey). As Jervey's description points out, petro-colonial vocabularies share uncanny similarities with the language we use to refer to our own circulatory systems. The symmetry in vocabulary further confirms the likeness of these two fluids. Furthermore, in the same ways that the blood facilitates life by creating energy through metabolic processes, oil too undergoes similar transformations. Mikael Höök's essay that details the production of crude oil confirms my sentiments. He says oil "is the black blood that runs through the veins of the modern global energy system... Its combustion brings energy in immense

amounts and can drive a wide array of machines, tools and processes” (13). Here, oil performs the same way that blood does: though a certain series of actions, these liquids serve to provide energy. In other words, blood is to (non)human bodies what oil is to industrial bodies. Ultimately, what Höök and Jervey are both signaling is the undeniable resemblance of oil and blood.

Playing God: How Petro-colonialism Devalues Life and Red-Lines Sacrifice Zones

Christmas Day 2008

My Twilight obsession shows no signs of stopping. My mom got me a “Team Edward” t-shirt from Rue 21. I can tell because of how it smells. In the movies, every member of the Cullen family wears a special piece of jewelry with their family crest engraved in it. My uncle Jimmy and his husband Helicopter John (we call him that because of his job as a flight nurse—and also because we have 3 other John’s in the family and it gets hard to differentiate between them in conversation), bought me a box set with all of these pieces of jewelry. I’m so thrilled about all my new Twilight regalia that I wear my Team Edward shirt and a Cullen family crest choker to Christmas dinner, hosted at my Aunt Judy and Uncle John’s house. Over slices of Boar’s Head ham and sweet potato casserole, everyone gushes over cousin Jeffrey’s new job. He just got hired as an underwater rig welder. In his early twenties Cousin Jeffrey makes more money than most everybody in my family, second only to Helicopter John. What’s weird about this day is that I SWEAR there’s a picture documenting my Twilight themed Xmas outfit, but no matter how many times I look for it, it’s nowhere to be found.

In addition to the linguistic and aesthetic likeness of oil, these liquids are homogenized in the most material of ways through petro-colonialism's praxis of violence. In other words, petro-colonialism, in addition to extracting energy via oil, Big Oil is equally fueled by the extraction of energy via stolen blood. The Dakota Access Pipeline exemplifies how oil fundamentally contains stolen blood through petro-colonialism's infliction of indigenous bloodshed. Put another way, blood and oil are inextricable sources of vitality under petro-colonialism, meaning that one absolutely necessitates the other. Robert Benson, co-director of the International Law Center for Human, Economic and Environmental Defense at the Los Angeles Times, calls attention to blood and oil's indivisibility. Benson reported on a summit between the native U'wa peoples of northern Columbia, Occidental Petroleum Corporation, and the Colombian government. His article, which details indigenous resistance to petro-colonial exploitation, reinstates the material and symbolic link between oil and blood seen here in his transcription of U'wa tribal leader, Roberto Cobaria's testimony:

To drill for oil is an extremely sensitive matter for us. We would be selling the blood of Mother Earth. We cannot do it. Our Father didn't authorize us to do it. He didn't authorize us to negotiate about it. Without Earth there is no life. It cannot be done. We want to know if Oxy will respect our law. If there is no solution, we have a history of suicide (Benson).¹⁷

Cobaria is reinstating the liveliness of oil by declaring that it is the blood of Earth itself. Not to mention, the threat of mass suicide—in the event that Occidental Petroleum should violate U'wa's tribal laws and sovereignty—further iterates how

¹⁷ Cobaria's mention of U'wa's "history of suicide" is referring to the tribal story about how in the 17th century, "the U'wa jumped from a cliff to their deaths rather than submit to conquistadors" (Benson).

petro-colonial extraction can not be disentangled with bloodshed or subjugation of native bodies or those of other minorities. Moreover, petro-colonial violence mixes blood and oil in the most material sense. Another example of blood and oil's emulsification is provided by John



Fig. 5 Ukrainian protester holding sign. Image courtesy of John MacDougal, *TIME* magazine.

MacDougal. MacDougal is a photographer for *TIME* Magazine whose images depict Ukrainian resistance to the current Russo-Ukrainian conflict. Moreover, his images denote how Russia's invasion of Ukraine is equally bound up with petroleum acquisition and bloodshed resulting from warfare. Ukrainian activists speaking out against Russian extraction further reiterate the homogeneity of oil and stolen blood as a result of petro-colonialism. They hold signs saying, "Enjoy Russian gas with the smell of Ukrainian blood" (MacDougall).

Turning to cinematic representations of blood and oil's material entanglement, *There Will Be Blood*, Paul Thomas Anderson's 2007 film adaptation of Upton Sinclair's novel, *Oil!* provides an apt example of how bloodshed and oil extraction are requisites of one another—even the title of the film in itself suggests blood necessitates oil. There's a scene in *There Will Be Blood* that depicts an extraction site employee repairing a piece of machinery inside an oil well. As he is doing so, another rig worker accidentally drops a drill pin on his head—killing him instantly. His body is retrieved from the well and is saturated in mud, crude oil, and of course, his own blood, the material blending of these Earthly fluids indicating the violence done to bodies that are intimate with the oil project.

In addition to the mixture of oil and blood, this section is particularly interested in the attitudes towards these kinds of bodies. By that I mean, the stipulations under which violence, like that which is committed against this innocent rig worker, is permitted under petro-colonialism. In other words, Big Oil is playing god. Meaning, it does with life, human or not, whatever it so pleases as long as it advances petro-colonialism's reign. Staying with *There Will Be Blood*, we see how this ambivalence to the loss of life during the pursuit of oil plays out under petro-colonialism. When the drill-site boss, Daniel Plainview, is told the news, the first thing he asks is, "Did I know him?" to which the reply is "no" (0:47). Daniel's response is concerning because it seems that in order for this man's death to be something more than just an inconvenient day on the job, Daniel must have known him personally. Furthermore, Daniel's attitude implies that this man's body is a lost commodity rather than a person whose life was real and meaningful. When Daniel sees his lifeless body, he simply calls out to his crew to clean him up and shut the drill site down for the evening; only to begin drilling again the next day (which by most capitalist standards is pretty generous).¹⁸ Moreover, Daniel's apathy also suggests that Big Oil is identically apathetic to death and violence. Commencing drilling mere hours after bloodshed indicates that oil is, in every sense of the phrase, mixed with blood.

Jessica Hautsch's essay provides an insight into why Daniel Plainview and Big Oil are so indifferent to death. Using Dracula as a metaphor for extractive industries states, "vampirism is ultimately unsustainable, and Dracula is forced to move from

¹⁸ Schuster, Dana. "Amazon Workers 'forced to go back to work' After Fellow Employee Dies on Shift." NY Post, 2019. <https://nypost.com/2019/10/19/amazon-workers-forced-to-go-back-to-work-after-fellow-employee-dies-on-shift/>

human to human, place to place, energy source to energy source, searching for new resource frontiers. He knows that he kills and destroys, and yet this knowledge does not stop, or even reduce, his consumption” (Hautsch). Not only does Hautsch reiterate the insatiable, and therefore unsustainable, nature of petro-colonialism, but she also drives home how little Big Oil cares about the lives it takes. The bodies involved with petro-colonial extraction are simply a means to propel Big Oil forward. Her use of the word “frontier” is especially significant because it reiterates the relationship between petromodernity and colonial methodologies. Estes' term “frontier violence” references this indefinite search for new sites of extraction. For Estes, “frontier violence” describes how the slaying of indigenous bodies, and other folx of color is a practice that historically fueled colonialism, and continues to feed petro-colonialism subsequently. In other words, white supremacist ideologies are integral to the petro-colonial project.

