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“Ghosts and Shadows”: Epistemophobia and the Disintegration of the Subject in John
Carpenter’s *Prince of Darkness*

by

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A THESIS

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Abstract

Recently, writer-director John Carpenter's work has been read increasingly through a philosophical lens, as evidenced by the works of scholars such as Dylan Trigg, Anna Powell, and Eugene Thacker. However, the critical material on *Prince of Darkness* (1987) remains somewhat limited, especially considering the film's explicitly philosophical narrative and themes. This project takes up *Darkness*'s dealings with epistemophobia, defined broadly as the fear of knowledge, before revealing more nuanced and complex meanings therein. We also consider the film's deconstruction of human subjectivity, engaging extensively with Trigg, Powell and Thacker's work while also affording necessary space to horror writer H. P. Lovecraft, a seminal influence on Carpenter's oeuvre. By reading *Darkness* within the context of both philosophy and literature, this thesis demonstrates that Carpenter's cinema deeply interrelates with these other disciplines, necessitating acknowledgment of their connections. The concept of epistemophobia provides the project's primary philosophical intervention: how does one extract knowledge from that which is horrifically unthinkable?

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Dedication

To Samara, my number one accomplice in horror film viewing.

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Epigraph

“Because of consciousness, parent of all horrors, we became susceptible to thoughts that were startling and dreadful to us, thoughts that have never been equitably balanced by those that are collected and reassuring.”

— Thomas Ligotti, *The Conspiracy Against the Human Race*

“The most merciful thing in the world, I think, is the inability of the human mind to correlate all its contents. We live on a placid island of ignorance in the midst of black seas of infinity, and it was not meant that we should voyage far. The sciences, each straining in its own direction, have hitherto harmed us little; but some day the piecing together of dissociated knowledge will open up such terrifying vistas of reality, and of our frightful position therein, that we shall either go mad from the revelation or flee from the deadly light into the peace and safety of a new dark age.”

— H. P. Lovecraft, “The Call of Cthulhu”

“You’re fucked;
You’ve lost.”

— Godflesh, “Jesu”

CHAPTER ONE: PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATION

Parts and Wholes: The Self

One of the most disturbing sequences in John Carpenter's *Prince of Darkness* (1987) is also one of its most philosophically telling: "Hello?" someone calls from the darkness outside, in a tone both alien and distantly familiar. Catherine Danforth (Lisa Blount) provides the audience's point of view as she stares down from an upper-floor window in the film's central location, St. Godard's church. She sees the resurrected form of colleague Frank Wyndham (Robert Grasmere), who summons her with a voice that sounds more suited to a garbled radio transmission or a badly damaged tape recording than to a human body. To foreground the scene's tension, Carpenter frames Wyndham in a wide overhead shot, providing a pocket of low-key bluish white light that renders the character's face unclear. From a distance this figure *looks* like Wyndham, but Carpenter forces us to question our assumptions: by introducing Wyndham's voice before making his appearance known, the director has characterized the scene with a distinct sense of *wrongness*. Specifically, this scene enacts Sigmund Freud's principle of the uncanny, which describes the disturbing unease that results from the familiar rendered unfamiliar; in Freud's words, "the uncanny is that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar" (124). Such a description applies intuitively to this image of Wyndham, who from a distance looks the same as always, but whose voice and pallor suggest a disturbing change. Once Catherine summons her classmates and instructors to the window, the shot tightens on Wyndham—now we can confirm that this is *not* the same Wyndham who we have previously seen. His unsmiling, sore-riddled face matches the streetlight's unsettling whiteness; scars etch patterns in his face, with one mark resembling a warped crucifix. With this visceral reveal, Wyndham's utterances intensify in foreboding: "I've

got a message for you,” he croaks, invoking the rhetoric of an Old Testament God, “and you’re not going to like it.” His message is as direct as it is ominous—“Pray for death”—and it further emphasizes the scene’s suggestions of religious perversion. Taking into consideration that Wyndham is previously defined by his refutation of all non-logical beliefs, the scene also goes on to viscerally defile and undermine his very worldview. Further, the scene recalls Robert C. Cumbow’s observation that, shortly before Wyndham’s own death, the character “condemns the superstitious fears of his colleagues by calling them ‘caca,’” and to that end, it is worth acknowledging that “[c]aca’ comes from the Greek ‘kako-,’ the prefix for evil, root word of ‘cacophony,’ conjuring the screeching of many demons, the sound of hell” (Cumbow 155). Cumbow suggests here that, by indirect virtue of a refusal to entertain non-classical notions of reality, Wyndham actually brings the most savage forms of evil *to* himself. That is, he summons the hellish forces by voicing his disbelief in their existence.

What resounds most loudly about this scene, though, is the series of images following Wyndham’s sinister message. Close-ups of his body reveal swarms of beetles breaking through the seams of his clothing, scuttling through his sleeves and sending his lifeless hands dropping to the ground; in a climactic moment of pure horror, the beetles emerge through the hollow of his neck and disconnect his aberrantly resurrected head, decapitating him instantly. This image invokes immediately an imbedded task in genre horror: to destabilize and transgress sanctified notions of the human subject. The head and face are universal indicators of subjecthood, containing as they do the brain and its “mind,” and of course the eyes, commonly perceived as “windows to the soul.” The fact that his body has been overtaken by bugs also carries subtextual resonance: Michelle Le Blanc and Colin Odell observe that, “[l]ike the Prince of Darkness, [insects] have inhabited Earth for longer than humankind” (81). How appropriate, then, that

Wyndham's previously recognizable eyes are shown to be black and insectile, before his head is finally separated from his body. He has been rendered pre-human, an embodied trace of the alien world that made his physicality possible. To be sure, this church-set film is bound up in questions of theology and religious belief; suitable, then, that Brian Marsh's (Jameson Parker) reaction of horror to the decomposing Wyndham is such a simple exclamation: "Jesus Christ!" It is important to reinforce here that this scene provides an uncanny representation of a character we have seen, before dismantling not only our expectations, but our understanding of whether any "part" of that character remains at all. Although this Wyndham appears to be in some sense the Wyndham who we have followed up to this point, we quickly learn that his "wholeness" is now an illusion, and that his physical shape is actually constituted by countless supernaturally animated insects. Even his garbled voice, though it may contain a trace of the original Wyndham's, comes through in a litany of tones rather than in a sense of singularity or "oneness." Watching this seemingly "whole" individual disintegrate into a sea of scurrying insects, the film disturbingly visualizes a breakdown of the totalizing (and totalized) human subject. Wyndham (if the figure that we now perceive can in fact still be called "Wyndham") is now comprised of a multitude of tiny "wholes" in the form of these beetles. John Kenneth Muir notes that "Carpenter [...] equates human beings with insects throughout the film (both life-forms are susceptible to Satanic control, living in a much larger universe than they can possibly suspect)" (141), and this image acts as one particularly striking example. Indeed, the reduction of Wyndham to a voice-piece for evil forces poses the horrifying destruction of his selfhood; he is very much equated to the insects who have reconstituted his physical form, in that he is now *made of* them. This bizarre correspondence between the human and the insect bears on my reading of the film. *Prince of Darkness* makes this connection in order to support one of its primary thematic

threads: the humiliation of the human. This is a notion to which I return; before doing so, however, the film's philosophical framework encourages fundamental study.

The Horror of Philosophy/The Philosophy of Horror

Prince of Darkness's plot begins with an unnamed priest (Donald Pleasance) discovering a secret canister in the basement of a Los Angeles church; the canister is filled with green, slime-like liquid. Puzzled and disturbed by this object, the Priest consults with physics professor Howard Birack (Victor Wong). Upon the Priest's insistence, Birack arranges for a group of graduate students and colleagues to spend their weekend at the church to study this mysterious canister. Studying the bizarre liquid proliferates horrific questions rather than providing answers: upon translating an ancient text beside the canister, the academics learn that its contents are a Satanic force. Although the slime exhibits no standard methods of communication, it does send out creepy psychic energy, complex differential equations, and other strange data (which the academics interpret by computer). The academics encounter other strange phenomena, such as a shared recurring dream (determined to be a warning sent back from the future, transmitted by tachyon particles). The dream reveals a shadowy figure standing in the church's doorway, ringed with clouds of fog. Distorted narration accompanies this image, informing the dreamers that this message is being projected backward from the year 1999, and that they must prevent whatever ominous consequences its imagery suggests. Eventually, the canister lets loose its Satanic slime, which it sprays into the faces of unsuspecting graduate students. Once infected, the students develop zombie-like behaviors similar to the patterns demonstrated by a group of homeless people lurking outside the church. Unable to escape due to the barricade of these homeless Satan drones, the academics face horror within the church's confines: the slime-induced characters systematically stalk uninfected colleagues and orally excrete slime into one their mouths; this

process proliferates the canister's control over the group. Eventually, Birack and the Priest share their knowledge systems to deduce that Satan (contained within the slime) is in fact a force that exceeds our limited moral systems. If God is matter and "positivity," then Satan is Anti-God, and is therefore linked to the incomprehensible dimension of anti-matter. Ultimately, the canister's sentient fluid attempts to open a mirror-gateway into that dimension, but after two students are drawn inside, the Priest smashes the mirror with an axe. The canister's influence appears to be thwarted until the bleakly ambiguous final scene, which shows Brian Marsh (Jameson Parker) awakening from a nightmare. In his dream, the shadowy figure from the tachyon transmissions has been replaced by his colleague Catherine Danforth (Lisa Blount). Emerging from the nightmare, Brian gets out of bed and reaches slowly toward his bedroom mirror; this conclusion suggests that the canister's influence has not been eradicated, and that the gateway between realities remains.

Darkness's downbeat ending is one example among many in John Carpenter's oeuvre (his affinity to bleak conclusions is perhaps most famously exemplified by *Halloween* [1978] and *The Thing* [1982]). Also of interest is that *Darkness's* focus on academic environments might stem from Carpenter's own experiences. Born in Carthage, New York, the auteur grew was raised in Bowling Green, Kentucky; his father was a professor of music, and Carpenter spent much of his childhood living in "a rustic log cabin nestled in a wooded glen on a remote corner of [a] college campus" (Wallace 11). Furthermore, it is worth noting that "in the late 1960s [he] enrolled in the film program at the University of Southern California (USC), one of the most respected film schools in the USA" (Lanzagorta). *Darkness* also speaks broadly to Carpenter's career-long sensibility in that it underlines the connection between genre characteristics and classicist visual grammar; more specifically, *Darkness* illustrates that the "the westerns directed

by Howard Hawks and John Ford, as well as the many low budget science fiction films from the 1950s, had a strong influence on [Carpenter] during his youth” (Lanzagorta). The film also marks an important artistic moment in Carpenter’s career in terms of authorial control: after having established himself as a studio filmmaker in the 1980s with *The Thing* (1982), *Christine* (1983), *Starman* (1984), and *Big Trouble in Little China* (1986), “Carpenter grew disappointed and frustrated because of the studio executives’ interference and lack of support,” and *Prince of Darkness* was born from his desire to pursue his own independent vision without imposed restrictions (Lanzagorta). Recently, the auteur’s cinematic output has slowed down, with a decade-long hiatus between *Ghosts of Mars* (2001) and *The Ward* (2011) (his most recent theatrical release to date). Between those two projects, he directed two entries for *Masters of Horror* (the aforementioned *Cigarette Burns* [2005] and *Pro-Life* [2006]); and he has recently released two albums of original instrumental music, *Lost Themes* (2015) and *Lost Themes II* (2016).

As a film committed deeply to the investigation of “parts” and “wholes,” John Carpenter’s *Prince of Darkness* (1987) finds possibilities in the vexed space between horror and philosophy. Within this space, I identify two areas of inquiry that prove to be almost entirely commensurate given enough scrutiny and investigation: first, the horror of philosophy, and second, the philosophy of horror. Although the reversal of these terms might seem initially arbitrary, both areas of inquiry address different questions. Eugene Thacker deserves recognition for the reversal; his reflections on the pivot point between “philosophy” and “horror” speaks to both terms as standalone disciplines with differing methodologies. Thacker describes the “philosophy of horror” as an area wherein “philosophy explains anything and everything, telling us that a horror film means this or that, reveals this or that anxiety, is representative of this or

that cultural moment that we are living in, and so on” (*Tentacles* 11). Thacker’s definition here suggests a skepticism toward the “philosophy of horror,” in that he perceives its tendency to contain or reduce horror texts within delimiting interpretive confines. Furthermore, his thoughts position the study as diametrically opposed to the deeply affective implications of horror; that is, he argues that the philosophy of horror moves past the visceral responses of its chosen genre in order to highlight its subtexts. Conversely, Thacker also helpfully defines the “horror of philosophy,” stating that the concept’s crux, “which we see in Descartes’ demon, Kant’s depression, and Nietzsche’s wrestling with an indifferent cosmos [...] is the thought that undermines itself, in thought”; he clarifies this notion, as “[t]hought that stumbles over itself, at the edge of an abyss” (*Corpse* 14). To that end, I recall John Clute’s statement that, “since the beginning of the 1980s, it has become common to state not only that certain emotional responses are normally generated in the readers of horror texts, but also to claim that these responses are, in themselves, what actually define horror” (9). Thacker implies less restrictive reading strategies for students of horror, suggesting that the genre exposes fallibilities within our knowledge systems; he finds value in horror and similar genres “not because we can devise ingenious explanatory models for them, but because they cause us to question some of our most basic assumptions about the knowledge-production process itself, or about the hubris of living in the human-centric world in which we currently live” (*Tentacles* 11). With Thacker’s work in mind, I will demonstrate that the philosophy of horror (as written by genre scribes such as H. P. Lovecraft, Thomas Ligotti, and Stephen King) veers into much of the same territory as the horror of philosophy (described above by Thacker as “the thought that undermines itself, in thought”).

In advance, it is worth recognizing that H. P. Lovecraft’s fiction explores epistemophobia and negative knowledge in a specifically literary fashion. This project will later undertake an

intensive study of the ways in which Lovecraft's works leave a lasting impression on *Darkness's* philosophy and horror. Nevertheless, at the outset it bears mentioning that literature informs, and is informed by, both cinema and philosophy in this study of epistemophobia. A key example presents itself in Lovecraft's 1931 novella *At the Mountains of Madness*, which uses descriptive language and psychological narration to confront vexing philosophical problems. Consider the scene in which Professor Lake and his crew perform a dissection on one of the strange creatures they have discovered during their Antarctic expedition. Lovecraft employs dense and descriptive language to detail the creature's anatomy: "Its five-lobed brain was surprisingly advanced; and there were signs of a sensory equipment, served in part through the wiry cilia of the head, involving factors alien to any other terrestrial organism" (155). This description of the creature's hyper-developed physiology shows the inadequacy of human knowledge—the dissection is a futile exercise, an attempt to understand that which totally violates preconceived human parameters. Interestingly, Lovecraft contrasts the painstakingly detailed anatomical passages with concise sentences conveying Lake's inability to comprehend: "The nervous system was so complex and highly developed as to leave Lake aghast" (154). Using literary form, Lovecraft stages a horrific and paralyzing encounter between the educated human subject and the object too strange and unknown to be reasoned away. Upon laying out a vivid breakdown of the creature's part-animal, part-plant physical structure, the narrator confesses that "to give it a name at this stage was mere folly" (155). Among many other examples in Lovecraft's oeuvre, this novella mines literature's specific attributes to capture that which cannot be contained or systematically organized by philosophy. Certainly, this literary antecedent leaves a profound impact on John Carpenter's work, and we will return to the lineage in detail throughout our second chapter.

My project thus takes up the overlapping fields of inquiry in literature, philosophy, and cinema through close analysis of *Prince of Darkness*, wherein the poles of philosophy and horror viscerally collide onscreen. My goals here are twofold: I aim first to provide sustained critical analysis of a film that has to date received mostly cursory or second-priority academic attention, and second, to localize the intersection between horror and philosophy. I find this intersection within the concept of *epistemophobia*, which is, simply speaking, the fear of knowledge; I take up this term as a horror-based response or confrontation with epistemology. Epistemophobia thus resists the project of epistemology, which produces philosophical work surrounding the concept of knowledge (for it can be said that, in this sense, epistemology acts as a form of *productive* or *positive* knowledge). By cautioning against knowledge, even going so far as to render knowledge horrifying, epistemophobia acts contrarily as *negative knowledge*. One recognizes the paradoxical suggestions of producing a critical study about such a cinematic text (one whose philosophy cautions against knowledge itself); however, one cannot avoid addressing within *Prince of Darkness* the problem of epistemophobia. Indeed, the concept rises rather explicitly from the film's narrative, especially considering that "the university's research conducted in the church [...] overlays the subterranean evil that breeds in the basement below" (Young 130). That is, the film rather overtly overlays systems of knowledge (various forms of scientific and theological research) within a space defined by faith-driven ontology, and pits the uprising of horror as the subterranean (or subconscious) consequence.

Eugene Thacker directly emphasizes horror's relationship to knowledge, arguing that "horror is not simply about fear, but instead about the enigmatic thought of the unknown" (*Dust* 8-9). Thacker's observation will prove useful here for a number of reasons, not least because "the unknown" connects integrally to epistemology. With that in mind, the term "epistemology"

also bespeaks a rich and robust philosophical tradition; for the purposes of this essay, I define epistemology as a theory grounded in knowledge, particularly as pertains the questions that *surround* knowledge: “how do we have access to ‘truth’? How do we ‘know?’” Considering epistemology within the context of horror, then, I find value in passages from Nick Land’s *The Thirst for Annihilation: Georges Bataille and Virulent Nihilism*.¹ The text helpfully lays out an outline of epistemology’s meaning, methods, and intentions, which will prove useful here:

Epistemology takes as its problem the relation of a subjective representation to what is objectively represented – which might be problematic (scepticism) or unproblematic (dogmatism), one of difference (realism) or identity (subjective idealism) – but what is evaded in this whole calculus of permutations is the relation between knowing (subject/object separation) and what is not knowing, or the sense of what escapes thought other than as an unknown object, which is to say, other than as the real thing ‘behind’ the representation of the object ([Immanuel] Kant’s noumenon is still this).” (169)

Land raises some important points here about epistemology’s negotiation with the “objective” world through one’s subjective aspirations to know. By extension, his use of the word “noumenon” invites further discussion in this context: earlier in the text, Land himself defines noumena as those things that “escape the competence of theory, being those ‘things’ which are unknowable in principle” (6). It is important to note, then, that noumena exist in oppositional relation to “phenomena,” which Land defines as “[t]he Kantian name for the items within the

¹ I recognize the problematic nature of Nick Land’s politics during the period that I am writing this paper. While I make no excuses for Land’s role in propagating dangerous alt-right beliefs, I believe it is worth noting that he did not publicly hold such opinions during the composition of *The Thirst for Annihilation*.

legitimate field of theoretical cognition” (6). As such, both phenomena and noumena converge in their (perhaps deceptively) opposing connections to knowledge: the former defines that which might be known, while the latter is utterly inaccessible to human knowledge.

With these preliminary distinctions in mind, I interrogate the ways in which *Prince of Darkness* represents the noumenon as a conduit for horror. It is crucial here to note that “horror” does not simply signify the kind of affect that Clute has described above. Rather, horror acts at least as an incapacitating or probing of customary systems of knowledge, and in its most unharnessed state it undoes those systems altogether; Stephen King gestures to this project when he writes coyly that “horror simply *is*, exclusive of definition or rationalization” (*Danse* 21). King suggests here a tension between “horror” and the reductive apparatus of “definition,” and Noël Carroll expands indirectly on this idea. Carroll writes here in reference to monsters, but his underlying premise extends to works of horror that do not include traditionally defined “monsters” as such; worth noting, then, is his argument that “monsters are not only physically threatening, they are cognitively threatening” (34). Clarifying this statement, Carroll states that monsters “are threats to common knowledge,” by which he means that they are “challenges to the foundations of a culture’s way of thinking” (34). To that end, noumena in *Prince of Darkness* are absolutely real, things that exist and make changes in the world; quite unlike Kant’s notion of some transcendent property from the inaccessible “elsewhere,” the noumenon in *Darkness* is horror itself: tactile, powerful, and devastating. It is necessary, then, that I assess the film’s depiction of unthinkable bleakness within epistemology’s pursuits; taking this into consideration, it is also worth parsing out Nick Land’s thoughts above regarding noumena—while he characterizes them as impervious to Kantian enclosure, this *does not* negate their actuality. Ben Woodard raises this point, arguing that for Land “noumena cannot be an epistemological limit

but rather are an ontological fact”; Woodard goes on to explain Land’s use of the term “fanged noumena,” stating that “noumena are fanged because they do not remain harmlessly domesticated in the cage of Kantian categorization, but rather, damage and determine us and our thinking by their very nature” (31). Suggested here by Nick Land, and by Land interpreted *through* Woodard, is a meeting point between fear and knowledge, between that which is unknown but *actual* and that which is *perceived to be* “known.” For if horror generally and *Prince of Darkness* particularly can reveal anything about knowledge, it is that knowledge cannot truly be *known* at all. In this abyssal territory, wherein the knowledge that studies fear nullifies itself *through* fear, I see the capacity for cosmic pessimism, and the crux of horror itself. As such, with *Prince of Darkness* as its cohesive, my project sections its discussion into the categories outlined above; however, as proven by the dark center of gravity that is *epistemophobia*, the interstitial zones between horror and philosophy expand quickly into consumptive forces, wherein neither topic stands isolated or untouched by the other.

