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Fear and (non) fiction: Agrarian anxiety in “The Colour Out of Space”

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Fear and (Non) Fiction: Agrarian Anxiety in “The Colour Out of Space”

by

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Thesis

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Thesis Committee:

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Dedication

To my grandfather, Donald Fitch, and the boyhood memories of sitting by his side as he read Edgar Allan Poe. He was the Whipple to my Howard.

And to Robert Wilder. The Ammi Pierce to all who studied the Swift River Valley.

Abstract

This literary and sociological study examines H.P. Lovecraft's "The Colour Out of Space" alongside New England agricultural societies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as their members faced socio-political change. Anxieties expressed in the short story reflect fears of communities facing erasure at the hands of a reservoir project. Patterns of historical American rural communities facing destruction in the name of progress as well as modern communities facing similar threats show the endurance of Lovecraft's specific brand of fear.

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Introduction

The genre of horror often deals directly with shared fears of a people in a specific time and culture. Though culture gives unique identities to folk tales and horror—Grimm’s fairy tales are as different from *1,001 Arabian Nights* as *The Evil Dead* is from *Wild Zero*—unifying themes connect them. For the horror genre in particular, specific types of fear can speak to a shared anxiety that transcends particular location and time. One such fear is a sense of loss for one’s own culture and its traditions. As Timothy H. Evans puts it,

Much horror literature is predicated upon feelings of insecurity brought about by cultural change, by the idea that our families and communities, our familiar beliefs and cultural forms, are increasingly under assault by forces beyond our control. Whether the proposed threat is secularism, modernism, or multiculturalism, tradition is often central to horror narratives. (100)

Evans explains that not only is the loss of tradition “central” to horror, but its use as a theme within works is key to understanding the genre (100). If ever there was an author who used the loss of tradition as the basis of generating his horror it was H.P. Lovecraft. His own anxieties about a once familiar world rapidly changing around him can be seen in his personal letters. Outspoken in his correspondence and articles, Lovecraft made it clear to his contacts and readers his views on the people and world around him. By analyzing his personal and fictional work, we can clearly see the moments and interactions that shaped his narratives. Thus, one can see how his personal opinions played out in stories inspired by his encounters with immigrants—as is the case with “The Horror at Red Hook.” Similarly, one can read his impassioned defense of historic preservation and note how his message transfers to his works of fiction—as with “The Colour Out of Space.” Fear of the unknown—what Lovecraft considered to be the “oldest and strongest

kind of fear”—is the foundation of “The Colour Out of Space,” a story that describes a small farming community as it comes in contact with a devastating and unknowable cosmic force (Lovecraft, *Supernatural* 12). The “Colour” alluded to in the title appears to be no color known to human eyes and it alters the land in a way that even a team of farmers and scientists cannot understand. A similar sense of powerlessness in the face of change was present in Lovecraft’s time, felt both by the author as well as members of small rural communities. One community in particular, the Swift River Valley, was facing not only change but complete erasure. Boston’s need for water necessitated the construction of the Quabbin Reservoir, which would displace the people of the valley, destroy their homes, and irreversibly alter their culture. Furthermore, this sense of being swept up and lost in the name of progress is hardly relegated to our nation’s past nor limited to the rural areas of New England in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The particular strain of fear that Lovecraft addresses in “The Colour Out of Space” can be found in the residents of the Swift River Valley, the postbellum South, and even rural pockets of modern day Louisiana. By analyzing the story together with the cultures that experience this kind of fear, we can discover how the Swift River Valley’s fate inspired Lovecraft to write a tale that resonates with many cultures similarly menaced by forces beyond their control.

I. Biography of a Reactionary

In “Lovecraft at the Automat”—a reference to Lovecraft’s frequent visits to the all-hours automated diners—J.M. Tyree notes, “from Poe on down, there has always been something more or less reactionary about the genre of horror fiction” (137). Novelist Michel Houellebecq traces these elements back to horror authors’ ability to be “aware of the existence of evil” (qtd. in Tyree 137). How authors go about doing this, and what precisely one deems evil, is something I will explore with Lovecraft. He often drew from personal experiences when crafting his fiction, both in plot and characters. In order to understand the impact that different events had on Lovecraft’s writing—as well as the accuracy of Tyree and Houellebecq’s claim—I will outline significant moments in his life and the reactionary writing that came out of them.

Lovecraft was born August 20, 1890, to Winfield Scott and Sarah Susan Phillips Lovecraft. He was raised in Providence, Rhode Island, a city so dear to him that his headstone would come to read “I am Providence” (Joshi, *Annotated* 1). Madness, a theme which ran through much of Lovecraft’s work, was a force in his early life after his father contracted syphilis, experienced a breakdown, and was housed at Butler hospital from 1893 to his death in 1898. Six years later, the young Lovecraft would lose his grandfather, Whipple V. Phillips, the man who helped nurture his voracious scientific and literary curiosity. The loss of such a powerful influence and the “subsequent mismanagement of his estate” forced Lovecraft and his mother to move. Remaining in Providence, and on the same street for that matter, proved to be so devastating that he began to have suicidal thoughts. Echoes of this highly emotional separation anxiety would appear again when Lovecraft later moved to New York—a difficult period in which he would produce some of his most reactionary fiction. Lovecraft’s earliest preserved stories, “The Beast in the Cave” and “The Alchemist,” come from that period of loss; however,

he would first become known for his scientific and journalistic pursuits before his tales were published (4).

In high school, Lovecraft's passion for science inspired him to write columns dedicated to the study of astronomy for two publications: *The Pawtuxet Valley Gleaner* and *The Providence Tribune*. His interest in and involvement with amateur journalism would eventually lead him to join the United Amateur Press Association in 1914. The following year, he began self-publishing *The Conservative*, a thirteen-issue journal that contained poetry, prose, reviews, and essays by Lovecraft and others. It is here that Lovecraft scholars begin to see early indications of his later politics. According to S.T. Joshi, Lovecraft's "contributions to the issues ... are on the whole dogmatic, narrow, and intolerant; he was taken heavily to task for his reactionary racial and literary views" (*Encyclopedia* 46). An example of this attitude can be found as early as the first issue's article "The Crime of the Century," in which Lovecraft reacts to the great war. To him, the crime of the century is not that there is a war taking place on an unprecedented scale, but rather that the mythological Teutonic peoples of primarily Germany and Great Britain have chosen to fight against one another while "allying (themselves) with alien inferiors":

In the unnatural racial alignment of the various warring powers we behold a defiance of anthropological principles that cannot but bode ill for the future of the world. ... [T]he maintenance of civilizations rests today with that magnificent Teutonic stock ... Tracing the career of the Teuton through mediaeval and modern history, we can find no possible excuse for denying his actual biological supremacy. (Lovecraft, *The Conservative* 24)

The crime alluded to in the article's title is then revealed to be the "division of such a splendid stock" and the comingling with "alien inferiors," which Lovecraft deems "monstrous" (25). Serving as an early example of his reactionary nature, these selections highlight the recurring theme of racism found throughout his work. However, Joshi notes that over the course of the journal's limited run, Lovecraft's views have seemed to soften and become more tolerant—which parallels much of the transformation in his fiction and personal correspondences (*Encyclopedia* 46). *The Conservative* was published sporadically from 1915 to 1923. It was during these years of this self-directed journalism that Lovecraft's fiction finally made its debut.

Of his earlier short stories, only two survived a mental-breakdown-fueled purge of his late teens: "The Beast in the Cave" and "The Alchemist" the 1917 publications, that introduced the literary world to H.P. Lovecraft. Due to their positive reception—and specifically fellow amateur writer W. Paul Cook's encouragement—Lovecraft would dedicate considerable time and effort to writing and publishing other short stories. Between 1917 and 1920, he shifted focus toward fiction, writing over a score of tales as "poetry and essays faded from his aesthetic horizons" (Joshi, *Annotated* 8).

Among the stories that Lovecraft composed during this period of renewed love for fiction was "The Rats in the Walls," a notable example of the author reacting to a specific incident and a real location from his direct experience. It is no secret that Lovecraft felt that in order for a story to be effective, the tale had to be grounded in a sense of reality. As he once wrote in a letter, "I think an author strongly reflects his surroundings" and does "best" when sticking to those inspirations and subjects "to which he has a real and deep-seated relation" (Lovecraft, qtd. in Joshi, *Lord of a Visible World* 197). In the case of the 1923 "The Rats in the Walls," his inspiration to write the piece was as simple as "the cracking of wall-paper late at night, and the

chain of imaginings resulting from it” (Lovecraft, qtd. in Joshi, *Encyclopedia* 223). To underscore the sensations that ground the piece to reality, Joshi has produced an annotated version of the thirty-page tale with fifty-four footnotes, most of which refer to actual historical events, people, places, and stories—including World War One, Rome’s withdrawal from Britain, the Mexican War, Druids, James the First, Warren G. Harding, the city of Bolton, the region of Troad, the insane asylum Hanwell, the legend of Bishop Hatto, and a dream experienced by Carl Jung (*Annotated* 25, 28, 31,30, 33, 34, 36, 46, 48, 54). This grounding of a story in reality, and specifically one to which Lovecraft has such a “deep-seated relation,” is key to analyzing the tales that he wrote during his stay in New York.

The following year the budding horror author married Sonia H. Greene and moved to Brooklyn to be with his new bride. Though the marriage started off well enough, a career change for Greene forced her to spend most of her time in Cleveland while Lovecraft moved to a small apartment “in the decaying Brooklyn Heights area” (Joshi, *Annotated* 10). The year 1925 saw little writing from Lovecraft, but nonetheless served as inspiration for some of his most reactionary works. Lovecraft was chiefly upset by the racial makeup of Brooklyn, going so far as to write to his friend Frank Belknap Long that “America has lost New York to the mongrels” (qtd. in Tyree 145). Novelists Michel Houellebecq and China Miéville point out the parallels between Lovecraft’s description of the droves of immigrants whom he then observed and the kind of eldritch creatures that he would eventually write about, highlighting such phrases as “monstrous and nebulous,” “slithering and oozing,” or “infesting worms or deep sea unnameabilities” that he used in his dehumanizing descriptions of the residents of Manhattan’s Lower East Side (138). His feelings on the subject of the city and its inhabitants are best summed up in a letter from his return to Providence, following his permanent removal from New York

which he describes as a place with “no central identity or meaning,” an “artificial” and “affected” city divorced from “its own past” and unable to connect to “anything else in particular” (Lovecraft, qtd. in Joshi, *Lord* 197). According to Lovecraft, the state of the city is due mostly to the immigrant population—“the mongrel and misshapen foreign colossus”—that “gibbers and howls vulgarly and dreamlessly” on the land of a once “lovely old city” (qtd. in Joshi, *Lord* 198). He then invites his letter’s recipient, Donald Wandrei, to read his short story “He” to get a clear sense of his true opinions of New York.

Lovecraft wrote this tale after an all-night walk through the city, during which he took the time to visit such historical sites as Hanover Square, Fraunces Tavern, and Battery Park—“where one or two colonial mansions yet linger”—before taking a ferry to Elizabethtown where he would pen the story while “pleasantly intoxicated by the wealth of delicate un-metropolitan greenery and the yellow and white colonialism of the gambrel-roofed Scott house” (qtd. in Joshi, *Lord* 177). The short story immediately presents the reader with a narrator who echoes the author’s own disdain for the city despite appreciation for its architectural history. The first paragraph of the work—labeled by Lovecraft scholars Joshi and David E. Schutz as a “‘virtual abstract’ of the author’s perspective on the entire period” (Tyree 143)—has the narrator lamenting his initial desire and decision to come to New York where “cyclopean modern towers and pinnacles ... rise blackly Babylonian under waning moons” (Lovecraft, *Complete* 332). After following a mysterious old man to his supernatural home, the unnamed protagonist weighs his option of staying in the “necromancer[’s]” house or returning to the city; the narrator, of course, eschews the latter as “nothing was more deadly than the material daylight world of New York” (336). The final decision at the story’s conclusion to return to “pure New England” belonged to both the author and his main character (340).

If “He” expresses Lovecraft’s fears of the city as a place, then “The Horror at Red Hook” highlights his fears of its residents. Though the people of New York are given only a passing mention in “He,” as “swarthy,” “hardened,” and “shrewd,” their caricature reflects the monstrous figures in his other tale (332). This story evidences even more clearly the coupling of Lovecraft’s reactionary writing with concrete elements drawn from the real world. “The Horror at Red Hook” begins with detective Thomas Malone experiencing a mental breakdown upon seeing a semi-collapsed structure in Rhode Island. The narrative slowly reveals the reason for his reaction in a flashback to the case of Robert Suydam that Malone picked up while working back in New York’s Red Hook slum. Malone takes an active interest in this reclusive turned charismatic figure with potential ties to illegal activity and the occult, investigating the mysterious man until the night of the Suydam wedding. Both the bride and groom are discovered strangled, lacerated with claw marks, and devoid of blood on the night of their honeymoon. After a group of associates to the late Mr. Suydam arrive and collect his body, Malone turns his attention to a suspected cult hangout and regular haunt of Suydam’s associates, and discovers a passageway to an underground cityscape. There he witnesses the reanimated corpse of Suydam interrupt a ritual, causing the myriad creatures that dwell within the subterranean realm to fly into a frenzy. Malone passes out and wakes to find himself back in the crumbling old church where the cult had been holding its rituals. Thus, the sight of decrepit buildings reminds Malone of the church where he discovered the entrance to a nightmare realm below the city.