This indifference petro-colonialism holds towards the bodies that are involved in the acquisition of oil bring to mind Stephanie LeMenager’s use of the term *homo sacer*. Borrowing from Hannah Arendt and Giorgio Agamben, the third chapter of LeMenager’s *Living Oil*, describes *homo sacer* as “the modern everyman, the man who can be killed, without legal retribution” (106). *Homo sacer*, in LeMenager’s analysis, is simply a body designed to be sacrificed for the purpose of petro-colonial expansion. Furthermore, according to LeMenager, these unprotected, disposable bodies, “feed and sustain” Big Oil, and are perpetually threatened by “the omnivorous capitalization of their resources” (107). However, most of the time *homo sacer* is non-white or non-men, or a body otherwise subjugated by colonial ideologies. To restate, petromodernity, as a by product of colonialism, creates sacrificial bodies through white supremacy (and as I’ll argue later,

patriarchy) recalling again the arguments put forth by Estes' where BIPOC individuals are relegated to categories of "racial minorities" by the colonizer, in order to justify their extermination. These categorical impositions are arbitrary, but nonetheless, through repeated systematic violence and propaganda, petro-colonialism has succeeded in positing the disposal of minorities as a natural occurrence. Moreover, petro-colonialism doesn't include marginalized individuals in their visions of modernity, but rather, seizes their vitality as fuel to obtain such futurity, once more solidifying the praxis of white supremacy that petro-colonialism utilizes.

The Twilight Saga and *Dexter* both provide examples of how Big Oil relies on arbitrary belief systems to permit petro-colonial violence. Moreover, these fictions are reproductions of the killer story, reproducing how Big Oil devalues certain bodies through a set of baseless, oppressive criteria. HBO's widely acclaimed series, *Dexter* exemplifies how petro-colonial killer stories rely on assigning arbitrary value systems in order to justify blood stealing. Dexter Morgan is the ruggedly handsome, dead-pan, forensic blood-spatter analyst, and vigilante-adjacent serial killer. He also has a casual but not-so-casual uncontrollable urge to kill people. His method of committing murder reiterates petro-colonial methodologies by depicting how killing can be justified under circumstances if certain people are devalued. Dexter adheres to what he calls "The Code," the name for his arbitrary ethics system that justifies his murderous habit. Under the stipulations of The Code, Dexter is not allowed to kill an innocent person, and instead is only permitted to execute people that have evaded justice in some way.¹⁹ Dexter justifying murder through something as porous as criminality raises a couple of concerns. First of all, as someone with an affinity for literal murder, who is Dexter to decide who

¹⁹ DexterWiki: The Code: https://dexter.fandom.com/wiki/Code_of_Harry

lives and who dies in the eyes of justice? Second, it is generally problematic to wholly devalue human life on the basis of criminality. However, like Michelle Alexander's analysis that oppressive structures have transformed into the justice system, Dexter's attitude towards justice and criminality similarly work to reinstall a contemporary praxis of white supremacy. Furthermore, innocence in itself is vague, and the indeterminacy of these parameters seem to suggest that justifying murder for selfish purposes is what The Code is actually about. Also, as it happens, the absolute paramount, number one rule of The Code that Dexter must adhere to is, *do not get caught*. This principle rule seems to imply that The Code isn't actually about serving justice and protecting society from so-called criminals, but is rather committed to the systematic devaluation of a specific type of person and, since they, in their criminality, are subsequently deemed as throw-aways of society, their deaths go unquestioned, and so does Dexter's consumption of their livelihood.

The Cullens in *The Twilight Saga* share these same petro-colonial sentiments with Dexter. *The Twilight Saga* renders vampires as creatures that really only enter human societies for the purpose of quenching their thirst. However, the Cullen family have made a home in Forks, Washington, the setting of *The Twilight Saga*, and participate in society as any human would: having jobs, going to school and the like. Forks' weather allows them to go out during the day because of the "near constant cover of clouds and rain" (Meyer 7). This isn't the only way they subvert typical vampire behavior though. They don't sustain themselves on the blood of humans. Instead, the Cullens live as "vegetarians," a term they jokingly call their practice of drinking the blood of animals that dwell in nearby woods. Their lifestyle is a testament to their "commit[ment] to

protecting human life” (Stephanie Meyer 695). However, the Cullens' making do on animal blood, as opposed to that of humans, isn't as good-natured as it may seem, and does in fact reify notions of petro-colonialism. This is due to the way that they can just deem some lives as more valuable and deserving of mercy than others. In other words, their diet posits humans as being the most sacred form of life, the ones most worthy of protection, and in doing so, The Cullens reinscribe the systematic devaluation of non-human lives, while simultaneously valorizing humanity above all else.²⁰

January 5th, 2009

It's my 11th birthday. My mom got me a silver LG flip-phone "in case of emergencies," she says. It has a camera!!! I take a picture of my Edward Cullen poster and it becomes the first ever wallpaper on my phone.

Like Dexter, all the vampires in *The Twilight Saga*, including the Cullens, are similarly obliged to above all, maintain their secrecy and keep their consumption under wraps. Furthermore, they are granted permission to consume whoever they'd like, at any volume, so long as they do it inconspicuously. Like in the case of Big Oil, Dexter and the vampires of *The Twilight Saga* maintain their discretion because of those they chose to commit violence against. Meaning, death is permissible so long as it's committed against a body that is disposable in the eyes of society under petro-colonialism. Moreover, his code and the Cullens' vegetarianism alike can be seen as metaphors for the methods that extractive industries employ in order to rationalize the violence of petro-colonialism.

²⁰ Like, maybe subscribe to a blood bank where consent is involved? Carline Cullen, the family's patriarch is literally a doctor so it wouldn't be that difficult?

That is to say, Dexter and the Cullens represent how certain lives under petro-colonialism, particularly BIPOC ones, serve energy consumption in perpetuity. Not only that, but these fictions reinstitute how petro-colonialism's secrecy and obscurity is maintained through the categorization of certain bodies as disposable.

Real-life iterations of how Big Oil fuels itself by the disposability of marginalized communities can be seen in instances of petro-colonial "red-lining". What I mean by red-lining is, in addition to petro-colonialism ideologically relegating certain communities to the margins, it also *physically* confines them to areas that pose threats to their vitality. Big Oil's weaponization of Western science works to ensure this. Like the

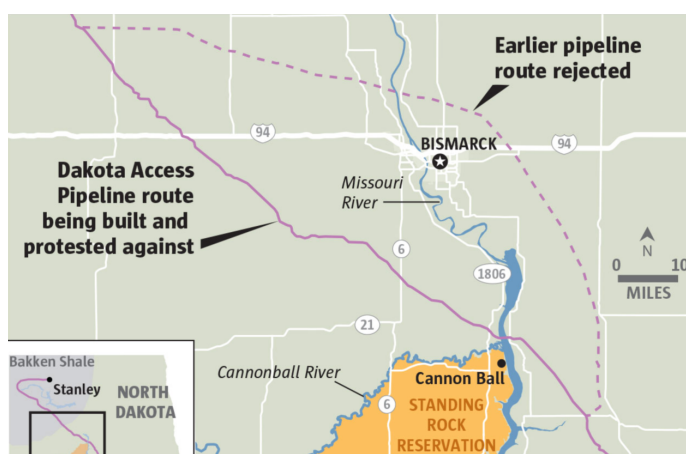


Fig. 6 Original plan for DAPL route bordering Bismarck and the new route set to border Standing Rock Sioux Reservation. Map by Mark Nowlin, courtesy of *Seattle Times*.