To begin, then, it is important to contextualize *Prince of Darkness* within John Carpenter’s filmography. For a long time, both Carpenter and his scholars have grouped together *The Thing* (1982), *Prince of Darkness* (1987), and *In the Mouth of Madness* into a single unit deemed the “Apocalypse Trilogy”; Michelle Le Blanc and Colin Odell, for example, reflect on a progressively darkening streak of nihilism as the three films’ connective tissue:

The Thing is an alien who crashed to earth before mankind was born and threatens the very existence of humankind should it escape its isolated location. By the film’s close it seems as though disaster has been avoided – narrowly. *Prince of Darkness* extends this theme to an urban setting where contagious ancient evil is more virulent but apparently thwarted by the film’s close. *In the Mouth of*

Madness, however, takes the apocalypse to the edge and makes sure it goes right over. There is no doubt that this marks a serious breakdown in social order – thus each film becomes more nihilistic than the last. (100-1)

Before moving on from Le Blanc and Odell’s summary, I find it necessary to argue that evil is not in fact thwarted in *Prince of Darkness*, given the horrifically ambiguous final image of protagonist Brian Marsh reaching slowly towards his bedroom mirror (which the film depicts as a passageway for cosmic evil forces); nor, for that matter, does *The Thing* suggest with any certainty that disaster has been avoided. I call attention to these quandaries because I see the series not as an escalating depiction of nihilistic dread, but rather as a cycle of uniformly pessimistic works wherein total disintegration is inevitable. It is also worth calling attention to the fact that more recently, John Carpenter also includes *Cigarette Burns*, his 2005 *Masters of Horror* entry, within the Apocalypse cycle (FlipON.TV). While I will address all of these films peripherally and to varying degrees of intentness, it is *Prince of Darkness* that foregrounds the cycle’s most widespread and philosophically robust potential—the film is explicitly concerned with philosophical and epistemological issues, as per its engagements with theology, ontology, and physics.

It is important to consider *The Thing*’s particularly powerful presence in Carpenter scholarship, and even in philosophy more widely. For example, Dylan Trigg went so far as to name his text *The Thing: A Phenomenology of Horror* after Carpenter’s film, grafting substantial portions of his theory onto the subject film’s narrative; as such, Trigg certainly foregrounds a scholarly emphasis on *The Thing* over the cycle’s other works. To that end, Carpenter himself reflects on the *Thing* by stating that he does not believe he “ever made a more savage film or as bleak a movie [...] since,” before quickly adding, “well, *Prince of Darkness* is pretty savage but

it's different" (Boulenger 173-5). Carpenter's impromptu emendation here is intriguing, in that the auteur appears to rethink the notion of "savagery": while the term implies a primal physicality, invoking easily *The Thing*'s brutal body horror and images of perverse animality, *Darkness* carries with it a "different" kind of savagery. But different how? *The Thing* will not entirely escape my attention, but I raise these points to emphasize the fact that its successor has perhaps been dwarfed within its shadow. Even still, it is worth considering the individual Apocalypse films' underpinnings in conversation with *Prince of Darkness*, especially the ways in which each work individually considers the titular theme of the apocalypse.

Considering *The Thing* first, H. P. Lovecraft's presence (which proves to be an overarching commonality within the Apocalypse Cycle) becomes immediately clear; Anna Powell notes that "*The Thing* (1982) [...] references Lovecraft's 'At the Mountains of Madness', in which a team of Arctic explorers encounter an unknown life-form, then mysteriously vanish; the title is echoed again in *In the Mouth of Madness*" (142). While her article prioritizes Lovecraft's clear influence on the latter film, Powell also acknowledges the horror author's resonance within *Prince of Darkness*, stating that "the influence of Lovecraft can be mapped onto *Prince of Darkness* with its apocalyptic science fiction combined with traditional demonism" (143). Le Blanc and Odell include *Cigarette Burns* within the same territory, arguing that it "recalls the Lovecraftian stylings of *In the Mouth of Madness* and *Prince of Darkness* in the way that it plays with characters' reality and perception of supernatural forces" (121).² While I acknowledge the profound role of philosophy and horror in all four of the Apocalypse works, it

² I will later attend to the recurrent presence of Lovecraft within these films, especially as it deeply informs both the narrative and philosophy of *Prince of Darkness*.

is within *Darkness* that I locate the clearest and most detailed synthesis of thematic concerns: in this film, theology, science, and philosophy all coexist under the umbrella of totalizing knowledge, and every one of these systems falters utterly in the face of unadulterated terror. Considering Carpenter's oeuvre as a whole, from the dour urban menace of *Assault on Precinct 13* (1976) to the bleak interiority of *The Ward* (2010), it is not unreasonable to suggest that the auteur's "vision culminates in *Prince of Darkness*" (Cumbow 147). Looking again at its place within the Apocalypse cycle, the film's thematic scope stands out: *The Thing*, while absolutely crucial for Trigg's study of unhuman phenomenology in the aforementioned text, focuses primarily on the horror of the body, manifesting in the violently paranoid interactions within a group of isolated men. *In the Mouth of Madness* likewise features a very specific and enclosed configuration of horror and pessimism, culminating in its protagonist's submission to mental fallibility. Finally, *Cigarette Burns* rounds out the series with a not-entirely-unironic study of cinema's capacity for brutal affect.

The Knowledge Behind Epistemophobia

Perhaps what most clearly distinguishes *Darkness* from the other Apocalypse entries is its scrupulous engagement with horror on a macrocosmic *and* microcosmic level. Indeed, the macro and micro combust into one nightmarishly inseparable category in the face of the film's revelations; this inseparability is made explicit quite early into the narrative. In a clip of narrative set-up intercut between the opening credits, the film depicts Professor Edward Birack delivering a lecture to his students. Carpenter directs this brief monologue succinctly and efficiently, editing between an emotive close-up of Birack (Victor Wong) and the dumbfounded faces of his students. Birack's lecture is essential to the film's thematic and philosophical concerns, and is worth citing in its entirety here:

Let's talk about our beliefs, and what we can learn about them. We believe nature is solid, and time a constant; matter has substance, and time a direction. There is truth in flesh and solid ground. The wind may be invisible, but it's real. Smoke, fire, water, light – they're different. Not as to stone or steel, but they're tangible. And we assume time is narrow because it is as a clock: one second is one second for everyone. Cause precedes effect: fruit rots, water flows downstream. We're born, we age, we die. The reverse *never* happens... None of this is true. Say goodbye to classical reality, because our logic collapses on the subatomic level into ghosts and shadows. [...] Now, every particle has an anti-particle. Its mirror image. Its negative side. Maybe this universal mind resides in the mirror image instead of our universe as we wanted to believe. Maybe he's anti-god, bringing darkness instead of light.

Indeed, the film's horrific progression follows up on Birack's ominous foreshadowing: *Prince of Darkness* concerns itself predominantly with the "ghosts and shadows" that the professor describes. Several scholars have noted the ramifications of the film's introduction—Robert C. Cumbow, for example, notes its imbedded meaning in relation to the next sequence of shots: after the lecture, Cumbow observes that "Carpenter cuts to Brian [Marsh]'s vision of the moon, then racks focus to the haloed leaf in front of it. The clear vision of science meets the mythic, the demonic, the unordered, unorderable reality of nature" (157). Le Blanc and Odell note the monologue's suggestions about Birack's affiliation to (or privileging of) specific forms of knowledge; they argue that, as indicated by the lecture, Birack "is initially sceptical of religious dogma and prefers to rely on quantum theories of uncertainty and non-linear time; as he puts it, 'our logic collapses on the subatomic level into ghosts and shadows'" (80). Dylan Trigg also

quotes the monologue at length, describing the ways in which it outlines the film's visual and thematic emphasis on mirrors:

Carpenter's vision – as told by Birack – presents us with a reversal of the phenomenal world. This is the ultimate Humean nightmare in which causality really does bring about a collapse in the natural laws. Once more, the horror of this mutation takes place in the figure of a mirror: not simply a mirror which reveals our own alterity as human subjects, but also a screen that beckons the horror of the cosmos itself. (101-2)

Trigg presents several noteworthy interpretations here, including a reference to Hume's theory of causation and, crucially, a note about the film's dealings with phenomena (and, necessarily in a film so concerned with mirrors and anti-forms, with noumena as well). To that end, Quentin Meillassoux usefully summarizes Hume's theory of causation in *After Finitude: An Essay on Contingency*; essentially, Meillassoux argues, the theory poses that "given the same initial conditions, the same results invariably follow" (85). To further clarify Trigg's ideas, Land's previous definitions of phenomena and noumena still hold here, which raises compelling possibilities within Trigg's reading. For example, does *Prince of Darkness*'s described "reversal of the phenomenal (or iterable and conceivable) world" then present a world overrun by noumena? Is the unknowable defined purely by horror and vicious anti-logic?

It is this subversion of systematically upheld knowledges (knowledges preserved by science, the academy, philosophy, and so on) that characterizes the film's epistemophobic thread. Furthermore, the expansion of macrocosmic inversion reveals disquieting truths about the cosmos. It is this element of the plot that aligns most closely with the philosophies of Lovecraft, who values the importance of "cosmic horror" so highly that he actually describes its

achievement as a reliable indication of “real literature” (25). To discuss the presence of such “cosmic vision” in *Prince of Darkness*, even within the relatively contained parameters of horrific philosophy and philosophical horror, is no small task. Thus, before considering the ways in which contention with a bleak cosmic vision specifically illustrates *Darkness*’s epistemophobia, I will discuss a group of philosophers and theorists whose work addresses the notion of cosmic horror. To begin, I take up Cumbow’s aforementioned observation of the moon’s appearance following Professor Birack’s introductory monologue; specifically, I notice that in association with the moon, Carpenter punctuates the film with several sustained shots of the sun. These shots are perceived by two of the film’s primary characters, Brian Marsh and Birack, who react with expressions of unease; furthermore, the images are powerfully underlined by crescendos of Carpenter’s own sinister musical score. The domineering visual presence of the sun and moon speaks broadly to the film’s cosmic concerns, yes, but the incorporation of the sun aligns more directly and particularly with Nick Land’s reading of Georges Bataille. Specifically, Nick Land (and ostensibly Bataille) subvert the writings of Plato, who argues for the sun as nourishment and purity; Land, contrarily, accepts the sun as life-giving but offers a characteristically nihilistic variation: “light – the sun – produces us, animates us, and engenders our excess. This excess, this animation are the effect of the light (we are basically nothing but an effect of the sun)” (27). *Prince of Darkness*’s frequent cutaways to the sun illustrate this notion, foregrounding its characters’ subservience to greater cosmic forces. Carpenter attributes slight deviations in the celestial world with ominous qualities, underlining shots of the sun with shrilly synthesized choral cues and companion shots of his actors’ disturbed faces.

Yes, the sun provides sustenance, but what if that sustenance is merely holding us out before an apocalyptic reveal? In this sense, the sun might be seen as an indifferent solar puppet-

master, a notion that evokes the disturbing suggestions put forth by prominent horror writer Thomas Ligotti (author of *The Conspiracy Against the Human Race*, a book of pessimistic philosophy). Moreover, it brings to mind *Prince of Darkness*'s trajectory, in that the film finds its academic students and mentors rendered zombie-like by forced oral intake of the mysterious canister's fluid. These moments work to substantiate the film's larger philosophical questions; not only do the transformations position the characters as ciphers of uncanniness (both familiar and utterly strange), but they also serve to destabilize customary assumptions of selfhood, individuality, and even of humanity. Ligotti asserts that "[i]n the course of our disillusionments, we have confessed to being bodies made of elementary particles just like everything else" (202). In *Prince of Darkness*'s context, this coldly scientific observation harbors terrifying consequences; for, as Birack states above, "every particle has an anti-particle"—the states of possession enforced by the film's canister reverse an unstable binary. If these humans are "made in the image of God," as believed by the naïve religiosity that precedes *Prince of Darkness*'s own belief systems, then it would be just as easy to remake those same humans in the image of God's opposite. Also, as mentioned above, this reduction of autonomous characters into possessed pawns relates to Ligotti's writings on the horror of puppetry; this author's work (both fiction and philosophy) pits itself against human subjectivity. Ligotti writes that "a puppet is only a plaything, a thing of parts brought together as a simulacrum of real presence," continuing to state that a puppet is thus "not whole and individual but exists only relative to other playthings, some of them human playthings that support one another's illusion of being real" (32-3). These possessions are among the many ways in which *Prince of Darkness* outlines its strong endpoint, wherein "[t]he clear vision of science meets the mythic, the demonic, the unordered, unorderable

reality of nature” (Cumbow 157). What exactly *is* this unorderable “reality of nature,” and how does it relate to the film’s philosophy at large?

Slime and Being

To broach this question, Jean-Paul Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness* provides one avenue for interpretation. Specifically, consider the philosopher’s reflections on “slime” as they relate to the slime-like liquid contained in the aforementioned canister at the center of *Darkness*’s proceedings. Considering slime as a substance that lingers uneasily between the poles of “solidness” and “liquidity,” this enigmatically sinister canister aligns well with the film’s overall project of undoing or overlapping binary relations. Indeed, by occupying this categorical “in-betweenness,” *Darkness*’s slime aligns intuitively with many of the underlying tenets of “impurity” identified in Noël Carroll’s *The Philosophy of Horror*. Specifically, consider Carroll’s statement that “objects can raise categorical misgivings by virtue of being incomplete representatives of their class, such as rotting and disintegrating things, as well as by virtue of being formless, for example, dirt” (32). Openly taking cues from Mary Douglas’s *Purity and Danger*, Carroll extends this notion, “initially speculat[ing] that an *object* or *being* is impure if it is categorically interstitial, categorically contradictory, incomplete, or formless” (32). Of course, Julia Kristeva’s *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* offers another important mode for thinking through this notion of the “impure.” Specifically, *Powers of Horror*’s titular concept of “abjection” warrants mention here. Defining “abjection,” Kristeva foregrounds ambiguity at the term’s core, “above all” else (9). Broadly speaking, abjection describes that which has been discarded, cast off, expelled, or excreted; by laying out a cursory definition, Kristeva attributes this broad affective category to a specific moment of psychological development:

abjection itself is a composite of judgment and affect, of condemnation and

yearning, of signs and drives. Abjection preserves what existed in the archaism of pre-objectal relationship, in the immemorial violence with which a body becomes separated from another body in order to be—maintaining that night in which the signified thing vanishes and where only the imponderable affect is carried out. To be sure, if I am affected by what does not yet appear to me as a thing, it is because laws, connections, and even structures of meaning govern and condition me. That order, that glance, that voice, that gesture, which enact the law for my frightened body, constitute and bring about an effect and not yet a sign. (9-10)

To clarify, Kristeva describes here a physio-psychological state in which the “child is not yet a subject nor the mother an object,” characterizing “the movement of abjection [as] that in which a space first appears between the two, a space created, necessarily, by a slight movement of rejection or withdrawal” (Hanson 44-5). To demonstrate the notion of abjection in the context of horror and disgust (specifically the filth and decay of the human body), Kristeva turns to Louis-Ferdinand Céline 1932 novel *Journey to the End of Night*. Arguing that the novel’s narrative “is always umbilicated to the Lady—fascinating and abject object of the telling,” Kristeva states that throughout the plot, “[t]he body is turned inside out, sent back from deep within the guts, the bowels turned over in the mouth, food mingled with excretions, fainting spells, horrors, and resentments” (146). By locating a psychological origin for her notion of “abjection,” Kristeva thus locates the affective impact of impurity (and, for our purposes, *slime*) within the self.

With Kristeva’s concept of abjection and Carroll’s foregrounding of “impurity” as characteristics that underpin objects of horror, then, it is worth studying further how *Darkness*’s slime acts as a vessel for philosophical questions. Sartre opens up this point of discussion by posing the question, “[w]hat mode of being is symbolized by the slimy?” (774). He takes up this

problem intensively, especially the notion of sliminess as “sticky” and “sucking” (776); for the purposes of discussing horror cinema, especially in reference to *Prince of Darkness*, his reflections on sliminess as related to consciousness hold the most relevance. More specifically, for our purposes here it is worth considering consciousness in terms of its affiliation to knowledge. Imagining a consciousness rendered slimy, Sartre veers openly into the realm of horror:

[...] the slimy offers a horrible image; it is horrible in itself for a consciousness to *become slimy*. This is because the being of the slimy is a soft clinging, there is a sly solidarity and complicity of all its leech-like parts, a vague, soft effort made by each to individualize itself, followed by a falling back and flattening out that is emptied of the individual, sucked in on all sides by the substance. A consciousness which became slimy would be transformed by the thick stickiness of its ideas. From the time of our upsurge into the world, we are haunted by the image of a consciousness which would like to launch forth into the future, toward a projection of self, and which at the very moment when it was conscious of arriving there would be slyly held back by the invisible suction of the past and which would have to assist in its own slow dissolution in this past which it was fleeing, would have to aid in the invasion of its project by a thousand parasites until finally it completely lost itself. (778)

Sartre’s thought here brings much to bear on what exactly is represented by *Prince of Darkness*’s canister of slime, described ominously by the Priest (Donald Pleasence) as “pure evil.” The Priest’s description proves notably incomplete here, especially considering the genre-specific application of “impurity” detailed above by Carroll and Douglas. The canister’s horror stems

from a completely *opposite* place than the one suggested here by the Priest; what is frightening and philosophically paralyzing about the slime is that it cannot be readily contained by the theological binary of “good” and “evil.” Rather, what makes the slime terrifying is that it is categorically interstitial: neither solid nor liquid, and not entirely self-constituted (when it trickles, it “sticks,” leaving its trace behind). As such, the Priest’s description of “pure evil” serves as one of many examples in which totalizing knowledge systems (especially science and religion) falter in the face of horror.

Returning more intently to Sartre’s quote above, several points of connection to *Prince of Darkness* stand out immediately: first, the correspondence between Sartre’s emphasis on “consciousness” and *Prince of Darkness*’s emphasis on horrific knowledge. Considering the canister’s slime as a symbol of abhorrent consciousness raises its own set of problems. For the slime does not appear to possess “consciousness” in the same sense as the human characters within the film; if it does possess consciousness, this is never made evident by the narrative proceedings. Certainly, the slime never produces a gooey green mouth from which it expresses philosophical viewpoints or verbally contemplates the meaning of its own existence. However, it *does* exhibit a form of thought in that it actively and knowingly excretes itself into the mouths of graduate students, claiming them as hosts for its own demonic propagation. How, precisely, does this substance’s consciousness work? And in what way does this depiction of alien consciousness relate to the film’s philosophical project at large? To answer these questions, consider Georges Bataille’s thoughts on immanence and animality in *Theory of Religion*. Specifically, Bataille’s thoughts on animality *as* immanence bear crucially on the slime’s role in *Prince of Darkness*. While it is obvious that the slime does not possess anything immediately resembling “animality,” Bataille’s description of the animal’s role is the most delimiting element

of his work at hand. In fact, upon arguing that “animality is immediacy or immanence,” Bataille recognizes openly that he “consider[s] animality from a narrow viewpoint that seems questionable” even to himself (17). It is thus not the *animality* aspect of this argument that registers here, but rather the discussion of immanence. Thus, while the animal works within Bataille’s writing here as an object devoid of humanist subjectivity, its role as something that is “*in the world like water in water*” aligns intuitively with this discussion of *Darkness*’s liquid-like slime (19). I will therefore use the terms “Bataille’s animal” and “Bataille’s animality,” recognizing as I do that his assumptions about animal worldviews stem at least partially from a problematic place of human exceptionalism.

When he argues that “animality is immediacy or immanence,” Bataille refers to the idea that, “[w]hat is given when one animal eats another is always the *fellow creature* of the one that eats” (17). More specifically, he suggests that by virtue of its inability to register “meaning” in terms of temporality and difference, his animal possesses “consciousness” but nothing that resembles a human “point of view.” So too can this be argued for *Darkness*’s canister-contained substance, which enacts its own aberrant form of “eating” by infecting and subsuming the human consciousness of its hosts. The slime, then, resembles Bataille’s animal in that it “seeks elements around it (or outside it) which are immanent to it and which it must establish (relatively stabilize) relations of immanence” (19). It is therefore immanent not only in terms of its self-constituted form, but also in its parasitic relation to the human characters. Bataille’s work here proves useful not only in conceptualizing the slime’s immanence, but also in framing the ways in which that immanence speaks to the film’s broader philosophical ideas. Bataille considers the immanence of animality to posit questions about the human’s relation to the world, suggesting that,

[i]n picturing the universe without man, a universe in which only the animal's gaze would be opened to things, the animal being neither a thing nor a man, we can only call up a vision in which we see nothing, since the object of this vision is a movement that glides from things that have no meaning by themselves to the world full of meaning implied by man giving each thing his own. (21)

Here, Bataille's thought relates to a fundamental connection in *Darkness*, between the apocalypse and the removal of the human. That is, Bataille's description of vision as "a movement that glides from things that have no meaning by themselves," as perception without meaning, describes the perspective that will be bestowed on the canister-infected remainders of humanity after the film has finished. As the central canister begins influencing its environment, the boundary between human and animal (typified in *Darkness* by various insects) blurs. Indeed, this results from the horrifically alien slime's project, which involves the systematic infiltration of human hosts. Bataille's thought therefore describes the world that might result from *Prince of Darkness*'s downbeat ending. This philosophy, thus, speaks directly to the film's *horror*; consider Stephen King's argument that "[w]hen you tamper with a man or woman's perspective on their physical world, you tamper with what may actually be the fulcrum of the human mind" (*Danse* 290)—by gesturing to consciousness without the customarily understood tenets of "human consciousness," *Darkness* disturbs our fundamental assumptions.