The realism of the story comes from references to actual locations as well as descriptions that seem to be inspired by actual structures. Martense Street is mentioned by name, as is the Dutch Reformed Church, though no house in the region fits the description of Suydam’s house, located on Martense near the church. The cult’s hideout/hellmouth is supposedly modeled after a

church used as a dancehall that once sat on the riverfront, which could explain the crowd imagery and rambunctious noises that characterize the setting (Joshi, *Encyclopedia* 114).

To ascertain Lovecraft's reactionary notions coming through in this piece, one need only to compare the portrayal of the foreigners to his personal experiences and xenophobic views. In letters to Long and Clark Ashton Smith, he claims "The Horror at Red Hook" is set in Brooklyn with a strong focus on "hideous cult-practices behind the gangs of noisy young loafers whose essential mystery has impressed me so much" in "connexion with the ... herds of evil-looking foreigners that one sees everywhere in New York" (Lovecraft, qtd. in Joshi, *Lord* 176). With regard to his encounter with these "noisy young loafers," Sonia H. Greene's memoir, *The Private Life of H.P. Lovecraft*, provides some background. During an night out, Greene and Lovecraft encountered "a few rough, rowdyish men," whose behavior was so offensive to him that "out of this circumstance he wove" the short story (qtd. in Joshi, *Encyclopedia* 114). In a letter to Bernard Austin Dwyer, Lovecraft writes of his Syrian and Turkish neighbors while he was living in his one-room apartment on Clinton Street. Admitting to rarely seeing those who stayed in the same apartment building—except when he "sometimes glimpsed faces of sinister decadence in the hall"—he could hear them "loathsomely" (Lovecraft, qtd. in Joshi, *Lord* 166). One person of particular interest was a Syrian who played "eldritch and whining monotones on a strange bagpipe," resulting in Lovecraft having dreams of "crypts under Baghdad and limitless corridors of Eblis beneath the moon-cursed ruins of Istakhar" (Lovecraft, qtd. in *Lord* 166). A sense of "something vast lying subterrenely in obnoxious slumber" evokes the "soul" of living on Clinton Street "at the edge of Red Hook" (Lovecraft, qtd. in *Lord* 167).

Such incidents and people are reflected in "The Horror at Red Hook." The tale is peppered with descriptions of the young thugs, foreigners, and cultists, all of whom are given

exactly the same treatment as the supernatural monsters of Lovecraft's fiction. New York's underground is described as "a polyglot abyss"; Red Hook—where Clinton Street is even mentioned by name—is a "maze of hybrid squalor ... a babel of sound and filth" whose denizens are "a hopeless tangle and enigma," making a "tangle of material and spiritual putrescence" from which "blasphemies of an hundred dialects assail the sky" (Lovecraft, *Complete* 315, 317). Much as Greene's account of a ruined evening, the tale describes how actions of "half-ape savagery" become part of "daily life" in Red Hook, taking place on "street corners," "doorways," or even in "indecent dialogues around cafeteria tables near Borough Hall"—located within Columbia Heights where Greene's dinner is interrupted (317). Suydam's followers, "a very unusual colony of unclassified slant-eyed folk who use the Arabic alphabet" made up of "Asian dregs wisely turned back by Ellis Island," are referred to as the "creatures" who inhabit the church/dance-hall (320). Though the cultists are usually described in large groups, one member is given a brief description when a small detachment is sent to retrieve Suydam's body:

A boat put off, and a horde of swart, insolent ruffians in officers' dress swarmed aboard the temporarily halted Cunarder ... (N)ot even the wisest and gravest seaman could think what to do. Suddenly the leader of the visiting mariners, *an Arab with a hatefully negroid mouth*, pulled forth a dirty, crumpled paper and handed it to the captain. (325, emphasis added)

This short passage exemplifies Lovecraft's disdain for both young "ruffians" as well as what appears to be less a man than an amalgamation of ethnic features that he treats as loathsome. Tyree sees the tale as rooted in the very real location of Red Hook that nevertheless in the end becomes "a neurotic race fantasy turned into a supernatural monstrosity by imaginative hyperbole" (144).

II. The Colour Out of Space

The latter half of the 1920's sees the creation of his best known and most successful tales, such as "The Call of Cthulhu," "The Case of Charles Dexter Ward," and "The Colour Out of Space" (Joshi, *Annotated* 11). With these new tales, as with most that come afterward, readers find Lovecraft grounding his work in reality, but no longer basing his antagonists on "personalized and sociologically locatable" sources; instead, they become "more amorphous, metaphysical, and extraterrestrial in nature" (Tyree 147). Gone are the literal foreigners as forces of evil, and what emerges is the supernaturalism that scholars most tend to celebrate in his tales (Tyree 147). Thus, the well-crafted "Colour Out of Space" does not reveal to its reader the inspiration for its monstrous threat in as straightforward a manner as "The Horror at Red Hook." As the work becomes more symbolic, so too must the analysis.

Let us begin by contextualizing the story. Lovecraft wrote "The Colour Out of Space" in 1927 after returning to Providence from New York. This began the period of separation from Greene that would eventually result in their divorce two years later (Joshi, *Annotated* 11). During this period, Lovecraft took a very important trip to the rustic areas of New England that included Bellows Falls and Battleboro in Vermont and Lake Sunapee in New Hampshire. A letter to Maurice W. Moe shows Lovecraft's exuberance during the journey: "Old New England forever!" he writes of a trip free of "[t]awdriness and commerce ... urban smoke ... ugly billboards" and instead populated with "the recaptured beauty of vanished centuries" (qtd. in Joshi, *Lord* 235). True to Lovecraft's narrative style, he describes his surroundings as a "luxuriant masses of forest" that hint of mythical creatures who inhabit "unwholsomely archaic houses!" (236, 234). The most notable location mentioned in this particular letter is Deerfield, home to "blasphemously primordial ellums" and the aforementioned houses (234). Though given

little coverage in his letter to Moe, and not mentioned by name in a 1935 letter to Ricahrd Ely Morse, Deerfield is proximate to the Swift River Valley, roughly twenty-five miles west from the water source. The correspondence with Morse in which he recalls the journey makes explicit the connection between the reservoir and the short story:

The trip through the doomed Swift River Valley must have held more than a slight touch of melancholy. I went through it 8 years ago, not long after its doom was first pronounced, & well-nigh groaned at the future destruction of exquisite old villages like Dana and its neighbours. ... We have had a similar experience in Rhode Island, where a vast amount of rural territory was flooded in 1926 for a reservoir. It was that flooding which caused me to use the reservoir element in "The Colour Out of Space." (Lovecraft, qtd. in Joshi, *Annotated* 60)

The Scituate Reservoir of Rhode Island, alluded to above, was also an area Lovecraft visited, albeit on a separate journey and after the Quabbin Reservoir program's announcement in 1926 completion (Joshi, *Encyclopedia* 42). By Lovecraft's admission, the Scituate was the initial inspiration for using the reservoir element in "The Colour Out of Space," yet the reservoir in the story shares many commonalities with the Quabbin. One notable example is their location and connection to a major city: the Quabbin is located in central Massachusetts, west of Boston, and the unnamed reservoir within the story is located in central Massachusetts, west of Arkham, one of Lovecraft's fictional cities whose location can be interpreted as either inland or "north of Salem, perhaps near Manchester" (qtd. in Joshi, *Encyclopedia* 7). Another similarity is the state of the region upon Lovecraft and his narrator's visit: both passed through the area prior to the reservoir's completion, unlike the Scituate which Lovecraft experienced only as a fully formed reservoir. The valley was not evacuated and flooded until 1939, two years after Lovecraft's death

(Joshi, *Annotated* 60; Greene 84). Joshi's entry on "The Colour Out of Space" for *An H.P. Lovecraft Encyclopedia*, begins with real-life influences of the story by stating that "[t]he reservoir in the tale is the Quabbin Reservoir," then proceeds to share Lovecraft's information about the Scituate Reservoir's impact on his tale (42). It would seem that both reservoirs influenced Lovecraft's writing. "The Colour Out of Space" is no "The Horror at Red Hook" with precise analogues in the real world; rather, the true horror of this story draws less from the dreadful annihilation of a single reservoir than from destruction on a much grander scale. To use one of Lovecraft's creations as an example, "The Colour Out of Space" is the unplumbed and blasphemous depth sitting just below the cultists' church/dance-hall of "The Horror at Red Hook" and other earlier reactionary works: infinitely deeper, more terrifying, and farther reaching in scope.

As the reflections of fears relating to the loss of one's home and way of life appear throughout "The Colour Out of Space," a brief summary of the story will be necessary. The tale begins with a surveyor visiting the proposed area for a new reservoir system that will benefit the city of Arkham. While there he begins talking with the inhabitants about the land, which leads to his learning about an area referred to as "The Blasted Heath" (60). One elderly man, Ammi Pierce, speaks to the surveyor at length about the place's history. It is Pierce's account that makes up the majority of the story, with the surveyor's portion serving mostly as a framing device. According to Pierce, in June of 1882 a meteorite struck the Gardner residence—"in the ground beside the well"—and became an object of scientific study. Nahum Gardner; his wife, Nabby; and their sons, Zenas, Thaddeus, and Merwin, happily cooperate with the studies and become local celebrities thanks to the newspaper coverage (65). During the research process, a team of three professors from Arkham's Miskatonic University discover many peculiarities, most

notably that the meteorite segment displayed a color “unlike any known ... of the normal spectrum” (67). The following morning, the scientists find that their sample has disappeared, leaving “only a charred spot” behind (68). Upon returning to the impact site and digging more deeply into the meteorite, the scientists discover a “large coloured globule” in its core, which possessed the same curious spectrum qualities of their sample: “[It] was almost impossible to describe; and it was only by analogy that they called it colour at all” (69). One of the professors strikes the globule with a hammer, causing the structure to burst, but “[n]othing was emitted, and all trace of the thing vanished with the puncturing” (69). The scientists conclude that such a substance is beyond their understanding, and all academic inquiry ceases. After a particularly dazzling thunderstorm in which lightning strikes the meteorite several times, its last remains at the impact site are nowhere to be found: “nothing remained but a ragged pit by the ancient well-sweep, half-choked with caved-in earth” (70).

Harvest season comes, but the vegetation is not as it should be. The crops initially appear to be robust and plentiful than ever, but the Gardners discover that everything growing in the land surrounding the well has a sickening taste and “even the smallest of bites induced a lasting disgust” (71). Wild animals begin taking on unnatural bloated features, and the trees begin to sway when there is no wind. Soon after, the well water takes on “an evil taste” (78). The livestock, increasingly sick, “began growing grey and brittle and falling to pieces before they died ... atrocious collapses or disintegrations were common” (79).

Amidst all of these horrors, the Gardner family falls prey to their own physical and psychological illnesses. Nabby is the first to go mad, screaming about “things in the air she could not describe” (77). Eventually, she is quarantined to one of the attic rooms, left totally alone until her son Thaddeus is relocated across the hall from her upon falling into a similar state. After a

month in seclusion, Thaddeus dies and his little brother Merwin goes missing while going to fetch water from the well.

Two weeks pass and Ammi Pierce begins to fear for the Gardners, as Nahum hasn't visited him in two weeks. Once Pierce arrives he is "shock[ed]" to see the state of the Gardner farm, a once thriving land now covered in "greyish withered grass" and structures turned "brittle wreckage" (82). Seeking out survivors, he comes upon a feeble Nahum who informs Pierce that Zenas now lives in the well. A quick trip upstairs leads Pierce to find what remains of Nabby, who has started crumbling like the livestock. Unable to leave her in such a state, Pierce bludgeons her to death in order to end her suffering. After hearing a commotion downstairs, Pierce returns to the ground floor to find Nahum in an even worse state of illness than when he left him. The "greying" and "brittle" man, attempting to explain what did this to him, tells his friend that it was "[n]othin' ... nothin' ... the colour ... it musta come in that stone ... it was the same colour ... an' it burns an' sucks ... sucks the life out," but his ramblings are cut short when "[t]hat which spoke ... completely caved in" (85, 86).

After Nahum dies, Pierce gathers a half dozen medical experts to claim the remains of the Gardner family. Nahum and Nabby's disturbing conditions unsettles even the medical examiner. The skeletal remains of Zenas and Merwin are in the bottom of the well, in water that holds a "foetor" that "disgust[ed]" the men (88). Night falls as the land begins to act mysteriously. As the men hide inside the safety of the farm house, they witness a shaft of the indescribable color shoot out of the Gardner well, causing the trees and nearby land to glow unnaturally, before veering off into space. After the men leave the scene, Pierce looks back and witnessed "something feebly rise" from the well "only to sink down again ... [i]t was just a colour—but not any colour of our earth or heavens" (96). In the years that follow, locals discover that the area

known as the Blasted Heath begins to expand its grey and brittle properties to the land around it “little by little, perhaps an inch a year” (98). At the conclusion of Pierce’s tale, the surveyor immediately leaves the Arkham area and vows never to drink the water from the future reservoir.

Lovecraft considered “The Colour Out of Space” to be the story he loved most. In his 1933 autobiographical essay “Some Notes on a Nonentity,” he states: “Of my products, my favourites are ‘The Colour Out of Space’ and ‘The Music of Erich Zann,’ in the order named” (Lovecraft, qtd. in Joshi, *Lord* 349). Throughout his correspondence, he praises the work as an outstanding example of a weird tale that achieves a sense of “verisimilitude” while utilizing a sense of “cosmic” dread, though he initially felt it would lack “popular appeal” (211, 260, 204). Though many of his other tales have gone on to gain more of that aforementioned appeal, some of those supposedly more accessible pieces fail where “Colour” succeeds (260).