nonsensical moral compasses of Dexter Morgan and the Cullen family, scientific reports commissioned by Big Oil operate under guises of objectivity and truth, when actually they serve to justify placing marginalized communities in harm's way. For example, Nick Estes writes about

how the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) was originally routed near Bismarck, a predominately white community in North Dakota, but its position soon changed after local complaints and a subsequent proposal by the Army Corps of Engineers, a modern champion of the petro-colonial project. DAPL was then rerouted to neighbor the Standing Rock Reservation. In order to shakily prove that this was not in fact yet another act of

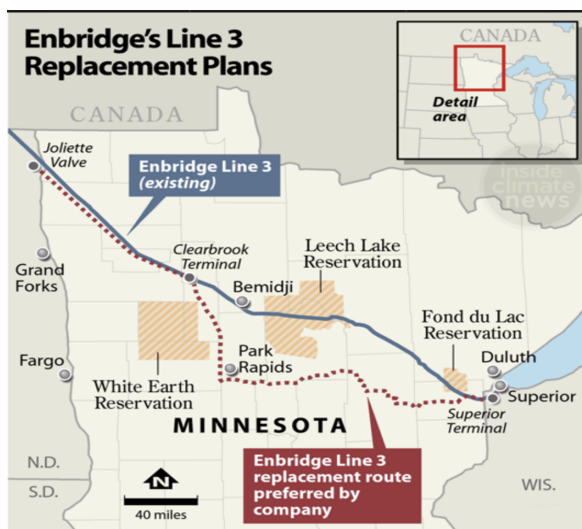


Fig. 7 Enbridge Line 3 Pipeline replacement plan. Renovation plans route Line 3 through Leech Lake Reservation. Photo by Paul Horn courtesy of Inside Climate News.

racism by petro-colonialism in a very long history of genocide and racism against indigenous folx, the Army Corps of Engineers enlisted companies that sponsored DAPL to “create environmental justice studies that would find no

‘disproportionate risk to a racial minority’” (Army Corps of Engineers qtd.

in Estes21). However, DAPL poses numerous threats to Standing Rock. For one, because DAPL runs straight through the Missouri River, in the event it were to leak, the people relying on it for clean water and fish are forced to grapple with the threat to their livelihoods. Not only that, but the Missouri River is sacred to the people of Standing Rock, and DAPL is in direct opposition to tribal sovereignty and a significant part of this native community’s collective identity. Despite this, Big Oil’s fictitious rendering of science permitted DAPL anyway, confirming the notion that petro-colonialism relies on a praxis of white supremacy in order to justify the disposal of marginalized communities. Moreover, DAPL explicitly violates tribal law, but because of the centuries of repackaging colonialism, this violation is permissible because of America’s long history of white supremacy.

More often than not, petro-colonialism is committed to protecting the white body, as seen in the case of DAPL. However, if necessary, the appropriation of *any* body will do so long as it facilitates extraction. Even more than the petroleum industry relies on fossil fuels themselves, it functionally relies on the recruitment of labor force into its

project. This means that no one is really exempt from the violence wrought by oil extraction. Marx confirms this concept that extractive industries don't discriminate when it comes to soliciting labor in *Capital*:

Capital asks no questions about the length and life of labour-power. What interests it is purely and simply the maximum of labour-power that can be set in motion in a working day. It attains this objective by shortening the life of labour-power, in the same way as a greedy farmer snatches more produce by robbing the soil of its fertility (237).

What Marx is reiterating is the ambivalence that petro-colonialism holds towards autonomy. Instead, Big Oil values the appropriation of vitality and maximization to fuel its expansion. We've seen this sort of sacrificial mentality from Big Oil as depicted by the scene from *There Will Be Blood*, and real-life iterations of oil and gas workers' deaths are usually much more gruesome. For example, during the 2010 DeepWater Horizon disaster resulted in the deaths of 11 rig workers, not to mention the countless marine lives lost in the tragedy. A fatality rate seven times higher than that of other industries, the oil and gas industry is one of the most dangerous to work for.²¹ Most of the deaths and injuries are due to falls from heights, fires and explosions, inhalation of toxic substances, being struck by tools or other objects or being crushed between objects, equipment and machinery malfunctions, and motor vehicle crashes going to and from rigs. If survived, most of these incidents leave victims of petro-colonialism with traumatic brain injuries, burns, electrocutions, broken bones, spinal cord fractures, eye injuries, loss of limbs, and soft tissue and organ damage. Worse yet, these tragedies occur so frequently that every

²¹ CDC. "Oil and Gas Extraction Program." 2022. <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/programs/oilgas/>
Waldman Legal. "How Dangerous is Oilfield Work." 2021.
<https://waldman.legal/how-dangerous-is-oilfield-work/>

day of the year an oil worker is either injured or killed at the hands of petro-colonialism. In other words, Big Oil functionally depends on extraction sites being containers for human blood. However, we saw with DAPL and the Army Corps of Engineers that petro-colonialism has no qualms with manipulating qualitative data to fit its own narrative. Big Oil's qualms then are a kind of petro-colonial speculative fiction or reiteration of the killer story in themselves. For instance, the data that is reported about petroleum-related bodily harm is misleading in many ways. Not only is Big Oil notorious for underreporting its death and injury rates to the federal government, but also, this data doesn't at all speak to the casualties of other bodies that are enmeshed in the extraction process, including those of BIPOC and poor folx, or womxn that are confined to these petro-colonial sacrifice zones. Not to mention, Big Oil takes no responsibility for the people whose deaths are a result of the long-term effects of their proximity to petroleum, or the countless non-human deaths and injuries resulting from land and water appropriation and the effects of climate change. And, although military casualties are reported to the federal government, they are not comprehensively attributed to their involvement with extractive industries despite the US Armed forces being the largest entity that acquires and consumes oil.²² Furthermore, extraction requires the exclusion and sacrifice of communities, and does so through systematic devaluing through racism via the colonial project. There are iterations of this in vampiric media, where killing is justified by arbitrary ethical codes that say some lives are okay to take.

²² Sneath, Sara. "Offshore Oil And Gas Worker Fatalities Are Underreported By Federal Safety Agency". New Orleans Public Radio, 2021.
<https://www.wvno.org/coastal-desk/2021-08-18/offshore-oil-and-gas-worker-fatalities-are-underreported-by-federal-safety-agency>

Oily Atmospheres: A Paternal Family History

East Alton, Illinois is the home of the Phillips 66 Woodriver Refinery that employed nearly every man on the paternal side of my family for generations, including my grandpa, father, uncles, and step-brothers. I never lived here myself, but my dad's side of the family have told me all about this oily town. There's a museum in town that honors the history of the Woodriver Refinery. It—and my grandpa's persistent asbestos cough—memorialized Big Oil's contributions to East Alton. In between the refinery and Roxana High school, Home of the Shells (yes, as in Shell oil) are two and a half miles