Further advancing a discussion of the canister's substance, it is important to consider the significance of its location, a Christian church. Le Blanc and Odell provide an interpretation of the slime's "outbreak," comparing it to baptism: "[w]hen the liquid strikes it is a perversion of the sacrament – a spurt sprayed into the mouth of the victim" (82). This holds true not only because it opens a connection between host and outside demonic forces, but also in terms of its

spatial reversal: baptism involves a subject's submersion in water, whereas the canister's slime resists gravity, spilling roof-ward before spilling back down into its hosts' mouths. Le Blanc and Odell see within this action a sexual implication, stating that "[w]hen passed on from mouth to mouth [the slime] is like the transmission of the aphrodisiac-venereal-disease parasite from David Cronenberg's *Shivers* (1975)" (82). Kenneth Muir extends this reading even further, arguing for a reading of the film as "an AIDS allegory"; he writes that the film's devil, "the *Prince of Darkness* of the title, [is] [...] a vat of prebiotic liquid evolving into intelligent life out of chaos [...] [that can] transmit itself by 'splashing' (ejaculating?) its essence into the faces and mouths of the endangered graduate students" (38). He continues to expand on this interpretation, emphasizing that the graduate students, "in turn, spread the 'devil disease' through their bodily fluids and emissions" (Muir 38). Muir gestures here toward ways in which AIDS was wrongly equated with homosexuality in the 1980s; in the 1982 *New York Times* article "New Homosexual Disorder Worries Health Officials," Lawrence K. Altman aligns the real disease of AIDS with the fictitious category of "GRID" which stands "for gay-related immunodeficiency" (Altman). Certainly, the AIDS epidemic has its influence on 1980s horror; David Cronenberg's body horror films *Videodrome* (1983) and *The Fly* (1986) evoke imagery of spreading disease and physical breakdown, while Stephen King's 1986 novel *It* deals explicitly with homophobia and the spreading of AIDS. *Prince of Darkness* also applies intuitively to this genre-specific sociohistorical trend. However, while there is something to be said for the visceral physicality of the slime's transmission in *Prince of Darkness*, I argue that its role in the film veers more into the realm of the ontologically paralyzing than the more embodied concept of sexual "deviance." While surely the film's imagery justifies this reading, its ontological emphases and overtly philosophical pronouncements encourage a less corporeal method of interpretation.

To that end, it is worth further pursuing Sartre's thought on this concept; to substantiate my reading of the slime's far-reaching metaphorical potential, I highlight the philosopher's statement that "the slimy is revealed in itself as 'much more than the slimy,'" and that as such the slimy is "rich with a host of obscure meanings and references which surpass it" (779). Expanding on this notion, Sartre states outright that "[f]rom the moment of its appearance it transcends all distinctions between psychic and physical, between the brute existent and the meanings of the world; it is a possible meaning of being" (779). This concept bears much significance in relation to *Prince of Darkness*, especially considering that the slime contained within the church basement's canister is the primary object of study. That the object of study can be affiliated with a "meaning of being" speaks further to *Darkness*'s horrific suggestions about the true but hidden reality of our world. What, then, might that "meaning of being" suggest? Here, it is worth considering the film's lineage of cosmic horror, especially as expressed in the works of H. P. Lovecraft. If the canister's slime "transcends all distinctions between psychic and physical, between the brute existent and the meanings of the world," it follows that the mysterious green substance transcends reason and *order* itself. What defines the slime above all else, then, is chaos. For a reading of chaos on the level of the cosmic or, indeed, on the level of *the universe*, consider Nick Land's argument that "[d]isorder always increases in a closed system (such as the universe), because nature is indifferent to her composition" (37). Carpenter powerfully visualizes the notion of the universe as a "closed system" by confining the film's impossibly powerful substance within a sealed container. This thought leads Land to the conclusion that the universe exists in entropic conditions; he defines entropy as "[t]he bedrock state of a system which is in conformity with the chance distribution of its elements" (37). *Prince of Darkness* nods to this notion as early as Birack's introductory monologue (cited above);

Birack argues that disorder underpins that which we perceive as reality. In his words, “our logic collapses on the subatomic level into ghosts and shadows.”

This concept figures crucially into the central symbol of slime. To that end, Sartre’s above statements substantiate the film’s dealings with epistemophobia: much of its horror stems from the characters’ various attempts at containing the canister’s contents within the parameters of systematic knowledge (as in the Priest’s fallible description of “pure evil”). Anna Powell extends the application of “sliminess” within *Prince of Darkness*, arguing that the term might be applied to various figures of threat aside from the slime canister; she states that “[s]liminess is conveyed chiefly by visuals in Carpenter’s work,” expanding to state that the auteur “usually insists on the repellent abjection of demonic entities, which generates his most repulsive imagery, particularly in *Prince of Darkness*, with its ants, maggots, roaches and degenerate street-people” (143). Powell’s characterization of “street people” as “degenerate,” and further her affiliating of their position with that of insects, demands further scrutiny. Undoubtedly, the notion is deeply problematic and offensively dehumanizing; however, there are ways in which Carpenter’s film engages rather brutally with the hierarchies of human society. This element of the film plays out as a diagnostic observation, rather than as a means of condoning class-based prejudice; indeed, Carpenter establishes his film’s world only to depict its quick and horrific decline. Further, it is imperative to recognize that this film’s concerns move past the interpersonal and into the territory of the (macro)cosmic; Kenneth Muir identifies this characteristic outright, stating that “[o]ne of the reasons that *Prince of Darkness* is such an eerily effective film resides in Carpenter’s decision to place human beings at the bottom of a cosmic hierarchy” (Muir 141). That the film aligns its homeless characters more closely with the “subhuman” class of insects raises ideological problems, undoubtedly; however, *Prince of*

Darkness does not valorize this social structuring. It simply represents, and this is of a piece with the film's philosophical project of deconstructing human subjectivity.

To support this argument, it is worth recognizing the ways in which Carpenter's work has elsewhere expressed his political commitments. Specifically, *They Live*—the director's 1988 follow-up to *Prince of Darkness*—warrants mentioning. A politically satiric horror piece, *They Live* levels a sustained critique against the sanctioned privilege that results from rampant capitalist Reaganomics. David Woods effectively summarizes the film's narrative and political subtext, writing that "the story depicts an America with rising poverty levels where those in power collaborate with aliens to make themselves wealthy at the expense of the general population, who are in turn kept passive by a welter of subliminal media messages" (30). Although the film incorporates genre traits in its use of aliens, the political implications stand out: the wealthy elite socially and economically oppress the masses. Through its engagement with these ideas, the film explores "the issue of just who is impoverished by the economic system" and that, in doing so, it employs "the omnipresent iconography of the working man, which indeed sits rather poignantly with that of the homeless" (Woods 32). While it would be tenuous to suggest that the politics of *Prince of Darkness*'s follow-up feature somehow resolves the problematics of *Darkness* itself, the clear connections between both films encourage recognition. Not only do both films centralize homeless characters in completely different ways, but they also both feature churches as important locations in their narratives; *They Live*'s rundown church, located in the middle of a shantytown, acts as a front for a radical anti-capitalist organization. In terms of assessing Carpenter's political sympathies, *They Live* also bears mention because it "has been held up as 'a vehicle for [Carpenter's] own ... radical political beliefs" (Woods 30). As such, while *Prince of Darkness* debatably demonizes its homeless

characters, this plot feature reflects philosophical concerns rather than simply endorsing classist ideals. If one still questions whether Carpenter possesses a politically attuned sense of awareness, it is worth acknowledging Stephen King's argument that "[a]ny writer of the horror tale has a clear—perhaps even a morbidly overdeveloped—conception of where the country of the socially (or morally, or psychologically) acceptable ends and that great white space of the Taboo begins" (*Danse* 278). Here, King's reference to "the Taboo" links to Carpenter's engagement with the uncomfortable subjects of classism and homelessness. While the author's suggestion cannot be empirically "proven," of course, it stands to reason that works of horror seek to shock and offend (as suggested by the affect-related name of "horror" itself). Thus, Carpenter does not thoughtlessly incorporate this imagery of insectile human beings and possessed homeless people; rather, he employs these concepts to substantiate the film's philosophy.

Consider the ways in which the film repeatedly (and unselectively) deploys visual metaphors to degrade the human at large (recall the scene detailed above, in which Wyndham's body breaks down into a pile of insects). *Darkness*'s recurrent affiliation of the human to insects speaks to the implications of a disturbing etymological link, between "human" and "humus." While insects do not act literally as ciphers for soil's organic matter, *Darkness* visualizes their proximity to muck; this notion plays out perhaps most explicitly in the image of worms slithering through clumps of mud that have been smeared across the outside of St. Godard's windows. So too does the infiltration of slime into the human body and mind illustrate this notion, which brings us back to the issue of Sartre and slime; Sartre describes the slimy consciousness as an "emptying" of the individual, a hideous flattening of "leech-like parts" that seek to gain purchase

on self-constitution.³ This links explicitly to the discussion above pertaining to *Prince of Darkness*'s fixation on "parts" and "wholes": the slimy consciousness, while taking on the illusive form of "oneness," is actually comprised of forcefully synonymized parts. This notion informs the film's depictions of possession by means of slimy-liquid ingestion: although the slime-infected characters might appear to be whole and "intact," further inquiry reveals this aberrant assembly of parts (for horrific visualization, consider again Wyndham's breakdown into a swarming assortment of insects). Indeed, Sartre's thought here encourages a cogent philosophical connection between the film's use of insect life forms and the horror of *the past* (specifically, recall Sartre's reflection on a consciousness that, if rendered slimy, "would be slyly held back by the invisible suction of the past" [778]). Horror cinema has long made use of insects as vessels for affect, representing as they do a multiplicity of life forms that appear alien to the human observer. Take, for example, Kurt Neumann's *The Fly* (1958) and David Cronenberg's 1986 remake, or the atomic paranoia pictures of the 1950s (for example, Gordon Douglas's *Them!* [1954] and Jack Arnold's *Tarantula* [1955]); indeed, the titular object of horror in William Castle's *The Tingler* (1959) also closely resembles a deformed and oversized centipede. On this topic of insect life forms, Le Blanc and Odell find a point of connection through one of Carpenter's contemporaries, Italian director Dario Argento. Beginning with the comparison between auteurs, the scholars go on to outline the extreme and particular significance of insects in *Prince of Darkness*:

³ Sartre's discussion of "sliminess" in relation to consciousness brings to mind C.G. Jung's rather ominous writings on water as a symbol for unconsciousness; Jung writes that "water is earthly and tangible [and] it is also the fluid of the instinct-driven body, blood and the flowing of blood, the odour of the beast, carnality heavy with passion" (19). For Jung, water is therefore innate to the unconscious, to the primordial "pre- or sub-human" human.

As in Argento's films (notably *Profondo Rosso* [1975] and *Phenomena* [1985], which also starred Donald Pleasance), insects play a big role, both in concepts of telepathy and as harbingers of misfortune. Like the Prince of Darkness, they have inhabited Earth for longer than humankind; they are his brethren. The window pane strains to ever increasing numbers of worms, rotten meat is filled with maggots, the tramps have insects on their faces and our first glimpse of Professor Birack is accompanied in long shot, craning down to an extreme close-up of red ants. (81-2)

Keeping Wyndham's grotesque disintegration in mind, it is interesting to note that Le Blanc and Odell describe these insects as the "brethren" of the film's human characters. It is intriguing on a fundamental level, in that these small organisms traditionally employed by the genre as creepily alien figures are here bound inextricably *to* the human. This notion is crucial to the philosophy of horror, as Dylan Trigg demonstrates in *The Thing: A Phenomenology of Horror*. In staging his own undercutting of human-centric phenomenology, Trigg indeed makes direct reference to the fact that the "theme of bodies possessed by forces older than humanity itself is a recurring motif in the horror genre" (83); Stephen King describes this concept as imbedded in the "moving, rhythmic search" of the *danse macabre* that is horror (*Danse* 4). King illustrates the path of this genre-specific "search" as an interior retreat into the "savagery" of our subhuman pasts, arguing that horror "is in search of another place, a room which may sometimes resemble the secret den of a Victorian gentleman, sometimes the torture chamber of the Spanish Inquisition . . . but perhaps most frequently and most successfully, the simple and brutally plain hole of a Stone Age cave-dweller" (4). Interesting that King describes this trait as driven by a "search," characterizing the genre with the possibility for inquiry and self-investigation not often granted

in the face of its overpowering affects. This characteristic of inquiry, however, need not result in “positive” knowledge—as King demonstrates, the search most often moves backward, digging for revelation in the foundations of “the human.”

For Dylan Trigg, too, this concept of pre-human forces possessing the human holds more sway than as just a mere exercise of generic tropes. Indeed, the concept underlines his entire project in *The Thing: A Phenomenology of Horror*, a text which seeks to rectify the phenomenological tradition’s inability “to think outside of the subject” (Trigg 3). Trigg stages a claim for the importance of “unhuman phenomenology,” a study that purports to decenter the self and turn its attention instead to the body. In making this philosophical move, Trigg intends to deal with the body in the same way that one might expect from a director of horror films: for the purposes of his text, Trigg dismisses theories that read the body as subordinate to the “subject,” the “self,” or the “social.” Indeed, Trigg’s intentions are not so very different from the image of a human body dissolving into the insectile remnants of its prehuman anteriority—the author positions his thought within the genre at hand, arguing that he aims “to demonstrate phenomenology’s value by conducting an investigation into the horror of the body” (Trigg 4). Both Trigg and King have effectively outlined the uncanny relationship between a repressed past and the “subject,” but neither addresses here the presence of “the demonic” as played out in *Prince of Darkness*. The problems of religion, and of its defilement, will come to bear more directly as this essay proceeds. In the meantime, I find it worth mentioning here that Robin Mackay finds within the “thinking and writing of ‘concept horror’” an attempt “to force the reader to secrete something of the poison that is buried within them,” describing the process as “a kind of demonic invocation” (15). To be sure, this notion of “demonic invocation” is one of many that stations *Prince of Darkness* as distinct from the other Apocalypse entries. While

Trigg's aforementioned text positions itself very much within its titular film, *The Thing*, this concept of the human body retaining its anonymous materiality plays out even more complexly in the second Apocalypse entry, *Prince of Darkness*.

To be sure, the terrifying violation of selfhood and subjectivity informs all of the Apocalypse films. Reflecting on *The Thing*, Carpenter himself claims that the film “has to do essentially [...] with losing your humanity and losing humanness” (Boulenger 136); likewise, *In the Mouth of Madness* strips its protagonist of his “humanness” by subjecting him to the recorded spectacle of his own life's fiction—as Marie Mulvey-Roberts observes, “the interface between real life and fiction becomes the film itself” (79); finally, *Cigarette Burns* takes this notion of narrative scrutiny even further, and the film criticizes the fabric of its *own* existence to emphasize that “[f]ilmmaking is about telling lies 24 times a second” (Le Blanc & Odell 122)—Le Blanc and Odell note that, in *Cigarette Burns*, “Carpenter reinforces this artificiality in the way he plays with jump cuts and deliberately jarring editing, both to shock the audience and draw attention to the construction of the film” (122). *Prince of Darkness* incorporates *all* of these critiques and techniques, and complicates them by virtue of its profound interest in knowledge and belief systems. Bryan Dietrich picks up on the film's far-reaching implications, especially as they pertain to perspective; he argues that it “effectively redefines the way we look at everything, from schizophrenics to visionary dreams”; to elaborate, he states that “Carpenter [...] show[s] us an eerily familiar world where the Holy Ghost is no different than plutonium, and where a physics grad student, palming a playing card that mysteriously vanishes, can prove Faust's assertion that ‘a sound magician is a demigod’” (95). What Dietrich emphasizes here is crucial: *Darkness* closes the gaps between worldviews, finding an overlap through their mutual interactions with horror. The notion of “losing one's humanness” underscores much of

Darkness's terror, and not only in the visceral linkages between the insect and the human. The film depicts possessions of varying visibility: some of the students retain their superficial appearances, while scientific researcher Kelly's face becomes horrifically mutated after she is impregnated with a demonic seed. These defilements of humanist exceptionalism underscore much of the philosophy in horror; as Mackay describes, horror bespeaks

a philosophy absolved of humanistic responsibilities, devoting itself to the experimental marshalling of all possible resources in the service of a transformation that would no longer be circumscribed within the bounds of the purely theoretical, and thus striking an alliance with those affects which, for the most part elided, nonetheless haunt philosophical thought like its very shadow. (4)

Mackay's observation here deserves further scrutiny, especially the suggestion that horror (and its associated affects) have long haunted many tenets of philosophical thought. I will engage with the complicated suggestions therein, beginning with a close study of *Prince of Darkness* in relation to the philosophy and fiction of Carpenter's most persisting literary influence, H. P. Lovecraft. Having established this indispensable voice in *Prince of Darkness*'s development, I will further study the film's narrative, horror, and philosophy through the category of religion and supernaturalism.

CHAPTER TWO: H. P. LOVECRAFT, *PRINCE OF DARKNESS*, AND THE ROLE OF THE COSMIC

H. P. Lovecraft's Influence on John Carpenter

Taken as a whole, the fictions and beliefs of horror writer H. P. Lovecraft present perhaps the most explicit foundation for much of the horror and philosophy in John Carpenter's *Prince of Darkness*; Anna Powell notes this connection at large, stating plainly that "H. P. Lovecraft [...] is a seminal influence on Carpenter's metaphysics" (140). Considering the ways in which *Darkness* deals so extensively with epistemological, ontological and metaphysical principles (particularly, knowledge, identity, space, and time), Powell's comment bears much significance here. Powell further pursues the Lovecraft-Carpenter connection, identifying ways in which Carpenter's work both aligns and deviates from Lovecraft's; she acknowledges first that "Carpenter lacks Lovecraft's scorn for the evolutionary weakness of the human race" (probably in reference to Lovecraft's notorious racism) (142). Most compelling, perhaps, is Powell's emphasis on the ways in which Carpenter's particularly cinematic language evokes Lovecraft's style and philosophy. She argues that "Carpenter's film style fulfils Lovecraft's criteria for successful horror fantasy, in which 'plot is everywhere negligible, and atmosphere remains untrammelled,'" by which she means that "[n]arrative structure is secondary to the films' evocation of psychological states and atmosphere" (142). While many of Carpenter's films (such as *Halloween* [1978], *The Fog* [1980], *The Thing* [1982] and *Christine* [1983]) function as meticulously plotted genre exercises, Powell raises a compelling argument by emphasizing the auteur's acute emphasis on "psychological states and atmosphere." Our focal piece, *Prince of Darkness*, especially typifies this approach; its repetition of nightmare imagery foregrounds its concerns with psychological states, and it draws a strong atmosphere through its incorporation of

a Gothic Church location and Carpenter's droning, minimalist musical score. Powell also notes the filmmaker's technical representation of Lovecraft's ethos; she argues that Carpenter's "cinematography notably uses the expressionistic devices of dynamic framing, darkness imbued by an unseen presence, monster's point-of-view shots and the fluid camera swoop of victim pursuit"; she draws directly from our focal text when she continues to write that "[h]is horror films, especially *Prince of Darkness*, also have the 'seriousness and portentousness' [...] required by Lovecraft, depicting characters under metaphysical siege, or in a potential Armageddon" (142). What Powell describes here is an affect-driven quality, almost a property of ineffable origin. She describes a connection between Lovecraft and Carpenter that speaks not only to a shared proclivity for subject matter and style, but also to a deeper source of intuition. However, as she outlines above, there is also a point of connection to be made in their philosophies, which she characterizes more specifically as their "metaphysics."

It is worth parsing out, then, the particular ways in which *Darkness*'s philosophy evokes Lovecraft's own. Carpenter himself substantiates the author's impact on *Darkness* in particular; Gilles Boulenger quotes the director as claiming that he "re-read Lovecraft" as one of the film's creative reference points, and Carpenter confirms this statement, citing Lovecraft's short story "The Outsider" as a specific example of influence (204). At first glance, this selection appears almost bizarrely out of touch with *Prince of Darkness*'s philosophical underpinnings. That is, a cursory assessment of Lovecraft's story reveals it to be a Gothic expression of horrific interiority, while *Darkness* contrarily reimagines Gothic tropes in order to express cosmic concerns. Indeed, Lovecraft's story commits entirely to a single (and singular) perspective—it portrays a mysterious, cloistered, tower-dwelling character whose appearance is heretofore unknown, even to himself. The piece climaxes when this character finally emerges from the

darkness and comes into contact with his own reflection for the first time. On the level of plot and perspective, the story certainly reads as a deeply interior narrative. However, closer analysis demonstrates ways in which *both* Lovecraft and Carpenter's texts expand on Gothic conventions, lending inner fears with the possibility of much broader, far-ranging horrors. This chapter navigates the evolutions of genre that link "the Gothic" to "the cosmic," with distinct emphasis on the ways in which Lovecraft's work (especially "The Outsider") informs Carpenter's film. To be sure, the connections between *Darkness* and Lovecraft's fiction at large are manifold, especially considering their shared pervasive interest in an unnerving interplay between science and supernaturalism. Furthermore, considering the darkly future-oriented notion of apocalypse that underscores *Darkness*, it is worth noting Lovecraft's statement that "the tale of supernatural horror provides an interesting field" for "those who relish speculation regarding the future" (*Supernatural* 105). Lovecraft's thought here gestures to the complicated dealings with temporality in his own work, and also anticipates similar conceits within *Prince of Darkness*. Specifically, it is worth noting that Lovecraft's fiction so often locates itself in spaces haunted by ancient pasts (for example, consider the cursed title location of "The Dreams in the Witch House"); this attribute situates his work within a Gothic tradition. However, he veers into the realm of cosmic horror by unearthing those terrifying ancients as a means of exposing dread beyond the realm of contemporary human comprehension; the emphasis on "cosmic" can be traced back to the fact that this dread within Lovecraft's fiction so often stems from the bizarre realities revealed to us by science. *Prince of Darkness* stages a similar maneuver in its use of subgenres, setting its proceedings within a familiarly Gothic location (an old Church), before using that same site as a vessel for cosmic horror.