III. Verisimilitude, American Gothic, and Puritan Roots

A major contributor to the artistic success of “The Colour Out of Space” is Lovecraft’s careful use of the cultural anxieties of New England agricultural societies. Verisimilitude is something which Lovecraft touches upon both in his correspondences and in practice. As we have seen, many of his works were directly inspired by personal events. Lovecraft speaks to the importance of empirical experience at length in a letter to Clark Ashton Smith, in which he explains that a “solidly realistic framework” was necessary for the inevitable “unreal element” (qtd. in Joshi, *Lord* 210). For Lovecraft an effective story must have common characteristics of a “hoax,” in that it must be a “stark, simple account, full of homely corroborative details ... clever enough to make adults believe it” (211). It must stand up against scrutiny, in much the same manner that a “crooked witness” must be prepared to invent details to thwart particularly observant lawyers (211). In *Supernatural Horror in Literature*, Lovecraft’s lengthy essay on the history and key elements of the genre, he touches on the importance of realism in horror, specifically how the authenticity should be used to create a foundation that will later be destroyed by an outside and alien element:

A certain atmosphere of breathless and unexplained dread of outer unknown forces must be present; and there must be a hint ... of that most terrible conception of the human brain - a malign and particular suspension of those fixed laws of Nature which are our only safeguard against the assaults of chaos and the daemons of unplumbed space. (15)

Though the creation of a reservoir is not as extreme a “suspension” of Nature’s laws as in the warped Gardner farm, this sense of losing one’s security when faced with great change applies to

the residents of the Swift River Valley as much as the unfortunate rural family in Lovecraft's work.

Critics have noted how Lovecraft's realistic narrative foundations help to create an authentic piece of cosmic horror. Rebecca Janicker views Lovecraft's use of local vernacular, especially in the dialogue featuring Ammi Pierce or Nahum Gardner; contrasting traits as with the city dwelling characters and their othering of the "rustics"; and institutions like the Boston and Maine Railroad, as well as the reservoir, as characteristics commonly associated with "regionalist" authors such as Sarah Orne Jewett, Mary Wilkins Freeman, and Sandra Zagarell (56-58). According to Janicker, this style of writing borrows from authentic regional characteristics in order to create a believable fictional setting. Often such works are also reactionary in nature, as is the case with Jewett's "A White Heron," which Louis A. Renza interprets to be against "postbellum industrial capitalism" (56). However, Janicker does not see Lovecraft as a traditional regionalist author since the horror writer utilizes American gothic elements—a unique style in which "the wilderness and the city" take the place of the European "decaying monasteries" as a means to "subvert the pastoral ideal so prevalent in its genre" (61, 60). Lovecraft utilizes the American gothic characteristic of "fear of the return of past fearful events," which Janicker claims manifests in the ever present sense of the locals losing their tenuous grasp on land that once was wild and not their own (63). Her reading of the tale interprets it as a reminder of human limitations in the face of the frightening natural world, and that this works to subvert the image of rural life as Edenic (64). Lovecraft's narrator describes the countryside as hosting unnaturally large trees, excessive weeds and briers, and "a touch of the unreal and grotesque" (61). All activity is subject to the will of nature in this bleak setting, and human fate in such a place becomes "uncertain" (61). In the case of the Gardner family,

people are faced with the very real danger of drought, disease, wild animals, and any number of natural uncertainties before experiencing their cosmic intruder. Even after the meteor lands, the land and animals are subject to similarly gruesome natural hardships: crops may not turn gray and crumble, but they do dry out and rot; livestock does not mutate and disintegrate, but it does catch diseases. These all-too authentic agrarian fears subtend Lovecraft's work, as the setting necessitates such anxieties.

Puritans of rural New England were well aware of the threats posed by nature and moved to domesticate it. In the 1660's, the structure of rural villages was loose by today's standards, as settlements were a series of family farms connected to a central meeting location by means of interconnecting roads. Due to the strong Christian morals pervasive throughout such communities, as well as the intense level of work necessary in a frontier farm, these early villages were considered "a corporation and an ecclesiastical parish" (Wood 35). Similarities to these roots are obvious in "The Colour Out of Space." Inhabitants of the unnamed farming community, described as "Puritan," diagnose the land as "evil" and "blasphemous" (Lovecraft *Annotated* 61, 78). Such a charge from a spiritual people should not be taken lightly, especially when the original function of the New England village was to be a "new Eden" or "second Zion" and "convert [the] wilderness" (Wood 34).

Growing out of New England's Puritan traditions, the "farm neighborhood" is a target for Lovecraft's tale (Hubka 13). Though the term "farm community" lacks concrete guidelines, it serves to prescribe rural communities wherein the members offer aid to one another for ethical and communal reasons (14). Because these communal duties often revolved around caring for the sick and dying, accounts of farmers taking ill neighbors into their care is common in literary and historical accounts of the New England area at the time (18). Lovecraft warped the tranquil

pastoral imagery no less than the tradition of communal health care. Ammi Pierce visits Nahum Gardner in the moments of his unfortunate friend's life. Instead of witnessing a natural or dignified end to Gardner, however, Pierce watches as his neighbor's face "cave[s] in" while feebly attempting to articulate what the Colour did to him (Lovecraft, *Annotated* 86). Prior to this scene, the narrator insinuates that Pierce bludgeons Nabby Pierce to death when he discovers her in her attic cell (85n).

Collecting money to aid the dying and having a communal location for the burial of the dead were two other common features of the "farm neighborhood" (Hubka 18). Lovecraft puts a dark spin on these traditions as well. Once the vegetation around the Gardner residence begins to warp, the neighbors shun the farm and family rather than aiding them financially or otherwise. The communal ties of the Gardners manage to disconnect within the span of one month after the colour begins to warp the land. The locals' fears reduce traffic to the Gardner farm, disconnecting the family from its community (Lovecraft *Annotated* 75). Final resting places for the Gardners likewise radically diverge from the "symbol for true neighborhood cohesion": the neighborhood cemetery (Hubka 20). Traditional cemeteries were built throughout rural New England in the nineteenth century, replacing colonial-era churchyard burials. As the century progressed along with urbanization, the custom of centralized rural communal burial gave way to interment within a town (20). The Gardners are not afforded either honor, save for young Thaddeus, who is buried in the family plot after wasting away in his own attic cell (Lovecraft *Annotated* 80). By the tale's conclusion, both Nabby and Nahum Gardner are "two crumbling objects" in the ruins of their home, and the remains of their sons, Zenas and Merwin, are "skeletal" when fished out of the well (87, 88). The Gardners' twisted remains are situated in neither a traditionally moral or socially cohesive location, like a colonial churchyard or

neighborhood cemetery, nor a modern setting of a town, with the displacement of the family further ostracizing them. A fitting image for a people caught between Puritan traditions and industrial progress: no proper resting place.

Another lingering Puritan influence on small rural communities was the importance of home and family. During the nineteenth century, domesticity evolved as the rapid changes within the nation's culture impacted the tension between private and public life. The term "home" itself went through a change as early as the eighteenth century, from being one's "town or region" to a domestic familial space (Jackson 47). This shift in meaning, coupled with the new view of the space as "a personal bastion against society, a place of refuge," added to the cultural value of the home (47). Though this is more clearly reflected in suburban housing, with its separation of space attempting to grant families and individual family members more privacy, its impact can be seen across the nation. Evidence can be seen in the form of sermons and articles among other sources. In an 1853 sermon, Reverend William G. Eliot Jr. made the following statement:

The foundation of our free institutions is in our love, as a people, for our homes. The strength of our country is found, not in the declaration that all men are free and equal, but in the quiet influence of the fireside, the bonds which unite together in the family circle. The corner-stone of our republic is the hearth-stone. (48)

It should be noted that Eliot's audience was entirely women. The role of wives and mothers changed as well with the increased participation of men in the newly industrialized workplace. Jackson cites the 1847 publication of Horace Bushnell's *Christian Nurture* as one of many works that reinforced the ideal of the "feminized" family and home (48). The text itself champions a female-led home that serves as a moral institution. In Jackson's words, "they were told that the home ought to be perfect and could be made so" (49). This differentiation of the household from

the outside world gained renewed interest in the late nineteenth century with the growing popularity of the concepts of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*. These concepts, much like the earlier concepts of home as “bastion” and “refuge,” translate to “the primary, face-to-face relationships of home and family” and “the impersonal and sometimes hostile outside society” (46). The colour preys upon the Gardner home as it destroys the sanity and structure of the family before it blasts the physical home into ruins. In this case, the short story targets an area of security that in itself was a reaction to and shield for cultural change in the family at the time. Having the mother of the house go insane first adds weight to the breakdown of the feminine domestic sphere, while creating a dramatic shift in the focus of the American family home from the hearth to the makeshift cell in the attic.

IV. The Doom That Came to the Swift River Valley

The cities of Dana, Enfield, Greenwich, and Prescott occupied the region of the Swift River Valley prior to the Quabbin Reservoir. Though this area fit many of the pastoral descriptions associated with rural cultures of the time and region, it was not without its own minor industrial boom. The economy of nineteenth century was seen as prosperous. Francis Underwood provides a scenic description in *Quabbin: The Story of a Small Town with Outlooks upon Puritan Life* following his trip to the top of Delectable Mountain. While looking down upon the valley, he is sure to include that among the valley's sounds the "hum of machinery" is absent (3). This is not to say that the Quabbin region was completely free of industrialism, but rather that it had a complicated history with it, which Underwood goes into in the portentously titled chapter "Quabbin Loses and Gains." A saw-mill; tan yard; and cotton, card, and linseed-oil factories are listed as stand-out examples of larger scale operations around the mid-nineteenth century. The success of these and other economic ventures helped draw people to the valley, which in turn inspired an increase in new housing. This minor industrial boom helped build the valley up, but as J.R. Greene points out, industrialism would also "spawn the instruments of the valley's decline" (5).

Many technological improvements of the time caused economic losses for the people of the valley, but nothing was quite as harmful as the railroad. The creation of the Massachusetts Central Railroad and the decision to have it run south of the valley rather than through led to the valley's economic "deterioration" (Underwood 195). Deforestation took resources away from mills. Business was lost to local competitors in Lowell, Lawrence, and Manchester. The popularity of "satinets" and other once successful products began to wane. All of these blows to the economy contributed to the eventual bust of the local industries (196). Though a railroad

would eventually be built through the region in the 1870's, thirty years after the initial railroad was laid twelve miles south of Enfield, the late timing of the project would prevent the resident industries from reclaiming their once flourishing business (Greene 5). Even this lifeline to the outside world cost the people dearly, as they were encouraged to buy stock in the railway.

However, as the segments that ran through the region—thirty-seven acres worth in Enfield and twenty-seven in Greenwich—would eventually be dismantled, the shares lost all value (Clark 13). As Underwood observes, “Railroads are sometimes feeders and sometimes drains” (195).

On a national level, the spread of railroads in the late nineteenth century opened up more business opportunities for companies and larger corporations. The new option of consolidating what was once geographically removed meant that successful businesses could save money and invest in creating more efficient means of production. Such strides would leave smaller industries like the mill-based ones in the valley behind. A series of economic depressions hit the region in 1873, 1885, and 1894, which caused many of the once successful industries to either leave the valley or shut down entirely (Greene 6). Small farms simply could not compete with agrobusiness due to its newfound access to cheaper goods. The lumber industry took a hit from the increased use of coal. These factors contributed to the population decline of the Swift River Valley in the second half of the nineteenth century, resulting in a drop of nearly one-third of their total population (Greene 7). A significant number of those emigrating came from an agricultural background, as was the case in Enfield: “One of every thirteen acres ... had been abandoned by the turn of the century” (Greene 6). In the case of the Quabbin, the railroad served not only as a drain on the community but also as an outside force that devastated the locals like the eventual reservoir and Lovcraft's colour. This pattern was common throughout the U.S. Though Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, and Wisconsin saw dramatic increases in property value, these states

were the outliers and not exempt from struggles of their own. One contributing factor to the increased difficulty for farmers was the growing distance between the farms themselves and “important marketing centers and sources of supplies” (Saloutos 167). Freight rates did become more affordable with the expansion of railroads, but the farmers who decided to spread their network farther were making an economically fatal mistake (167).

Despite this devastation, further attempts were made to save the farm economies in the Swift River Valley. Right after the turn of the century, the dairy farmers attempted switching from producing cheese to producing cream and whole milk, with the intention to sell them to communities in the surrounding area (Greene 6). However, new health standards regarding the production of milk ended up creating six state-level regulations, many of which served as a challenge to the traditional means of production. Two notable regulations were as follows: “Cows and horses must be kept in separate places” and “No pigs or manure should be kept under the barn” (Clark 17). Meeting these directives was especially difficult for the farmers of the valley, as the use of one barn housing cows, horses, pigs, and a basement space for manure was the local practice. In addition, all cows were to be tested for tuberculosis, forcing the farmers to purchase a replacement for sick cows with little government compensation. These regulations were so taxing that by 1925 “only about six [farms] kept over twenty-five cows” (Clark 17). Thus, regulation crippled a once successful dairy industry, especially in Prescott, where dairy was the most successful agricultural item (Greene 4). A similar upset took place when the spread of bulk feed stymied the developing poultry economy in 1925 (Greene 6).

