

# **The Dunwich Horror Study Guide**

## **The Dunwich Horror by H. P. Lovecraft**

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# Plot Summary

This guide was created using the following version of this text: Lovecraft H.P. The Dunwich Horror. Great Tales of Horror. New York: Fall River Press, 2012. Print (Hardcover Edition, 2012).

"The Dunwich Horror" is a 1928 short story by cult-favorite horror author H.P. Lovecraft. The story is also part of a literary universe known as the "Cthulhu Mythos." While the work was originally published in the magazine, "Weird Tales," it has since been printed in many other forms.

"The Dunwich Horror" is the story of the Whateleys and its relation to the Dunwich Horror, which happened in Dunwich, Massachusetts in 1928. The narrator is an unnamed third person narrator. The story begins with the explanation that the Dunwich Horror was covered up by the town. The narrative then shifts to a chronological recollection.

The recollection starts with the birth of Wilbur Whateley, the son of a strange albino woman, Lavinia, and an unknown father. He lived with his mother and his grandfather, Old Whateley, also known as the Wizard Whateley. The boy grew incredibly fast in terms of mental capabilities, maturity, and height. Eventually, the boy's grandfather began teaching him about the occult and bought him many occult related books. The two also began renovating their property adding rooms and removing walls as if they were hiding something.

After Lavinia disappeared and Old Whatley died, the boy began to search for the grimoire known as the Necronomicon for an unknown purpose. He eventually went to Miskatonic University and met the librarian, Dr. Armitage. He asked Armitage if he could borrow the untranslated copy of the work but Armitage refused. Armitage then looked at the book and learned that Wilbur was trying to do something nefarious.

Not long after, Wilbur attempted to break into the Miskatonic University library in order to steal their copy of the Necronomicon. Wilbur was killed by a guard dog. His corpse revealed his true form, witnessed by Armitage and his colleagues Rice and Morgan. It was covered in tentacles and was rather unhuman. His body then disintegrated before their eyes.

Not long after, the creature known as the Dunwich Horror escaped from the Whatley home and began nightly rampages throughout the town. The professors eventually learned of this and Armitage decided that he needed to act. Through his research, Armitage discovered that a spell could vanquish the Horror.

The Horror made a path towards Sentinel Hill. A few days afterwards, the professors arrived and confronted the beast. They sprayed a powder on the being, revealing it to be rather similar to a mixture of Wilbur's true horrifying form and the Whately family's human members. Armitage and the professors chanted a spell at the beast until a

lightning strike caused the monster to disappear. The narrator then describes that the entire ordeal was covered up.



# I

## Summary

The chapter starts with a description of Dunwich, a small Massachusetts town near hills and forests. The narrator explains that centuries ago, the area was rife with Satan worship and the occult. In 1928, something known as the Dunwich Horror took place, which the townsfolk covered up and do not speak about. Midway through the chapter, the reader is told of a preacher known as Reverend Abijah Hoadley who gave a sermon in 1747 about the sounds that occur when evil is afoot. The chapter ends with the narrator stating that Dunwich is incredibly old, with the oldest landmark being stone rings at the top of the hills of Dunwich.

## Analysis

This chapter has two main purposes. The first is to set the scene. Lovecraft chose the state of Massachusetts because it was the area he was familiar with and in the United States, where most of his readers lived. This creates a sense of closeness to the area and the idea that the not-yet-mentioned Dunwich Horror could happen close to the reader.

The second purpose the this chapter is foreshadowing. The narrator mentions that the area has a history with the occult, and that evil has visited the area before. As this happened in the eighteenth century, these claims foreshadow the fact that it will happen again in the twentieth century. The author also strategically does not mention what the Dunwich Horror of 1928 actually is, but alludes that it has something to do with the aforementioned evil.

## Discussion Question 1

What purpose does Hoadley's sermon serve in the context of the entire story?

## Discussion Question 2

What are some reasons that the townsfolk would cover-up the Dunwich Horror?

## Discussion Question 3

Why does the narrator explain that Dunwich is incredibly old?



## Vocabulary

orgiastic, stigmata, degeneracy



## II

### Summary

In 1913, a strange albino woman named Lavinia Whateley gave birth to a son on the eve of Candlemass. It was not apparent who the child's father was, but incest-related rumors circulated. As the child was born, dogs began to frantically bark. The son, named Wilbur, was goatish in appearance. His grandfather, Old Whateley, told the townsfolk that one day Wilbur would stand on the hill and shout his father's name.

Old Whateley was known to the townsfolk as the Wizard Whateley due to his interest in the occult. Years ago, Whateley got on the hill and shouted the name of Yog-Sothoth, making the hills shake. After his grandson's birth, he began buying cattle, but his cattle size never grew. Often times, people would find the discarded corpses of the cattle, bloodless and covered in sores (similar to ones that Old Whateley had).

The chapter ends with an explanation that Wilbur grew incredibly quickly and was speaking by the age of 11 months.

### Analysis

This chapter is full of characterization regarding the Whateley family. Overall, the odd appearances of the family are written in a way to make them seem unnatural. Also, Wilbur's appearance mirrors the goat-like appearance of demons in other literature (think the Devil). This is intentional as it implies that Wilbur is evil. This is only exemplified by Wilbur's odd rate of growth. Wilbur's birth symbolizes the entrance of evil into the world, as this led to the actual Dunwich Horror. This chapter is also the introduction of the fact that dogs seemed to hate Wilbur. Here, dogs are used as a motif to explain that Wilbur is not natural, as in fiction, dogs are generally able to sense danger.