But what, precisely, *is* the Gothic? How do we define this literary movement?

Originating primarily in England during the late 18th and early 19th centuries, it is defined as much by cultural context as it is by formal distinctions. For the purposes of background and historicizing, Fred Botting's *Gothic* proves useful:

The dominance of classical values produced a national past that was distinct from the cultivation, rationality, and maturity of an enlightened age. This past was called 'Gothic', a general and derogatory term for the Middle Ages which conjured up ideas of barbarous customs and practices, of superstition, ignorance, extravagant fancies and natural wildness. (22)

This literary movement, then, is predicated on a reaction against (or subversion of) Enlightenment attitudes and ideologies. The Gothic is not defined entirely by its underlying viewpoints, though; rather, it is also recognizable by virtue of its recurring aesthetic and formal characteristics. Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) is often viewed as the first Gothic novel proper, and it bears many (but not all) of the genre's constantly evolving set of recurrent traits; in a non-exhaustive list of key Gothic texts, Matthew Gregory Lewis's *The Monk* (1796), Charles Robert Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820) and Jane Austen's satirical *Northanger Abbey* (1817) also necessitate mention (Botting 45). Broadly speaking, the Gothic frequently incorporates any number of the following attributes:

Dark subterranean vaults, decaying abbeys, gloomy forests, jagged mountains and wild scenery inhabited by bandits, persecuted heroines, orphans and malevolent aristocrats. The atmosphere of gloom and mystery populated by threatening figures [is] designed to quicken readers' pulses in terrified expectation. Shocks, supernatural incidents and superstitious beliefs set out to promote a sense of

sublime awe and wonder which entwine[s] with fear and elevated imaginations.

(Botting 44)

The genre develops other forms beginning in the late 19th century and continuing all the way to contemporary fiction, with such noteworthy developments as the Southern Gothic emerging in the mid-20th century (typified by writers like Flannery O'Connor and William Faulkner), and the broader American Gothic evolving from the late 19th to the early 21st century (non-exclusively typified in its shifts by Edgar Allan Poe, H.P. Lovecraft and Stephen King, respectively). Surely, *Darkness* taps into several of the Gothic's original qualities, with its dark basement setting, and its atmosphere of gloom and mystery. However, there are crucial ways in which the film deviates from the foundational Gothic model, employing its iconography to new ends. It makes this move by way of taking up Lovecraft's commitment to cosmic horror.

Before venturing into a close reading of *Prince of Darkness* as it relates to both the Gothic and the fictions of H. P. Lovecraft, it is worth first parsing out *what* precisely Lovecraft means when he refers to "cosmic horror." Noël Carroll's *The Philosophy of Horror* proves useful here, surmising that "the gist of Lovecraft's theory seems to be that the literature of cosmic fear attracts because it confirms some instinctual intuition about reality, which intuition is denied by the culture of materialistic sophistication" (162). Carroll's use of the term "materialistic sophistication" here responds directly to the ideas laid out by *Supernatural Horror in Literature*'s introduction. Specifically, Lovecraft levels a critique against materialistic sophistication as the set of social ideals that downplay horror fiction's validity; Lovecraft describes materialistic sophistication as a belief system that "clings to frequently felt emotions and external events, and of a naïvely insipid idealism which deprecates the aesthetic motive and calls for a didactic literature to 'uplift' the reader toward a suitable degree of smirking optimism"

(12). What Carroll and Lovecraft describe here, then, is not bound up in materialism so much as it is in insipid sentimentalism (born from over-simplified notions of materialist *sophistry*); Lovecraft is himself a materialist, but his fiction and philosophy is much more sophisticated than that which is allowed by the narrow and naively optimistic creed of materialist sophistry. Certainly, this aversion to horrific truths is also at work in *Prince of Darkness*, a film that gestures to such “smirking optimism” through Walter (Dennis Dun)’s constant quipping, even in the face of attack from demonic forces. Anna Powell speaks to the ways in which Carpenter’s film takes Lovecraft’s philosophy toward materialist sophistry and uses it to defile Enlightenment standards of normalcy and law; specifically, Powell writes that in *Darkness* and its Apocalypse successor, *In the Mouth of Madness*, “when confronted by primal evil, they [science and clinical psychology] are rendered unable either to explain or protect” (140). She argues that thus, “[b]y encouraging scepticism towards the supernatural, reason enables the irrational to flourish and psychoanalysis offers only the inadequate method of treating possession as psychosis” (140). Why open oneself up to such dangerous knowledge, then? Indeed, this is one of the very questions put forth by *Prince of Darkness*, which suggests that the truth undergirding a culture upheld by materialist sophistry is one of incomprehensible terror. Carpenter supports this link, stating that he did “a lot of reading on theoretical physics and atomic theory” before writing the film; he goes on to articulate the ways in which that scientific knowledge fuels *Darkness*’s horror, explaining that “[t]he point of quantum mechanics is something called ‘observer-created reality,’ which in one bold and terrifying stroke slams at the heart of human perception and its understanding of the objective Newtonian reality” (Boulenger 201). Thus, it may be said that the cosmic horror in *Darkness* seeks not only to combat the naïveté of materialist sophistry, but to defile it by binding it up in that which it seeks to snuff out.

In other words, *Darkness* shows horror not as a resistance to materialist sophistry, but as its uncontainable underbelly.

The Role of Science in H. P. Lovecraft's Work, and in *Prince of Darkness*

Considering the overlap between Lovecraft and Carpenter pertaining to the horror of scientific knowledge and discovery, the notion of “objective Newtonian reality” urges closer scrutiny. The act of extending Lovecraft and *Darkness*'s philosophy to the field of scientific inquiry aligns with many of the persisting concerns imbedded within horror itself. Robin MacKay emphasizes the horror-inflected tenor of the interplay between philosophy and science, stating that:

Human cognitive defaults continue to cry out against the insights which modern physics, cosmology, genetics, neuroscience, psychoanalysis and the rest seem to require us to integrate into our worldview. As for philosophy, it has largely replaced wonder, awe, and the drive to certainty with dread, anxiety and finitude. Moreover, despite the diverse technological wonders they have made possible, the modern sciences offer little existential respite: There is no consolation in the claim that (for instance) I am the contingent product of evolution, or a chance formation of elementary particles, or that my ‘self’ is nothing but the correlate of the activation of neurobiological phase-spaces. (3-4)

MacKay's statement here speaks certainly to *Prince of Darkness*'s overarching theme of epistemophobia, especially in its description of the knowledge afforded by modern scientific knowledge. More specifically, though, it aligns *Darkness* with H. P. Lovecraft's attitudes toward, and incorporation of, many of the scientific discoveries made within his own lifetime. Consider, for instance, the author's expression of dread regarding Einstein's then-contemporary research.

In a letter written to Maurice W. Moe, Lovecraft states that his “cynicism and skepticism are increasing, and from an entirely new cause – the Einstein theory” (231). Elaborating on this thought, he exposes an undermining of his subjective perspective as the source of his terror—his sentiment anticipates clearly John Carpenter’s statement above, regarding the breakdown of “objective” Newtonian reality; specifically, Lovecraft writes that “[t]he latest eclipse observations seem to place this system among the facts which cannot be dismissed, and assumedly it removes the last hold which reality or the universe can have on the independent mind” (“Letter,” 231). Here, his emphasis on *the independent mind* speaks to *Darkness*’s concerns with the breakdown of individuality and personal identity, as portrayed in the scene depicting Wyndham’s physical breakdown. Further, Lovecraft’s reference to “the universe” brings immediately to mind his fictional and philosophical fixations on cosmic horror. He advances this notion himself, stating that Einstein’s writings lead him to the belief that “[a]ll is chance, accident, and ephemeral illusion - a fly may be greater than Arcturus, and Durfee Hill may surpass Mount Everest - assuming them to be removed from the present planet and differently environed in the continuum of space-time. . . All the cosmos is a jest, and fit to be treated only as a jest, and one thing is as true as another” (“Letter,” 231). Certainly, the concept of reality’s unreliable appearance plays out elaborately within *Prince of Darkness*, perhaps most strikingly through its visual fixations on scale. For one condensed visual metaphor, consider the scene that depicts Brian Marsh shuffling cards while the image of a cosmos fills his television screen: the macrocosmic condensed into a simulated miniature, which we are in turn perceiving through the formal armature of cinema. The scene’s imagistic suggestions deepen as the camera reverse-tracks to reveal the back of the television set, exposing a swarm of insects moving across and within. Through this compressed series of images, Carpenter visualizes *Darkness*’s interests

in the fallibility of perspective: by virtue of a televised recording, an insect can visibly comprise the same amount of space as a star. Brian, fixated on the television screen, is unaware of the abject reality that lurks just behind its representation. This scene thus illustrates the film's concerns with space; how, then, might we approach the overlap between Lovecraft and Carpenter when it comes to the issue of time?

On the topic of time, it is worth noting that Lovecraft's statement above, about "speculation regarding the future," works itself out in *Darkness's* dealings with an impending apocalypse, and in the film's deliberate use of chronology: set in its then-contemporary late-1980s, *Darkness* also incorporates dream sequences transmitted from the year 1999. The film also aligns more broadly with Lovecraft's own "philosophy of horror," adhering as it does to the author's repeated assertions regarding the key principles of "pure, true" tales of cosmic horror, as discussed above—take, for example, Lovecraft's demands on "literature of cosmic fear in its purest sense," which suggest that:

A certain atmosphere of breathless and unexplainable dread of outer, unknown forces must be present; and there must be a hint, expressed with a seriousness and portentousness becoming its subject, of that most terrible conception of the human brain—a malign and particular suspension or defeat of those fixed laws of Nature which are our only safeguard against the assaults of chaos and the daemons of unplumbed space. (*Supernatural* 15)

Lovecraft's use of the word "chaos" here warrants underlining, not least because *Prince of Darkness*, released in 1987, contends with the then-contemporarily burgeoning area of chaos theory. On the whole, though, Lovecraft's statement aptly describes *Darkness's* tonal and thematic characteristics—interestingly, in Carpenter's film, the "unexplainable dread of outer,

unknown forces” registers psychically, and thus, through “inner” as well as “outer” means. This aspect of the film reveals itself nowhere better than through its menacing, recurrent dream sequences, which depict the warnings communicated by a darkly cloaked figure. These scenes undo the separation between “interior” and “exterior” spaces, presenting as they do the transmission of a mysterious figure’s message, said figure claiming to broadcast its information from the future, in the year 1999. This impossible folding of time, paired with the disintegration of self-contained consciousness, demonstrates the film’s fundamental erosion of natural “laws.” Moreover, this fixation on the division between “the interior” and “the exterior” offers a worthy entry point into the film’s dealings with the overlaps between cosmic horror and its Gothic antecedents. One finds within both Lovecraft’s fiction and *Prince of Darkness* a means of “opening up” the Gothic form, of reconfiguring it into something new. In this sense, both Lovecraft and Carpenter might be said to inhabit the Gothic tradition, but theirs are not simple processes of continuation. Rather, I have identified within both authors a means of writing the Gothic anew. Here, I take up this correspondence at length.

“The Outsider,” *Prince of Darkness*, and Mirrors

Returning to Carpenter’s specific mention of Lovecraft’s seemingly pure Gothic expression of “The Outsider,” it is therefore worth interrogating the ways in which that particular story informs *Prince of Darkness*. To begin: it is noteworthy that, like *Darkness*, Lovecraft’s story derives much of its horror from the presence of mirrors. Certainly, mirrors have long been a mainstay in works of Gothic and horror fiction, with examples ranging from Edgar Allan Poe’s

“The Fall of the House of Usher” to Mike Flanagan’s recent film, *Oculus* (2013).⁴ In *Danse Macabre*, Stephen King uses the mirror as a symbol for what he perceives to be contemporary horror’s shift toward the self; he argues that “narcissism is the major difference between the old horror fiction and the new; that the monsters are no longer just due on Maple Street, but may pop up in our own mirrors—at any time” (252).⁵ Judging by King’s statement, then, mirrors make their way into contemporary horror fiction figuratively as well as literally. Opening the thresholds of genre further, consider also Jorge Luis Borges’s “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius”: Borges’s philosophically driven work of speculative fiction finds the character Adolfo Bioy Casares musing darkly that “mirrors [...] are abominable, because they increase the number of men” (3). Initially, the citing of Borges might seem discordant in a close study of horror fictions. However, it is worth noting that this writer of magic realism certainly knew of H. P. Lovecraft, even going so far as to dedicate his own uncannily terrifying piece (“There Are More Things”) to Lovecraft’s memory (Borges, *Book 35*). With this compelling connection in mind, “There Are More Things” offers critical avenues into *Prince of Darkness*’s use of mirrors, and indeed into the film’s philosophical underpinnings at large. Further, it offers a surprising bridge between the seemingly enclosed horror in “The Outsider” and the more apparently expansive, outward-looking dread in *Prince of Darkness*. That is, much like Carpenter’s film, Borges’s piece situates its horror within the realm of philosophical inquiry; however, it works on a distinctly Lovecraftian register, containing as it does a source of terror whose power cannot be defined by

⁴ Other examples of prominent uses for mirrors in horror literature and cinema range from Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897) to Graham Masterton’s 1989 novel *Mirror* to Marina Sargenti’s 1990 film *Mirror, Mirror*.

⁵ “Maple Street” refers here to the title neighborhood in *The Twilight Zone*’s episode “The Monsters Are Due on Maple Street,” in which townspeople conspire against one another under the collective belief that aliens reside among them, waiting to execute an invasion.

language. The narrator of “There Are More Things,” studying philosophy “at the University of Texas, in Austin,” muses within the introductory paragraph that his mysterious uncle “first revealed to [him] philosophy’s beautiful perplexities” (35).⁶ However, it isn’t long before the narrator unfurls the simplistic notion of philosophy being characterized primarily by “beauty”; in fact, the story goes on to align the aforementioned uncle’s interest in philosophy with horror, referencing “the well-constructed nightmares of the young H.G. Wells” (36).⁷ Additionally, in true Lovecraftian fashion, the story posits that while “one accepts those incompatible things which, only because they coexist, are called the world” (36), the revelation of that world’s underlying truth harnesses a horror too profound to be imagined. Indeed, this notion of incompatibility underlying what we call “the world” speaks directly to Carpenter’s own reflections regarding *Prince of Darkness*’s meaning; thinking about the creation of his film, the auteur states that “[he] knew things were not working like [he] thought they were,” that he “knew there was another mechanism involved, and [that he] came to find out that it was a haunted mechanism we still can’t explain and that has enormous implications beyond just this table and the sun rising” (Boulenger 40). Summarizing this thought, Carpenter states plainly that “[w]hat [*Prince of Darkness*] is about is the nature of reality” (Boulenger 40). That the “nature of reality” turns out to be profoundly horrifying indeed echoes Lovecraft, but also this concept of “incompatibility” as outlined by Borges.

Considering also the incorporation of a portentous dream within “There Are More Things” (38-9), and also its use of mirrors as a primary source of ambiguous dread (in a passage

⁶ One wonders if the slogan “Keep Austin Weird” originates far earlier than its disputed late-20th century origins would suggest (Yardley).

⁷ This cursory reference to science fiction scribe H.G. Wells further situates Borges’s work in conversation with Lovecraft and Carpenter, both whom ascribe their horror with the material of science fiction.

that I take up explicitly below), I stress again that Borges's piece provides a strikingly useful thread between Lovecraft's "The Outsider" and Carpenter's *Prince of Darkness*. Further, "Things" offers an explicit link to the tradition of pessimistic philosophy: the narrator recalls devoting "whole afternoons [...] to the study of Schopenhauer" (40). The story makes good on its promise of a bleak worldview, with its damning final series of lines; retreating from the unthinkable and *alien* adjustments that have been made to his uncle's house, the narrator feels "something, slow and oppressive and twofold, [...] coming up the ramp"; chillingly, the story concludes with the narrator's confrontation with said slow and oppressive threat, but leaves that threat ambiguous and unseen—"Curiosity overcame my fear, and I did not shut my eyes" (42). Integral to the purposes of this reading is that, after cataloguing the eerily bizarre sights he has confronted, the narrator states that he remembers "a V of mirrors that became lost in the upper darkness" (41). This image leads directly into the narrator's litany of questions (for example, "[w]hat would the inhabitant be like?" [41]), all of which lead to another fitting connection to *Prince of Darkness*: "I felt an intruder in the chaos" (42). Also worth scrutiny here is the fact that the mysteriously arranged "V of mirrors" becomes "lost in the upper darkness," affiliating the alien inhabitant's reflection with whatever unknown threats may lurk in the shadows. More broadly, the story defamiliarizes "the mirror" as such, in a way that recalls Lovecraft and anticipates Carpenter simultaneously; that is, Borges's story links the mirror to the unnervingly alien (as in "The Outsider") while also suggesting its link to broader and less easily represented horrors (as in *Prince of Darkness*).

Opening up this notion of the mirror as a far-ranging symbolic object, it is worth noting that what the mirror projects back is not an identical or "true" representation; rather, the subject looking into the mirror sees him or herself *flipped*, thus perceiving a skewed imitation rather than

viewing an actual representation of him or herself. With this in mind, Lovecraft's "The Outsider" taps into the uncanniness of the mirror itself as much as it thinks about the horrific contents of its reflection. *Prince of Darkness* investigates both horrific meanings within the mirror, while also considering that *behind* the mirror lies access to whatever horrors might be ushered in by "true" reality. This reading of the mirror brings to mind Kendall R. Phillips' writings on the prominence of frontiers within Carpenter's oeuvre. Specifically, Phillips argues that, "[i]n Carpenter's films, the frontier is a liminal space in between the normal structures of society and the dangerous realms of the wild and uncivilized, and in this way, the frontier serves as the location for Carpenter's vision of horror" (123-4). As a conduit between a recognizably surfaced reality and unthinkable terrors beyond, then, *Prince of Darkness*'s mirror might be interpreted as one of Carpenter's many metaphoric frontiers. Such an interpretation becomes even clearer considering Phillips' statement that, "[o]n one side of the frontier lie all those strictures of social order and repression that constitute civilization, and just beyond its edge lies the embodiment of that which has been repressed and now seeks to return" (124). Considering Phillips' interpretative strategy within the context of mirrors, one sees the ways in which *Darkness*'s mirrors are indeed disturbingly liminal objects (specifically, in that it is both inward- and outward-projecting). With this in mind, recall again Borges's densely philosophical notion outlined above, that "one accepts those incompatible things which, only because they coexist, are called the world" (36); that the mirror pits those incompatible things against one another (God/devil, Christ/antichrist, matter/anti-matter) speaks to its crucial function in the division between surface comprehensions of "reality" and the thinly veiled possibilities lying just behind. Pushing the function of the mirror further, then, consider its operation in the context of the film's existential fears. Considering the diametrically compressed and enormous scale of *Prince of Darkness*'s horrors, it

is worth opening up this conversation to the mirror as a vessel for “cosmophobia.” Here, Thomas Ligotti’s introductory remarks are instrumental in bringing the mirror’s seemingly interiorized concepts into the realm of the cosmic. Consider, to that end, Ligotti’s thoughts:

We must either outsmart consciousness or be thrown into its vortex of doleful factuality and suffer, as [Peter Wessel] Zapffe termed it, a “dread of being”—not only of our own being but of being itself, the idea that the vacancy that might otherwise have obtained is occupied like a stall in a public lavatory of infinite dimensions, that there is a universe in which things like celestial bodies and human beings are roving about, that anything exists in the way it seems to exist, that we are part of all being until we stop being, if there is anything we may understand as being other than semblances or the appearance of semblances. (41)

While Lovecraft and Borges’s pieces are somewhat contained by the parameters of their form (short prose fiction), *Prince of Darkness* takes advantage of its runtime and cinematic form to explore many of the ideas at work within Ligotti’s thought. Certainly, the film’s unravelling of stable selfhood (via the mirror), and its destruction of customarily constituted understandings of “reality” speak to Ligotti’s closing description of “semblances or the appearance of semblances.” That is, by peeling back the veneer of stable reality (through dismantling of religious, scientific, and philosophical worldviews), *Prince of Darkness* totally undoes the intellectual, spiritual, and physical content that qualifies our understandings of “self.” Surely, too, these sentiments underpin many of H. P. Lovecraft’s fictions (including, less obviously, our focal piece, “The Outsider”; although, keeping in mind the critical work we have undergone regarding the function of the mirror, “The Outsider” is not the inexplicable outlier that we might have assumed). Surely, concerning as it does the pursuit of knowledge and conscious understanding, even in the face of

“unconscious” warnings via dreams, *Prince of Darkness* contends openly with the “vortex of doleful factuality” and suffering bound up in the uncovering of *true* knowledge.