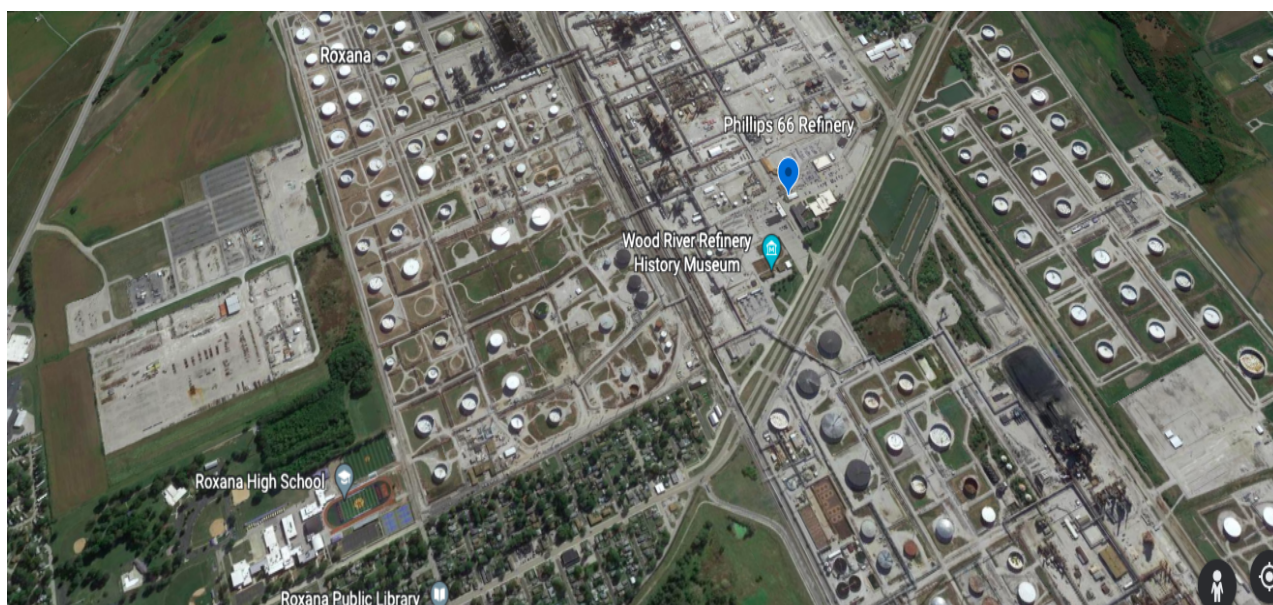


Fig. 8 Woodriver Phillips 66 Refinery and oil drums. Oil reservoirs are touching Roxana High School perimeter. Also, oil vats are pushed up against low-income neighborhood and trailer park. Image sourced from Google Maps.

worth of oil vats that affectionately hug the high school. If you want to cheer on the Shells' football team you'll surely be riveted by a lively sports event. The excitement doesn't stop there. The impending threat of an oil drum explosion adds a unique layer to the viewing experience. The possibility of a fiery demise was both a natural and inescapable part of life for my family and the inhabitants of East Alton. With every breath

containing the smell of petrochemicals, the air itself served to remind them of their subjugation under Big Oil. On the other side of this sprawling field of oil vats was the trailer park my step-siblings grew up in. Parts of their neighborhood caught fire resulting from an exploded oil vat. My step-family was eventually able to move out of that trailer park after my step-mom went to Southern Illinois University's petro-funded nursing program. After her certification she took care of hospice patients; most of which were dying of long-term complications from the refinery. Later on, she put her medical knowledge to use as a paralegal. Most of the lawyers she worked for graduated from the local, also petro-funded law school that championed a specialization in settlement cases regarding those same long-term health complications afflicting community members as a result of their proximity to the Phillips 66 refinery. She's a regular Eric Brockovich type.

Let's rewind a little bit. My dad just graduated from high school and just scored a full-time position at the refinery. Dreaming of a life beyond poverty and fume inhalation, my dad remembered the business card given to him by the Marine recruiter he met in his high school cafeteria before he graduated. He goes to the Marine office only to find out that it's closed for the day. The Navy office next door is open though. With promises of secure housing, food, healthcare, a steady income, and reduced (but not eliminated) interactions with toxic fumes, my dad enlisted in the Navy. Ditching his small-town refinery gig, he unknowingly slipped into oil's big leagues: The Military Industrial

Complex.

Interlude: The U.S. Military's History of Blood Stealing

The U.S. Military is the largest consumer of petroleum *in the world*, and also the largest carbon emitter globally.²³ The casualties discussed in “Playing God: Sacrifice Zones, Petroculture and the Extraction of Life” are a result of Big Oil’s apathy towards life coupled with the valorization of sacrificing bodies to fuel its expansion. The U.S. Military is the poster child for creating such positive feelings towards self-sacrifice, commandeering notions of brotherhood and camaraderie to recruit people into ensuring petro-colonialism's power. These killer-stories are sold under the guise of national freedom and protection, and make us and their recruits believe that they are a force of good. Even if we don’t buy into these falsified sentiments, the government restricts our ability to thrive, cutting civilians off from wealth, housing, food and clean water, education, so people soldier Big Oil’s cause out of necessity and desire to survive.²⁴ Not to mention, the global casualties of war that have resulted from conflicts over petroleum have resulted in *millions* of casualties just from conflict alone.²⁵ If this already weren’t enough to earn them the status of #1 blood stealer, check this out: the military owns and operates one of the largest global blood banks! They bank blood from their own troops in order to replenish them in case of wartime casualties. They offer military members 4 hours of paid time off per blood extraction.²⁶ If the Armed Forces can’t accrue

²³ Crawford, Netta. “US military is world’s single largest consumer of oil, and as a result, one of the world’s top greenhouse gas emitters.” *Energy in Demand*, 2019. <https://energyindemand.com/2019/06/22/us-military-is-worlds-single-largest-consumer-of-oil-and-as-a-result-one-of-the-worlds-top-greenhouse-gas-emitters/>

²⁴ Bareis, Natalie and Mezuk, Briana. “The relationship between childhood poverty, military service, and later life depression among men: Evidence from the Health and Retirement Study.” *National Library of Medicine*, 2016. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5704990/>

²⁵ Beaumont, Peter and Joanna Walters. “Greenspan Admits Iraq Was About Oil, as Deaths Put at 1.2 Million.” *The Guardian*, 2007. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/sep/16/iraq.iraqtimeline>

²⁶ “Department of Defense Instruction 6480.04 Armed Services Blood Program” <https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/DD/issuances/dodi/648004p.pdf>

enough blood from their members, they recruit civilian bodies to meet their blood quota, offering free t-shirts and movie tickets to donors. Ultimately this makes the U.S. Military the #1, global vampire, in its consumption of blood, and ultimately the life force of the planet itself via its dedication to Big Oil and the subsequent contributions to climate change.

Present day and also March 21, 2009 according to my mother

I called my mom to ask her to look for the picture of me wearing my Team Edward shirt on Christmas so I could add it to this thesis. She says it doesn't exist but later texts me this: "I went through old emails and plugged in the word Twilight and it turns out March 21st 2009 is when I bought the Twilight DVD for you. I used it as leverage so that you would clean your room... Lol I wrote an email to Jim telling him that." ("Jim" is my Uncle Jimmy—the one that got me the Twilight Jewelry for Xmas). Like, I was so smitten by Twilight that I was willing to clean my room for it.

Extraction Culture and Petro-colonial Violence

Regarding petro-colonial red-lining, Big Oil ideologically and physically devalues certain communities in order to justify extracting their vitality for the sake of fuelling petro-colonial expansion. Additionally, Big Oil, and the fictions that follow its killer-story template, call upon methods of white supremacy. It is also the case that patriarchal violence is equally bound up with petro-colonialism and the acquisition of liveliness. In other words, in addition to the violence committed against BIPOC and poor folx, womxn and feminized bodies are also at risk from petro-colonial blood stealing. Of course, as this thesis suggests, the wide-spread success of patriarchal violence can be

attributed to the killer story and petro-colonialism's ability to indefinitely repackage it. LeGuin herself, in her assertion that "thrusting [and] raping" are key features of the killer story, implies that disentangling patriarchal violence from petro-colonial extraction is impossible (5).