Like last chapter, this chapter also utilizes foreshadowing and the repetition of shouting on the top of the hill. The narrator explains that years ago, Old Whateley yelled the name of Yog-Sothoth on the top of the hill, causing the hills to shake. After Wilbur's birth, Old Whateley explains that Wilbur will shout the name of his father on the hill. This is purposeful, as it leads the reader to the belief that Yog-Sothoth is, in fact, Wilbur's father.

Whippoorwills are also briefly mentioned in the chapter. According to legend, whippoorwills steal the souls of humans. Whippoorwills return throughout the book in order to signify the disruption of the natural order.

Finally, it is important to note that rumbling from the hills starts here and is mentioned throughout the story. This rumbling motif symbolizes supernatural occurrences, as it gets worse throughout the story when supernatural events happen.



## **Discussion Question 1**

Is there meaning behind the fact that Wilbur was born on Candlemass Eve, a Judaeo-Christian holiday?

## **Discussion Question 2**

What kind of character does Yog-Sothoth seem to be?

## **Discussion Question 3**

Why do the townsfolk immediately dislike Wilbur?

## **Vocabulary**

daemonic, psychopomp, whipporwill





### III

## Summary

After Wilbur was born, Old Whateley began renovating ruined parts of his home, presumably for Wilbur. One room in particular was odd, as it was filled with old books. In 1915, rumbling noises began near the hills and thumping noises erupted from the second floor of the Whatley home (according to a fish peddler). Around this time, an odd smelling tool house was also renovated on the Whateley's property.

Wilbur also began shooting the dogs that tried to attack him. In 1917, the draft board found it unusual that there were no draft-able men in Dunwich. The government and reporters launched an investigation. The townsfolk eventually became frustrated with the reporters as they were reporting that Old Whatley paid for cattle using ancient gold coins.

## Analysis

In this chapter, it becomes very clear that Old Whateley is training Wilbur in the occult during this period, as the old books seem to symbolize lost and evil knowledge. This was previously foreshadowed, as the grandfather is known as a wizard. The reader can assume that the books in the Whateley house are books on the occult. Odd sounds also began to occur during this period. This is no coincidence, as the sounds are purposefully described as starting when Wilbur began being "educated."

While the townspeople do become annoyed that the reports focus on Old Whateley's gold coins, this is not an insignificant detail, as the coins significantly out date Old Whateley. Finally, the narrator briefly mentions that the cows may be being sacrificed, but the reader does not explain to whom the sacrifices are for. However, due to previously mentioned details, it is implied that it is Yog-Sothoth.

## Discussion Question 1

What does animal sacrifice generally imply?

## Discussion Question 2

Why does the author not explain where Old Whateley got the ancient coins?

## Discussion Question 3

Does the fact that Wilbur shot dogs change his character?

## Vocabulary

heathen, taciturn, promiscuously

## IV

### Summary

The chapter opens with an explanation that twice a year, the Whateleys would light fires on the top of Sentinel Hill, which would increase the noises coming from the hills. The renovations also continued during this time, as Old Whateley and Wilbur, now 10, removed all of the partitions in the ground floor of the house.

In 1924, Old Whateley noticed that an increasing number of whippoorwills visited his windows at night. This made him believe that he was about to die. He did, but on his deathbed, he explained that Wilbur should keep feeding "it" and to open the gates of Yog-Sothoth. He also told Wilbur to search for something on page 751 of the complete edition of an unnamed book.

In 1926, Lavinia became afraid of Wilbur and later disappeared.

### Analysis

This chapter is essential the catalyst for the rest of the story. Old Whatley tells Wilbur to search for something on a particular page of an unknown book. It seems that he needs this in order to open the gates to Yog-Sothoth. This works as a catalyst as through much of the rest of the story, it is explained that Wilbur searches for the book, foreshadowed as the Necronomicon.

The whippoorwill and hills sounds also reappear in this chapter. According to the narrator, the whippoorwills become very loud, then fall silent when Old Whateley dies. It was previously mentioned that superstition states that whippoorwills steal the souls of people, so it is quite possible that they do steal the soul of Old Whateley.

Lavinia also disappears under unknown circumstances in this chapter. It is not stated, but it is implied that either Wilbur kills and sacrifices her, or simply kills her, further expanding on Wilbur's evil nature.

### Discussion Question 1

Are there other explanations regarding the behavior of the whippoorwills in this Chapter IV?

### Discussion Question 2

What does Lovecraft accomplish by not explaining what book Old Whateley alludes to?



## Discussion Question 3

Why do the townsfolk think that Wilbur killed Lavinia?

## Vocabulary

contempt, uncanny, orgies



# V

## Summary

Wilbur began having correspondences with different university libraries in order to find the untranslated Latin version of the Mad Arab's book, the Necronomicon. He eventually found a copy held by the library of Miskatonic University. The libraries, Dr. Armitage looked at one of the pages which mentioned the gate of Yog-Sothoth and the existence of Cthulhu.. Wilbur asked Armitage if he could borrow the Latin copy, Armitage refused. Wilbur left the campus while guard dogs barked at him. After Wilbur's departure, Armitage locked away the copy of the Necronomicon and began research on both the book and Wilbur Whateley himself.

