

The opening of *The Dunwich Horror* by H. P. Lovecraft (written in 1928)

When a traveller in north central Massachusetts takes the wrong fork at the junction of Aylesbury pike just beyond Dean's Corners he comes upon a lonely and curious country.

5 The ground gets higher, and the brier-bordered stone walls press closer and closer against the ruts of the dusty, curving road. The trees of the frequent forest belts seem too large, and the wild weeds, brambles and grasses attain a luxuriance not often found in settled regions. At the same time the planted fields appear singularly few and barren; while the sparsely scattered houses wear a surprisingly uniform aspect of age, squalor, and
10 dilapidation.

Without knowing why, one hesitates to ask directions from the gnarled solitary figures spied now and then on crumbling doorsteps or on the sloping, rock-strewn meadows. Those figures are so silent and furtive that one feels somehow confronted by forbidden things, with which it would be better to have nothing to do. When a rise in the road brings the
15 mountains in view above the deep woods, the feeling of strange uneasiness is increased. The summits are too rounded and symmetrical to give a sense of comfort and naturalness, and sometimes the sky silhouettes with especial clearness the queer circles of tall stone pillars with which most of them are crowned.

Gorges and ravines of problematical depth intersect the way, and the crude wooden bridges
20 always seem of dubious safety. When the road dips again there are stretches of marshland that one instinctively dislikes, and indeed almost fears at evening when unseen whippoorwills chatter and the fireflies come out in abnormal profusion to dance to the raucous, creepily insistent rhythms of stridently piping bull-frogs. The thin, shining line of the Miskatonic's upper reaches has an oddly serpent-like suggestion as it winds close to the
25 feet of the domed hills among which it rises.

As the hills draw nearer, one heeds their wooded sides more than their stone-crowned tops. Those sides loom up so darkly and precipitously that one wishes they would keep their distance, but there is no road by which to escape them. Across a covered bridge one sees a small village huddled between the stream and the vertical slope of Round Mountain, and
30 wonders at the cluster of rotting gambrel roofs bespeaking an earlier architectural period than that of the neighbouring region. It is not reassuring to see, on a closer glance, that most of the houses are deserted and falling to ruin, and that the broken-steepled church now harbours the one slovenly mercantile establishment of the hamlet. One dreads to trust the tenebrous tunnel of the bridge, yet there is no way to avoid it. Once across, it is hard to
35 prevent the impression of a faint, malign odour about the village street, as of the massed mould and decay of centuries. It is always a relief to get clear of the place, and to follow the narrow road around the base of the hills and across the level country beyond till it rejoins the Aylesbury pike. Afterwards one sometimes learns that one has been through Dunwich.

40 Outsiders visit Dunwich as seldom as possible, and since a certain season of horror all the signboards pointing towards it have been taken down.

Comprehension and vocabulary

1. What do you think the *Miskatonic* is? (line 24) Give evidence from the text to support your answer.
2. What does the word *precipitously* (line 27) tell the reader about the hills?
3. What is a more common word for *mercantile establishment*? (line 33)
4. Write several sentences describing the geographical location of Dunwich village. Where is it? How do you get there? What geographical features are nearby?

Techniques and effect

5. *The Dunwich Horror* is an example of Gothic literature, which you will study in detail in Year 8. One common theme in Gothic literature is nature being more powerful than people. What examples of this can you find in the extract?
6. Lovecraft, the author, uses lots of negative language to describe Dunwich and its surroundings. Choose your favourite example of this, and explain why it is an effective description.
7. Write down at least three questions you have about Dunwich after reading the extract.
8. Look at the last sentence (lines 39 and 40). What effect does it have? How does it make the reader feel? (*Don't write, "it makes the reader want to read on" – explain why!*)

Extended writing

9. Draw a picture or map of Dunwich village, based on what you have learned about it from the extract. Annotate your drawing with quotes from the text.