The above excerpt from “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius” (regarding mirrors as “abominations”) also warrants closer examination, and further substantiates John Carpenter’s initially puzzling citation of “The Outsider”; specifically, as suggested earlier, one might sooner expect *Prince of Darkness* to take inspiration from Lovecraft’s more expansive and explicitly cosmic fictions, such as “The Whisperer in the Darkness” or “The Dreams in the Witch House.” However, Borges’s notion reinterprets psychological notions of the mirror as a conduit for understanding self, reimagining it instead as a conduit for *externalized* horror. That is, Borges’s piece interprets the mirror as an abomination not because it reflects the man back to himself, but because it actually creates *another version* of the man. In this sense, mirrors can be seen to offer a multiplicity of other realities or worlds; appropriate, then, that *Prince of Darkness* finds within mirrors the potential for passage into a new Satanic reality. Further, recall the notion that mirrors present a “flipped” imitation of the subject rather than a facsimile—this plays into the importance of the mirror as an object of reversal, inversion, polarity, and even of binaries at large. Considering, then, the film’s dealings with incompatible but bound dual sets (matter versus anti-matter, Christ versus Antichrist, and even religion versus science), the mirror acts as a pivotal unifying symbol. So too does this reading of mirrors gesture to fascinating connections between “The Outsider” and Carpenter’s film. Lovecraft’s piece appears initially to be a Gothic tale of interior terror, inspired in no small part by the “enclosed” works of Edgar Allan Poe (for example, “The Black Cat” and “The Pit and the Pendulum”); however, considering the ambiguity of the mirror, and for that matter, the disturbing ambiguity of the narrator, the piece offers insights into the cosmic or outward-looking possibilities inherent to its Gothic design.

These possibilities invite themselves through the disturbingly ambiguous questions that the story poses: who, or *what*, is this narrator? What does it mean to be *alien* to oneself? The story communicates these ideas by staging the narrator in front of his reflection before he can comprehend that it *is* a reflection. On his mirror image, the narrator states that “it was not of this world—or no longer of this world—yet to my horror I saw in its eaten-away and bone-revealing outlines a leering, abhorrent travesty on the human shape” (Lovecraft, “The Outsider” 5). A moment of aporia arises from this encounter: if the narrator is not human, then what is he or she? What does this say about the stability of identity, or, for that matter, the stability of perception? Like Lovecraft’s piece, Carpenter’s film situates itself within many trappings typical of Gothic narratives (it features a prevalent ancient location, supernatural threats, the return of the repressed, and it foregrounds concerns with religiosity). However, even more brazenly than Lovecraft’s “The Outsider,” Carpenter’s film employs those Gothic tropes as an avenue into vast and *explicitly* cosmic concerns.

Indeed, the conventions of Gothic horror do not differ altogether from those of cosmic horror. By addressing the notion of “transgression” as an underlying trait within Gothic fiction, Fred Botting indirectly identifies ways in which the genre informs horror’s many later iterations (perhaps *especially* works of cosmic horror such as *Prince of Darkness*). Specifically, Botting notes that, historically, “Gothic productions were considered unnatural in their undermining of physical laws with marvellous beings and fantastic events” (6). Certainly this can be said for *Prince of Darkness*’s central thesis, which posits that the laws upheld by scientific, philosophical, and religious practice falter in the face of reality’s horrific truths. Mulvey-Roberts also parses out the Gothic implications at work within *Darkness*, tracing its lineage within a “Gothic trajectory, [...] from Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818) to Anne Rice’s Vampire

Chronicles starting with *Interview with the Vampire* (1976)”; through investigating connections between such a varied lineage of Gothic texts, Mulvey-Roberts finds “the search for origins which can open up levels of rebirthing” (81). In doing so, she attributes deeply Gothic origins to the horror of Kelly’s demonic birth in *Prince of Darkness*, and indeed to the film’s broader depiction of an evil “reborn” within the central location. Consider her substantial reading on this topic:

Such a nascent level of meaning may be viewed in *Prince of Darkness* where the acolyte becomes a midwife delivering the avatar from the meniscus of the mirror that has the viscosity of amniotic fluid. Taking place in a church, this rebirth is being investigated by a group of scientists. In common with the members of the scientific community in Carpenter’s *The Thing*, the observers are being taken over by that which they are observing. (81)

By drawing a connection here to *The Thing*, Mulvey-Roberts gestures to the ways in which *Darkness* speaks to Carpenter’s filmography-long concerns (and especially to the concerns of his Apocalypse works). Worth acknowledging, too, is that this birth features not only the bodily invasion of the demonic; rather, *Darkness* makes it clear that the mirror through which Kelly communicates with her antichrist “father” acts also as a conduit to other dimensions. The film’s transgressive, Gothic dealings with religion also take on shades of the cosmic through the eventual revelation that Jesus Christ was an alien sent to Earth to warn the human race about the apocalypse.

It is, however, the mirror that seems to act as the most explicit meeting point for “The Outsider” and *Prince of Darkness*, and also for the connection between the Gothic and the cosmic. As this comparative reading shows, the mirror acts simultaneously as a vessel for

investigating oneself, but also as a symbol for the mysteries and ambiguities of material reality (and thus, as a figure of implicitly cosmic dread). The mirror trope within horror and the Gothic traces at least as far back as to Lovecraft's own influences: as L. Sprague de Camp points out, it is likely that Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Fragments from the Journal of a Solitary Man" inspired "The Outsider." To illustrate the link, de Camp states that "Hawthorne noted an idea for a story in which he was walking in New York," and that Hawthorne "was astonished when people screamed and ran at the sight of him until he looked in a mirror and learned that '[he] had been promenading Broadway in [his] shroud!'" (de Camp 151). This obvious source of influence does not devalue the impact of Lovecraft's work on its own terms, but rather serves to exemplify the genre's recurrent fixation on the mirror as an object of horror. How, then, does the mirror figure as such in "The Outsider," and how does that influence carry through into *Prince of Darkness*? As an object generally speaking, the mirror represents a vessel of self-identifying subjectivity, a notion that Jacques Lacan addresses in his essay "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience." Lacan's piece positions the mirror as a metaphorical conduit of self-realization, offering as it does a symbol for a seismic stage of human psychological development. The title "stage" of Lacan's essay describes:

a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation and which manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its own totality that I shall call orthopaedic – and, lastly, to the assumption of the armor of an alienating identity which will mark with its rigid structure the subject's entire mental development. (444)

As such, while Lacan describes the mirror stage as initiating a process of “alienating” psychological development, its fundamental role in the figuration of “self” bears heavily here.

Much of the horror (both affectively and philosophically) in *Prince of Darkness*, and indeed in “The Outsider,” stems from a disjunctive association between “self” and “body.” Crucial, then, that both texts conclude with ominous images of the mirror—the narrator of Lovecraft’s story ends by describing the mirror as an emblem of pure terror, describing his own much-belated and terrible “mirror stage” as the moment whereby he came to know himself as “the outsider” (Lovecraft 6). Indeed, Carpenter echoes this ending so heavily that the striking similarity necessitates serious scrutiny. In “The Outsider,” the narrator’s final statement carries as much damning weight as does the final shot of *Prince of Darkness*, wherein protagonist Brian Marsh reaches slowly toward his reflection—Carpenter cuts before the audience can determine whether or not that surface still harbors the potential to access a hellish other dimension. “The Outsider” finishes with this image’s striking literary precedent: “I know always that I am an outsider; a stranger in this century and among those who are still men. This I have known ever since I stretched out my fingers to the abomination within that great gilded frame; stretched out my fingers and touched *a cold and unyielding surface of polished glass*” (6). In both texts, the notion that the object of horror can be caged within one’s own body effectively *nullifies* customary notions of self as stable, contained, and (obviously) embodied. Thomas Ligotti takes up this phenomenological element of horror much before the release of Dylan Trigg’s *The Thing: A Phenomenology of Horror*. Indeed, Ligotti explicitly centralizes this dissonance within the sensation of horror, between material body and phenomenological self; he states that “[e]verything comes back to the self and must come back to the self, for it is the utmost issue in our deciding whether we are something or nothing, people or puppets” (98). In *Prince of*

Darkness, this concept of “puppetry” plays out with profound explicitness: as the film’s academics are infected by the canister’s fluid excretions, they transform into machine-like automatons in service of a demonic overseer. They retain their physical bodies, but contact with mirrors incites states of hypnosis and hysteria. Even Kelly, whose flesh reddens and corrodes after the consumption of the possessing fluid, maintains a semblance of her original physical form.

This distinction, then—between the horror of the flesh (as corrosive, and susceptible to horrific physical damage), and the horror of the dissociated self—plays out deliberately in *Prince of Darkness*’s final scene. In fact, it is this last series of images that most closely mirrors Lovecraft’s “The Outsider” (pun only partially intended). Specifically, the final scene shows Brian Marsh awakening, sweat-sheened and rattled, from a new version of the film’s recurrent nightmare. In this iteration, his lover Catherine replaces the cloaked figure standing inside the church entrance; when Brian jolts awake, he hallucinates for a moment that the demonized body of Kelly is lying beside him. Finally, he turns toward his bedroom mirror, his face a mask of unreadable emotion; he reaches out with his hand toward his reflection, and the film cuts to black. Considering the placement of this episode within the film’s overall design, it is worth scrutinizing the dream as a specifically *filmic* device. Carpenter renders these sequences as explicitly *outside* or even *beyond* the film’s consistent logic, employing garbled audio and a damaged analog aesthetic. Cumbow argues that “[t]he cautionary dream-message suggests that film may be our salvation (*Saint Godard*),” but that, at the same time, film as a medium “is also the thinnest of protective layers between our comfortable, complacent sense of reality, and the dark side: In the climax of the film, the world beyond is seen in the traditional image of the other side of the mirror” (164). Cumbow here emphasizes the saint’s name as an acknowledgment of

the film's nod to French *nouvelle vague* auteur Jean-Luc Godard. So too does he draw attention to the fact that Brian's hesitantly reaching fingers actually extend toward *us*, the audience, forcing us into the position of mirror or reflection. This gesture explicitly visualizes "a key feature of the horror genre" that Noël Carroll describes as "the mirroring effect"—specifically, this feature assumes that "the emotions of the audience are supposed to *mirror* those of the positive human characters in certain, but not all respects" (18, emphasis added). Citing specific examples for clarification, Carroll argues that characters' responses "counsel us" toward an appropriate response. How appropriate, then, that Brian's final expression is one of uncertainty: Carpenter does not provide the relief of affective catharsis, à la the surprise "jump scare" that closes other famous genre films, such as Brian De Palma's *Carrie* (1976) or Sean S. Cunningham's *Friday the 13th* (1980). Instead, the mirroring effect pushes forward a mutual character-audience aporia. Addressing the final scene, Marie Mulvey-Roberts identifies its symbolic component, noting that "[t]he looking glass acts metaphorically for the magic mirror of the cinema screen onto which is projected a phantasmagorical illusion of light and shade" (82). The profoundly downbeat ending, then, extends deliberately outward in its implications, and this is perhaps where *Darkness* deviates most explicitly from "The Outsider." Lovecraft's story contains the intimate and particular horror of one character's deferred mirror stage, wherein self disconnects monstrously from body, whereas *Darkness* reaches much further.

The Impact of Lovecraft's Cosmic Fiction on *Prince of Darkness*

For a more explicit connection between *Prince of Darkness* and Lovecraft's fiction, consider the aforementioned novelette, "The Dreams in the Witch House" (1933). Like Carpenter's film, "Witch House" concerns itself with the confrontation between scientific inquiry and supernatural horror; moreover, both *Darkness* and "Witch House" repeatedly

incorporate eerie dream sequences to complicate the boundary between objective and subjective (or psychic) reality. To briefly summarize Lovecraft's story, the narrative follows Miskatonic University undergraduate Walter Gilman, who is housed in the titular "Witch House," an ancient Arkham residence (which earns its name because it once contained Salem witch Keziah Mason). While staying there, Gilman is plagued with vividly horrific nightmares and nightly tittering sounds from within the walls. Fascinated by the room's strange angles and hoping to find entry into unknown dimensions, Gilman studies non-Euclidian calculus and quantum mechanics, while also perusing occult works like the fictional grimoire, Abdul Alhazred's *The Necronomicon*.⁸ While Carpenter's film focuses its horror within the context of group dynamics, it connects overtly with Lovecraft's fiction in terms not only of dream sequences and its central science/supernaturalism tension, but also in terms of its overarching commitment to cosmic horror.⁹ Like *Darkness*, "Witch House" shows scientific inquiry to be a tool with which one can access dangerous knowledges; in fact, Lovecraft's story shows Gilman's studies of calculus and quantum mechanics as *paths* toward contact with cosmic dread, outlining this progression through Gilman's indirect discourse: "Old Keziah, he reflected, might have had excellent reasons for living in a room with peculiar angles; for was it not through certain angles that she claimed to have gone outside the boundaries of the world of space we know?" (Lovecraft, "Dreams"). Here, Gilman's fascination with "angles" links to his fascination with geometry. The visible world that Gilman explores through science and mathematics gives way to possibilities beyond; Lovecraft

⁸ L. Sprague de Camp notes that while "there is no such thing as 'non-Euclidean calculus,'" seeing as "Euclid flourished nearly two thousand years before calculus was invented by Newton and Leibniz," he assumes that Lovecraft knowingly disregards this fact; the author probably "used the term as science-fiction writers often use pseudo-scientific terms, to 'give artistic verisimilitude to an otherwise bald and unconvincing narrative'" (357).

⁹ Carpenter acknowledges the importance of group dynamics in his oeuvre at large, stating that "a group mentality courts the reptile brain in each of us, it courts the deep part of the cortex that is cold-blooded" (Boulenger 36).

describes the character's "interest gradually veer[ing] away from the unplumbed voids beyond the slanting surfaces, since it now appear[s] that the purpose of those surfaces concer[n] the side he [is] already on" (Lovecraft, "Dreams"). This description of reality's two "sides" aligns with the discussion above regarding the mirror's function in *Prince of Darkness*; as in Lovecraft's story, processes of scientific inquiry lead to the horrific realization of what resides on "the other side." So too does "Witch House" foreground the link between academic curiosity and cosmic horror, much like *Prince of Darkness*; the story describes Gilman making an impression during a classroom "discussion of possible freakish curvatures in space, and of theoretical points of approach or even contact between our part of the cosmos and various other regions as distant as the farthest stars or the trans-galactic gulfs themselves" (Lovecraft, "Dreams"). Eventually, the discussion veers to contact with regions as "fabulously remote as the tentatively conceivable cosmic units beyond the whole Einsteinian space-time continuum" (Lovecraft, "Dreams"). Gilman's eventual experience stages these possibilities of contact not as wondrous, but rather in line with Lovecraft's signature expression of cosmic horror.

Anticipating the Satanic figure lurking behind the mirror in *Prince of Darkness*, "Witch House" offers a pair of horrific tour guides for Gilman's cosmic excursions. Exiled witch Keziah Mason, who "guided by some influence past all conjecture—[...] actually found the gate to [other-dimensional] regions," travels with the deformed Brown Jenkin (Lovecraft, "Dreams"). Indeed, Lovecraft's vivid descriptions of Brown Jenkin provides another example of this story's influence on *Prince of Darkness*. As in Carpenter's film, Brown Jenkin foregrounds a fear of the link between the human and the verminous, thus acting as a tangible manifestation of the story's metaphysical horror: like Frank's insect-constituted body in *Darkness*, Jenkin's interstitially rat-human form advances a philosophical project of humiliating the human. Anticipating Frank's

disturbingly uncanny appearance and breakdown, Lovecraft attributes Jenkin with traits both human and completely alien, writing that “[w]itnesses said it [Jenkins] had long hair and the shape of a rat, but that its sharp-toothed, bearded face was evilly human while its paws were like tiny human hands”; pushing the descriptive horror further, the story states that Jenkins “took messages betwixt old Keziah and the devil, and was nursed on the witch’s blood—which it sucked like a vampire” (“Dreams”). Jenkins’ body thus represents categorical violations (Lovecraft emphasizes this aspect by lapsing between the pronouns of “he” and “it”); the character is both human and rat, both alien subject and object of horror. Another connection presents itself in the reference to “the devil,” considering *Darkness*’s interests in Satan and, more specifically, an “anti-god.” “Witch House” openly contends with the topic of Satanic worship, mostly relayed through the ramblings of Gilman’s neighbour, a “superstitious loomfixer named Joe Mazurewicz” (Lovecraft, “Dreams”). Gilman overhears Mazurewicz “praying because the Witches’ Sabbath [is] drawing near,” and notes through indirect discourse that “May-Eve [is] Walpurgis-Night, when hell’s blackest evil roa[m] the earth and all the slaves of Satan gathe[r] for nameless rites and deeds” (Lovecraft, “Dreams”). Of course, *Darkness* also openly employs Satanic imagery throughout, even depicting the devil’s red arm extending through a mirror to reach into Saint Godard’s.¹⁰

In *Prince of Darkness*’s dream sequences (described in detail above), the academics’ shared transmissions act as psychic conduits that transgress both time (as the transmissions are projected backward from the future) and space (as a communally shared mental state, the

¹⁰ Throughout my final chapter, I return to the topic of religion and Satanism in *Prince of Darkness* in greater detail.

transmissions violate the interiority of dreams). “The Dreams in the Witch House” depicts Gilman’s dream sequences similarly. Lovecraft describes these sleeping visions in vivid detail:

Gilman’s dreams consisted largely in plunges through limitless abysses of inexplicably coloured twilight and bafflingly disordered sound; abysses whose material and gravitational properties, and whose relation to his own entity, he could not even begin to explain. He did not walk or climb, fly or swim, crawl or wriggle; yet always experienced a mode of motion partly voluntary and partly involuntary. Of his own condition he could not well judge, for sight of his arms, legs, and torso seemed always cut off by some odd disarrangement of perspective; but he felt that his physical organisation and faculties were somehow marvellously transmuted and obliquely projected—though not without a certain grotesque relationship to his normal proportions and properties. (“Dreams”)

Much like the garbled dream transmissions in *Darkness*, Gilman’s eerie nighttime voyages dislocate narrative stability. While Gilman moves throughout the majority of the story in a world of familiarly stable, physical reality, his dreams skew everything—not only are the abysses that he traverses “inexplicably coloured,” but his very perceptual apparatus has been dramatically altered. His movement has been shifted into something utterly unfamiliar, and the process of seeing detaches itself somehow from his body. Of course, this connects intuitively with the notion of “humanless” perspective Bataille describes above, in the sense that Lovecraft imagines perceiving without the familiarity of human-centric “meaning,” or even the physical origin of sight.

Lovecraft’s 1934 story “From Beyond” offers another variation of sense-dissociative description; like “Witch House,” this piece lends itself more obviously to comparison with

Prince of Darkness than does “The Outsider.” Like “The Dreams in the Witch House,” “From Beyond” typifies Lovecraft’s fixation on cosmic horror, focusing on mad scientist Crawford Tillinghast’s attempts to access realities beyond the parameters of the five human senses. Indeed, Tillinghast’s existential monologues recall many of the ideas within Birack’s lecture detailed above; Tillinghast argues that “[o]ur means of receiving impressions are absurdly few, and our notions of surrounding objects infinitely narrow,” by which he means that, “[w]ith five feeble senses we pretend to comprehend the boundlessly complex cosmos,” when in actuality our perception is embarrassingly limited (“From Beyond”). Indeed, while charting this character’s rapid descent, Lovecraft’s story repeatedly states outright many of the philosophical ideas that we can see underlying *Darkness*’s epistemophobia; for example, early into “From Beyond,” the narrator reflects on the fact “[t]hat Crawford Tillinghast should ever have studied science and philosophy was a mistake,” because the narrator believes that science and philosophy “should be left to the frigid and impersonal investigator, for they offer two equally tragic alternatives to the man of feeling and action; despair if he fail in his quest, and terrors unutterable and unimaginable if he succeed” (“From Beyond”). Such a grim perspective on these spheres of academic inquiry makes its way into *Prince of Darkness*, seeing as the collective study of the film’s central canister proves both despairing *and* terrible. Also, taking that central canister into consideration, Crawford Tillinghast’s experimental machine in “From Beyond” offers another intuitive point of comparison. Much like the eerily radiant green fluid that swirls inside *Darkness*’s canister, Tillinghast’s “detestable electrical machine” glows “with a sickly, sinister, violet luminosity” (Lovecraft, “From Beyond”). This description raises the issue of imagery in Lovecraft’s piece, which certainly foregrounds the visual but also plays notably on aural

sensations. Indeed, scrutinizing the story's most horrific sequences proves it to be a strikingly *cinematic* work, thus providing yet another noteworthy link with Carpenter's film.