## Analysis

This chapter is the first appearance of the Necronomicon, and the first instance of it symbolizing the concept of forbidden knowledge. When Armitage looks at the page that Wilbur has left open, Armitage is able to assume the work's danger without context. Not only is he able to figure out that the book is dangerous, but based on his reading choices and the reaction of the guard dogs, that Wilbur is dangerous as well. Armitage realizes that the knowledge within the Necronomicon is forbidden in nature, meaning that Wilbur intends to do something nefarious with it. This leads Armitage to decide to research the subject.

## Discussion Question 1

What does the name of the Necronomicon imply?

## Discussion Question 2

What is the purpose of making a librarian the hero of the story?

## Discussion Question 3

Why does Wilbur need the untranslated version of the Necronomicon?

## Vocabulary

rustic, avidly, begotten



# VI

## Summary

In 1928, Armitage was awoken by the library guard dog followed by an inhuman scream. Armitage rushed to the library and noticed that the whippoorwills were making much noise. On the ground of the library laid the dying, stinking, body of Wilbur Whatley (almost nine feet tall), except his true form was revealed. Wilbur had tentacles, a reticulated hide, and fur. Rice and Morgan entered and saw the body as well. Before dying, Whatley murmured something about Yog-Sothoth. The corpse then disintegrated and the whippoorwills fell silent.

## Analysis

The chapter reveals two things. The first is that Wilbur finds the Necronomicon so important that he is willing to risk his life in order to obtain it. The second is that Wilbur is less human than many characters thought. He is not just a deformed and quickly aging human, but he actually had some sort of supernatural parentage. Finally, this chapter acts as a catalyst for Armitage to seriously pursue the meaning of Whatley's actions.

## Discussion Question 1

What could be the reason that Wilbur's body disintegrated?

## Discussion Question 2

Why do the whippoorwills begin making noise when the dog is barking?

## Discussion Question 3

Why does Wilbur not kill the dog in Chapter VI?

## Vocabulary

piebald, squamous, reticulated



## VII

### Summary

After Wilbur's death, his books and diaries, written in a strange language, were sent to Miskatonic University for analysis. On September 9th, 1928, the Whatley home was destroyed and an invisible creature escaped. That night, the beast wandered throughout the town destroying the surroundings, leaving strange prints and a stench in its wake. When day broke, the destruction stopped, but commenced again during the night. On the second night, the Dunwich Horror destroyed the Frye house, killing everything inside. Amidst the destruction, the townsfolk were able to notice that the creature's prints ended at the ancient stones on the hill where the Whatleys previously lit fires.

### Analysis

The main motif used in this chapter has to do with the invisible creature. Due to the fact that the creature is able to leave some sort of prints and is able to destroy property, the being must be material in some way. It is possible that Lovecraft does this intentionally, as perhaps the Dunwich Horror is indescribably. Basically, it is possible that humans cannot understand or comprehend the appearance of the being. Lovecraft uses this motif in many of his works as well as using it later, once the creature is revealed.

It is also no coincidence that the creature's prints end at the top of the hill. This implies that the creature and the Whatley's fires are somehow related. There is only one possible explanation: both are related to Yog-Sothoth.

### Discussion Question 1

How would you explain the townspeople's reactions to the Dunwich Horror?

### Discussion Question 2

What does Lovecraft accomplish by not being specific about the types of prints that the creature leaves?

### Discussion Question 3

Is there any clear relationship between Wilbur and the Horror at this point in the story (Chapter VII)?

## Vocabulary

confounded, decadence, soundness





## VIII

### Summary

Miskatonic University was unable to decipher Wilbur's diary. However, Armitage decided to try anyway. Thanks to some other occult related works, Armitage was able to determine that the diary was written in a language passed down by occult experimenters. When Armitage was able to translate a page, he realized that Wilbur was writing about the aftermath of something, as he mentioned the absence of humans. Armitage continued translating, but it had a negative effect on his mental health. Later, Armitage, seemingly almost insane, called Morgan and Rice and stated that they needed to stop whatever it was that Wilbur wrote about. Armitage then experimented with some chemicals and decided to plan a trip to Dunwich in a week, but the plans changed when they saw that the destruction in Dunwich was in the newspaper.

### Analysis

This chapter continues with the theme of forbidden knowledge. While Armitage attempts to translate Wilbur's journals, his mental state deteriorates over time. Essentially, he is learning things that no human should know, as it does not exist within the same dimension as humans.

This chapter also reveals some information about Old Whately. When Armitage discovers that the diary uses a type of language that has been passed down from occult experimenters, it becomes clear that Old Whatley is not the first person to have this information. In fact, this coupled with the fact that it is mentioned in the first chapter that supernatural occurrences have happened in Dunwich in the past, draws a connection between the two. It seems that occult practitioners have been practicing in Dunwich for a very long time.

### Discussion Question 1

Could there be any other reason why Armitage's mental status declines?

### Discussion Question 2

What does the diary translation tell us about Wilbur?

### Discussion Question 3

it is briefly mentioned that people think the citizens of Dunwich reported a monster due to bootleg whisky. Why would they believe this?

## Vocabulary

facetious. perusal, vigintillions



# IX

## Summary

Armitage, Rice, and Morgan rushed over to Dunwich (where the police were waiting) and arrived in the afternoon. They noticed a trail of destruction and prints leading all the way to Sentinel Hill. Armitage rehearsed a spell and Morgan uncased a firearm. At night, the hills rumbled and the whippoorwills called.