Benay Blend's contribution to the book *Ecofeminism in Dialogue*, speaks to this feature of LeGuin's killer story concept. Blend, a post-colonial ecocritic, details how colonial acquisition by design requires appropriating femininity in order to carry out its visions of progress. According to her, the colonial project "relied on sexualizing the land as virgin space whose purity and fertility made it ripe for penetrating by the colonizer" (35). Blend's use of "penetrating" is especially significant, as it invokes phallic symbolism that resembles LeGuin's sentiments. Continuing, Blend suggests that weaponizing femininity and the subsequent erasure of personhood, are prerequisites of extraction. Put another way, the appropriation of femininity through narratives that devalue land and womxn alike is *integral* to settler-colonialism and petro-colonialism as its offspring. The colonization of America and other settler-nations is determined by their ability to impose themselves onto the feminized body, human or not. Nick Estes' citation of Sarah Deer's book *The Beginning and End of Rape: Confronting Sexual Violence in Native America*, bolsters LeGuin and Blend's argument, stating that "rape 'can be employed as a metaphor for the entire concept of colonialism' because it is not only experienced individually but is also part of an ongoing structure of domination—one with a beginning, but no end" (Deer qtd. in Estes 229-30). For Estes, these acts of violence against the landscape and womxn, or otherwise feminized bodies alike are acts that nourish petro-colonial growth. Ultimately, Estes' articulation that the rape of native

peoples and their land is ongoing makes clear the ways in which petro-colonial ideologies undergo infinite transcriptions in order to sustain Big Oil's power.

To restate, waters, land, and feminized bodies are systematically devalued and marginalized by patriarchal ideologies as they emerge out of colonial acquisition. Estes, confirms that settler-colonialism appropriates femininity in order to assign a meaning to it that justifies harm against feminized people: "like the land itself, the bodies of Indigenous women, girls, trans, and Two-Spirit people are also seen as open for violence and violation" (37). He goes on to say that petro-colonialism, and the culture of extractive industries more broadly, "intensifies [the] murderous heteropatriarchy" set forth by settler-colonialism (Estes 37). Furthermore, the "murderous heteropatriarchy," and petro-colonial killer story subsequently, are perpetuated by the presence of man-camps. Man camps, according to Estes are the, "transient all-men communities of oil and gas workers." Furthermore, man camps operate as "hubs for the exploitation of Indigenous women through trafficking and sex work" (Estes 77). This means that violence and bloodshed of womxn, children and queer folx, *especially* those that are native, operates in tandem with extraction.

Julia Stern's article, "Pipeline of Violence: The Oil Industry and Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women" further reiterates how unfathomably dangerous it is to be a femme person living in proximity to extraction sites. And as my last section suggests, most of the time extraction occurs near or on native territories. Stern notes the alarming rates of violence that occurs to indigenous womxn specifically as a result of man camps,

In 2015, violent crime reports increased in the Bakken oil-producing region of Montana and North Dakota, due to the socio-economic changes brought to the

area with the oil boom. According to one report, sexual assaults on women on the Fort Berthold reservation increased by 75%. Conversely, there was no corresponding rise of violent crimes in the counties outside of the Bakken oil region. In fact, the overall crime rate decreased during this time (Stern).

Here, we see yet another example of how Big Oil, through structures of white supremacy and patriarchy, confines native communities into sacrifice zones that materially blend the blood of indigenous womxn and children with oil. More than that, Stern's assessment that rates of violence only go up in proximity to extraction posit that Big Oil, beyond a reasonable doubt, is to blame for the violence committed against these individuals. Moreover, because native populations are deemed to be so disposable and are granted such little agency by petro-colonial epistemologies, when native children or womxn inevitably go missing or are murdered at the hands of extractive industries, they almost never obtain justice because the law is designed to appeal to the interests of petro-colonialism. Because of discrepancies between law enforcement and sovereign territories, Missing and Murdered Indigenous Womxn and Girls (MMIWG), almost never receive justice.²⁷ Again, not only is petro-colonialism ambivalent to violence and blood stealing, but it *thrives on it*.

In the same way petro-colonialism enforces white supremacist ideology to systematically devalue people of color, the patriarchy is a means to justify violence against womxn. These are fundamental characteristics of the petro-colonial killer story. In other words, petro-colonial killer stories rely on systematic belittling of womxnhood and femininity in order to ensure harm against femmes flies under the radar. Moreover, our

²⁷ Department of the Interior Indian Affairs, "Missing and Murdered Indigenous Peoples crisis: Violence Against Native Americans and Alaska Natives far exceed national averages." <https://www.bia.gov/service/mmu/missing-and-murdered-indigenous-people-crisis>

consumption of Western speculative fictions that involve vampires or other blood stealers further emulsify the oppression of womxn into the global consciousness. This is especially true for femme bodies that are additionally marginalized by other oppressive structures like white supremacy. Niamh McShane’s essay, “Gender and Vampires: The Violent, The Voracious and the Venereal in the Vampire/Victim Relationship” confirms the insidious reality that vampiric speculative fiction reifies patriarchal notions in order to naturalize the violation of bodies subjugated by such ideologies. She writes that “the vampire metaphor develop[ed] into a container for antipathy towards women and fear of female sexuality.” Conversely, vampiric speculative fictions contain harmful petro-colonial stereotypes that depict femininity as “passive and powerless to the penetration of the lecherous, painting a picture of women as fundamentally weak and lifeless” (McShane 4). Again, McShane’s use of penetration recalls the aforementioned histories where lands and their native peoples are thrust upon by the colonizer. Ultimately, because Western iterations of vampires embroider patriarchal oppression into their storytelling structure—through stereotypes born out of colonial acquisition such as those involving purity, virginity, and passivity, or through the fear-mongering of feminine sexuality—vampiric literature successfully recapitulates petro-colonial epistemologies, and the killer story.

Dexter: New Blood, a reboot of the original series *Dexter*, addresses the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Womxn and Girls epidemic. It also depicts how their disappearances are a direct result of petro-colonialism’s proximity to native lands. The series is set in upstate New York in the fictional town of Iron Lake. The Seneca Nation’s sovereign lands neighbor Iron Lake. Iron Lake’s mayor, Kurt Caldwell, owns a truck stop

on the stretch of road between Seneca territory and Iron Lake. Angela Bishop, Seneca Nation tribal member, is also Iron Lake's police chief, and one of only two other police officers the town has. Angela assumes the responsibility of single handedly investigating more than 30 cases of womxn and girls that have gone missing from the reservation and the surrounding area. As Chief Bishop later discovers, every single one of the missing womxn and girls were murdered by none other than Kurt Caldwell himself. Each of his victims were patrons of his truck stop. If Kurt noticed they were there on their own, he would sweet talk them and generously offer them food or a place to rest for the night free of charge. It's also important to mention that all of his victims were either sex workers, transients, or indigenous. Although the violence against these womxn weren't a result of man camps specifically, their violation is a result of petro-colonial occupation via Kurt's truck stop, and the ideological structures of white supremacy and patriarchy therein, all the same. In other words, *Dexter: New Blood* is highlighting an important connection between violence against womxn due to their proximity to Big Oil and depicts how extractive or blood stealing entities justify their harm through the systematic devaluation of femme subjectivity. Put another way, Kurt exemplifies how a strategy that works to enable petro-colonial violence against womxn and girls is through the appropriation of femininity that posits femme bodies as weak, passive or in need of reformation.