Lovecraft's foregrounding of *sound* in particular proves far too prominent to be overlooked; when he is first subjected to the power of Tillinghast's strange machine, "From Beyond"'s narrator notes that, "from the farthest regions of remoteness, the *sound* softly glided into existence" ("From Beyond"). He describes the sound in vivid detail, as "infinitely faint, subtly vibrant, and unmistakably musical, but [holding] a quality of surpassing wildness which [makes] its impact feel like a delicate torture of [his] whole body" ("From Beyond"). This element of the story brings to mind *Prince of Darkness* not only because cinema in general is a fundamentally audiovisual medium, but also because Carpenter *in particular* warrants mention, as an auteur who places heavy emphasis on sound design and musical score. As he does for the majority of his films, Carpenter composes *Prince of Darkness*'s score (in collaboration with Alan Howarth). Characterized by deep synths and melodic repetitions, the musical score serves to underline the atmospheric sound design rather than to overtly pronounce affective cues. Le Blanc and Odell note the importance of music and sound design in Carpenter's work at large, stating that in the director's films, "mood tones set up suspense in a scene," elaborating to state that mood tones "often take the form of ominous bass drones, occasionally accompanied by continuous staccato rhythms, to prepare the audience for 'something'" (21). Within the confines of literary form, Lovecraft employs similarly cinematic technique: the narrator describes his machine-induced experience as "a vortex of sound and motion," before going on to provide a detailed, powerfully audiovisual transcription ("From Beyond"). While Le Blanc and Odell identify a broad and basic formal function of sound within Carpenter's work, such a cursory overview does not sufficiently address the vital role that both audio design and musical scoring

perform within *Prince of Darkness*. Moreover, it is worth parsing out the distinction between Carpenter's work in this film and the particular valences of auditory experience that Lovecraft outlines in "From Beyond."

As such, a line quoted above necessitates revisiting; specifically, we return our attention to Lovecraft's description of the sound's impact as "a delicate torture" of the narrator's "whole body" ("From Beyond"). Here, the affect extends *beyond* the aural, describing as it does the machine's ability to access hitherto dormant senses. The description of "delicate torture" alludes to the strangeness of vestigial organs or nerve-points newly invigorated, but a subdued eroticism also underlines that strangeness. Worth noting here is that Stuart Gordon's 1986 cinematic adaptation foregrounds this implicit sexuality, contributing a new subplot wherein Crawford's sexual appetites intensify and transform as his research continues. The phrase "delicate torture" also lends itself to a reading that foregrounds the object of "torture" over the modifier "delicate"; that is, the sound's affect might cause discomfort in a way so abstracted from customary experience that its resultant torture can *only be* described as "delicate" rather than, say, "brutal." All this is to say that as a writer of prose fiction, Lovecraft maximizes on the medium's ability to describe sensory multiplicity. The same might be said of John Carpenter, considering his multifaceted approach to cinematic auteurship: as *Prince of Darkness*'s director, writer (under the pseudonym Martin Quatermass), and musical composer, he hearkens explicitly back to a literary author's *total* control of affective impact. In line with our "From Beyond" excerpt, which details the auditory experience of coming into contact with the story's dimension-transgressing machine, an intuitive comparison presents itself in *Prince of Darkness*. Specifically, consider the association between Carpenter and Howarth's musical score and the various shots that foreground the film's mysterious canister. Worth considering that Carpenter and Howarth

compose the film's main theme from the repetition of low bass notes; surface-level analysis verifies Le Blanc and Odell's reading above, which argues that Carpenter's scores warn the audience of frightening events to come. Of more interest here, though, is the fact that Carpenter underscores shots centralizing the canister with high-pitched, synthesized choral notes. Much like the machine-induced sound Lovecraft describes in "From Beyond," this theme sets itself apart from the majority of the film's soundscape; as such, Carpenter uses cinematic form to characterize the canister as something that exists in some sense "outside" of *Darkness's* reality.

With the topic of sound in mind, it is worth pursuing the other cinematic characteristics at work in "From Beyond." Lovecraft describes "the scene" of the narrator's machine-induced trip as "almost wholly kaleidoscopic," a "jumble of sights, sounds, and unidentified sense-impressions" from which he still remembers "[o]ne definite flash"—in that flash, he "seemed for an instant to behold a patch of strange night sky filled with shining, revolving spheres, and as it receded [he] saw that the glowing suns formed a constellation or galaxy of settled shape; this shape being the distorted face of Crawford Tillinghast" ("From Beyond"). This image proves to be crucial in investigating the genre crux at the center of this chapter: while delving fully into the realm of cosmic horror (the strange and eerie vastness of galaxies and glowing suns), Lovecraft also invokes his Gothic antecedents. Specifically, he makes a link by defamiliarizing Tillinghast's human face, thus recalling fundamental Gothic concerns with the human. In doing so, Lovecraft shows the horror of the self to actually be reflected *within* the horror of the cosmos; Dylan Trigg stages this notion within his own philosophical project, stating outright that "to speak of the horror of the body, is also to speak of the horror of the cosmos" (146). Lovecraft couches this dense notion within the language of cinematic affect, calling explicit attention to this style when the narrator describes a picture that rises "over and above the luminous and

shadowy chaos” as “superimposed upon the usual terrestrial scene much as a cinema view may be thrown upon the painted curtain of a theatre” (“From Beyond”). Not only does Lovecraft’s “From Beyond” provide narrative points of entry into Carpenter’s film, then, but also complicated formal connections. In this piece, the origins of Carpenter’s Gothic-cosmic cinema show through.

To that end, it is worth considering further the connections between cinema and Lovecraft’s fiction. S.T. Joshi touches on Lovecraft’s film-related views, stating that the author’s “early letters testify to a considerable enjoyment of films of the 1910s and 1920s--not merely horror or fantasy films, but comedies and melodramas as well”; he cites Charles Chaplin as a specific example, noting that Lovecraft wrote a poem in 1915 dedicated to the auteur (Joshi). And although Joshi writes that Lovecraft was generally “disdainful of the film medium, especially when it attempted to venture into horror and the supernatural,” the horror author’s enthused response upon seeing *The Phantom of the Opera* in 1925 warrants mention; in a letter, Lovecraft recalls the experience fondly, describing the film as a “spectacle,” and that when the picture’s “horror lifted its grisly visage [... he] could not have been made drowsy by all the opiates under heaven” (Joshi). Taking this information into consideration, it is clear that Lovecraft was actively viewing and responding to works of cinema during the period in which he composed “From Beyond” (and, as detailed above, this is verified by the story itself, with its set piece-like scenes, its audiovisual emphasis, and its explicit reference to cinema screens). Intriguingly, Joshi cites several Lovecraft stories as demonstrating clear cinematic influences (“Nyarlathotep” [1920], “The Shadow out of Time” [1935], and “The Case of Charles Dexter Ward” [1927]); but “From Beyond” goes without mention in his essay. As evidenced by

Gordon's filmic adaptation, the story foregrounds distinctly filmic sensations, most especially through its depictions of the narrator's machine-initiated excursions.

John Carpenter's Gothic-Cosmic Cinema

Regarding the discussion of Lovecraft's relation to cinema, and Cumbow's analysis above, which suggests that film is "the thinnest of protective layers between our comfortable, complacent sense of reality, and the dark side" (164), it proves useful to consider the ways in which *Prince of Darkness* extends the philosophies of Lovecraft (and, ostensibly, of Borges) into the territory of cinema. Expanding on the film's sphere of influence, Le Blanc and Odell note that Carpenter visibly evokes "Jean Cocteau's surrealist masterpiece *Le Sang d'un Poète* (193[2])" (83). The director himself acknowledges this point of influence; Carpenter responds to the question, "Did Jean Cocteau's *Orpheus* inspire the last image of *Prince of Darkness*?" plainly and directly: "Of course" (Boullenger 204). Keeping in mind *Prince of Darkness*'s open use of film references, then, it is worth drawing attention to the ways in which Lovecraft's literary and philosophical project develops new meaning within the grammar of cinema. In doing so, it is crucial to think through the implications of the cinema screen as a mirror, or at the very least as a locus for delineating polarity (the viewer and the viewed, the "real" and the "fantasy"). Unpacking this notion in reference to *Darkness*, both Mulvey-Roberts and Cumbow offer helpful entry points. Mulvey-Roberts effectively organizes many of this essay's concerns, arguing that "the characters actually penetrating the mirror relinquish their individuality for a collective Gothic darkness into which they are reborn"; she continues to state that "[t]he looking glass acts metaphorically for the magic mirror of the cinema screen onto which is projected a phantasmagorical illusion of light and shade" (Mulvey-Roberts 82). Cumbow too speaks to this notion of darkness, albeit with the explicitly Gothic demarcation that Mulvey-Roberts has

helpfully emphasized; specifically, Cumbow states that “[t]hough not without its underpinnings in the world of literature and art, the mirror image in film is frequently a metaphor for the movie screen itself, a layer of illusion through which a greater reality breaks, a layer both protective and expressive, which shows us images that stimulate our fancies even as they reflect our realities” (164). In line with Mulvey-Roberts’s interpretation, he argues that “[b]eyond [the mirror] lies a darkness that we recognize as the darkness of the movie theatre, but also of something more” (Cumbow 164). Both of these insights provide densely packed avenues from which to derive the film’s dealings with “reality” and “representation,” specifically within the context of its particular language—the language of cinema. At first glance, it seems fitting that Cumbow’s ambiguous description of “something more” might be conveniently applied to this “collective Gothic darkness” described by Mulvey-Roberts, but this leads us back to the complicated relationship between the Gothic and the cosmic. For when we think through the function of the mirror in *Prince of Darkness*, we are not seeing behind its deceptive surface a simple expression of terrible repression, or even of mere supernaturalism. Rather, what lurks behind the mirror is the very chaos lingering behind the thin membrane protecting our deceptively stable “reality.”

What does this say, then, for the extraordinarily complex correspondence that closes *Prince of Darkness*? Carpenter stages the final sequence in a vacuum-sealed space of mystery; the viewer is not informed how much time has passed since the climactic horror, or even whether or not Brian is himself still dreaming before the film cuts to black. This deliberate drive for ambiguity underscores and finalizes the film’s suggestions of warped or defiled temporality. Indeed, if Brian might be said to inhabit the film’s “reality,” then this truly might position the audience in the dark realm of the Gothic-turned-cosmic, a space wherein supernaturalism gives way to unthinkable cosmic dread. Effectively, then, *Prince of Darkness* moves into genre-

defying territory, suggesting openly that its customarily received “fantasies” are actually statements on our preconceptions of reality. Certainly, this scene does not act simply as a closing gimmick, but actually gestures to many of its director’s fixations to come; consider not only the elaborate self-awareness of *Escape from L.A.* (1996) and *Ghosts of Mars* (2001), but also, even more relevantly, the confrontational metatextuality of the next two Apocalypse entries, *In the Mouth of Madness* (1994) and *Cigarette Burns* (2005). Indeed, a close reading of these two films enriches the context of metacinema as transmission for cosmic horror, especially when considering *Madness*’s intensive commitment to the works of H. P. Lovecraft.

This notion of metacinematic expression ties directly into the concept of generic evolution; the cosmic emerges from the Gothic, and *Prince of Darkness* announces the metacinematic cosmic-Gothic. Surely, *Darkness* embodies this category perhaps less overtly than the next two Apocalypse entries; and for this reason, it is worth exploring how *In the Mouth of Madness* and *Cigarette Burns* advance the cinematic expression of cosmic horror into a formal consciousness and a direct confrontation with the audience. For the purposes of this chapter, it is also noteworthy that *Madness* owes so much to the works of H. P. Lovecraft. Le Blanc and Odell identify a number of specific influences in this regard:

In the Mouth of Madness, while not adapted from specific Lovecraft stories, nevertheless carries the spirit of Lovecraft’s work. Structurally, the inspiration comes from [‘The Case of Charles Dexter Ward’] with its asylum book-ending and mental condition resulting from shock encounters with unspeakable entities. There are many more allusions, notably the evil in the black church setting of [‘The Hunter in the Dark’] (‘This place had once been the scene of an evil older than mankind and wider than the universe, it was a place of pain and suffering

beyond human comprehension’) and the title of Cane’s new book relating to the Cthulhu novel *At the Mountains of Madness*. (99-100)

This range of connections to the work of H. P. Lovecraft substantiates further the idea that *Prince of Darkness* shows Carpenter cultivating a direct correspondence with his literary influence. Mulvey-Roberts parses out the ways in which this engagement with Lovecraft finds thematic possibilities within the cinematic medium, writing that “[i]n Carpenter’s *In the Mouth of Madness* (199[4]), the interface between real life and fiction becomes the film itself”; she continues to emphasize that “[o]ne of its final scenes is of the hero watching the film in an act of solitary, almost incestuous, spectatorship. By doing so, he becomes witness to his own performance in the making” (78-9). This conclusion is crucial in drawing a connection to *Prince of Darkness* in that both films incorporate closing sequences that illustrate their respective protagonists’ imprisonment in a horrific knowledge of cosmic proportions; further, much like Brian of *Darkness*, John Trent of *Madness* is drawn into a direct and chillingly ambiguous engagement with audience. As such, these two titles work in tandem to trouble the all-too-convenient dismissal of Lovecraftian philosophy as “mere fiction.” One sees here, then, a conscious movement of genre development: Carpenter identifies in “The Outsider” a powerful incorporation of the cosmic into the Gothic, and pushes that correspondence further into the medium of film. *Madness*, then, also *expands* on the ideas put forth by *Darkness*: as Brian reaches toward the screen in *Darkness*’s final scene, he appears unaware of the viewing audience. *Madness*, however, doubles back on itself, so that Trent is *with us* watching himself, laughing in uncontrollable horror from within the darkness of a cinema auditorium. In chasing out this series of connections between *Darkness* and the following Apocalypse entry, it is also worth noting that, in *In the Mouth of Madness*, “the publishing house – a mainstay of popular

enlightenment – is the very means and mechanism by which a particularly hideous Armageddon is let loose upon the earth” (Young 130). Much like its Apocalypse predecessor, then, *In the Mouth of Madness* explores the possible harm inherent to the very pursuit of knowledge. In this sense, the work further evaluates the troubling notion of epistemophobia.

With all this in mind, how does John Carpenter’s final official Apocalypse entry *Cigarette Burns* expand upon (or even complete) the auteur’s statement on a Lovecraftian ethos through the valences of cinema? First, it is important to identify not only how *Cigarette Burns* engages with those previous films, but to pinpoint how it relates to H. P. Lovecraft’s writings at large. Le Blanc and Odell address such a Lovecraft-Carpenter correspondence directly, both between the Apocalypse films, and with the author himself. They state that “*Cigarette Burns* recalls the Lovecraftian stylings of *In the Mouth of Madness* and *Prince of Darkness* in the way that it plays with characters’ reality and perception of supernatural forces,” before expanding on their reading to note that, “[c]entral to the film is the *Necronomicon* substitute *La fin absolue du monde*” (121). It is crucial that this vehicle of mass annihilation and hysteria in *Cigarette Burns* translates to the English phrase *The Absolute End of the World*. Carpenter ends his Apocalypse cycle with an entry that seems to encompass its very contents; that those contents cause extraordinary violence and damage speaks to the auteur’s interest regarding the philosophical import therein. That is, *Cigarette Burns* calls attention to itself *as* cinema while simultaneously questioning the simplistic notion of cinema as escapism or fantasy; surely, this line of inquiry undergirds the endings of *Darkness* and *Madness* described above. However, *Cigarette Burns* encapsulates an entire cycle of four films within its object of horror—*The Absolute End of the World* translates rather easily to a single English word: *Apocalypse*. This detail is both confrontational and philosophically consistent; as with Lovecraft’s opposition to “materialistic

sophistry” in all its insipid optimism, Carpenter’s sequence of films work toward the statement that horror is *not* simply escapist fiction, but is rather a mode of anti-knowledge that supersedes—or rather devastates—our customary ways of seeing. As I have described, this philosophy stems in no small part from the beliefs and writings of H. P. Lovecraft.

As such, Carpenter uses metacinematic technique to expand on Lovecraft’s dealings with both Gothic and cosmic literary forms. Pushing the interactions of genre even further, one sees in *Darkness* a filmic extension of Lovecraft’s science fiction/horror interplay. Science fiction rears its head through *Darkness*’s past-projecting video signals into people’s dreaming brains by use of tachyon particles. This plot device offers not only another genre element, but also deepens the film’s metacinematic characteristics as detailed above. The tachyon particle-motored dreams perform not only the literal role of scenes within Carpenter’s film, but also as representatives of the film *Prince of Darkness* itself, and also of cinema at large. The connection to *Darkness* itself is clear, not only in the affective emphasis on horror and discomfort, but also in that the conduit of particles speaks to the film’s overarching concerns with particles and anti-particles. Opening up the dreams’ implications further, consider them also in relation to cinema at large. Much like the eerie dream signals, cinema becomes real when it is projected and absorbed into our minds, even despite the fact that its “signal” originates from fictional, nonexistent, or pre-existent worlds. Thus, much like Tillinghast’s machine in “From Beyond,” *Darkness* contends not only with matter (particles and anti-particles) and space (“cosmic” and “inner”), but also with *time*. The concept of temporality as illustrated in the dream sequences serves the film’s metacinematic project: cinema violates time just like these strange signals, but locking its pre-existent matter into a perpetual state of *presence*—whenever the film is watched, it is always existent in the moment. Carpenter foregrounds this concept by staging the audience on the other side of the

film's metaphorical mirror (as described above). Fascinating, then, that the metacinematic incorporation of time also organizes itself into a binary pairing: while the symbolic feature of the dreams project from the future, *Prince of Darkness* is a recording of the past. The film therefore takes the space, time, and matter concerns of H. P. Lovecraft's fiction and renders them explicitly cinematic.

CHAPTER THREE: *PRINCE OF DARKNESS* AND SATANISM

Bracketing *Prince of Darkness*'s connection to H. P. Lovecraft, from *where* does the film draw its supernatural elements? Surely, its overarching concerns with Judeo-Christian religious belief demand attention. As such, it is worth mentioning that the film's title explicitly describes Satan, probably drawing its reference from John Milton's *Paradise Lost*; in the epic poem, Milton writes that, upon the revelation that Sin and Death will bestow their dark influences on the world, "the Prince of Darkness answer[s] glad" (227. 383). Indeed, *Prince of Darkness* engages with a long-standing religious binary between God and the Devil, but the American wave of "Satanic panic" speaks most clearly to its contemporary milieu. The term "Satanic panic" describes a period in the late-twentieth century U.S. which saw a widespread and mostly unfounded fear of pedophilic daycare owners, heavy metal music and horror films, which coalesced into a united cultural fear of a Satanic pandemic. This panic welcomes comparisons to the Salem witch hunt and trials, which Carpenter's key influence H. P. Lovecraft incorporates into "The Dreams in the Witch House" (discussed above).¹¹ By responding to this cultural moment, *Darkness* finds another opening for epistemophobia; it incorporates the mythologizing of Satanic threats in order to foreground the fear of dreadful knowledge. Before venturing into a detailed discussion of the specific ways in which *Darkness* speaks to its time-specific anxieties, I offer a brief but necessary background in Satanic panic. Sarah Hughes helpfully historicizes this phenomenon in "American Monsters: Tabloid Media and the Satanic Panic, 1970–2000,"

¹¹ In "Another Look at Moral Panics: The Case of Satanic Day Care Centers," Mary deYoung explores the parallel between Satanic panic and various sociopolitical "witch hunts."

providing a broad but simultaneously rigorous background of Satanic panic and 1980s cultural consciousness. Hughes states that:

In February 1984, in the modestly wealthy suburban community of Manhattan Beach, California, news reporter Wayne Satz of KABC-TV, ABC's local Los Angeles affiliate, delivered a live story on an area daycare center that would lead to the longest and most expensive criminal trial in American history. Over the next few years, Ray Buckey, an employee at the McMartin preschool, along with the women in his family who owned and operated it, stood trial for hundreds of counts of conspiracy and child abuse tied to cult practices that the media and alleged experts called "satanic ritual abuse." The FBI, as well as state and local law-enforcement agents, closed down the daycare center and began an extensive search for evidence, which included a futile dig for secret tunnels and animal remains beneath the school. Although juries eventually acquitted all of the defendants, Buckey's arrest prompted other communities to turn against one another in variations of McMartin. After Satz's report, numerous employees and owners of daycare centers, preschools, and after-school programs throughout the country were accused, arrested, and imprisoned. Some of those incarcerated did not see their sentences overturned until years or even decades later. [...] During the 1980s, the legal and economic ramifications of ritual-abuse accusations, as well as ongoing news reports of cases, appeared to validate a national hysteria over the presence of devil-worshipping pedophiles in America's suburbs. (1-2)

At first glance, this historical detail might appear to speak exclusively to 1980s American suburbia. Given *Prince of Darkness's* primary setting within the Gothic interiors of an urban

church, Satanic panic might not welcome immediately obvious connections. However, the film grapples with this contemporary anxiety in numerous, noteworthy ways. In addition to its title and Satanic imagery, its very status as a horror film positions its relation to this historical moment, as does the inclusion of shock rocker Alice Cooper.¹² Many Christian propaganda films directly target horror films, heavy metal, and rock music as instrumental in the uprising of Satanism (for example, *Geraldo Rivera Show's* "Devil Worship: Exposing Satan's Underground" [1988], *Exposing the Satanic Web* [1990], *Escaping Satan's Web* [1987], *Doorways to Danger* [1990], and *Pagan Invasion: Halloween Trick or Treat* [1999]).¹³ Considering also the above-mentioned law-enforcement dig for "animal remains," and the overarching concern with Satanic panic regarding claims of "animal and human sacrifice" (Hughes 11), *Darkness* makes blatant visual reference to this cultural anxiety.