A few years following the passing of the dairy regulations, the Metropolitan District Water Supply Commission began to purchase lands from the people of the Swift River Valley, yet another factor that led to a great population decline in the early twentieth century. In 1900,

the cities of Dana, Enfield, Greenwich, and Prescott reported populations of 790; 1,036; 491; and 380, respectively. This figure was Dana's highest population ever, and Enfield's third highest. By 1930, the numbers had dropped to 595, 497, 238, and 48, cutting the population in half (Greene 106).

While the Quabbin Reservoir may have served as the inspiration for "The Colour Out of Space," two other reservoirs had devastated rural communities in Massachusetts: the Cochituate and the Wachusett. The Lake Cochituate Reservoir came first and supplied Boston with water until the construction of the Wachusett, which was built in 1895, just three years after the supposed events in "The Colour Out of Space" (Levia 151; G. Anderson 52). The impact of the Wachusett Reservoir is a horror story all its own. Boylston and West Boylston were two communities ravaged by the sixty-five-billion-gallon reservoir (G. Anderson 52). Though both suffered, West Boylston faced a grimmer fate than Boylston:

In the near future West Boylston was to lose 157 or 33 per cent of its dwellings which meant that 1,305 people or 43 per cent of its residents would be driven from their homes. The town would lose three churches and four schoolhouses, four cotton mills, one gristmill, and one sawmill. As for natural resources, West Boylston was about to lose a total of 870 acres. (51)

In addition, the value of both towns dropped dramatically. Boylston lost 39% of its total value while West Boylston was to lose 60% (51).

A lingering sense of dread permeates official reports and residents' accounts of the doomed Swift River Valley. Rumors of a reservoir started as early as the 1890's, after Boston's population boom and acquisition of surrounding bodies of water such as Jamaica Pond, Long Pond, and Sudbury River. Boston's population continued to grow, making more drastic action

necessary, so the Wachusett Reservoir was created at the turn of the century. Like the Quabbin, this reservoir would require the destruction of four towns. The geographic layout, its altitude—which would allow engineers to forego a pumping system—and its relatively small population made the Swift River Valley an easy choice for Boston’s next reservoir (Cole).

News coverage of the impending reservoir had a highly nostalgic and at times maudlin tone. F. Lauriston Bullard’s article “Reservoir to Cover 3 Bay State Towns” serves as a particularly dramatic example. His piece opens with the image of families “contemplat[ing] with sad forebodings the fate which has overtaken them,” and then goes on to describe how a long-suffering sense of “doom” will finally “befall” the inhabitants and the cities will be “obliterated” (Bullard). He takes stock of the beautiful natural resources and splendid man-made features of the area that will be lost forever before decrying the “waning” population, which he attributes to the reservoir, a “calamity, long apprehended and now imminent,” leaving his reader with images of “empty” and “forlorn” houses they leave “in their desertion” (Bullard).

A series of short articles titled “Letters from Quabbin” by Amy W. Spink and Mabel L. Jones were printed in *The Springfield Union* from April 14, 1938, to July 19, 1938, which covered a range of topics over the course of twenty-eight installments. These topics included the dimensions of the then-proposed reservoir, history of industry in the valley, final town meetings, relocation of buried residents, summer camps, historic churches, wild flowers, and notable individuals, among many others. The letters provide brief snapshots of over twenty distinct aspects of life in the Swift River Valley. With regard to the letters’ varied tones, each lengthy subheading supplies a preview not only of the content, but the narrative timbre as well in such straightforward pieces as “Swift River Chosen as Preferable to Merrimack . . . ,” “Beautiful New Burial Ground Receives Thousands of Bodies . . . ,” or “Huge Earthen Barrier, Half-Mile Long,

Will Block Swift River Exit ... ” to the more emotional “ ... Tragic Phase of Great Water Supply Project,” “ ... Only Crumbling Walls Remain,” or the headline to a picture series, which reads “Quabbin Villages Disappearing Forever.”

Though these more dramatic subheadings appear in the earlier letters, the sense of loss and fear permeate the bodies of the articles throughout. Letter four—“The Exodus”—covers the process of valley residents moving out of their homes, which it describes as “heartbreaking” as many of those displaced knew no other home (Spink and Jones). Three people are interviewed in this installment, with two of the three vowing not to move out until physically forced to do so. Though the stories of residents resisting the move until the waters crept onto their lands exist are merely legend, the Ware River New reported that in May of 1939 one of the three remaining families attempted to continue their lives while “[a]ll around them burning debris were smoking” (Greene 84). Letter nineteen—“The Granges”—laments the loss of the organizations that “touche[d] practically every phase of community life,” and “[had] knit the friendship of the towns” (Spink and Jones). Letter twenty-two—“The Wild Flowers”—mourns the “fate” of the region’s beautiful flora: “to be drowned under the great reservoir” (Spink and Jones). Letter twenty-three—“The Camps”—points out that the Swift River Valley no longer hosts gardens, campers, or camps, “just the old chimneys standing deserted and alone” (Spink and Jones).

The fifteenth “Letters from Quabbin” entry, entitled “Quabbin Park Cemetery,” has a hopeful tone about the ongoing movement of bodies from the valley to the new cemetery in Ware. In addition to praising the careful planning and execution of the program, the article admires the beauty of the new cemetery, referencing Thomas Gray’s “Elegy in a Country Churchyard” to help describe the tranquil, if melancholic, appearance of the place. Spink and Jones conclude that all those factors ensured the popularity of the new site. The Quabbin Park

Cemetery had existed for many years at the time of the article's publication on June 2, 1938 (Spink and Jones). The land for the cemetery was purchased in 1931 and held its dedication two years later. Burials in the valley ceased in 1932 to help make the massive undertaking more manageable (Spink and Jones). Sources disagree on the number of bodies moved as well as the number of graveyards affected, but the figures are close despite their conflicting reports. The New England Waterworks Association Journal reported thirty-four cemeteries would be emptied of 7,652 bodies, of which 6,551 would end up in Ware while the others would find their resting places in other nearby towns (Greene 69). Spink and Jones's article cited "26 burial grounds" and 7,550 bodies (Spink and Jones). Spink and Jones note how one witness seemed "obviously surprised" at the level of "respect" and care being taken to move the deceased (Spink and Jones). However, relocating their dead for the sake of creating a reservoir was "the final indignity" for many of the valley's inhabitants (Conuel 60). Though workers put effort into identifying unmarked graves by examining personal items and testing the soil within the coffins, the colonial and post-colonial residents were the only ones to receive such thorough cataloguing. Bun Doubleday, a former resident, claimed that "they undoubtedly missed the Indian graves" (60). The final arrangement of the bodies made for quite the controversy. In the end, "graves were not placed with any consideration of their location in the original cemetery, or even by town" (Greene 69). Despite their best intentions, this act too served as a disservice and insult to many of the residents within the Swift River Valley.

Of all the letters, numbers six and twenty-five provided perhaps the most emotionally charged accounts of loss in the region. Letter six—"Spring in Quabbin"—sets its somber mood with the opening sentence: "The usual pleasant bustle of spring activities is noticeably absent in the Quabbin area this year" (Spink and Jones). Other things listed as absent include friendly

farmers, complete with rake in hand, chatting with friends and exchanging gardening tips; flower enthusiasts exchanging resources; the pleasant sounds of livestock; and the scent of recently turned earth. Such an account makes sense when noting that this piece was written in 1938, the last spring before the region would be evacuated in April of the following year. Letter twenty-five—"The Last Graduation"—takes on a sentimental tone as it relates the tale of the three cities with remaining schools—Prescott having closed its schools years before the exodus—and their evening of graduation ceremonies. These ceremonies were held for the younger students, as the cities within the valley never had a high school and instead sent their older students to Athol, Belchertown, New Salem, or Ware. Despite the lack of high schools in the area, each city had consolidated its schools around the turn of the century, stepping away from the one-room schoolhouse model and creating larger establishments. The closing of these widely shared spaces—especially in Greenwich, where the public building that housed the school also served as a grange hall—is depicted as resonating deeply with the locals. Spink and Jones set the scene by stating that the bells and busses had performed their final services and that the doors "are closed forever" (Spink and Jones). The closing of the schools was seen as an ending for the children who studied there, and for all who felt that the building was more familial than institutional. Brief summaries of the events were given, faculty acknowledged, and Dana's graduating class was listed as it was small enough to fit within the confines of one sentence. Of all the schools, Greenwich is given the most attention, being described as a "typical scene" one would witness regardless of which graduation ceremony one attended (Spink and Jones). Though most of the events are summarized in a matter of a few sentences, special attention is given to the farewell song composed by one of the Greenwich teachers and the audience's reaction to its conclusion: "Other organizations have danced themselves out, to the blare of horns and the thunder of

drums,” but for the residents of the doomed river valley, its “sweet and final benediction” would conclude the ceremony before the people left Quabbin, “once a valley of homes” (Spink and Jones).

This sense of loss resonated even in schools outside of the valley. In the 1927 edition of the Belchertown high school senior *Echo*, Madelaine Haesaert, an Enfield resident, had the following to say about the fate of her hometown:

Must be laid to waste, be uprooted, be destroyed, and be utterly removed ...
 Where prosperity once reigned, ruin threatened ... No matter what they pay us,
 they can never make suitable recompense ... A pageant of many moods, but one
 theme: the eternal conflict between the old and the new, the struggles between the
 needs of the many and the rights of the few, the endless enigma of human
 existence. (qtd. in Wilder)

Though the Metropolitan District Water Supply Commission offered comparatively good rates for the lands they purchased—\$103.64 per acre compared to the \$83.45 per acre in the nearby and also soon to be submerged Ware valley—Haesaert’s essay echoes the sentiment heard from many residents of the area (Greene 69). Elizabeth Rand of Enfield wrote essays as well as poetry expressing a sense of loss similar to Haesaert’s. Her poem, “Reflections,” was written in 1927 at the start of the official exodus. It begins with “Before me stretches the valley which sooner or later will be the famous Swift River Reservoir as deep and as wide as the sea,” before going into a list of things that would be missed, which included: “hilltops, trees, and flowers ... many of the games of childhood, played about the old home door, many of the scenes of gladness,” and ends on a similar point made by Haesaert by giving “the best we’ve got to Boston” along with the hope that its children would benefit from the valley’s sacrifice (Wilder). Similar works of poetry

and essays can be found scattered throughout Quabbin newsletters and archives, with most sharing the same bittersweet message with its hint of optimism. This sentiment is summarized well in Thomas Conuel's *Quabbin: The Accidental Wilderness*, in which he states that the problem of creating the reservoir was not logistics, but "the tricky emotional problem of ... obliterating a whole community with its history and sense of shared lives" (11).

The modern organization Friends of the Quabbin reprinted selections of "Letters from Quabbin" in their newsletter "Quabbin Voices." The organization printed other primary sources, including a sympathy letter from the nearby town of Shutesbury. Though brief, the message was produced during the annual town meeting of 1927 and offered "heartfelt sympathy for them in their compulsory abandonment of their homes" and invited the people of the Quabbin to resettle "in our community" ("Voices" 18.2). Another notable reprint is the "Quabbin Elegy" as well as a short accompanying article which was printed in the Springfield Paper, April 13, 1938. The poem takes on the voice of the valley itself and urges the reader not to mourn, as it is "not dying" but rather taking on a "new life" as the "[c]up-bearer, to all mankind" ("Voices" 5.3). The elegy was originally composed for the final meeting of The Quabbin Club of Enfield, a women's organization that started as study group and later evolved into a community service organization. During its forty-one years, the club's meetings were described as "[a] center of culture and information" as the women often invited guest speakers, held an annual "Guest Night" celebration, and organized discussions on topics such as women's suffrage, children's education, and juvenile courts (Spink and Jones). Community service included the creation and maintenance of the Quabbin Park, providing financial assistance to schools, and volunteering in veterans' and children's hospitals. The First World War inspired the organization to send aid to Belgium and France, join the Red Cross, and buy a Liberty Bond. Despite the club's impact, they

held their last meeting April 12, 1938, which concluded with a final benediction of “O Lord God, let us not forget to be kind” delivered by “voices husky with emotion” (Spink and Jones).

The residents of the Swift River Valley were understandably frustrated with not only the fate of their homeland but also at their lack of representation in the decisions being made. The Metropolitan District Water Supply Commission formed in 1926 as the result of the Ware River Act, and would go on to manage construction of the reservoir project. Local resentment grew as there were no members from the Quabbin region on the commission. Thus in the fall of 1926, a collective of representatives from the towns within the valley banded together and would soon be known as the Swift River Valley Protective Association. Leslie Haskins, a former state representative, was the organization’s chairperson. With the help of Haskins, the organization created lists of demands and proposed amendments to a one-hundred-page bill created by the commission (Greene 54). Nine amendments were created by the association, with the plan of setting a deadline for ending local business as their focus. The deadlines were a chief concern of the locals, as the commission had the legal right “to take over the towns at anytime” until their “final eviction”—an event that had no set date (“Voices” 8.4). This is exactly what would happen to Prescott on June 25, 1928, when the dwindling population voted to turn management of the city over to “a half-dozen ... agents of the commission” (Greene 61). Following an unhappy compromise that included some of the association’s amendments, the Water Supply Committee passed the bill along to the Ways and Means Committee. There it met fierce resistance by the assistant corporate counsel for Boston, Elijah Adlow, who disagreed with unemployment compensation for displaced people as well as any other portion of the bill he thought would increase the overall cost of the project. Following Adlow’s pushback, negotiations

fell apart, and very few amendments from either organization were accepted (Greene 57).