Moreover, after assigning to them petro-colonial ideologies, Kurt's modus operandi materially conjures oil extraction. What I mean by this is *how* Kurt physically goes about violating these poor womxn calls to mind how oil itself is acquired. For example, Kurt first kills them by shooting them in a place that can be covered with clothing, in order to preserve their beauty, the only value that petro-colonial

epistemologies assign to womanhood.²⁸ Then, after they're dead he sticks a tube in their bodies and actually drains their blood from them, the darkness and thickness of which resembles oil undeniably (39:55). This grotesque visual of the show, in the similarities it bears to oil extraction, signifies the material and symbolic link between blood and oil, whose vitality propel the petro-colonial project forward. The metaphor for petro-colonial world-building in *Dexter: New Blood* can be seen in what Kurt does with his victims' bodies after extracting their lifeblood. He preserves them with formaldehyde, dresses them in white, notably feminine clothing, and locks them away in rows and rows of glass tombs; sentencing them to a resting place that is a gruesome spectacle made in Kurt's image, much like our current petromodern society.

Dexter later discovers Kurt's disturbing, petro-colonial mausoleum and confronts him. Instead of assuming responsibility for violating these womxn, Kurt denies their victimhood and declares,

No, I saved them! They're just runaways. Do you have any idea the kind of trauma they were gonna go through? I'd pick them up on the road, take them to my cabin, and I'd give them a comfortable room and a nice warm meal, and safety. But that was never enough for them... so, I preserved them, kept them safe forever.

To which Dexter replies, "Bullshit. This wasn't about saving anyone. This was about power. You love the power you had over them, it fed the darkness that was inside you." (E9 45:00-47:04). Dexter is right, this is an assertion of power, and it is perpetuated by patriarchal ideologies that serve to enforce Big Oil's reign. Here, Kurt's self-declared safeguarding of women is nothing but a chimera because the danger they face is due to

²⁸ Barf.

his compulsive consumption that is perpetuated symbolically and literally by his entanglement with petro-colonialism and the acquisition of vitality therefore. Moreover, Dexter's accusation that Kurt doesn't care about their well-being at all, but rather, feeds his compulsions with the harm to womxn further symbolizes how Big Oil is satiated by the liveliness it acquires. To reiterate, extractive industries, as they are permitted by patriarchal violence, commodify the femme body (and landscapes) to control it however Big Oil sees fit in order to build hollow, lifeless relics that memorialize and reinforce petro-colonial control.

Twilight allows us to examine another representation of how womxn's proximity to petro-colonial epistemologies and blood-stealing entities heightens their risk of experiencing violence. *Twilight*, like petro-colonialism portrays womxn as weak and fragile creatures that need rescuing. What's ironic though is that most of the time feminized bodies aren't in need of protection until they are interpolated by gendered violence produced through patriarchal control and petro-colonial killer stories. In short, *The Twilight Saga* is from the first person point of view of Bella Swan, a quiet, doe-eyed girl who moves from Arizona to Forks, Washington. Upon arrival, she is transfixed by the Cullen children, a group of mysterious, strikingly perfect and gorgeous students at her highschool who don't seem to fit in with everyone else. As we discover later, they are not human, but immortal vampires who are frozen in time. One of these painfully good looking vampires is Edward Cullen, who is bronze-haired, boyishly handsome and has been frozen at 17 years old for 102 years.²⁹ Oh, and Bella's blood smells more delicious to him than that of anyone else he's ever met. He likens it to his own personal "brand of

²⁹ Despite his immortal-ness and being permanently frozen at 17, Edward is still over a century old in technical terms, a fact that has been a major ick-factor amongst *Twilight* discourse.

heroin” (Meyer 169). Despite the odds, one of which is Bella’s nearly irresistible blood, they fall deeply in love. Their unyielding affection for each other is the uniting feature of the film series and the novels they were adapted from. Their romance isn’t what sustains the four-part saga though. Each novel’s major story arc involves Edward and the rest of the Cullen clan rescuing Bella from many, many vampire-related dangers that result from her entanglement with this supernatural community of blood stealers. The plot of the series in itself reaffixes petro-colonial epistemologies to the consciousness of its readers by reinstating that vitality extraction is intrinsically tangled up in patriarchal violence, however, this reality is shrouded by their “love”—even though Bella didn’t really have much choice in her affections (I’ll speak to that point in the next section). During a conversation between Bella and Edward he says, “Your number was up the first time I met you” (Meyer 110). Edward himself acknowledges the reality that his involvement in Bella’s life alone puts her at risk of death and violence.

Just one more out of many instances of Bella’s “number being up” as a result of her closeness with Edward happens on their *very first date*—an outing that is abruptly cut short because of the danger Bella faces by her proximity to vampires that threaten to drain her vitality. Edward and the rest of his family take Bella to a clearing in the woods to watch the Cullens play baseball (Hello? Can you say red flag?? Isn’t like, the number one rule of first dates NOT to let your suitor take you into the woods?!?). The thunderous noise from playing baseball with super-vampire-strength intrigues a trio of nomadic, human blood drinking vampires in the nearby forest. The nomads approach Bella and the Cullens and they soon detect that Bella is a human. James, one of the nomads, is super-naturally gifted at “tracking” which just means his senses are majorly heightened,

making him very gifted at catching his prey and will not stop hunting until he has killed whoever is in his sights. Already, James in this moment can be seen as a metaphor for petro-colonialism. In addition, Bella's status as a site of extraction is reinforced. To recall Estes' definition of settler-colonialism and its "never complete"-ness, James and the colonizer alike will employ whatever means necessary to see through the extermination of their prey. Continuing, James says to the Cullens "you brought a snack?" in reference to Bella (Meyer 241). The Cullens become defensive and manage to escape with Bella. Adhering to petro-colonialism's relentlessness, James doesn't let up on his pursuit to kill Bella and steal her blood. This ensues in a cross-country pursuit leading up to the novel's climax. The final showdown between the Cullens and James results in James' death (yay). However, Bella is severely injured because the Cullens almost didn't rescue her in time. She is left with cuts, bruises, broken limbs, a severed femoral artery, a fractured skull and a deep bite mark. Sounds similar to the injuries sustained by extraction mishaps, no?

Furthermore, James' death doesn't relieve Bella from danger in the slightest. One of the other nomads from the baseball field was James' mate, Victoria. The premise of the next two installments of *The Twilight Saga* involve protecting Bella from Victoria's goal of avenging James' death. Bella is keenly aware of the dangers posed by her intimacy with vampires, and asks Edward over and over again to "change" her. "The change" is simply the transformation from human to vampire via the venom of a non-fatal vampire bite. Being changed would irrevocably grant Bella the ability to save herself if faced with danger. However, Edward denies her request for the sake of maintaining her "purity" and "loveliness" (Meyer 266). Here, Edward is displaying the

power he holds over Bella because she depends on him to protect her, even though he's the reason she's in danger in the first place. Here, Edward is reinforcing the passivity and weakness associated with womxn that McShane's essay details. Not only that, Edward's reason for refusing to empower Bella perpetuates the idyllic notions of purity and virginity that is archetypal of vampiric literature and petro-colonialism alike.

Ultimately, Edward and Kurt's perverted, self-appointed status of protectors of womxn, despite being the very entities these womxn need protecting from, speaks to what Sheena Wilson would call "rescue narratives." Wilson, energy humanities professor and director of the international Petrocultures Research Group at Alberta University, contributed a chapter to *Oil Cultures* entitled "Gendering Oil." There she details womxn's oppression under oil, and argues that the "rescue narratives" existing at the junction of white supremacy and patriarchal dominance are absolutely integral to maintain petro-colonialism. Moreover, Wilson explains that rescue narratives by nature require the victimization of marginalized womxn by Big Oil. Womxn's victimization allows the so-called benefits of petroleum to swoop in and rescue them, despite the fact that the structural oppression of femmes are a result of Western epistemologies and petro-colonial extraction in the first place (Wilson 252-3).