Specifically, recall the scene that depicts Etchinson (Thom Bray) exiting Saint Godard's church in a wide shot; he moves out of the shadows and into a patch of streetlight before pausing, visibly unnerved. As a look of realization crosses his face, the film cuts to the object of his unease: a small cross leaning against a brick wall, upon which a pigeon has been crucified. The camera switches to a medium shot, containing both Etchinson and the crucified bird, before cutting to Etchinson's P.O.V. down the shadowy alley. Shock rocker Alice Cooper (playing the ringleader of the film's homeless "schizoids") emerges from the darkness. As Cooper advances

¹² Cooper's public declaration of his own newfound Christianity in the late 1980s almost seems to speak to this film's complex dealings with binary systems; fitting that Carpenter casts a born-again Christian whose career is founded on performing hard rock music under the guise of a Satanic psychopath (Chapman).

¹³ At one point during "Devil Worship: Exposing Satan's Underground," host Geraldo Rivera confronts Black Sabbath frontman Ozzy Osbourne and asks him whether or not the rocker feels "guilty" for the purported epidemic of recent Satanist murders and molestations. Further, among its various accusations leveled at popular heavy metal music, *Exposing the Satanic Web* includes an extensive analysis of the Satanic messages imbedded in Slayer's *Reign in Blood* album cover.

toward Etchinson, brandishing a broken bicycle like a spear, Etchinson's Walkman music plays more loudly; his audible song of choice is Alice Cooper's "Prince of Darkness." The track's lyrics contain blatant blasphemy, especially during the chorus that underscores Etchinson's demise: "Prince of Darkness / Ready to baptize you in lies / Heart of evil / Soul of blackness" (Cooper). As Cooper impales Etchinson on his makeshift weapon, the film cuts to a close-up of the rocker's face, painted pale in the style of Satanist metal icons like King Diamond of Mercyful Fate (later to be reimagined and typified by the "corpse makeup" worn by black metal bands like Darkthrone and Mayhem).¹⁴ This sequence makes an overt audiovisual association between murder, Satanic imagery, and extreme music; Carpenter gestures openly to these connections—in *Darkness's* audio commentary, he notes that the cross-like scar appearing on Kelly's infected arm takes influence from Blue Öyster Cult's band logo (Audio Commentary).¹⁵

Certainly, this speaks to the film's acknowledgment of itself as cinematic fiction—Cooper the actor and Cooper the character merge in a single violent image, which gestures brazenly to the culturally prevalent fear of Satanism. This open engagement with Satanic panic plays on a common project of the horror genre at large; according to Stephen King, works of genre horror tap into social "pressure points" to generate unease. King argues that "sometimes these pressure points, these terminals of fear, are so deeply buried and yet so vital that we may tap them like artesian wells—saying one thing out loud while we express something else in a whisper" (*Danse 6*). This double-function holds for *Darkness's* engagement with Satanism, and with its overall philosophical project. Taking into consideration the prescient concerns of Satanic

¹⁴ Along with *Prince of Darkness*, Mayhem's debut EP *Deathcrush* was released in 1987.

¹⁵ This image appears on several of the band's records released in the 1970s (including, incidentally, their 1979 album *Mirrors*).

panic, the “pressure points” are immediately clear; I will soon return to the additional issue of its philosophical project (that which is “expressed in a whisper”). First, though, it is worth asking: in what ways does *Darkness* contend with this prescient cultural moment, and to what end? Hughes sees the project of 1980s American horror cinema as commensurate with the interests of a contemporary political movement; she argues that “Michael Myers, Jason Voorhees, and Freddy Krueger, as well as their numerous low-budget imitators, were uniquely tied to the rise of the New Right and its conservative economic policies” (19). Specifically, Hughes connects these slasher icons with the likes of “Ray Buckey and other defendants [of the McMartin trial],” arguing that in the public sphere these various defendants “became hybrids of several different sixties backlash types,” such as Charles Manson and Richard Ramirez (17). Hughes’ suggestion, then, is that the *Halloween*, *Nightmare on Elm Street*, and *Friday the 13th* franchises uniformly offer boogeymen to bolster a widespread cultural fear of Satanic child molesters. While these three franchises perform different functions and offer distinct variations on their respective genre forms, one might assume that there exists in each an awareness of “Satanic panic.” However, seeing as Hughes lumps together three disparate series into one political project, one suspects that she attends to the reductive argument that “horror is invariably an agent of the established order” (Carroll 196). For the sake of brevity and focus, I will refrain from defending these three suspects, focusing instead on *Prince of Darkness* as an exemplar of horror cinema engaging with contemporary cultural fears without propagating a repressive ideological agenda. Indeed, *Darkness* contends explicitly with Satan on thematic and narrative levels, but it does so in service of philosophical inquiry rather than ideological condemnation.

Considering the role of televised propaganda in the 1980s, *Darkness*’s eerie, VHS-like dream transmissions raise interest. Citing Jean Baudrillard’s *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981)

for philosophical reference, Hughes speaks to the impact of televisual ubiquity in the U.S.A. during the 1980s. She argues that “[t]he decade’s substantial expansion of television’s role within the domestic space possibly trapped viewers inside what contemporary cultural theorist Jean Baudrillard termed a ‘hyperreality,’” a term that she defines as a “natural world” that has become “indistinguishable from the simulacra that invade[s], exploit[s], and appear[s] to reflect it” (5).¹⁶ Carpenter invokes this televisual ubiquity by giving all of *Darkness*’s characters the exact same dream images, and by braiding those sequences within the narrative. Like Baudrillard’s hyperreality, Carpenter’s film is indistinguishable from simulacra in numerous ways: within the text itself, the characters confront this crux in the form of dreams. Tapping into the media-propelled mania of Satanic panic, Carpenter thus weaves a hyperreal tension into *Darkness*’s narrative—simulation within simulation. The relation is clear not only in the means of transmission, but in the dreams’ explicitly Satanic content: the shadowy, cloaked figure stepping out from the smoky church entrance recalls classic devilish iconography. This filmic device addresses not only the characters, then, but also the audience. Hughes notes that, “[a]s media representations stimulat[e] real emotions, the consumer’s ability to tell the difference between the ‘true’ and the ‘false,’ the ‘real’ and the ‘imaginary’ dissolve[s]” (5). To that end, *The Satanic Bible* warrants mention here; while Anton Szandor LaVey’s treatise was published in 1969, well before the release of Carpenter’s film, its impact still resonates loudly in the 1980s. For example, consider that “the Church of Satanic Liberation was established in January 1986 after its founder, Paul Douglas Valentine, was inspired by reading *The Satanic Bible*” (Baddeley

¹⁶ The notion of hyperreality underscores televisual depictions in many prominent American horror films of the 1980s, such as Tobe Hooper’s *Poltergeist* (1982), Tommy Lee Wallace’s *Halloween III: Season of the Witch* (1982), David Cronenberg’s *Videodrome* (1983), Donald Cammell’s *White of the Eye* (1987), and Wes Craven’s *Shocker* (1989).

153). We might therefore turn to *The Satanic Bible* while interpreting *Darkness*'s images of Satanic hyperreality. Returning to the dream sequences in particular, LaVey makes noteworthy emphasis on the importance of dreams for occultists; he writes that “witches and sorcerers are night people” who send “thoughts towards unsuspecting sleepers” (123). In line with its binary-disrupting project, *Darkness*'s dream scenes—menacing though they may be—do not themselves exact harm on the dreamers. Instead, unlike the possibly devious occultists described by LaVey, the messenger of *Darkness*'s dream transmission seeks to warn the sleeping academics for their own benefits. As such, the devilish cloaked harbinger might also be read as a clerical-looking figure; the draping cloak suggests the possibility of a priest's robe.

How else might we consider Satanic panic within this film's framework? Recall Birack's crucial opening lecture, in which he instructs his students to “say goodbye to classical reality.” Consider also the metaphoric functions of mirrors and the canister's slime. The two previous chapters' analyses show *Prince of Darkness*'s commitments to epistemophobia, to the horror of devastating knowledge realized. By engaging with the 1980s milieu of Satanic panic, *Darkness* offers yet another variation on this epistemophobic thread. Considering the unresolved nature of the McMartin case, and the sustained cultural focus on a ubiquitous and unchecked Satanic threat, *Darkness* speaks to a social fear whose truth remains unresolved. That is, the film sees Satanic panic as an immanent and poorly understood threat, which originates in the human while simultaneously eluding human comprehension (much like our unconscious minds and instincts). This notion of ubiquity, and of a force built within one's culture but whose place is denied within oneself, links the concept of Satanic panic indirectly to the concept of cosmic fear as described by H. P. Lovecraft. That is, it is worth noting that the McMartin case targeted members of the very suburban communities who were making accusations and pushing criminal charges. This

untraceable threat, whose origins can be traced back to the collective “self,” recalls some of the key tenets underlying Dylan Trigg’s horrific phenomenology (which, as described above, locates the horror of the cosmos within the horror of the body). While Satanism might not overtly invoke “the cosmic,” the parallel to Trigg presents itself through the notion of discovering something vast and terrifying localized within the self. As such, the film’s broader thematic concern of epistemophobia is bracketed inside its engagement with the specific sociohistorical phenomenon of Satanic panic.

While drawing a connection between the Satanic or the demonic and the dread of *unresolved* knowledge, Eugene Thacker’s notion of “demonology” proves useful. The author offers a definition of the term:

If anthropology is predicated on a division between the personal and the impersonal (“man” and cosmos”), then a demonology collapses them into paradoxical pairings (impersonal affects, cosmic suffering). If ontology deals with the minimal relation being/non-being, then demonology would have to undertake the thought of nothingness (a negative definition), but a nothingness that is also not simply non-being (a privative definition). (*Dust* 46)

I acknowledge in advance the substantial distinctions between Thacker’s project and Carpenter’s. Thacker’s demonology aims to think *absolute* absence or nullity, whereas Carpenter’s film attributes the negative (anti-God, anti-matter) with its own ontological gravity. Some of the tenets underlying demonology prove useful here nevertheless. Preliminarily, it is worth noting that Thacker uses the term demonology to lay out “a philosophical register” for thinking “the demon” or “demonology,” which he classifies “as a limit for thought, a limit that is constituted not by being or becoming, but by non-being, or nothingness” (*Dust* 45). Recognizing *Darkness*’s

depiction of the demonic presence on the mirror's other side as an usher of the apocalypse, this interpretative strategy raises interest; for what is the apocalypse if not total nullification? Thacker also offers a means of moving beyond the confines of sociopolitical specifics, arguing that his model of demontology distinguishes itself from both anthropology, "in which the demon is simply a stand-in for the human and ruminations on the nature of evil in human beings"; and also from "metaphysics, in which the demon functions as a stand-in for the pair being/non-being" (*Dust* 45). How, then, might demontology pertain to *Prince of Darkness*? In order to mobilize this term within *Darkness*'s context, it is necessary to redirect its focus. For what we see in *Darkness* is not pure negativity, but rather a dynamic tension between positive and negative; the film shows us that evil needs a host—bodies and minds to warp and pervert. This being the case, we cannot do away with demontology altogether; profound negativity persists in *Darkness* as crucially as "positivity."

How do we glean positivity from such a horrific, downbeat film? At the outset, it is important to distinguish positivity from optimism. Here, positivity describes propagation and growth, rather than outlook or sensibility. Taking this framework into consideration, *Darkness* conceptualizes positivity and negativity as dynamically interconnected principles, most specifically in its depiction of the canister of slime. The canister's negativity is clear: its excretions excise the infected hosts of their humanity, rendering them puppets to a higher power. This is a destructive, and thus negative, consequence. However, positivity exists alongside that negativity—while the academic hosts lose their subjective individualities, the canister's self-propagating slime produces a contagion among them. The process of contagion entails proliferation, thereby complicating the notion of absolute negativity. At the negative cost to the human, then, comes the positive propagation of the demonic slime. Taking this into

consideration (while also recalling the above discussions of *Darkness*'s commitment to "humiliating the human") Thacker's suggestion that a "philosophical demonology would [...] have to be 'against' the human being – both the 'human' part as well as the 'being' part" also holds much significance (46). Worth noting here, then, that Thacker's thought aims to *forgo* the human altogether—demonology aims to think outside the parameters of the human, whereas *Darkness*, as a work of narrative cinema, centrally figures the human.

Still, a number of philosophical problems bound up in Thacker's framework also show up in *Prince of Darkness*. Thacker addresses points of tension directly, stating that "demonology comes up against one of the greatest challenges for thought today, [which] is, in many ways, a Nietzschean one – how does one rethink the world as unthinkable?" (48). *Darkness*'s anti-human forces bear anthropologically coherent shape and develop meaning in relation to the human; in this sense, Carpenter's work differs starkly from the ideas put forth by demonology. However, the film offers a genre-codified response to Thacker's question, "how does one rethink the world as unthinkable?"; that is, for Carpenter, the answer's best approximation reveals itself through the grammar of horror cinema. Of course, Thacker's problem poses a self-defeating contradiction: by definition, the unthinkable *cannot* be thought. How, then, does Carpenter find a method of answering this question within the context of horror cinema? More specifically: we have discussed the many ways in which *Darkness* assails customary thought, but how does it broach the problem of the unthinkable *in particular*? To answer this question, we must consider the ways in which horror cinema privileges *affect*. As recognized above, John Clute identifies the crucial role that affect plays in the horror genre at large (regardless of medium), stating that "since the beginning of the 1980s, it has become common to state not only that certain emotional responses are normally generated in the readers of horror texts, but also to claim that these

responses are, in themselves, what actually define horror” (9). This affect-centred genre centralizes emotional responses even more brazenly when it is expressed through filmic language. As such, while cinema cannot *think* the unthinkable, its distinctly audiovisual properties can generate an affective experience whose impact overshadows or even temporarily incapacitates thought. Such breakdowns and failures become explicitly *philosophical* when Carpenter uses them to highlight problems and questions that transgress the limits of human thought and knowledge.

This is certainly true of *Prince of Darkness*. Whether through its ritual-like imagery of reverent academics surrounding the luminous green canister, underscored by Carpenter and Howarth’s eerie score, or through the image of a solid mirror becoming a dimension-breaking pool of liquid, *Darkness* “employ[s] imagery that symbolically addresses the epistemology of film itself” (Cumbow 160). Cumbow’s use of the word “epistemology” is key here, of course, given our project-long emphasis on epistemophobia. Consider the possibility that the epistemology of film, when put toward a horror of philosophical excess, moves into an experiential space somewhere outside of knowledge. This is not to say that the viewer is unaware that she is watching a film, but that the affective core described by Clute plays *more* integrally into *Darkness*’s dealings with the unthinkable than does knowledge. We cannot think the world as unthinkable, but Carpenter finds the potential for abstract representation. Cinematic grammar is key here: consider the role of cross-cutting, as when Kelly finally pulls a demonic claw from the growing mirror and Carpenter cuts between an omniscient viewer’s P.O.V. and Kelly’s perspective, staring into a sheet of glass that allows for unthinkable interdimensional movement.

To be sure, the notion of “thinking the unthinkable” presents a different quandary for Thacker, who works within the context of philosophy, than it does for Carpenter, who works

within the context of cinema. Let us return, then, to the ways in which demontology plays out in both thinkers' texts. Although *Darkness's* demonism occupies a totally different ontological space than that proposed by Thacker's absolute nullity, overlap presents itself through emphases on *negativity*, *anti-humanism*, and *anti-being*. As such, one sees in *Prince of Darkness* an ontological approach that in many ways anticipates Thacker's idea. How, then, might we reconcile the differences without doing away with demontology altogether? For the purposes of framing *Darkness's* philosophy, I introduce the notion of *exuberant demontology*. Exuberant demontology does not dispense with demontology's attempts to think "a limit for thought" (which are vital here), but considers the ways in which *Darkness* couples this concept with positivity (not to be confused with *optimism*). When I describe "positivity," I refer to the reproductive force of *Darkness's* demonic slime: its eerie intelligence does not aspire to nullify, but rather to propagate, to locate hosts and transform them. Further, its physical form does not adhere to the Gothic tropes of darkness and shadows—instead, it gives off an eerie and, yes, exuberantly green glow. Of course, it is crucial to consider not only this aspect of "exuberance" (which here describes the slime's contagion by way of alien self-propagation), but also the other half of the equation: demontology.¹⁷ What we have here appears initially to be a contradiction in terms, if demontology seeks to think total nullity. The term's paradoxical nature proves fundamentally crucial here, considering *Darkness's* investment in eroding and complicating binary relations. The slime's above-described interstitial characteristics (neither solid nor liquid) thus symbolize its similarly interstitial thematic function: animated, energized, but also

¹⁷ This concept of exuberant demontology is not exclusively specific to *Prince of Darkness*. Energetic, positivist, representations of simultaneously destructive demons have appeared in numerous other horror films, such as John Boorman's *Exorcist II: The Heretic* (1977), Lamberto Bava's *Demons* (1985) and *Demons 2* (1986), Tibor Takács' *The Gate* (1987), and Dario Argento's *Mother of Tears* (2007).

destructive. The slime enacts its profound nullification by taking hold of its hosts, erasing their subjectivities and “human-ness.” Therein lies its apocalyptic implications—this canister’s substance has the capacity to absolve the human of its essence.

Here, exuberant demontology’s root word “demon” proves crucial as well, seeing as the demonism of Satanic belief undermines the notion of the sacred Enlightenment subject. Bracketing this definition of exuberant demontology, then, consider again the problem of thinking the unthinkable in explicit relation to Satanism. Indeed, LaVey describes the devil as evading human categorization and understanding; to that end, *The Satanic Bible*’s following passage warrants quoting in full:

Most Satanists do not accept Satan as an anthropomorphic being with cloven hooves, a barbed tail, and horns. He merely represents a force of nature—the powers of darkness which have been named just that because no religion has taken these forces *out* of the darkness. Nor has science been able to apply technical terminology to this force. It is an untapped reservoir that few can make use of because they lack the ability to use a tool without having to first break down and label all the parts which make it run. It is this incessant need to analyze which prohibits most people from taking advantage of this many faceted key to the unknown—which the Satanist chooses to call “Satan.” (62)

What LaVey offers in his definition of Satan is in some sense an anti-definition. Recall Stephen King’s argument from our introduction, in which the author makes a similar case for the horror genre itself: “horror simply *is*, exclusive of definition or rationalization” (Danse 21). Just as King does with the horror genre, LaVey argues here for a disconnection between “Satan” and the reductively controlling function of “definition.” This stems in part from the very negativity at the

foundation of LaVey's Satanism; that is, while Satanism aims to affirm traditionally discouraged or even punished energies, its foundation still lies in the *negation* of other religions (especially Judeo-Christianity). What the underlying tenets of Satanism set forth, then, is a kind of anti-knowledge. For LaVey, this means emancipation and power. Thus, LaVey does not offer a theological basis for his Church of Satan, but instead finds within the symbol of Satan a catalyst for embracing forces typically condemned or discouraged by organized religions (specifically the seven deadly sins: lust, greed, envy, gluttony, pride, sloth, and wrath). In his introduction to *The Satanic Bible*, Magus Peter H. Gilmore notes that LaVey's "blasphemously named 'Church of Satan' was consciously designed to be an adversary to existing 'spiritual' belief systems" (10). To that end, *The Satanic Bible* works not as a rigid theological system, but (as suggested above) instead as an anti-theological philosophy; in LaVey's writing, then, "Satan is embraced not as some Devil to be worshiped, but as a symbolic external projection of the highest potential of each individual Satanist" (Gilmore 15). Through its emphasis on untapped energies repeatedly condemned by religious systems, LaVey's Satanism thus presents a worldview with access to forbidden or "evil" knowledge. Through the lens of Satanic panic, we might therefore consider Satanism itself an expression of epistemophobia. Satanism provides us with knowledge of the primal or infernal within ourselves, aligning with one of epistemophobia's primary iterations: the fear of knowing the horrific.

One sees a crucial predecessor for *The Satanic Bible* in William Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. Long before LaVey, Blake writes extensively about the affirmative power of infernal forces, and he affiliates Satanic expression with the embrace of heretofore religiously restrained *energies*. Also much like *The Satanic Bible*, Blake's text acts as a philosophical rebuttal to repressive and manipulative religious groups; Michael Phillips notes that "Blake's

principal objects of attack in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* are the self-styled prophet and visionary Emanuel Swedenborg, and the New Jerusalem Church founded by his followers” (6). Swedenborg, Phillips informs us, “was a Swedish scientist and theologian,” and also a self-identified “visionary” (6). Blake invested his faith in Swedenborg’s visions, revelations, and teachings, “until about 1790, when he realized that much of what Swedenborg had written was a sham and that there was nothing new about the New Jerusalem Church”; more specifically, Blake discovered that the New Jerusalem Church “was simply reinstating all that [he] abhorred in established religion” (10). As such, one also sees in Blake (and, by extension, in LaVey) a serious engagement with the social enforcement of customary perspective: in both thinkers’ works, Satan symbolizes radical reaction to regressive and conventional cultural thought. Phillips identifies this philosophy within Blake’s writings, stating that “[i]t is clear that Blake never faltered in his belief in the work or in its power to challenge the reader into thinking what in conventional social and moral terms was unthinkable”; he then links this epistemological project with Satan, our current subject of interest: “[t]o the end,” Phillips writes, “the devil in Blake refused to lie down” (47). As such, it is worth consulting the Devil in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, which influences the Satan of LaVey’s *Bible* and, by extension, plays into the Satanic panic invoked by *Prince of Darkness*.