Despite their best efforts, the people of the Quabbin had failed to save their valley.

The Swift River Act of 1927 passed, setting in motion the funding and process of starting the reservoir program. Robert Wilder, a former resident of Enfield, claimed that he and those who lived in the valley were “driven away ... just thrown out” without any kind of “safety net” and consequently “alienated” from Boston (Cole). The city of Boston also chose to hire workers not from the valley, but from the capital itself. Strangers were now entering the lands of the Swift River Valley to cut down trees and dismantle homes. As the work continued, visitors and fleeing inhabitants experienced their last impressions of the region. On April 22, 1938, Enfield held its final gathering at the fireman’s ball. This key event comes up time and time again as one studies the Swift River Valley. Organized by the Enfield firemen, the event—which brought in nearly one thousand people—was meant “[t]o unofficially mark the end of the four towns as legal entities” (Greene 82). Enfield’s town hall had to host much of the gathering on its surrounding lawn, due to the volume of attendees. The scene was described as “bittersweet” as the people danced and sang “Auld Lang Syne” while “bawling their eyes out” (Cole). Authors like J.R. Greene felt that this single event was “the height of sentimentality” for the residents of the doomed river valley (Greene 82). A story in the *Springfield Morning Union* claimed the scene was “as dramatic as any in fiction or in a movie epic” (Conuel 10). The remaining cities of the Swift River Valley officially shut down six days later.

The structures and trees of the area were cleared over the course of the next year. Many locals would visit and watch the progress alter their former homeland. One witness described the newly barren land as “a moonscape. It was an awful looking mess” (Cole). As disturbing as the vast openness of the land may have been, the last few efforts to destroy the towns’ remains

created responses that were more akin to the type of terror one could expect when reading a Lovecraftian tale. Robert Wilder and Lois Barnes described witnessing the burning of brush and demolished buildings as “like stepping into Hell, because the whole valley was fire ... there was a real feeling of ‘this is the end’” (Cole).

Evelina Gustafson wrote *Ghost Towns 'Neath the Quabbin* during these end days of the Swift River Valley. The travelogue covers her time in the region as she observes the cities and speaks with the locals. The tone of the piece is clearly one sympathetic toward the former residents. Her account of an elderly resident weeping openly at the loss of his “narrow, wooded roads of the valley,” the “whippoorwill that sang back of the old farm at night,” and “meeting my old friends down at the General Store” sets the tone of the piece within its first chapter (16). She takes time to lament the towns that will be “condemned to obscurity,” offering her “heartfelt sympathy” before going into summaries of her walking tours of each one (17, 20). Stopping to chat with a shop owner in Greenwich, she asks where the young businesswoman plans to live once the valley is cleared, to which the woman “answered dryly ‘I don’t know. I have no place to go. This is my home’” (38). An unnamed citizen expresses a similar sentiment in the seventh installment of the “Letters from Quabbin” series (Spink and Jones). Gustafson also reports on a dialogue between two New England farmers, about the virtues of an ox-yoke. She admires them for their “‘down to earth’ quality ... which is so likeable” and “hope[s] that their type will always be with us” before reminding her reader that “the deathknell of this lovely, little countryside had now rung” (109).

Gustafson highlights the architectural accomplishments of the valley in addition to the people. Among them is the Griswold home in Prescott, which by 1930’s standards manages to claim the label of antique. Much of the home’s original construction was still intact at the time of

its forced disassembly, including “hand hewn beams, the old fireplace and brick ovens, and ... hand made nails” (48). Gustafson momentarily mourns the loss of such a signal example of “early American architecture” before she switches her focus to a cemetery dating back to 1744 (48). Though the physical structures are very much at the heart of the author’s travelogue, the customs and traditions tied to the rural home and town have a chapter all their own. In “Old Customs of the Valley,” Gustafson treats the reader to a brief and idyllic image of the family gathered around the hearth, complete with toasted apples, spinning wheels, harness mending, and homemade clothing and other items. The scene figures almost as an impenetrable buffer to the outside world: “Let the wind howl outside, happy and cozy were they, close to the fireside!” (93). Constructing such a home is illustrated as a town-wide endeavor as well. Citing the efficiency of multiple laborers and the camaraderie necessary to help build each other’s homes, she concludes the chapter by making a “wish” that “more folk had that good old New England spirit today” (95). The image of the family’s refuge from the rough winds of the world and the community effort needed to construct the home are placed in contrast with the reality facing the Swift River Valley, a reality of which Gustafson reminds the reader at the end of the chapter: “the great number of them were sold for little or nothing and demolished for the usable lumber they possessed” (110).

One final tour, taken in the summer of 1939, is the subject of the book’s last chapter. Gustafson notes the change that had come over the “lovely valley,” stating that it was “denuded of brush and trees,” which she felt had been “sacrificed” to the reservoir program (120, 121). After pausing in the blank space that once was Greenwich, she recalls the lyrics to the class song performed the prior year during graduation exercises, also printed in full in the “Letters from Quabbin” series: “Our thoughts will linger here, tho waters flow / O’er all our homes and farms

and schoolhouse too” (122). Gustafson spotted more signs of the end including an abandoned buggy, houses in the process of being demolished, and the replacement of chimney smoke with that of sparse open fires within the valley. The book concludes with Gustafson making her work’s intentions clear:

I hope that I have succeeded in giving my readers a vivid description of this territory which is destined to lie evermore covered by the waters of the great Quabbin Reservoir. I hope that I have also succeeded in imbuing in your hearts some of the love for the old valley that I and many another possess ... Once thriving little communities, they now lie forgotten—ghost towns. (125)

Both in tone and focus, *Ghost Towns 'Neath the Quabbin Reservoir* mirrors much of the news coverage at the time of the clearing of the Swift River Valley.

V. West of Arkham the Hills Rise Wild

The sense of dread within “The Colour Out of Space” can be seen in Dana, Enfield, Greenwich, and Prescott. Like Gustafson, Lovecraft describes his landscape with precision. In the opening lines of “The Colour Out of Space,” the narrator gives a snapshot of the location: “There are dark narrow glens where the trees slope fantastically ... there are farms, ancient and rocky ... brooding eternally over old New England secrets” (Lovecraft, *Annotated* 58). When compared to Gustafson, Lovecraft displays a similar affirmation, but where Gustafson’s imagery is lively, Lovecraft’s is sinister. Gustafson’s tragedy comes from the destruction of something beautiful and, in her eyes, very much alive. Rather than highlighting a vibrant community about to be destroyed, Lovecraft’s setting suggests an aura of decay following an unexplainable event. If Gustafson’s work is meant to showcase “some of the love for the old valley,” then Lovecraft’s is meant to showcase the doom that invades it (Gustafson 125).

Lovecraft, like Gustafson, uses dialogue with simple speech to express the locals’ fear, as is evident in this statement from the character Ammi Pierce: “It come from some place whar things ain’t as they is here ... one o’ them professors said so ...” (Lovecraft, *Annotated* 90). The more academic and urbanized characters ridicule the valley residents in “The Colour Out of Space.” Newspaper articles surface as critical mediums at least twice over the course of the short story. The first is when the newspaper describes Nahum Gardner in the coverage of the meteorite. Immediately following Nahum’s newfound celebrity status is Lovecraft’s characterization of the man as “genial” and “living ... on the pleasant farmstead in the valley,” a figure whom the more metropolitan members of the Boston and Arkham communities could misconstrue as a simple country bumpkin (71). At another point, a “city man” mocks the “dark fears of rustics” about the alarming unnatural events in an article about odd vegetation (74). Even

the surveyor shows prejudice toward the rural folk in his first meeting with Ammi Pierce, equating his surprising level of intelligence to that of “any man ... in Arkham” and his lack of protest against the reservoir to that of “other rustics ... in the sections where reservoirs were to be” (63).

In addition to Gustafson’s, several other texts have been written on the subject of the Swift River Valley that connect the region to Lovecraft. Francis H. Underwood’s *Quabbin: The Story of a Small Town with Outlooks upon Puritan Life* describes the Quabbin area as it was in the late nineteenth century. Underwood’s account provides the reader with a snapshot of the era that Lovecraft attempted to emulate in “The Colour Out of Space,” which takes place in 1882. A sense of unchanging and ancient lands is immediately impressed upon the reader, as the author states that little has altered since the region’s initial settlement a century and a half prior: “for the natural features are too marked to be affected by the superficial touches of me. Ploughs and axes do not disturb the eternal basis of landscape” (2). Attention then shifts to the many hills within the valley, including Great Quabbin, Delectable Mountain, and Ram Mountain. The areas where the land can be effectively cultivated are described as either “prosperous,” with “neat and comfortable” homes, or having “thin” coverage of crops along with “poison ivy” and “skunk cabbage” infringing on “their pastures gray and brown” (Underwood 18-19). Regardless of the diversity of the cultivated lands, all of the farmhouses share a unifying feature: the chimney. These immense structures were square, with openings on all sides, and centrally located so as to serve as a heat source for the whole house as well as an oven for the kitchen (19). One is reminded of Gustafson’s idyllic scene of the family gathered around the hearth when reading Underwood’s description of this staple of antique rustic architecture. Like Gustafson in 1940, Underwood spends some time on the familial ties to farmland. He explains how the farms

themselves came to be named after the families that occupied them. The tradition of keeping farms and the surrounding land within the original families was very much alive in 1890's in the Quabbin region. He provides "'The Estes Place,' 'The Sherman Place,' 'The Deering Place,'" as examples. Many farms came to be owned and renamed by someone other than a family member, but those possessing "a notion of permanency" kept their family's name (26).

Lovecraft recreates Underwood's image of an unspoiled land filled with hills in the opening paragraph of his short story: "the hills rise wild, and there are valleys with deep woods that no axe has ever cut" (58). Though the Gardner farm is initially described in a manner more fitting to the healthy farmland in Underwood's account, the eventual state of the Blasted Heath resembles that of one of the poorer farms, its supernatural "fine gray dust" potentially drawing inspiration from the similarly colored lands of less fortunate but more natural Quabbin pastures (62). Among the natural features are the same flora mentioned in *Quabbin*, including skunk cabbage, which grows across the road from the Gardner farm (73). Likewise, the chimney makes important appearances within the short story, just as it would have in the lives of the people whom Underwood described. This rural staple functions as a recurring features of Lovecraft's signature atmospheric descriptions—"wide chimneys crumbling," "tumbled bricks and stones of an old chimney," "but there were not any real ruins, only the bricks of the chimney"—with the Gardner chimney in particular playing a key role in the plot (59, 62, 97). Once Ammi Pierce notices no smoke coming from this chimney, he becomes "apprehensive of the worst," and upon entering the "deadly cold" farmhouse, he discovers that "the cavernous fireplace was unlit and empty" (82). The lack of activity from this essential home feature, known for both its utility and its stimulation of familial bonding, indicates that something is gravely wrong with the Gardner Place. The fact that Lovecraft even uses that label throughout the short story taps into

Underwood's point about the familial inheritance of farmland in rural New England (64, 72, 82, 94). Labeling the setting for his story in such a way reinforces the long-established tie that the Gardner family had to the land before their farm's name was changed to "The Blasted Heath," a clear sign that the family's "notion of permanency" had expired (Underwood 26).

Underwood likewise writes about the far-reaching economic transformation of the Quabbin region. He makes a clear distinction between poorer and successful farms. Those living in the former are described as surviving by means of subsistence farming, which led to a "pinched and sordid" state of existence that held "no hope except in the final rest from toil" (24). Those more prosperous, though far from educated and often limited to reading the Bible and newspapers, had a more stable lifestyle with a lot Underwood describes as "fairer" and "better" (24).

Lovecraft's kinship with Gustafson and Underwood should come as no surprise, as the horror author's travelogues of the 1920's and 1930's were a significant source of his entire body of work. Starting in 1928, he began compiling these notes annually, documenting his journeys through New England, the East Coast, and even portions of Canada. He also wrote other accounts of his travels, such as his 1924 trip to Philadelphia and his incomplete study of Rhode Island architecture (Evans 105). Built structures were of chief interest to him, with antiquarian houses being his focus. It was Lovecraft's belief that homes "should never be made—they should be sown, water'd, weeded, tended, and allowed to grow" (qtd. in Evans 107). This idea motivated Lovecraft to become part of a preservation movement taking place in New England, the "Colonial Revival Movement," which worked to maintain the structures and heritage of the region, with the support of both organizations—the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities—and individuals—Norman Isham (108). In 1927, coincidentally the same year when

he visited the Swift River Valley and penned “The Colour Out of Space,” Lovecraft attempted to save Providence’s Brick Row, a series of warehouses and buildings facing the Providence River that inspired settings in several of his horror stories, “most notably in his 1927 novel *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*” (111). The city had decided to demolish the old buildings and replace them with a hall of records to facilitate a newly constructed courthouse. Lovecraft, who had already made a name for himself as a staunch preservationist, increased his letter writing efforts, even going so far as to write whole letters for others on which to simply sign their names before sending them on to the *Providence Journal*. Despite his best efforts, including his publication of an essay-length letter in a 1929 issue of the *Providence Sunday Journal*, the advocacy failed and the building was razed. The loss of Brick Row was especially disappointing to Lovecraft, as another neighborhood that inspired the setting for his short story “Pickman’s Model” had already been demolished in 1927. Perhaps most upsetting of all was that after the Great Depression set in, the city could not afford to make Brick Row anything other than a parking lot (112).