That morning, the Horror began to move, this was unusual as it generally only moved at night. Apparently the creature had set a course to Sentinel hill, and in the process, destroyed Seth Bishop's home. Armitage told the other professors that they had to follow the being. Armitage put a powder he had developed into a long-range sprayer in order to reveal the invisible creature for a moment. The townspeople questioned Armitage about the effectiveness of spells, but Armitage, Morgan, and Rice moved towards the Horror anyway.

## Analysis

Essentially, this chapter sets up the climax of the story. Lovecraft makes it very clear that Armitage is well armed with his spells and powder, but it is unknown to the reader whether the men are a match for the Dunwich Horror.

It is rather unlike the citizens of Dunwich to be skeptical of magic and the occult, as they are towards Armitage's proposed method to stop the Horror. The townsfolk are more than happy to believe the rumors about the Whateley's (regardless of the fact that they were true). It is possible that the people of Dunwich call into question the effectiveness of Armitage's methods because their lives are in direct danger; when they speculated about the Whateley's, there was no sign that their lives were in danger. It seems that fear makes the citizens less likely to perform such speculation.

## Discussion Question 1

Is there any significance in the way that Bishop's home is destroyed?

## Discussion Question 2

Why does the Horror decide to begin moving during the day?



## Discussion Question 3

Why does Morgan bring a gun when they cannot see the Horror, and the powder plan is not yet set?

## Vocabulary

outbuilding, blasphemy, lumbered

# X

## Summary

The men approached the creature and adjusted the sprayer. Several townsfolk sat back with telescopes and observed the scene. When Aritage sprayed the creature it revealed a building-sized creature with many eyes, jelly-like appendages, and tentacles. Some observing citizens collapsed due to shock and some simply panicked. The men began chanting the spell near the bench-like stone, which is now described as an altar.

The Horror began to scream saying words like "father," "help," and "Yog-Sothoth." A wretched stench invaded the air and much of the foliage and whippoorwills died. The rumblings in the hills also increased in volume. A lightning strike then hit the Horror and it disappeared. After the creature was gone, Curtis, a townsman who fainted, remembered that the creature had white skin and had no chin, just like the Whatleys. The story ends with Armitage explaining that the Dunwich Horror was Wilbur's brother.

## Analysis

The reveal that the Dunwich Horror is the brother of Wilbur Whatley is very heavily foreshadowed throughout the entire story. At the beginning of the work, the narrator states that Old Whateley explains that a child of Lavinia will stand on the hill and shout his father's name. Wilbur acts as a red herring (which ends with his death) in this case, as it is not Wilbur that calls his father's name, but his twin brother, The Dunwich Horror. The fact that the Dunwich Horror is eventually visible becomes clear that it symbolizes the fact that evil can be represented in a material form.

Lovecraft seems to intentionally leave out details regarding what would have happened if the professors did not stop the Dunwich Horror. It is implied that the Dunwich Horror would have heralded the coming of its father Yog-Sothoth (who's existence symbolizes that evil exists outside of our realm of comprehension), but it is unclear how the Horror would have known exactly how to do that. Also, when the townsman exclaims that the Dunwich Horror looks just like the Whatleys, he is more correct than he realizes. Like Wilbur's corpse, the creature has tentacles and inhuman features. Overall, the entire story is basically a way to foreshadow this confrontation.

## Discussion Question 1

With this new information: Why does the town cover up the Dunwich Horror?



## Discussion Question 2

How does this imply that someone stopped the coming of Yog-Sothoth at some point prior to the story?

## Discussion Question 3

Why is the description of the Dunwich Horror so sparse?

## Vocabulary

abyss, reaffirmed, quivering



# Characters

## Wilbur Whateley

Wilbur Whateley, son of Lavinia Whatley, and the Old One Yog-Sothoth, is the main focus of the short story. Wilbur ages incredibly quickly, reaching adulthood in a little over ten years. He also is described as goat-like. His grandfather, Old Whateley, helps Wilbur understand occult subjects and the nature of his true parentage; together, they hide the Dunwich Horror in their barn.

After his grandfather's death, Wilbur wants to expand his knowledge regarding the occult. He becomes obsessed with a rare grimoire known as the Necronomicon. After a librarian will not let Wilbur borrow a copy, he decides to trespass. Due to this, Wilbur is attacked and killed by a guard dog. His body is discovered to have tentacles and many un-human characteristics. His body then evaporates.

## Old Whateley

Old Whateley, also known as the Wizard Whateley, was Wilbur's grandfather. Whateley is shunned by the town due to his obsession with the occult. He teaches Wilbur on the subject and informs him about the Necronomicon. Before dying, he foretells that Wilbur will one day stand on the hills of Dunwich as call is father's name.

Whatley later dies due to natural causes.

## Lavinia Whateley

Lavinia Whatley, Wilbur's mother, is a reclusive albino women who does not leave the Whatley home. Not much is told of Lavinia other than that she becomes mysteriously pregnant. Some townspeople think it is an incestuous pregnancy, but she is actually impregnated by Yog-Sothoth.

Lavinia mysteriously disappears late into the story. it is heavily implied that Wilbur either kills her or sacrifices her to Yog-Sothoth.

## The Dunwich Horror

The Dunwich Horror is the offspring of Yog-Sothoth and the brother of Wilbur Whateley. Wilbur and his grandfather keep the Horror hidden in their house. It is unknown whether Lavinia also gave birth to the Horror. This is unlikely, as the Horror resembles its father much closer than Wilbur.



After Wilbur's death, the being escapes and runs rampant in Dunwich. After making the being visible thanks to a powder, Henry Armitage and his companions vanquish the Dunwich Horror being using a spell.