Seduced by Oil: Petroaesthetics and Autotopic Desire

In addition to brute force and violation of bodies as a killer story in itself, Big Oil also appeals to our desire to experience pleasure. It seduces us with carefully crafted social programming that advertises oiliness in such a way we don't question, or care about its means, of which is the well-being of our bodies and the environment. As I've established, the petroleum industry is fueled by the life source of people (and landscapes)

in addition to crude oil. How exactly has Big Oil sold itself to us so successfully to the point where we wilfully ignore of its effects? Even if all we have left to ourselves after the oil encounter is the most minuscule amount of vitality left, Big Oil greedily slurps it up. However, it rewards us for our sacrifice via the tiniest compensations that vampire capitalism can pass off as fair, sustaining us with the littlest crumbs of modernity and material comforts. However, because petro-colonial methodologies deprive us of livelihood, this small payment from Big Oil feels generous, despite the immense cost to us. When you're really hungry, anything tastes good. If you're constantly on the verge of starvation, maybe you can even look past a little mold.

Like the "loving oil" paradox, LeMenager in *Living Oil* also warns us about "the charisma of energy." In other words, how Big Oil sells us dreamy, progressivist mirages of luxury, wealth, innovation, and modernity, that ultimately aims to distract us from the reality that this image is sustained by our own vitality. Furthermore, because of the incremental indoctrination of petro-colonial killer stories, Big Oil has so thoroughly immersed us into a life in oil that "we are loathe to disentangle ourselves or our definition of life from it," according to LeMenager (4). LeMenager's sentiment implies that Big Oil has, over years and years of killer storytelling, appropriated our autonomy so much so that our devotion appears like a choice that we made—even though petro-colonialism has posited itself as the only choice available. In other words, because petro-colonialism seduces us with just the right dose of hope, we volunteer our lives to its project with the belief that we want our relationship with it to stick around. Or, more insidiously, it forces our proximity to it through violence laced with colonial methodologies, as I detailed in the previous sections regarding petro-colonialism's commitment to white supremacy and

patriarchy. Returning to Jessica Hautsch's essay, she uses Lauren Berlant's term "cruel optimism," a concept that speaks to how our desires, in the case of this analysis the desire for oil, work against our well being and ultimately slowly drain our life force:

Vampiric survival depends on sustainable extraction practices which are at odds with their imperative toward growth. In this way, we can see how vampiric thirst articulates crude optimism with special force. Berlant explains that "where cruel optimism operates, the very vitalizing or animating potency of an object/scene of desire contributes to the attrition of the very thriving that is supposed to be made possible in the work of attachment (Berlant qtd. in Hautsch).

In other words, although petro-colonial expansion relies heavily on our fervent consumption of petroleum products, that very participation with Big Oil is what moves us and Earth towards death. Moreover, Big Oil has overwhelmingly succeeded in forcing global dependence on oil, and charming the consciousnesses of those entangled with it. However, the "vitalizing animacy," of petro-products are propelled by stolen blood, and therefore will ultimately drain the vitality of the entire planet. However, the reality that we will succumb to the effects of petro-colonial vitality extraction evades us or even if we are aware of such devastation, we are ambivalent because it has succeeded in enchanting us so thoroughly.

Yet again, vampires become a potent way to examine how Big Oil has by charm or force, ensured our participation in our own self-consumption. Ted Adkinson's essay, "Blood Petroleum: True Blood, the BP Oil Spill, and Fictions of Energy/Culture" states that the West has a long-standing "cultural practice of making vampires screens for projecting collective desires and anxieties" (213). This means that as a society that is

under petro-colonialism's thumb, it's safe to assume that vampires reflect Big Oil's desires and its praxis for achieving them. Edward and Bella's love affair affirms the intoxicating and forceful relationship we have to Big Oil, and that petro-colonialism's paramount design feature is to recruit us into the oil project. Edward's monologue in the film adaptation of *Twilight* exemplifies how blood-stealing entities, vampires, and Big Oil exist only to harvest vitality gently or forcefully. Opposing traditional vampire tropes, *Twilight* vampires don't burn or disintegrate in the daytime. Instead, when the sun touches their skin it shines as if it were encrusted with thousands of tiny diamonds. Edward and Bella are hanging out in the woods again, which already visually signals the slippery secrecy of extractive entities, when the sun breaks through the blanket of clouds that usually covers Forks, Washington. Edward moves toward this beam of light and instantly begins glittering and refracting brilliant tiny rainbows (eat your heart out Swarovski!!). Bella, mouth agape and more captured by his breathtaking perfection than ever begins this exchange between them:

BELLA:

You're... beautiful.

He realizes that she's in awe. She reaches to touch him, but

he immediately backs into the shadows, his skin normal again.

EDWARD: (appalled)

Beautiful? I'm a killer, Bella.

This is the skin of a killer.

His arm juts into A SHAFT OF LIGHT, sparkling again.

BELLA:

I don't believe that.

EDWARD:

Because you believe the lie. The camouflage. I'm the world's most dangerous predator.

Everything about me invites you in - my voice, my face, even my smell. As if I need any of that...

He's suddenly BEHIND her—then IN FRONT of her—then by a tree, DARTING so fast, we only see where he lands.

EDWARD:

As if you could outrun me! As if you could fight me off.

He abruptly rips off a LARGE TREE LIMB, then THROWS it against a tree trunk with explosive force.

Bella flinches, but holds her ground, unshakable.

EDWARD:

I'm designed to kill.

BELLA:

I don't care.

EDWARD:

I've killed people.

BELLA:

It doesn't matter (Rosenberg).

Edward's incomprehensible speed and supernatural strength exemplify the same inevitable invasion by petro-colonialism I've already detailed. Big Oil and Edward alike

are devastatingly adept at strong-arming their victims to bend to their will for the purpose of vitality extraction. However, what I'm most interested in, is the overwhelming sensory experience that accompanies these creatures and hypnotizes those in their proximity in such a way that even if their victims were aware of the danger facing them, they can't bear to turn away from such beauty. First of all, Bella on countless occasions deifies Edward, likening his appearance to that of angels or some "forgotten pagan god of beauty" (Meyer 329). If god-like beauty wasn't capturing enough, Bella describes the way Edward smells as equally hypnotic, "sweet, delicious, the scent made my mouth water... Instinctively, unthinkingly, I leaned closer, inhaling" (Meyer 166). She doesn't even think twice about approaching this creature that could kill her in a blink. In fact, she is desperate to be near him because he is so spell-bindingly, stupendously, mouth-wateringly appealing. Edward himself in this script excerpt affirms that his beauty is *a lie*, an ephemeral falsehood that is meant to distract from the imminent danger it "camouflages" in his own words. But, like Bella's for Edward, our love for Big Oil seems like a personal choice because petro-colonialism is supernaturally endowed with characteristics created for the sole purpose of enchanting us first and foremost. Ultimately, Edward's gorgeousness speaks to how petro-colonial killer narratives "anesthetize our sensibilities by transforming extractive violence into pristine beauty," and secure Big Oil's power therein.³⁰

The beauty of *The Twilight Saga* vampires aren't the only way petro-colonial epistemologies are sold to us in this franchise. Both the book series and their cinematic