The demolition of these locations was no less a loss to Lovecraft the preservationist as to Lovecraft the author. These locations that both he and his characters traveled through evoke a sense of realness, making the character’s discoveries all the more terrifying. Timothy H. Evans points out that realistic settings especially appear in his earlier works, which seem to follow a three-step system: first, an “outsider” arrives in an unfamiliar place; second, that place is described “in picturesque terms”; and third, characters make a deeper exploration and discover horrors (114). The story structure plays out in such tales as “The Festival,” “The Outsider,” “The Haunter of the Dark,” “The Whisperer in Darkness,” “The Shadow Over Innsmouth,” and *At the Mountains of Madness* along with the previously discussed “He” and, of course, “The Colour Out of Space” (114). In addition to being travelers, many of Lovecraft’s protagonists are or

become folklorists over the course of their travels, a persona that can be traced back to Lovecraft's personal life. An avid reader of folklore, his personal library contained volumes of tales from Greece, the Middle East, Europe, and America. Like his characters, he collected and documented tales from his travels, for example by reappropriating local folklore in "The Shunned House," which contains a ghost based on a Rhode Island legend. This story is another apt example of his deployment of familiar location, as the setting is an amalgam of two separate Providence homes: 135 Benefit Street and the Andrew Joline House. "The Unnamable" similarly borrows from New England monster lore and even names the source, Cotton Mather's *Magnalia Christi Americana*, within the short story itself (116). "The Colour Out of Space" provides the reader with locations and folklore based on Lovecraft's travels, all while expressing a sense of loss for a territory about to be consumed by industrialized progress.

A foundational element in Lovecraft's tales are his monsters. Together with his use of detailed and realistic settings, they give his stories a sense of authentic horror by symbolizing very real sources of fear. Monsters, as Jeffrey Jerome Cohen points out in his book *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, reflect elements of the cultures that create them. Just as "The Colour Out of Space" can overall be seen as a reflection of fears associated with the Quabbin Reservoir, the colour itself is a subject for cultural analysis. Of the seven theses laid out in Cohen's chapter "Monster Culture," three provide the best insights for reading Lovecraft's creation as more than a merely indescribable alien entity. In his first thesis, Cohen describes "[t]he monstrous body" as a "pure culture," in that it embodies the "fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy" belonging to "a certain cultural moment" (4). He asserts that if "read," monsters serve as "that which reveals" or "that which warns," as the Latin etymology "monstrum" would suggest (4). A direct example would be the giant ants of 1954's "Them!" that Cohen sees as communists, the aim of

both being world domination (14). Many monsters in popular works of gothic literature and cinema can be interpreted similarly—Frankenstein’s monster as fear of modern science, Dracula as the anxiety surrounding eastern European immigrants, zombies as symbols of mindless consumerism, Blacula as marginalized African culture in 1960’s America—so Cohen’s first thesis comes as no surprise when applied to Lovecraft’s colour, which manages to warp the land and life around it just like the reservoir does the valley through a coalition of strangers, demolition crews, fires, etc. The colour comes from a place both alien to Ammi and the Gardners and familiar to Lovecraft’s contemporaries: Boston, boardrooms, a country in the throes of modernization.

Cohen’s third thesis, “The Monster Is the Harbinger of Category Crisis,” explains how monsters manage to resist the natural order and classification of things. By inhabiting spaces between or even outside our usual modes of viewing and cataloguing the world around us, monsters complicate our “binary thinking” and create a “crisis” (6). The xenomorph in Ridley Scott’s *Alien* provides an example of this monster function by appearing to have features of several conflicting biologies—“bivalve, crustacean, reptilian, and humanoid”; it lays eggs in others “like a wasp,” sheds its skin “like a snake,” and thus challenges the observer’s notion of the natural order (6). Lovecraft’s colour is characterized as being beyond description, and the narrator even states that “it was only by analogy that they called it a colour at all” (Lovecraft, *Annotated* 69). The Quabbin Reservoir inhabits this nebulous space as well, a means to provide the people of Boston with a much-needed water source, while also a program of cultural erasure. Binary thinking complicates our ability to tackle such a difficult moral question. The reservoir can be seen as neither inherently evil nor the savior of Boston.

The fourth thesis, “The Monster Dwells at the Gates of Difference,” likewise resonates Lovecraft’s work:

The monster is difference made flesh, come to dwell among us. In its function as dialectical Other ... the monster is an incorporation of the Outside, the Beyond—of all those loci that are rhetorically placed as distant and distinct but originate Within. ... [M]onstrous difference tends to be cultural, political, racial, economic, sexual. (Cohen 7)

Lovecraft’s New York stories depict foreigners in dehumanizing ways, a long-practiced tradition Cohen traces back to the Greeks’ description of African skin, which is described as being scorched by the sun (8). Lovecraft’s colour allegorizes things beyond human understanding of the cosmos. At the conclusion of the tale, the creature appears as “a frightful messenger from unformed realms of infinity beyond all Nature as we know it,” whose lasting impact seems to be making anyone who hears of it aware of “the black extra-cosmic gulfs it throws open before our frenzied eyes” (Lovecraft 99). One is left with a sense of unease at this conclusion, and Lovecraft’s signature sense of cosmic dread reminds the reader that the colour is just one antagonist from an unfathomable void. The gates addressed in the Swift River Valley differ from Lovecraft’s racial ones. Instead, these gates are more aligned with his cosmic ones: the fear of something vast and unimaginable devouring one’s sense of reality. The residents of the valley were faced with political, economic, and cultural gates in their struggle to save their land. The political power of Metropolitan District Water Supply Commission, the loss of jobs to more successful industrial centers, and a growing urban population all worked to disempower the region’s inhabitants. Lovecraft’s colour, like the obstacles to the valley, serve as examples of Cohen’s fifth thesis: “The Monster Polices the Borders of the Possible.” Monsters “warn” as well

as “prevent” humans from traversing an unknown “border that cannot—*must* not—be crossed” (Cohen 12). Cohen cites East Asian dragons and the dinosaurs of Jurassic Park as examples of monsters who persuade people to live safely and curb their interest in the unknown, which in turn “prevents mobility (intellectual, geographic, or sexual)” (12). So too does Lovecraft’s colour: as a scientific curiosity accidentally unleashing an alien force onto the Gardner farm, it resembles the Swift River Valley from growing politically, economically, and culturally as a monstrous form of gatekeeping.

VI. Juggernaut Drove His Car across the South

American families began to sense outside forces encroaching in the latter half of the nineteenth century. With the success of the Industrial Revolution, businessmen like Cornelius Vanderbilt, John D. Rockefeller, Andrew Carnegie, and J.P. Morgan became part of an ultra-wealthy class unheard of prior to the Civil War. These industrialists, considered “robber barons” by many, helped usher in an era of conspicuous consumption (Jackson 87). Rural mansions were among the new indicators of prosperity. The boom in the remodeling and construction of country homes in England that had taken place between 1835 and 1889 inspired the new American “country estate” movement that took place from 1885 to 1905 (88). In *Crabgrass Frontier*, Kenneth T. Jackson offers Greentree as a prime example of such housing. John Hay Whitney’s 500-acre estate was built during the 1870’s when “socially prominent families began spreading over farmlands” around Long Island (89). Estates like Greentree often contained “square pavilions, balustraded arcades, and hundreds of acres of lawns, ponds, gardens, and polo fields” (89). Though wealthy estate owners bought up considerable portions of land, they were not alone in setting their sights on rural territories.

Cities were expanding both in population and territory. New York, Chicago, Detroit, and Boston would peak in territory around 1930 and steadily increase (140). Between 1830 and 1860, the twenty-one largest major cities in the U.S. went from a combined population of 1,127,000 to 6,217,000. During the mid-nineteenth century, Americans living in urban spaces increased from 8.8% to 19.8% (Chudacoff 60).

Of specific interest to our studies is the city closest to and the reason for the Quabbin Reservoir: Boston. Between 1850 and 1890, the metropolis grew from five square miles to thirty-nine and remained so until its leap to forty-four square miles in 1930 (Jackson 140). Between

1830 and 1860, the city saw its population increase from 61,392 to 177,840 (Chudacoff 60).

Chudacoff and Smith describe the city's growth, as well as the nationwide impact of similarly rising metropolises:

In 1850 ... Boston's outer borders lay scarcely two miles from the old business district; by 1900 the radius extended ten miles. Now those who could afford it could live far removed from the old walking city and still commute. ... The new accessibility of peripheral land sparked real estate development and urban sprawl.
(92)

The increase in transportation and urban job demand influenced expansion, as did the popularity of "the doctrine of forcible annexation," which supported the "development of the metropolitan community" even when faced with resistance from "small territor[ies]" (Jackson 147). An example of the doctrine can be seen in Boston as well as St. Louis, which both expanded three times before 1860 (148). Suburbs such as Roxbury, West Roxbury, and Dorchester became amenable to the idea of "annexation in exchange for the provision of services" and ended up adding 20 square miles to Boston in the process (Chudacoff 102). Boston faced resistance when attempting to consolidate Brookline. The wealthy suburb voted 706 to 299 against annexation, using its reputation and electorate to show that Boston's growth would not go unchecked. This opposition is doubly significant, as the residents of Brookline made it clear that they were not rejecting forcible annexation in the name of progress but "were expressing a determination to control the physical and social environment in which they lived" (Jackson 149). The lasting impact of Brookline's resistance was suburban resilience around the nation as well as Boston's failure to gain legislative approval for another consolidation proposal in 1931 (149).

Water management was another hot topic that predated the Swift River Valley, with the challenge of supplying water to major metropolitan areas neither beginning nor ending with Boston. The first citywide waterworks in the U.S. started in Philadelphia in 1798 when the city council hired Benjamin Latrobe to design the system. Latrobe created the city's main water source, the Centre Square reservoir, by pumping water from the Schuylkill River (Chudacoff 56). Thirteen years following the start of that program, Philadelphia created another series of reservoirs using the river. Despite their early success, reservoirs were not a common source of water in the early nineteenth century. Private companies sold water to cities, such as New York, Baltimore, and Boston. The quality of the product changed from city to city and company to company. For example, Baltimore's water quality was described as "adequate," whereas New York's was "intolerable" (56). Eventually the demand for more public waterworks grew. By 1860, sixteen of the major cities in the U.S. had reliable water systems in place. Boston began creating its public waterworks in 1845 (56).

Growing populations in both urban and suburban areas owe a lot to the growth of railroads. According to Chudacoff and Smith, from 1860 to 1910 the number of cities with a population of 100,000 or more went from 9 to 50; 25,000 to 100,000 went from 26 to 178; 10,000 to 25,000 went from 58 to 369 (108). In 1900, the U.S. had "more miles of track than the rest of the world combined" (Jackson 91). Philadelphia set the precedent for improving the structure of the rail system when it decided to make the Pennsylvania Railroad straighten its route to Pittsburgh. Part of correcting this "meandering" trajectory included purchasing rural lands throughout the 1860's and 1870's (91). Much like the situation with the Swift River Valley, these purchases would displace the farmers that owned the land between Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, as the railroad companies were well aware. In the end, the company "simply

bought them out” rather than opting to “fight the farmers along the way” (91). High-paying developers purchased the land with the intention of placing businesses close to a railroad (91). Such business practices were not new at the time. John Jacob Astor serves as an early example of a similar scheme. After initial success with China and fur trades, Astor began “aggressively” purchasing “cheap Manhattan farmland north of Canal street after 1810” (Jackson 134). Then during the Panic of 1837, he purchased more lands and then “ruthlessly foreclosed on hundreds of property owners who were temporarily unable” to make their payments (134). Three years after the Panic, Astor was worth \$20 million, which earned him the title of “richest man in the United States before the Civil War” (134).

Tourism to pastoral villages grew due to popularity of the railroads in Boston, New York, and Philadelphia. This gave way to an emerging view of the area as part of an “ahistorical colonial tradition” (Wood 42). Colonial revival architecture is a reflection of growing interest in early New England culture. Its emergence in the 1880’s, along with the writings of Romantic authors, championed idyllic colonial ideals such as “domesticity” and “a nourishing connection to nature” (Wood 42). Often New England villages and agrarian communities served as “metaphor[s] for sentimentalized pastoralism” (42). Lovecraft’s letters betray his own Romanticized view of the area tinged with his disdain toward a growing and assimilating industrial force:

Familiar forces and symbols—the hills, the woods, and the seasons—become less and less intertwined with our daily lives as brick and stone horizons ... replace them, and the quaintly loveable little ways of small places die of inanition as easy transportation fuses all the surface of a great country into one standardized mold. ... Quantity and distribution are the watchwords in an age where factories ...

reign supreme and all sectional manners and modes of thought are obliterated.
 (qtd. in Evans 109)

The foreboding that one feels from this passage is not unlike the sensation of reading a Lovecraftian tale. Its sense of loss fits with the uneasiness felt in “The Colour Out of Space.”