## Henry Armitage

Henry Armitage is the protagonist of the story. Armitage is the head librarian of Miskatonic University and is one of the few who see Wilbur's body. Armitage then collects all of Wilbur's texts and writings and begins attempting to decode them. After almost going insane due to the content, Armitage discovers that Wilbur was involved with the being Yog-Sothoth.

Armitage decides that the Dunwich horror, the offspring of Yog-Sothoth, must be stopped and along with Morgan and Rice, reveals and vanquishes the Horror using a spell discovered in Wilbur's texts.

## Francis Morgan

Morgan, a professor at Miskatonic University, is one of the men who helps Armitage vanquish The Dunwich Horror. He appears in other Cthulhu mythos works not written by Lovecraft.

## Warren Rice

Rice is a professor at Miskatonic University and one of the men who helps Armitage vanquish The Dunwich Horror. Little detail is given regarding his character.

## The Mad Arab

The Mad Arab is only briefly mentioned in the story. He is known as the author of the grimoire, the Necronomicon.

## Cthulhu

Cthulhu is only briefly mentioned in the story. Cthulhu, the best known member of the Old Ones, is a squid-like being who lives under the sea. More information can be found about the being in another of Lovecraft's stories, "The Call of Cthulhu."

## Dunwich

Dunwich itself can also be considered a character in the story. Dunwich seems to react to the presence of the Horror through its whippoorwills and the sounds beneath its hills. It is possible that the area is warning its citizens or is simply reacting to the power being.





# Symbols and Symbolism

## Whippoorwills

The author uses whippoorwills to symbolize nature's reaction to supernatural occurrences such as the existence of The Dunwich Horror and Wilbur Whatley. Beginning with Wilbur's (and presumably the Horror's) birth, the whippoorwills become noisy. This noise becomes louder and more intense as Wilbur and the Horror grow. Once the two are dead, the whippoorwills cease their noises, implying a return to the natural order.

## The Sounds in the Hills

The author uses the sounds in the hills in a very similar way as he uses the whippoorwills, as a symbol of the response to supernatural occurrences. The rumblings in the hills begin with Wilbur and the Horror's birth and only become more noisy as they grow. These noises stop once the two die, as the unnaturalness has been wiped from the town.

## Wilbur's/The Horror's Birth

The author uses Wilbur and the Horror's birth to act as a symbol for the entrance of evil into the human world. Only after their births does the town lose its natural order. Presumably, the two's births act as a herald to the coming of their father, Yog-Sothoth, and the Old Ones.

## Wilbur's Appearance

Wilbur's goat-like appearance is used as a very clear symbol of Wilbur's nature. Within many examples of mythology, evil figures such as demons (think Satan) are shown to have goat-like characteristics. Lovecraft uses this intentionally in order to put across the point that Wilbur is, in fact, evil.

## Wilbur and Old Whateley's Books

Old and Wilbur Whateley's books represent lost and evil knowledge. Old Whateley uses these books to educate his grandson in the occult. Old Whateley is known as a wizard, as this knowledge is quite antiquated and is no longer understood by most people. However, the most important aspect of this symbol is that it encourages Wilbur to pursue purely forbidden knowledge.



## The Behavior of Dogs

The behavior of the dogs in the story is used to represent the evil of Wilbur's nature. In many works of fiction, dogs are known to be able to sense things that are unnatural or dangerous. This description is quite apt for Wilbur Whateley. The dogs attempt to attack Wilbur because they sense the danger associated with Wilbur and his intentions.

## Necronomicon

The Necronomicon, a recurring object and symbol in Lovecraft's works, is used as a symbol for knowledge that is forbidden to humans. This is shown by the fact that Wilbur eventually seems to go mad in his quest to acquire the knowledge within the grimoire. A similar occurrence happens with Armitage as well, as it is implied that he almost goes mad after studying the contents of the work in order to figure out a way to stop the Dunwich Horror. Even the author, the Mad Arab, seems to have also gone mad due to the nature of the work.

## Wilbur's Later Appearance

Wilbur's appearance after his death is a symbol for two related things: first, it symbolizes the confirmation that Wilbur's parentage is not natural, as it becomes clear that he is not fully human; second, his odd appearance is a symbol of his relation to the Dunwich Horror. Since they both have tentacles and animal-like qualities, his appearance is used to represent the fact that Wilbur and the Horror are related by blood.

## The Dunwich Horror

The author uses the creature known as the Dunwich Horror to symbolize the idea that evil can represent itself within the material world. It also symbolizes that evil can exist, but is not often visible. For example, when the Horror finally escapes the Whateley's home, it is invisible. However, once Armitage reveals the creature, the men realize that it is evil and has invaded our world.

## Yog-Sothoth

Yog-Sothoth represents the existence of evil outside of what we can perceive. Yog-Sothoth is a member of a group of beings known as the Old Ones, who live outside of our dimension but can sometimes manifest their existence on Earth. Creatures like this exist all throughout Lovecraft's works and always have evil motives, but are often not present.



# Settings

## Dunwich

Dunwich is where the vast majority of the story takes place. Dunwich, a fictional town located in Massachusetts, is a small rural town full of hills and farms. It is also the home of various occult legends. The town is also the home of the Whatleys, a group of strange believers in the occult. The town itself seemed to react to the existence of the horror, as sounds tended to come from the hills and, as time went on, its whippoorwills made more and more noise. These sounds become more frequent and loud as time goes on and ceases when the Horror is vanquished.