³⁰ Davis, Thomas. "Anthropocene Insecurities: Extraction, Aesthetics, and the Bakken Oilfields" <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5917b02b1e5b6c9407368c36/t/596e2eb3db29d6567ab39d51/1500393139877/Anthropocene+Insecurities+ELN+Final.pdf>

renderings relentlessly advertize petroleum-based consumerism and valorize the automotive industry. In *Economics of the Undead*, James Dow and Glen Whitman's chapter "Blood Money," says, "the undead are justly famous for their consumption—not just of blood and flesh, but also of consumer products" (107). Moreover, Dow and Whitman confirm the notion that vampires are simply a reflection of societal desires, especially as they have been prescribed by Big Oil. LeMenager's *Living Oil* chapter entitled "Aesthetics of Petroleum" further speaks to how contemporary media is almost always plagued with petro-colonial aesthetics. She says that petro-media "valorize[s] driving" creating a "mystified ecological unconsciousness of modern car culture, which allows for a persistent association of driving with being alive" (68, 80). In addition to this, according to LeMenager, other principal features of petroleum aesthetics include the glorification of speed as well as focalizing highways and roads as sublime landscapes. (69, 75). Also, the romantic aesthetics of roads are accompanied by equally dreamy "images of gauziness," smog, or other kinds of haze (71). This visual combination not only glorifies car culture, but the privacy that comes with it. Moreover, cars and highways become the ultimate form of mobilized privacy, which reiterates petro-colonialism's reliance on concealment, slipperiness, obscurity, in order to function (82). Not only that, but petro-colonialism becomes more invisible because of how appealing its killer story aesthetics are. Moreover, these features of contemporary media sell to us visions of "autotopia" as LeMenager calls it, where Big Oil's expansion entails curating a social desire for automobility (76).

The Twilight Saga ticks all of these boxes LeMenager has set forth, embodying the infinite modalities of control that petro-colonial killer stories employ in order to sell

Big Oil's vision to us. First of all, a defining characteristic among the vampires of *The Twilight Saga*, aside from their inhuman beauty is their speed. They are able to run a blurring 100 miles per hour, which makes them virtually invisible to the human eye.³¹ The vampires of *The Twilight Saga* enjoy running incomprehensibly fast, but because the Cullens specifically are committed to living in human society, their natural born affinity for speed becomes too conspicuous. Instead, they opt for cars of the cutting edge of the automotive industry, equipped with post-market enhancements to optimize the performance of their fancy cars. The Cullens' passion for fast, luxurious vehicles is a trademark of the novels and films alike, and is also something that the Cullens bond over.

The glorification of car culture is so intrinsic to *The Twilight Saga* that when Stephanie Meyer released *Midnight Sun*, a companion novel that follows the same plot of *Twilight* but is told through Edward's first person point of view. Meyer adds in a spectacular, action-packed, high-speed car chase that didn't exist in the original storyline. Ultimately, Meyer's creative decision to add this moment in, when the trajectory of the novel wouldn't be derailed in its



Fig. 9 Screenshot from *The Twilight Saga: Eclipse*. Image depicts Bella's truck driving down a winding road.

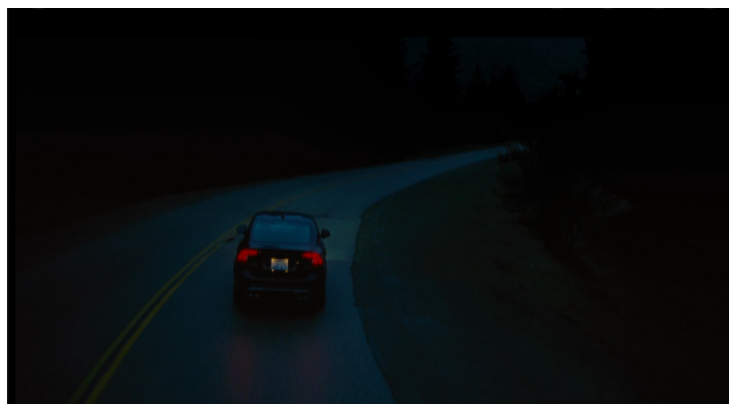


Fig. 10 Screenshot from *Twilight*. Image depicts Edward's volvo driving down a dark road.

³¹ Information courtesy of Twilight Fandom Wiki page liked here: <https://twilightsaga.fandom.com/wiki/Vampire#Speed>

absence, denotes that autotopic sensibilities are a hallmark feature of *The Twilight Saga*. Furthermore the film adaptations especially dedicate themselves to glorifying the petroleum aesthetics that LeMenager describes. The films quite often include lofty aerial shots depicting a single car driving down misty, winding roads that are damp with rain and embraced by enchanting forests on either side.

These cinematic spectacles at once reinforce *The Twilight Saga* as an iteration of the killer story, but also demonstrate how petro-colonialism relies on a tactic of camouflaging itself as magnificent, enchanting, and the ultimate road to happiness. As the franchise grew in popularity, depictions of driving became more akin to car commercials than movie scenes, indulging petro-colonialism. Each new installment of

The Twilight Saga brought with it newer, faster, shiner cars “pimped out,” as LeMenager would say, with “supple plastics, and diverse, soft, hard and wet wares,” amenities that she argues



Fig. 11 *Twilight* themed Volvo sweepstakes advertisement.

further facilitate the ease by which Big Oil seduces us (68). Petro-colonialism succeeded in rebooting the killer story through *The Twilight Saga* so successfully that sales for cars depicted in the franchise skyrocketed.³² At the height of the series’ massive popularity brought with it a wave of *Twilight Saga* themed car commercials that solidified petro-colonial epistemologies into consumer’s consciousness. The advertisement I’ve

³² See *The Twilight Lexicon*: <https://www.twilightlexicon.com/2010/02/07/volvo-sales-increase-and-twilights-to-blame/>

included (see Fig. 11) that reads, “the storytellers” is particularly insidious because Big Oil itself seems to confirm that *The Twilight Saga* is in fact the “new voice” of the petro-colonial killer story. Furthermore, in the event that fans of the franchise



Fig. 12 “I drive like a Cullen” bumper sticker. Image sourced from Etsy.

weren’t rich enough to go out and purchase a brand new Volvo, a slice of *Twilight Saga*-flavored autotopia was made accessible to them. Bumper stickers that said “i drive like a Cullen” were yet another manifestation of ideologies born out of the franchise’s idyllic petro-aesthetics and further ensured petro-colonialism’s global reign.

Coda: Meditations on Paramore’s “Decode”

Paramore, a contemporary punk rock band, was featured on *Twilight’s* Official Motion Picture Soundtrack (and they also happen to be my all-time favorite band). The band’s front womxn, Hayley Williams wrote the song “Decode” especially for the film’s soundtrack. The song details a toxic love affair, one that’s all too familiar in a world colonized by petroleum:

How can I decide what's right?/When you're clouding up my mind/I can't win your losing fight/All the time/Nor could I ever own what's mine/When you're always taking sides/But you won't take away my pride/No, not this time/The truth is hiding in your eyes/And it's hanging on your tongue/Just boiling in my blood/But you think that I can't see/What kind of man that you are/If you're a man at all/Well, I will figure this one out/on my own (I’m screaming I love you so) (Paramore).

Her lyrics hauntingly reverberate how overwhelming and intimidating Big Oil is. The image of a cloudy mind implies how petro-colonialism manages to constantly evade scrutiny through invisibility. This invisibility though is a result of our intimacy or closeness with oil. In such obscurity, we can't "decide what's right" and we end up making choices that work against our best interest and well being. Additionally, because our bodies are occupied by petro-colonialism, life in Big Oil's shadow becomes "a losing fight." One whose ramifications linger in our blood, appropriate our autonomy, and restrict the ability to "own what's [ours]." Severing ourselves from Big Oil will surely not be painless, and will surely leave us "screaming (I love you so)". Ultimately, the reality of our entanglement with petro-colonialism is right on the periphery though, and as Williams suggests, if we look deeper and unrelentingly into the eyes of Big Oil and pick apart the truths "hanging on [its] tongue, we can dislodge ourselves from its falsehood, and forge new paths beyond its grasp.

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