To understand how “The Colour Out of Space” could reflect fears of agricultural workers and residents of rural communities, it would be beneficial to examine the figure of the American agrarian. Clifford B. Anderson outlines the basic beliefs of agrarianism in his article “The Metamorphosis of American Agrarian Idealism in the 1920’s and 1930’s.” Even though Anderson’s focus lies on the early twentieth century, the ideals that he outlines have their roots in the years preceding the Civil War (182). According to Anderson, American agrarianism has three fundamental “doctrines”:

[1] [A]griculture is fundamentally basic and superior to other occupations because it supplies the food and clothing of the nation and is the original source of all wealth and raw materials. ... [2] [F]arming is a way of life, not a mercenary occupation, and that for this reason the farmer is morally superior to the laborer. ... [3] America should remain a nation of small yeoman proprietors in order to avoid national decline. (182)

The reader gets the impression of a people important to American prosperity and culture. One recurring motif is the moral superiority ascribed to the agrarian. Men and women who work the land figure as the source of the nation’s foundational and continuing wealth and as people who treat their work as a vocation instead of just as a job.

The symposium *I’ll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition* addresses this moral issue. Published in 1930, the text was the product of twelve Southern writers and

academics concerned with the transformation of the agrarian South. At the time of its authorship, industrialism had been in full swing for over fifty years. Increased manufacturing led to the destruction of many small villages, the migration of farmhands to more promising careers in industry, and a sense of Southern culture as fleeting (Pressly 146). The twelve authors fear many losses, including “social ... and economic autonomy,” but preceding those losses is that of “morality,” the first quality to “surrender” to the “victorious principle of Union” (qtd. in Davidson xx). Though the work focuses on the case of the South, their situation was quickly becoming a national issue according to the authors (D. Davidson xxi).

Concerned with morality, Allen Tate contributed an essay to the symposium titled “Remarks on the Southern Religion,” which provides a scathing criticism of American capitalism and its alleged moral bankruptcy. His claim is that in settlements such as Jamestown, Europeans were able to perform a “large scale exploitation of nature” in the name of profit over religion (167). One ideology that made all of the alleged exploitation possible was Protestantism, which led to an economy with the efficiency of a feudal system but without the feudal religion of Catholicism to inhibit its trading power, largely due to its roots being “non-agrarian” and the “result of secular ambition” (168).

The “men of letters” who wrote *I'll Take My Stand* present a pristine era—“an idyllic utopia that never really existed”—inhabited by hard working yeomen who, in the minds of the authors, were “losing contact with the natural world” in the face of “Progress” or “Industrialism” (xi, vi, xii, xiii). Louis D. Rubin’s introduction to the 1962 reprinted edition suggests that readers view the text “as a commentary on the nature of man,” with “the vision of an agrarian South” serving “as an extended metaphor” (xviii, xi).

The authors frame the great national conflict to be “Agrarian *versus* Industrial,” and their allegiances lie with Southern mode of living as opposed to the “American or prevailing way” (xix). Industrialism appears throughout the introduction. While the agrarian lifestyle is framed as one of enjoyable efficiency, industry’s drive to maximize output and streamline production causes a more leisurely approach to labor seen as “evil,” with the product, not the process, as the only “good” (xxii). Higher production leads to the creation of more machinery, and the advancement of that machinery results in greater political influence for the industrialists. The relationship to the land itself, religious in its nature, is likewise affected, as mechanical advancements disrupt mankind’s “role as creatures within it” (xxiv). Art suffers as well due to the divorce from nature and the elimination of time to reflect. Though the collected essays were published five years prior to Walter Benjamin’s “Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” one can imagine the authors would have much to discuss with Benjamin on the matter of modernization and erasure of the artist. Industrial progress is seen as a myth—“It never proposes a specific goal; it initiates the infinite series”—and the introduction of new machines does nothing to allay the weary working class (xxvii). The introduction concludes with a dismissal of the “hypothetical welfare of some fabulous creature called society” in favor of responsibility to oneself, and a clarification of what is meant by an “agrarian society” (xxviii).

The twelve Southerners acknowledge that both industrial and agrarian lifestyles must exist, despite the two being in opposition. However, industry must be kept from superseding a more traditional way of life. What sets an agrarian society apart, however, is the following:

Technically, perhaps, an agrarian society is one in which agriculture is the leading vocation, whether for wealth, for pleasure, or for privilege—a form of labor that is

pursued with intelligence and leisure. ... The theory of agrarianism is that the culture of the soil is the best and most sensitive of vocations. (xxix)

The authors readily admit that the conflict between industrial and agrarian life cannot be answered or settled easily. Regardless, industrialism must be kept in check whenever and wherever it threatens to overtake agrarian society (xxx).

Frank Lawrence Owsley's contribution to the text, "The Irrepressible Conflict," frames the struggle between industrial and agrarian as between North and South. The titular conflict is the continued fight for political dominance between the two halves of the nation, with the means and modes of production as focal battlegrounds. Owsley sees the Northern attempt to dominate and regulate the economy as a second wave of attacks following the Civil War. Owsley is most alarmed by the "conquest of the Southern mind," replacing its ideals, values, and history with the "Northern way of life and thought," along with the "Northern legend" and its view of America's past (63). History is especially important, as Southern farmers can trace their roots from the Greeks and Romans (idealizing the hard-working Cincinnatus over the more academic Cato), to early settlers of the nation (tracing their lineage to English yeomen), and even to president George Washington—who worked "not as a capitalist who guards his investments, but as one who watches over friends" (71). Regardless of how idealized and selectively abridged this legitimization of Southern agrarianism may be, Owsley believes working the land is as noble at the time of writing as it had been throughout its history. A transcendental view of the profession such as this provokes opposition, especially when the subject of slavery arises.

To his credit, Owsley does not shy away from talking about slavery; rather, he delves into the subject while still asserting the nobility of Southern agrarian culture. Slavery is framed as "part of the agrarian system," albeit "not an essential one" (73). Owsley asserts that the English

“forced” the system of slavery upon them and that the introduction of the cotton gin and plantations meant that slaves became “an economic instrument of great advantage” (77, 78). The subject of ending slavery arises, but the logistic issues of mass relocation to Africa and a fear of former slaves reverting to their “cannibal” and “barbarian” roots prevents the idea of resettlement within the States (77). Such Southern thinkers as “Hammond, Fitzhugh, John C. Calhoun, Chancellor Harper,” and “Thomas R. Dew” reached the conclusion that one culture, black African or white American, would come to dominate the other (81). It was in the name of saving the “civilization” of “the white race” that slaves had to be subjugated (82). Lovecraft’s feelings toward the Teutonic race and his subhuman description of other races would be right at home in Owsley’s chapter. The Southerner’s idealized image of the South mirrors Lovecraft’s own Anglophilia. Owsley gives additional defenses for the use of slaves, but at this point in his essay, his attention slips to the North’s stance on the subject and its subsequent treatment of the South. The North’s alignment with abolitionists came when it realized that states utilizing slaves would continue to be agrarian, a mode of production successful in the early nineteenth century, while the remaining sectors of the country would begin to move toward an industrial boom. The Whig majority in the North reached the conclusion that they needed to shift the balance of economic power. By “borrow[ing] the language of the abolitionists,” and thereby reframing the conflict as an issue of “morals” rather than power, the industrialized North was able to intensify its conquest of the South in the ideological conflict (84). Once the Federalists began to take steps towards a more centralized government—in Owsley’s view, a violation of “personal liberty” per the Magna Carta and the American Revolution—and reduce state’s rights, the North made its political ambitions known (89). In the end, industry would reign as “Juggernaut drove his car across the South” (91).

Thomas A. Pressly's "Agrarianism: An Autopsy," written ten years after the publication of *I'll Take My Stand*, points out that the general Southern public did not agree with Owsley and his fellow authors. Other academics such as Vanderbilt University's Edwin Mims "felt that, while the new industrialism brought evils in its wake," it was also capable of creating opportunity for improvements in education, infrastructure, and the arts (qtd. in Pressly 147). Though Mims's 1926 publication *The Advancing South* was more widely accepted than *I'll Take My Stand*, the latter found an audience and its authors became regular contributors to publications such as *The American Review*, *The Southern Review*, and *The Review of Politics* (157). Six years after the initial publication of *I'll Take My Stand*, the twelve Southerners created a second collection of essays titled *Who Owns America?* with the help of "a group of writers from all sections of the country ... against 'giant industrialism'" (qtd. in Pressly 158). Unlike *I'll Take My Stand*, which received heavy criticism for failing to provide "a definite program" to counter the perceived threats of industrialism, the later work offered a model that drew inspiration from feudalism and the figure of the yeoman (155, 159, 160). Regardless of the improvements made to their earlier arguments, the work failed to gain an influential foothold. As Pressly points out, they built their movement primarily on ideals tailored to a reader that "would not have understood the Agrarian language even had he been reached by it" (162). Despite the general Southern public's rejection of their claims, they were correct that industrialism and urban expansion greatly impacted agriculture.

Urbanization played into tensions as the U.S. saw a dramatic population boom in its cities:

When the federal government took its first census in 1790, only five cities could boast ten thousand or more inhabitants. By 1830, the number had risen to twenty-

three, and it reached one hundred one by 1860. The number of people living in urban places swelled from two hundred thousand in 1790 to 6.2 million in 1860, approximately one-fifth of the total national population. (Chudacoff 37)

Population shifts created problems within these urban spaces, including new pressures on merchants to adjust to a system unlike the European ones to which they had grown accustomed (38). The newfound complications led to clashes within these sectors and with surrounding rural areas.

One of the earliest examples of such a conflict was Shays' Rebellion in 1786. Following a year-long depression, tensions formed between merchants and indebted farmers. At the root of the disagreement was the increase in the amount of paper currency, which to the merchants meant more economic stability but to the farmers more debt. The conflict came to a head when Daniel Shays, a Revolutionary War captain, led 2,000 farmers in an effort to prevent the state from seizing property from owners who had not paid their taxes (38). Further examples of agrarian opposition between played out in the Constitution Convention as well, at which urban and mercantile interests were well-represented. Of the fifty-five delegates present, twenty lived in urban areas and twenty more were "lawyers and merchants" with "extensive urban contacts" (39). The disproportion worked in the majority's favor by giving Congress increased power over taxation and regulation, while at the same time limiting states' abilities to create tariffs, money, and bills of credit. Once the Constitution made its way to state ratifying conventions, "areas dominated by small farms chose delegates who opposed it" (40). By the end of the 1780's, the economy had recovered due in no small part to the growth of both industry and agriculture.

Over the next century, manufacturing grew along with the "commercialization of the countryside," the relationship becoming more inextricable yet more complicated (Chudacoff 45).

Throughout the eighteenth century, craftsmen were responsible for much of the products sold to the farming community. As demand advanced together with industry, the process of creating products went from relying entirely upon the artisan to becoming a series of “many steps, each requiring less skill than the formerly integrated process” (46). The roots of change are with the “merchant capitalists” who used their wealth and influence to access more resources than the journeymen before them and then divided up the labor associated with “traditional skills”—such as shoemaking, metalworking, tailoring, and haberdashery—thus making it possible to create goods on a larger scale (46). Once the factory production of goods became common, the alienation of traditional means of production increased. Artisans could afford tools of the trade, but certainly not a factory of their own. Monopolization of the means of production led to growing stratification between the rich and poor. For example, in the city of Boston in 1771, the wealthiest 5 percent owned 44 percent of taxable property. These numbers become more dramatic as industrial/mercantile interests gained more influence in the region. In 1833, 4 percent of the population controlled 59 percent of the wealth. Fifteen years later, that percentage would jump to 64 (47). New York saw a similar pattern between 1828 and 1845, going from 4 percent of the population owning 49 percent of the wealth to 66 percent doing so (48).

Early contributors to the growing success of industry included support for “manufactures” by notable Americans like George Washington, Henry Clay, and Alexander Hamilton (whose *Report on Manufactures* championed industry as a boon to agriculture) and European economists (Adam Smith acknowledged a symbiotic relationship between the European and the U.S. economies, though viewing the former as “more distinguished”), along with the added need for mass-produced “materials of war” (both arms as well as food) (Saloutos 156-58). Fear of becoming like Spain or Portugal added to the increase of industry, agricultural

countries like theirs being perceived as falling behind more industrialized European cultures (157). By the mid-nineteenth century, the impact of industrial cities on the consumption of agricultural products became clear and served as the subject of reports such as 1852's "Whig Principle and Its Development":

... [I]t was estimated that the manufacturing towns and villages which sprang up from Maine to Texas consumed "about six hundred thousand bales of cotton, besides wool, leather, and various other materials ... every manufacturing town becomes a direct benefit to the farmer, by keeping up the price of his grain." (158)

Between 1810 and 1860, industry multiplied ten times, while the population only grew four-and-a-half fold (159). This incredible growth worked as a catalyst to agriculture with the total number of farms in the U.S. jumping from 1,499,073 in 1850 to 2,044,077 the following decade (162).

The trend continued throughout the century with a total of 5,737,372 farms by 1900 (162).

Though this data may seem like statistical evidence for Hamilton's promised agricultural boom, looking more closely it reveals some troubling information. While the number of farms increased, the average size of American farms decreased. In 1850 the average was 202.6 acres, while in 1860 it was 199.2, and by 1900 the average acreage had plummeted to 146.2 (162).