## Miskatonic University

Miskatonic University is the work place of Armitage, Rice, and Morgan. Wilbur also visits the university to view their copy of the Necronomicon. Wilbur is killed by a dog at the university's library when he breaks in in order to steal the copy.

## The Whateley House

The home of the Whatley's is not shown much in the story. Both Old Whateley and Wilbur create new structures on the land over time in order to compensate for the growing size of the Dunwich horror.

## Home of the Old Ones

The Home of the Old Ones is not shown in the story. It is thought to be some sort of other dimension in which powerful ancient beings, such as Cthulhu and Yog-Sothoth, reside.

## Hills of Dunwich

The hills of Dunwich is where the final confrontation between Armitage, Rice, and Morgan and the Dunwich Horror occurs. Throughout the story, the hills make odd and loud noises in increasing frequency and volume as the Horror grows.



# Themes and Motifs

## Forbidden Knowledge

Lovecraft uses the theme of forbidden knowledge in order to put forth the idea that knowledge exists that humans simply should not know or cannot comprehend. It must be noted that Lovecraft actually uses this theme very often within his work, so it is not just “The Dunwich Horror” that utilizes this theme. Essentially, in both “The Dunwich Horror” and Lovecraft’s other works there often exists knowledge that humans should simply not pursue. In the case of this this story, it is the knowledge of the Necronomicon.

Forbidden knowledge is used as a driving force for a large portion of the story’s plot. After Old Whateley teaches Wilbur about the occult, Wilbur seems to crave the further knowledge that his grandfather could not provide him. This causes him to pursue both the Necronomicon and the knowledge that it contains. While Wilbur is not able to actually obtain the knowledge that he wanted, this pursuit does provide somewhat of an element of clarity to the other characters of the story. Once Armitage and company see Wilbur’s true form, which is revealed when he is killed by the dog, the professors discover that the knowledge within the grimoire is something not to take lightly.

Armitage learns that the knowledge within the Necronomicon is a direct threat to the world. The knowledge of the grimoire was a direct threat to the world, as it has the ability to herald in beasts like the Dunwich Horror and its father, Yog-Sothoth. Wilbur, being half human, revealed this knowledge and only makes the situation worse.

Another detail that shows the forbidden nature of this knowledge is the knowledge of the Necromicon its effect on the mental status of those who encounter its knowledge. The Necronomicon seems to drive Wilbur mad (or madder than he already was) which most likely leads to his breaking and entering of the library and his eventual death. A different and clearer example of this is the book’s effect on the mind of Armitage. Armitage initially only glances at the page that Wilbur left open and it fills him with dread. Just a glance causes his to determine that the book contains things that no human should be privy to.

## Sacrifice to Evil

Lovecraft uses the theme sacrifice to evil in order to portray the evilness of many of the happenings within the story and somewhat prove to the reader that this type of behavior actually has an effect in the real world. One of the first examples of this lies in the foreshadowing located in the beginning of the story. In this section, the narrator implies that many rituals used to take place on the top of Sentinel Hill. While the narrator does not come out and simply mention that human sacrifices took place, he does imply that



this is so through the description regarding the disturbing nature of some of these rituals.

The theme picks back up when the narrator describes that Old Whateley would often buy cattle, but his cattle count would not change. It is also mentioned that some of the villagers would find cow corpses seemingly bloodless and full of sores. At first, this implies that the Whateleys are simply killing the cows in some sort of sacrificial ritual. However, later, we learn that family actually feeds the cows to the Dunwich Horror. In a way, this is still sacrifice. These sacrifices cause the Dunwich Horror to grow and later become strong enough to escape and ravage the village.

The author also implies that Whateley did sacrifice his mother and that Old Whateley was somewhat sacrificing himself to the Dunwich Horror. In regards to Wilbur's mother, she simply disappears without a trace. Since no one actually sees her leave the property, it is very possible that Wilbur feeds his mother to the Dunwich Horror. Old Whateley's strange sores can also lead the reader to believe that he was sacrificing himself to the Horror. This idea lies in the reference that Old Whateley and the cow corpses have similar sores. The reader learns that the sores on the cow corpses are because of their seemingly sacrificial contact with the Dunwich Horror. It is never clearly stated that Old Whateley's sores are due to the Horror feeding on him, but it is far too much of a coincidence.

## The Natural Order

Lovecraft uses the theme of natural order to state to the reader that a natural order within the universe exists, and that it can be disrupted. The disruption of the natural order is seen in three major ways throughout the story: the dog's behavior towards Wilbur, the rumbling in the hills, and the behavior of the whippoorwills.

It is described that almost from birth, Wilbur does not receive a positive reaction from canines. It even got to the point where Wilbur felt that he needed to carry a gun in order to protect himself from the disturbed animals. In fiction and reality, it is often stated that dogs can sense when something is not quite right. Arguments have been made that animals can sense malicious intent, natural disasters, and the feelings of humans. As Wilbur is basically somewhat inhuman, it is possible that the dogs are able to sense this. It is implied that the dogs are able to perceive that Wilbur is not quite within the natural order, causing them to respond badly.

The rumbling in the hills seems to correspond with events that are outside of the natural order. Just some of the instances of the rumbling intensifying is when Wilbur is born, when the Dunwich Horror escapes, and when the professors confront the Horror. The similarity in all of these instances is that none of these things fit within the natural order of the world. Wilbur, a partial monster, is born; this is not natural. The Dunwich Horror escapes and terrorizes the town; this is not natural. Finally, there is a mystic confrontation between the men and the Horror; this is clearly not natural. There is a direct correlation between these instances and the rumblings within the hills.



Finally, the whippoorwills seem to react differently when something that could be considered unnatural happens. Two of the biggest examples of this are when the Horror escapes and during the confrontation. During these two parts of the story, the narrator describes that the whippoorwills become louder than they have ever been before. This, like the rumbling, could be considered the world's reaction to something disrupting the natural order.

## Indescribable Horror

The author uses the motif of indescribable horror in order to portray the appearance of the Dunwich Horror as something that humans are not supposed to see nor comprehend. This a theme that is commonly used within Lovecraft's works. In fact, many critics also criticize Lovecraft for using it in the way that he does. These critics claim that it is possible that Lovecraft could effectively describe the appearance of his creatures but simply chooses not to. However, the benefit of the vague description allows the reader to fill in the blanks and imagine what Lovecraft's various creations look like.

The two main instances of Lovecraft using the motif in the story are when Armitage discovers Wilbur's corpse and when the appearance of the Dunwich Horror is revealed to some villagers and the professors. With the corpse of Wilbur, Lovecraft does describe some parts of the body, like the fur and the appendages, but still uses the term indescribable within the description. This is the first instance of man viewing a being that is not of their world, so it would make sense that the narrator would find great difficulty in describing it. This claim is supported due to the fact that Wilbur is the offspring of an Old One, a being from another dimension that most humans have no idea even exists.

The usage of an indescribably description is used again when Armitage reveals the appearance of the Dunwich Horror using the powder that he creates. Humans seem to have a much worse reaction to the appearance of the Dunwich Horror than the corpse of Wilbur Whateley. The narrator describes that at least one towns-person has some sort of attack and collapses onto the ground upon viewing the being. This indescribable horror is even more indescribable, as it is much closer to the appearance of Wilbur and the Dunwich Horror's father, Yog-Sothoth. It seems that humans are not meant to lay eyes on creatures such as Yog-Sothoth, leading to the reaction that some of the towns-folk seem to have.

## Triumph over Evil

Lovecraft uses the theme of triumph over evil to show that humans can actually overcome situations that seem impossible. Oddly enough, this is one of the very few Lovecraft stories where this theme is used, as in the vast majority of his stories, the characters either go mad, die, or disappear due to the Old Ones or things associated with them.



The fact that the Horror is initially invisible does not help the situation either. It seems quite impossible to defeat a being that is not even initially visible to humans. However, it gets worse, as the being Horror has great destructive power, easily killing an entire family of Dunwich residents. There is no way that a human could defeat the being under normal means. However, under certain conditions, the humans discover a way to combat the Dunwich Horror and succeed.

Once Armitage learns of Yog-Sothoth, the Dunwich Horror, and what it plans to herald in, the situation seems impossible to overcome. As far as Armitage and the narrator knows, humans have never triumphed against the Old Ones before. Fortunately for the human characters, Armitage becomes determined to solve the entire problem. Armitage, who is not a chemist or even a scientist, somehow manages to engineer a powder that is able to reveal the appearance of the Dunwich Horror. He almost goes mad doing so, due to the content of the Necronomicon and Wilbur's journals. In short, the protagonist creates a way to defeat the Horror even though doing so is quite out of his field of study.

Essentially, according to this theme, humans are able to beat the odds, even though their opposition may be unnatural and incredibly powerful.

# Styles

## Point of View

Like in many of Lovecraft's other stories, the author utilizes an unnamed narrator who narrates in the past tense. While the reader is never told who is narrating the story, it is clear that he has some sort of exclusive knowledge about the Dunwich incident, as he acknowledges that the Horror was covered up. The mysterious aspect of the nature of the story's narrator is that it is not clear how the narrator knows exactly dialogue was spoken during the incident. This implies that the narrator must have been present during the time of the Dunwich horror.

## Language and Meaning

While, for the most part, Lovecraft uses standard conversational English throughout the story, there are two types of instances where he uses different types of language. Toward the beginning of the story, the reader is told of a sermon given by Reverend Abijah Hoadley. In this sermon, older spellings of words and uncommon capitalizations are used. An example of this is "It must be allow'd, that these Blasphemies of an infernall Train of Daemons are Matters of too common Knowledge to be deny'd" (3). This is used in order to cement the antiquity of the sermon, as these types of language motifs fell out of style over time.

The second odd use of language is the language used by characters such as the Dunwich Horror and the narrator of the Necrominicon. An example of this is "'Eh-y-ya-ya-yahaah - e'yayayaaaa... ngh'aaaaa... ngh'aaa... h'yuh... h'yuh... HELP! HELP! ...ff - ff - FATHER! FATHER! YOG-SOTHOTH!...'" spoken by the Dunwich Horror (34). This is used in order to imply the otherworldliness associated with the Old Ones.

## Structure

The "Dunwich Horror" is split up into ten chronological parts. As the narrator seems to have vast knowledge of the happenings within the story, some chapters will focus on Dunwich, while others focus on Armitage. Some chapters are interrupted by quotes from other sources such as the Necrominicon and the sermon by Hoadley.





## Quotes

Two centuries ago, when talk of witch-blood, Satan-worship, and strange forest presences was not laughed at, it was the custom to give reasons for avoiding the locality. In our sensible age - since the Dunwich horror of 1928 was hushed up by those who had the town's and the world's welfare at heart - people shun it without knowing exactly why.