Mortgage companies made the spread of small farms possible. Much like with the housing crisis of the late 2000's, lenders "sent unlimited sums, with reckless confidence, to be loaned" at interest rates that many borrowers could not manage (170). Other factors led to farming becoming "unprofitable," including the incentivization of industry with protective tariffs while levying taxes disproportionately against rural communities and thereby harming farmers' foreign-market prospects (165, 168). Though the tariffs were initially put in place to "insure the farmer a home market"—and the higher taxes were as much a result of new as old taxes,

including those on schools and roads—the result was no better if not worse: an economically stressed demographic (157, 168). Industry’s ability to gain “adequate representation in the major political parties” is one reason why such tariffs were put in place and industrialists were able to “evade assuming a fair share of the tax load” (169). The National Grange of the Order of Patrons of Husbandry increased its political activities in the 1870’s and 1880’s in an attempt to organize and take action against some of these devastations—advocating public owning of railroads and political representation for agrarians for example (171, 172). Though it managed some victories and restored a lost sense of power—in the case of the Lubin Plan, this meant the creation of an export bounty for “agricultural staples—the potency of industry grew as the power of agricultural waned (*Social Economist*, qtd. in 173). In the end, the agricultural communities felt a sense of doom as outside forces influenced their economic fate. Whether or not they came to understand “the nature of those forces” or even their eventual place in the American economy during this transitional period “is a different matter” (174).

VII. The Colour of Oil

The sense of having one's land and culture as a "conquest," as Owsley might put it, for an industrialized other is not consigned to our nation's past. Arlie Russell Hochschild's interest in the poverty-stricken segments of Louisiana inspired her to spend five years studying impoverished individuals and their political views. *Strangers in Their Own Land* presents her findings as she attempts to understand why they support policies and candidates that go against their interests, particularly in the case of environmental issues. It should be noted that her study took place in the first half of the 2010's, seeing publication just prior to the election of Donald Trump. The subjects of her study are American conservatives, many of whom ally themselves with the Tea Party. Industrial pollution negatively impacted most of their lives. In seeming contradiction to the resulting need for improved business regulations, increased cleanup programs, and compensation/assistance for those affected, these subjects sought to reduce federal regulations on and oversight of industry, cut funding to the Environmental Protection Agency—along with other tax-funded environmental organizations—and decrease governmental aide to lower-income homes. The pattern in Hochschild's area of Louisiana recurs in other conservative states, as well as throughout Southern history. Red states have higher instances of poverty and disease and lower school enrollment. According to *Measure of America* and *Kids Count Data Book*, Louisiana had the second-lowest national ranking for health and "child well-being," and the third lowest for eighth-grade reading and mathematics (Hochschild 9). Red states like Louisiana were found to have higher pollution exposure as well. However, most residents expressed disdain for federal assistance and even felt that "Americans 'worry too much' about the environment" (79). With regard to history, Hochschild points out the Southern tradition of localized control and resistance to federal taxation, though she acknowledges that the

demographics that make up the “far right”—“white, middle to low income, older, married, Christian”—are nationwide (15).

A key to understanding Hochschild’s demographic is knowing that much of it views environmental regulations as severe repercussions. Following the discovery that Pittsburgh Plate Glass’s toxic chemicals had contaminated several bodies of water, the Louisiana Department of Health and Human Services acted to caution people about the affected waters, yet not just the multinational company but also the local people resisted its efforts. As a gesture of their rejection, residents “promptly riddled [warning signs] with bullets or stole [them]” (33). The reason for this resistance is clear: jobs. Hochschild declares that a “seafood advisory” cost over 25,000 jobs in the fishing industry shortly after the discovery of chemical waste (32). The willingness of locals to endanger themselves for the sake of jobs is a recurring theme, specifically when oil is the subject.

Many perceive regulation as a threat to Southern identity and power as well. Governor Bobby Jindal sees increased regulations relating to climate change as a “trojan horse”-style power grab by liberal—or Northern, if seen through Owsley’s lens—members of the government (qtd. in Hochschild 48). Lee Sherman, one of Hochschild’s subjects, shares the concerns expressed by the authors of *I’ll Take My Stand*: a worry that the region had lost some of its “honor” (35). This demoralization did not come about all at once; rather, Hochschild claims the new environmental regulations registered as part of a long-established Northern conquest. The North’s installment of its own choice for governors following the Civil War; the incursion of carpetbaggers, “agents of the dominating North”; the arrival of the Freedom Riders; and the imposition of Obamacare all appeared to be power grabs in the eyes of those resisting federal dominance (209). Regardless of one’s feelings toward environmental or other regulations, they

have proven effective, especially economically. Hochschild cites a 1992 study by Massachusetts Institute of Technology that found a positive correlation between stricter regulations and job availability, as well as a 2016 survey of “the world’s major economies,” which found that well-regulated nations saw “improved ... competitiveness in the international market” (78).

Though one would imagine opinions to shift in times of environmental disaster, those of Hochschild’s subjects remain steadfast even when industrial accidents happen. One disaster involved an explosion at the same plant that was dumping chemicals into marshes, described as “massive, dark clouds churning skyward ... carrying hydrochloric acid, ethylene dichloride, and vinyl chloride” toward water sources and populated areas (70). General Russel Honoré, leader of the Joint Task Force during the Hurricane Katrina rescue/clean-up effort, explains to Hochschild that even though most regulations help prevent such disasters, Louisiana's “self-regulation” passes responsibility from the EPA to the state Department of Environmental Quality and then onto the oil companies themselves (71). Lack of enforcement traps residents between an ineffective government and an apathetic industry.

The best illustration of this is in the Texas Brine sinkhole of 2012. The earth shook and split, trees and brush sank, natural gases were released, and oil spewed into bayou waters, making its way toward a nearby aquifer. What many residents assumed was an earthquake was a sinkhole that would grow to the size of thirty-seven acres over the course of three years (100). Its cause cannot be easily pinned on one party, as the Texas Brine drilling company had struck the side of an enormous salt dome “sheathed by a layer of oil and natural gas” while performing a government-approved operation (101). Like the residents of the Swift River Valley, the people of the affected area were forced to evacuate. Those who stayed behind witnessed the devastation to their homes. Mike Schaff, one of Hochschild’s frequent interviewees, saw the concrete in his

floors crack on the day of the event. He described his community of small families as kept in touch by means of Mardi Gras celebrations, parades, dances, and fishing, but Texas Brine transformed the family homes and fishing holes into a “methane bath” (106). The resulting distrust of government agencies that allowed such an action to gain clearance is understandable, especially when looking through a 2003 EPA report on how well states upheld federal policies. According to the report, Louisiana ranked lowest in the region—made up of Louisiana, Arkansas, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas—as the state was consistently behind in inspections, rarely punished companies that were not in compliance, had incomplete and often inaccurate records, and even “allowed sixteen facilities to discharge material into Louisiana waters without permits” (Hochschild 109). Such statistics breed suspicion of regulations, but the residents of the affected bayou region had reason to suspect the actions of larger industries as well.

A report funded by the California Waste Management Board, which an unknown source leaked, identified populations that would be less likely to resist the installation of facilities that “pose a potential health risk” by increasing “nitrogen oxides, carbon monoxide, sulfur dioxide,” and “hydrocarbons” among other toxins (80). The report showed that the people who fit the “least resistant personality profile” were “longtime residents of small towns in the South or Midwest,” “high school educated only,” “conservative,” and “advocates of the free market” (81). Though the report was published in 1984, similar patterns appeared decades before when oil companies first infiltrated in the region:

When the big oil companies first came to Louisiana in the 1940’s, 40 percent of adults in Louisiana had no more than a fifth-grade education, and its citizens were the least likely in the nation to move out of state. From the seventies on, most

people had become Republican advocates of the free market and minimal government. (81)

Given this history, as well as its current residents still fitting the “least resistant personality profile” for the most part, Hochschild’s region of study was the perfect setting for minimally-regulated industry to take root.

Talk of oil is prevalent throughout Hochschild’s interviews. From its negative impact on tourism, fishing, and the environment—as in the case of the Deepwater Horizon disaster of 2010—to its potential for regional job creation—“more prosperity” eventually leading to “less need for government aid”—oil was among the key issues raised (76, 64, 73). Its connection to Southern history is of particular interest to the current study. The impact of modern oil companies parallels the impact of plantations that dominated the South in the nineteenth century: economic powerhouses of the region whose rise to power marginalized working-class whites. In the nineteenth century, “poor white farmers” had to struggle with the lower-quality land leftover from the plantation farmers (209). The sugarcane and cotton crops required deforestation, which resulted in even fewer job opportunities for those outside the system. The use of slaves meant that lower-class white workers were often seen as “surplus labor” (209). In each case, one highly successful sector dominated the local economy, and those outside of this trade found themselves severely marginalized. Hochschild, not the only person to consider “Oil ... the new cotton,” nonetheless admits that the two altered the South in distinctly different ways as well, especially as oil promises paying jobs unlike the plantation system, and supposedly “brought pride,” not “shame,” “to the South” (210-211).

Though many of Hochschild’s subjects saw opportunity in oil, others suffered greatly because of it. A short dialogue with a historical reenactor revealed that his home had been

financially destroyed by the presence of an oil tank built next to his property. Neither he, nor any other resident, had any say as to where the tank would be placed. Once it was there, the value of his house plummeted. In his frustration he told Hochschild, “Confederates tried to get out from under the control of the federal government—to secede. But you can’t secede from oil” (211). Accounts of land and job loss pervade Hochschild’s interviews. In one passage, the author provides statistics for jobs lost due to governor Bobby Jindal’s \$1.6 billion given to “industry as ‘incentives’ to invest in Louisiana”; the resulting state-budget cuts cost 30,000 public-sector workers their jobs (Jindal qtd. in 47). Some of Hochschild’s subjects supported Jindal “on the grounds of faith and family values” (47). With the Republican primary election looming toward the end of the study, many talked of supporting Ted Cruz and Donald Trump, two climate-change deniers who supported defunding of the EPA.

Hochschild writes a short tale of her own, like Lovecraft creating tales drawn from environmental fears, a tale that works more of a direct analogy to real life than “The Colour Out of Space.” Her “deep story” begins with people in line from myriad backgrounds who represent the American people (135). The line goes over a hill in the distance, on the other side of which is the American Dream. The focus of the story is on the people’s frustration with being unable to reach the other side. As time passes, a working-class white character notices other people cutting in line ahead of him, many of whom are women, immigrants, racial minorities, and even the oil-drenched state bird. Women’s rights initiatives, Affirmative Action, acceptance of Syrian refugees, and even the state’s increased protection of its near-endangered symbol all enable them to get ahead of the story’s observer. Eventually the main character realizes that the person allowing this line cutting to take place is Barack Obama. Hochschild describes the observer/implied reader as feeling “betrayed. The president is *their* president, not *your* president”

(140). The story concludes with its central character, despite all of his hard work and belief in the American Dream, unable to reach his goal and even being mischaracterized as a racist for not celebrating the movement of those ahead in line. Hochschild came to discover that many of her subjects saw themselves as the main character in this story, with one even claiming to “live” the tale (145).

Toward the end of Hochschild’s work, she checks on the subjects of her five-year study. Many attempted legal action to either prevent continued pollution and industrial development, and many others hoped for some compensation for their illnesses deriving from toxic waste and emissions. As with the Swift River Valley Protective Association, their appeals to higher authority ended in frustration. The courts ultimately dismissed the lawsuits over the Texas Brine accident, and many residents were never given compensation for their ill health or lost property (238). Following the Pittsburgh Plate Glass toxic drainage incident, many members of the community filed a class-action lawsuit. After eighteen years of waiting for a verdict, that case was also dropped due to “lack of evidence” (238). Mike Schaff, a former “estimator” for oil rigs and tanks, and current Tea Party supporter, gives the final interview, advocating for the environmental following the destruction of his property and community at the hands of Texas Brine (4-5). Despite having moved from the ruins of his old home to a new one near the Atchafalaya Basin, he still endures the threat of contamination, with fracking waste making its way into the waters near his new home. Schaff leaves Hochschild with the hope of seeing her, if not in their own lifetime, then in a heaven imagined to have “beautiful trees” (242). Like the Swift River Valley residents, Schaff seemed to hold “no hope except in the final rest from toil” (24).

Conclusion

H.P. Lovecraft's "The Colour Out of Space" tells the story of a fictional community's erasure by something incomprehensible. Though the Gardners, Ammi Pierce, and the land "West of Arkham" are just products of the author's imagination, their fears and eventual destruction reflect very real losses for the inhabitants of the Swift River Valley. Those affected by the Quabbin Reservoir directly inspired Lovecraft's work, and their plight is still experienced by people well beyond the small communities of Dana, Enfield, Greenwich, and Prescott. Even now, sectors of our nation, like those explored by Hochschild, are encountering similar anxieties in the name of progress. Threats to culture and identity spread and adapt, much like how the eponymous Colour continues to grow subtly and without any sign of stopping.

At the end of his lecture "Exodus from Enfield," former Swift River Valley resident Robert Wilder was asked what he missed most about his hometown. After a thoughtful pause, he responded with,

There's not one thing. There's so many things. It led to my core, my family's core. We lived there. That was our survival. And to have it taken away so abruptly and having no choice or no say in it, that was like tearing out a piece of your heart. ... Like I say, it took sixty-odd years to decide that it was really a pretty good thing they did, something really necessary.

Similarly, "The Colour Out of Space" ends with its narrator voicing his lingering concern over Ammi Pierce, the one witness to the full extent of the Colour's destructive power. Such an ending is uncharacteristic of an author who was known for callously handing out gruesome fates to his characters. Contemporary stories of low-income delta regions caught between environmental disaster and governmental abandonment, supernatural tales of early farmers

struggling against waves of urban expansion, and historical accounts of valley residents facing erasure in the wake of an incoming reservoir all leave us with our own Ammi Pierces.

These/such are the ones who face annihilation, yet despite whatever devastation that they may witness or personally be subjected to, they manage to tell their stories.

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