-- Narrator (I paragraph 4)

**Importance:** This quote sets up the tense of the story. Through this quote we learn that the events of the Horror took place in the past. This also implies that the reason that the reader may have not heard of the incident is because the town covered it up.

I myself did not more than a Fortnight ago catch a very plain Discourse of evil Powers in the Hill behind my House; wherein there were a Rattling and Rolling, Groaning, Screeching, and Hissing, such as no Things of this Earth could raise up, and which must needs have come from those Caves that only black Magick can discover, and only the Divell unlock

-- Reverend Abijah Hoadley (I paragraph 6)

**Importance:** This quote uses older language to solidify the idea that the Hoadley said this long ago. Basically, even in the past, people like Hoadley knew that Dunwich had some sort of evil presence.

Less worthy of notice was the fact that the mother was one of the decadent Whateleys, a somewhat deformed, unattractive albino woman of thirty-five, living with an aged and half-insane father about whom the most frightful tales of wizardry had been whispered in his youth. Lavinia Whateley had no known husband, but according to the custom of the region made no attempt to disavow the child; concerning the other side of whose ancestry the country folk might - and did - speculate as widely as they chose.

-- Narrator (II paragraph 1)

**Importance:** The main purpose of this quote is foreshadowing. Essentially, this sets up the mystery of Wilbur's parentage.

Meanwhile Old Whateley continued to buy cattle without measurably increasing the size of his herd.

-- Narrator (III paragraph 1)

**Importance:** Like the previous quote, this quote incorporates foreshadowing. Here, the fate of the cattle is foreshadowed, implying that the Whatleys are using the cattle for nefarious purposes.

"The aversion displayed towards him by dogs had now become a matter of wide remark, and he was obliged to carry a pistol in order to traverse the countryside in safety.



-- Narrator (III paragraph 3)

**Importance:** This quote attempts to solidify the evil nature of Wilbur. The fact that dogs seemed to want to attack Wilbur, implies that something is unnatural about him.

More space, Willy, more space soon. Yew grows - an' that grows faster. It'll be ready to serve ye soon, boy. Open up the gates to Yog-Sothoth with the long chant that ye'll find on page 751 of the complete edition, an' then put a match to the prison. Fire from airth can't burn it nohaow.

-- Old Whateley (IV paragraph 5)

**Importance:** This quote from Wilbur's grandfather is the catalyst for the second half of the story. These directions lead Wilbur to the Necronomicon.

Not in the spaces we know, but between them, they walk serene and primal, undimensioned and to us unseen. Yog-Sothoth knows the gate. Yog-Sothoth is the gate. Yog-Sothoth is the key and guardian of the gate. Past, present, future, all are one in Yog-Sothoth. He knows where the Old Ones broke through of old, and where They shall break through again.

-- The Mad Arab in the Necronomicon (V paragraph 3)

**Importance:** This quote from the Necronomicon is used to push forward the idea of Yog-Sothoth's existence.

Above the waist it was semi-anthropomorphic; though its chest, where the dog's rending paws still rested watchfully, had the leathery, reticulated hide of a crocodile or alligator. The back was piebald with yellow and black, and dimly suggested the squamous covering of certain snakes. Below the waist, though, it was the worst; for here all human resemblance left off and sheer phantasy began. The skin was thickly covered with coarse black fur, and from the abdomen a score of long greenish-grey tentacles with red sucking mouths protruded limply.

-- Narrator (VI paragraph 5)

**Importance:** This description of Wilbur's corpse is the final reveal that Wilbur is indeed the son of Yog-Sothoth, as part of him is clearly inhuman.

Cha'ncey he heered the whippoowills so laoud in Col' Spring Glen he couldn't sleep nun. Then he thought he heered another faint-like saound over towards Wizard Whateley's - a kinder rippin' or tearin' o' wood, like some big box er crate was bein' opened fur off.

-- Chauncey (VII paragraph 5)

**Importance:** This quote from a briefly mentioned townspeople demonstrates the fear the the escape of the horror caused in the town.

He had nervously telephoned his wife he would not be home, and when she brought him a breakfast from the house he could scarcely dispose of a mouthful. All that day he



read on, now and then halted maddeningly as a reapplication of the complex key became necessary. Lunch and dinner were brought him, but he ate only the smallest fraction of either. Toward the middle of the next night he drowsed off in his chair, but soon woke out of a tangle of nightmares almost as hideous as the truths and menaces to man's existence that he had uncovered.

-- Narrator (VIII paragraph 6)

**Importance:** Armitage's behavior in this quote demonstrates the effect of the forbidden knowledge of the Old Ones on a human.

We must follow it, boys.' He made his voice as reassuring as possible. 'I believe there's a chance of putting it out of business. You men know that those Whateleys were wizards - well, this thing is a thing of wizardry, and must be put down by the same means.

-- Henry Armitage (IX paragraph 14)

**Importance:** Here, Armitage explains that he knows of a way to stop the horror, and it involves magic.

Eh-y-ya-ya-yahaah - e'yayayaaaa... ngh'aaaaa... ngh'aaa... h'yuh... h'yuh... HELP!  
HELP! ...ff - ff - ff - FATHER! FATHER! YOG-SOTHOTH!...

-- The Dunwich Horror (X paragraph 12)

**Importance:** The voices, presumably from the horror while he is being subjected to Armitage's spell is the first statement that implies that the Horror is the offspring of Yog-Sothoth.