Consider *Marriage*’s fourth plate, entitled “The voice of the Devil.” This section, organized as a series of Commandment-like “laws,” presents many of the philosophical and conceptual ideas at work in both LaVey and Carpenter’s works. Like LaVey’s *Satanic Bible*, this plate begins by situating itself in opposition to existing religious dogmas and systems: “All Bibles or sacred codes. have been the causes of the following Errors” (Blake 63.2). The second “Error” proves a particularly intuitive entry into *Darkness*’s crux of epistemophobia; specifically,

Blake's Devil states that an Error presents itself in the belief "[t]hat Energy. calld Evil. is alone from the / Body. & that Reason. calld Good. Is alone from / the Soul" (63.5-7). This applies to *Darkness* in the sense that Carpenter's film devalues the notion of a soul, reducing its characters to slime-infected puppets and writhing piles of insects. Any sense of "individuality" or "soul" diminishes in the face of the film's group hypnosis, whereby evil comes from *out there* to control characters' minds and bodies. This horrific imagery hearkens back to Blake's Devil, who also complicates binary understandings by calling out the "Error" in equating "evil energy" with "the body" and "Good" with "the Soul." In line with this chapter's Satanist focus, consider the lineage from Blake's Devil to LaVey's philosophy, which also calls us to harness typically condemned or punished "energies." LaVey sees no evidence for a deity who aims to punish the human for embracing her inner, infernal forces; with that in mind, he hinges much of his writing on the pessimistic belief that the "powerful force which permeates and balances the universe is far too impersonal to care about the happiness or misery of flesh-and-blood creatures on this ball of dirt upon which we live" (40). For LaVey, there is no cosmic moral gatekeeper; there is no God.

Underlying these Satanic philosophies, then, is the dismantling of conventional thought; in the case of Blake's Devil, this comes about in the unstitching of binaries (evil, or the body vs. good, or the soul). This impetus also makes its way into *Darkness*, albeit with different implications. Whereas Blake and LaVey see emancipatory possibilities within humankind's inner infernal energies ("Energy is Eternal Delight," argues Blake's Devil [63.20]), *Darkness* sees horror. Also, while LaVey sees the "powerful force which permeates and balances the universe" as something that can be captured and controlled for personal benefit, *Darkness* depicts this cosmic force as a slime that breaks free to spray into our faces and infect us, whether

we like it or not. Where Blake and LaVey see optimistic possibility within the embracing of these energies, *Darkness* sees the opposite. In Carpenter's film, those who have been possessed by the slime are rendered puppet-like, stripped of subjectivity, and subservient to the will of something akin to LaVey's nonexistent God—something “far too impersonal to care about the happiness or misery of flesh-and-blood creatures.” During an interview about the film, Carpenter admits that he is unconvinced by the idea of the “Devil [as] a personification of evil,” stating that, to the contrary, he has “always thought that evil is everywhere” (Boulenger 203). He unpacks this idea further, expressing outright some of the ways in which Satan plays into his film's undoing of binaries:

The idea of the Devil has always confused me slightly. According to what I understand—and I'm not an expert on this—Devil is Lucifer or Satan—or whatever you want to call it—and he is a saint who rebelled in Heaven before Earth was created. I'm confused that Evil arose in a place of absolute Good. How did it happen? What does that mean? Does that mean that Heaven is no more perfect than any other place? I suppose I'm not convinced because the literal belief seems so easy. (Boulenger 203)

Of course, Carpenter expresses this confusion by situating *Darkness*'s locus of evil within Saint Godard's Church, a place of holiness and worship. While *Darkness* does not venture into representing Heaven, it troubles the distinction between Church-protected goodness and outside evil. Carpenter wants to think in binary terms (as indicated by his description of “Evil” and “absolute Good”), but he *cannot*; hence, evil as he depicts it in *Darkness* is *non-binaristic*, and much more complicated than the clean divisions implied by particle/anti-particle, internal/external, and God/Devil.

Indeed, we can glean much meaning from Carpenter's statement: the sealed canister of evil explicitly symbolizes that which is locked under the watchful eye of Judeo-Christian gatekeepers. Here again, the film invokes LaVey's arguments; this Satanic energy keeps the Christian establishment busy and watchful, just as it is literally housed within their church. Carpenter therefore plays into the notion of Satanic panic by identifying the role of Satan *within* Judeo-Christian structures. Consider the role of binaries in LaVey's statement that, "[w]ithout a devil to point their fingers at, religionists of the right hand path would have nothing with which to threaten their followers" (55). This point holds relevant in the midst of *Darkness's* late-eighties milieu; Hughes helpfully historicizes the politics of Satanic panic, noting that "[i]n the early 1980s, the increasingly popular media presence of conservative evangelicals began to crowd out the views of rival religious groups and political parties" (21). As such, during the period of *Darkness's* release, the New Right finds itself in a position to consolidate conservative citizens' interest against the quasi-ubiquitous "threat" of Satanism. Hughes makes this connection between politics and religion clear, writing that "[e]vangelicals were able to influence many of the nation's commercial media outlets through powerful alliances forged during the previous decade with other conservatives, many of whom served as influential members of the Republican Party" (21). Perhaps of more direct interest here, though, is the fact that LaVey identifies ways in which the concept of the devil is actually *built into* the concept of God. He states that "[t]he semantic meaning of Satan is the 'adversary' or 'opposition' or the 'accuser,'" and furthermore that the "very word 'devil' comes from the Indian *devi* which means 'god'" (55). LaVey thus takes up the philosophy laid out by Blake's devil, by complicating Christian assumptions about stark delineations between religious poles. *Darkness* imports these ideas into the territory of horror cinema; not only does the film visualize multiple binaries' negative halves,

but it troubles the reliability of a positive/negative division altogether. In one key image, Carpenter articulates his aforementioned puzzlement over the Christian belief that “Evil arose in a place of absolute Good” (Boulenger 203): specifically, consider the scene in which the Devil pulls Kelly into the mirror. Carpenter back-lights the mirror with a radiant white glow, doubly invoking the Holy Spirit and the sanctity of the human subject (symbolized by the ego-capturing mirror); he pollutes this metaphor by placing a horrifically scarred, demonic Kelly in front of the glass, and showing this very mirror to allow Satan passage from his dimension into ours.

This image is one among many in *Darkness* that destabilizes and unravels the customarily “whole” notion of the exceptional human. First, Kelly’s humanness has been wiped out by her subservience to Satanic forces; and second, the mirror, which should reflect the human back to herself, has instead become a twisted synthesis of God and Devil. As a philosophy, Satanism offers a useful tool for this human-destabilizing process. While *The Satanic Bible* in many way foregrounds human interest (especially in the brazenly capitalist pursuit of self-interest above all else), one of its “Nine Satanic Statements” bears mentioning here. Specifically, consider Statement 7, which asserts that “Satan represents man as just another animal, sometimes better, more often worse than those that walk on all-fours, who, because of his ‘divine spiritual and intellectual development,’ has become the most vicious animal of all” (25). LaVey’s thought speaks directly to *Darkness*’s philosophical underpinnings—in the central study of the church-residing canister, religion stands in for spiritual development (typified by the Priest and the theology graduate students) while science fills in the category of intellectual development. Perhaps more importantly, *Darkness* closes the gaps between the human and animal, providing disturbing composites between the two categories rather than suggesting a divide. Indeed, if Satan can be seen to represent the primal or animal within the human,

Darkness's final scene cements its argument that the human *is* the animal, seeing as it replaces the dream sequences' devil-like figure with Catherine Danforth. Of course, the film's recurring alignments between insects and humans also support this Satanic notion: when Wyndham's body breaks down, the film reveals that he is *made of* insects. In *Darkness*, though, the implications of this human-animal alignment do not bear the vindictory spirit of LaVey's Satanism. Instead, the horrific images of human-animal connections speak to a long-standing fear of Satan and the Satanic; consider LaVey's statement that "[t]he devils of past religions have always, at least in part, had animal characteristics, evidence of man's constant need to deny that he too is an animal, for to do so would serve a mighty blow to his impoverished ego" (60). *Darkness* knowingly evokes these animal characteristics, especially the kind of physically animal-like traits described above by LaVey. When Kelly reaches into the mirror with a reverent declaration of "Father," the "hand" that grasps her own resembles a hoof-claw hybrid, with red, reptilian flesh. By situating this archetypal figure of Satan inside the mirror, *Darkness* locates the demonic within the cipher of the human ego. Worth noting, too, that Kelly recognizes this beastly figure *as* her father; again, *Darkness* suggests the human shares an inextricable connection to the Satanic—Kelly's proclamation suggests outright that she is *born from* the animalistic figure of Satan.

The ego-dwelling Devil does not simply represent an occult figure, but also derives much of its metaphoric function explicitly *from* its animal-like features (recall the hoof-claw hand that plunges through the mirror). Of course, this metaphor substantiates the film's project of "humiliating the human." To that end, recall the images detailed above—*Darkness*'s final sequence, which replaces the dreams' reappearing Satanic figure with Catherine; and Wyndham's possessed body disintegrating into a pile of insects, thereby suggesting that these

tiny animals actually stand in for something that is inherently *him*, Wyndham. These images trouble the Enlightenment notion of humanness defined by rationality, subjectivity, and a moral soul; *Darkness* upends this notion even more aggressively by targeting highly educated academics. The film pursues its human-animal concerns further by attributing all of the slime-infected characters with an insect-like “hive mind,” motivating their actions with instinct rather than reason. This characteristic necessitates mention in the context of Satanism, considering LaVey’s reference to an animalistic devil within the human ego. Unlike the ironically quasi-humanist opportunism of *The Satanic Bible*, though, *Darkness* locates within the human animal nothing but a machine-like will to propagate. The film further advances its animal-human metaphors through the scene detailed above, in which Etchinson discovers a crucified pigeon outside the church, a malicious parody of Christian symbolism. This image downplays the most sanctified of Christian figures, and it is worth noting that Jesus Christ is both all God *and* all man. As such, if the pigeon can be read as a blasphemous stand-in for Christ, then this sinister image reduces even the most holy of human figures to the position of animal. Of course, this image also defiles the dove, a Christian symbol of purity and holiness. By replacing that bird with a similar-looking animal that is instead associated with dirt, disease, and the verminous, the scene directly desecrates religious symbolism.

Finally, necessary to parse out is *Darkness*’s distinctly scientific build-up to its Satanic revelations: the film organizes itself around arithmetical principles, that seek to positively categorize the unknown (unlike the negation of demontology). This structurally systematic approach arises in part from the film’s commitments to science fiction; consider that Carpenter’s pseudonym Martin Quatermass openly refers to Bernard Quatermass of Nigel Kneale’s sci-fi film *The Quatermass Experiment* (1953). More specifically, in *Darkness* God is opposed by the

ontological figure of anti-God; positive matter exists on the other side of the metaphysical “equation” than does anti-matter; and so on. However, as recognized above, the film entangles its mathematical opposites, so that “one” and “zero” (in *Darkness*, “Christian God” and “Satan”) are not easily distinguishable from another. This is not to say that the film suggests that the Christian God and Satan are inseparable, or that they do not occupy separate onto-spiritual spaces; but rather that they depend on each other for sustenance. In one sense, this philosophical undercurrent might be seen to serve Carpenter’s genre preferences. In line with this emphasis on arithmetical pairings, consider Stephen King’s argument that “[a]ll tales of horror can be divided into two groups: those in which the act of horror results from an act of free and conscious will—a conscious decision to do evil—and those in which the horror is predestinate, coming from outside like a stroke of lightning” (62). At first glance, it might appear that *Darkness* adheres to the latter grouping—the canister’s unbridled energy comes from outside the realm of human control, exacting apocalyptic damage on the film’s characters; but one also sees acts of free and conscious will in the Church’s decision to keep the canister hidden, and furthermore in the academics’ decision to investigate its properties. However, these choices stem not from an urge to “do evil,” as described by King; rather, these acts of “free and conscious will” are largely in service of acquiring knowledge, bringing us back to the central concern of epistemophobia. Specifically, the film lays bare the danger of attempting to access cosmic or “foreclosed” knowledge by drawing a connection between scientific practice and occult horror. This speaks to one of epistemophobia’s primary characteristics: the horrifying knowledge that our knowledge is insufficient.

This final chapter has thus approached epistemophobia from a number of different angles. First, there are the two overarching variants: the fear of horrific knowledge (that the

human, constituted by biologically distinct parts, is equivalent to a pile of insects), and the terrifying full consciousness of knowledge's inadequacies. Our chapter expands on the philosophical groundwork laid out in the preceding sections, which detail a link between the fear of the body and the fear of the cosmos (via thinkers such as Dylan Trigg and, less directly, Thomas Ligotti). In the context of Satanism and Satanic panic, this macrocosmic concept plays out on the level of the individual and the social. While New Right propaganda and the ensuing hysteria makes a Satanic threat seem ubiquitous, and like something that functions on the basis of infernal energies, its terror ultimately traces back to the very group who argues for its demise. In short, the very thing that the panicked anti-Satanists fear *is* their own fear. *Prince of Darkness* thus invokes Satanic panic neither as a means of propagating fear, nor of arguing against it; instead, in line with its mirror-centric visual language, the film reflects a culture back upon itself. This is made nowhere clearer than in the last shot, which situates the audience as Brian's mirror image—this film's dealings with contemporary sociocultural allegory are sent back to the viewers, holding them accountable to self-reflection. By drawing on the historically relevant wave of Satanic panic, the film further deepens its study of epistemophobia, and its own genre awareness (as a work of horror cinema that incorporates a devilish hard rock icon like Alice Cooper, *Darkness* recognizes its role in this cultural conversation). These dealings with fear relate to knowledge in that they pertain directly to the production of knowledge: by delving deeper into the origins of Satanic panic, one finds that its creation lies in conservative sociopolitical structures. Ultimately, the dreaded knowledge repressed by this milieu confirms that Satanic forces exist within the collective self—the infernal, the animal, the “pre-human” thrives fundamentally in all of us. While uncovering this horror (both the horror of philosophy and the philosophy of horror), Carpenter's visual techniques suggest the philosophical dynamics

of an exuberant demontology, wherein the process of nullification comes about through the slime's machine-like but intelligent positivism—glowing green, transfixing, and mysteriously self-reproducing, but destructive just the same. In the end, *Prince of Darkness* creates a sense of epistemophobia in its audience by announcing a truth far to horrifying for us to bear: that the essential nature of the human subject is closer to this vile slime than we could ever bring ourselves to admit.

CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSION

This project has demonstrated the ways in which John Carpenter's *Prince of Darkness* (1987) troubles and eventually collapses the distinction between a "philosophy of horror" and a "horror of philosophy" (taking the former term from Noël Carroll's book of the same name, and the latter from Eugene Thacker's trilogy). In order to execute its study, this thesis has employed engagements not only with philosophy, but also with cinema and literature, which we have seen reciprocally inform—and mutually complicate—one another. Thus, by drawing from *Darkness*'s literary antecedents and philosophical offspring, we have found that all of these forms necessitate simultaneous close reading. Analysis of *Prince of Darkness* therefore requires that one lend attention to H. P. Lovecraft's writings, and also to works by Dylan Trigg, Eugene Thacker, Thomas Ligotti, and Stephen King; inspection of these interrelated fields reveals epistemophobia to be an overlapping concern among all. At first glance, epistemophobia seems a relatively basic concept (the fear of knowledge), but this thesis reveals it to be *anything but*. We have provided a detailed, complicated taxonomy and enumeration of epistemophobia's meanings—the term works on a blatantly phobic, neurotic level, in which coming into contact with knowledge is horrifying in itself; but it also describes the fear of discovering knowledge's profound limitations. Film, literature, and philosophy work simultaneously to guide discussions of this term, resulting in a comprehensive and truly novel detailing of its ramifications. We have thus staged here a vital philosophical intervention, providing a concept that begs to be applied in further horror studies.

Taking seriously the problem of generating knowledge about *negative* knowledge, this piece has outlined a theoretical framework, and then put that framework in conversation with the film's various contextual registers (specifically, its literary antecedents and its relevant

sociohistorical events). Underlying *Darkness*'s line of inquiry is a long and often interrelated set of binaries, neatly laid out in Birack's introductory lecture (as cited repeatedly above). Indeed, this fixation on binary relations undergirds our decision to set the philosophy of horror against the horror of philosophy, exposing the fragility of a distinction between these categories just as *Darkness* itself undermines the customary belief in difference between positive and negative, good and evil, matter and anti-matter, and even human and animal. Much in the way that Birack suggests that "all knowledge breaks down on the subatomic level into ghosts and shadows," this project has demonstrated the breakdowns of various knowledge systems. Most intently, we have studied *Darkness*'s breakdown of the self; not only does Carpenter's film question or devalue the human subject throughout, but also grotesquely visualizes it as the sum of its pre-human antecedents (insects provide the key metaphor here). Using Dylan Trigg's *The Thing: A Phenomenology of Horror* to study the implications of this human-insect correspondence, this thesis gains entry into one of its overarching issues: the horror of the cosmic. The insect stands in for pre-human alterity, which for Trigg eventually leads back to the body's connection with its indifferent cosmic origins. He makes this connection explicitly clear, stating that "to speak of the horror of the body, is also to speak of the horror of the cosmos" (146).

This interest in the cosmic has justified our project's emphasis on *Prince of Darkness* rather than on Carpenter's other "Apocalypse cycle" entries (*The Thing* [1982], *In the Mouth of Madness* [1994], and *Cigarette Burns* [2005]); out of the four titles comprising this cycle, *Darkness* contends most intently with both the micro- and the macro-cosmic. Also worth noting is that, aside from Anna Powell's essay "'Something Came Leaking Out': Carpenter's Unholy Abominations," there exists almost no sustained critical engagement with this film's philosophy. At the time of its release, reviews were mixed if not generally unfavorable, and one suspects that

this reaction has plagued its ability to gain traction in horror scholarship.¹⁸ By taking seriously this film's unique philosophical questions and methods of exploration, this project therefore fills a gap in the scholarship and lends a new perspective to the critical dialogue.

In addition to executing a complex study of epistemophobia, this thesis has engaged closely with *Darkness*'s philosophical project of humiliating the human. Anna Powell gestures to this move, writing that “[s]liminess is conveyed chiefly by visuals in Carpenter’s work,” and that Carpenter “usually insists on the repellent abjection of demonic entities, which generates his most repulsive imagery, particularly in *Prince of Darkness*, with its ants, maggots, roaches and degenerate street-people” (143). Importantly, we have explained that *Darkness*'s representation of homeless characters does not work on the basis of classist condemnation, but rather serves a larger project of placing “human beings at the bottom of a cosmic hierarchy” (Muir 141); we have justified this reading by outlining the film's fixations on broad philosophical quandaries, and also by lending attention to Carpenter's anti-capitalist follow-up film, *They Live* (1988). We have emphasized that both insects and the central canister's slime work toward the film's overarching concerns with undermining the human subject: these unsettling presences make their way into the human body, whether through forced ingestion (as with the slime), or exposure of interiority (as with Wyndham's disintegration). The insects stand in for prehuman anteriority, whereas the slime represents a futilely restricted primal force that exists always-already within the human. No matter the efforts of priests and academics alike, the slime breaks free and

¹⁸ For examples of sustained negativity leveled against *Darkness* in popular criticism, consider reviews by Philip Strick and Brian McKay. Strick deems the film's “basic story [...] nonsensical, the characterisation [...] perfunctory, and the whole construction [as] transparently a pretext for repeating the short-sharp-shock formula that worked so well for *Halloween*” (148), while McKay argues that the film's “imagery is used to little effect” before labeling “the final dream image” as “a bit of a cop out” (Review).

reclaims its hosts. Upon swallowing the eerie green substance, the hosts lose their subjective individuality and become agents for the slime's mission: propagating infection and affecting reproduction.

Our second chapter has shown author H. P. Lovecraft to be an essential literary antecedent for *Darkness*'s philosophy and genre characteristics. Acknowledging Carpenter's statement that he re-read "The Outsider" before directing *Prince of Darkness*, we emphasize the mirror's central role in both texts. Our reading has drawn deeply from this mirror-based connection, turning to Jorge Luis Borges's "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" and "There Are More Things" to scrutinize the reflective surface's philosophical resonances. We have stressed the mirror's capacity for flipping, skewing, or defamiliarizing perceptions of reality, applying this reading to *Darkness*'s distinctly cinematic uses. In Carpenter's film, the mirror comes to represent not only a cipher for the screen, but also a veil between equally unreliable realities. Thus, the mirror aligns with *Darkness*'s overarching concerns through its relationship with dual sets—in this case, the reflected object and the reflection. This duality, compounded by the mirror's capacity for allowing inter-dimensional passage, speaks to its role as an object extending beyond the confines of subject-centric psychological horror. As such, we have pinpointed in the mirror (and ostensibly in Lovecraft's story) a useful bridge between the conventions of the Gothic and those of more overtly cosmic-focused fiction. *Darkness* carries on from this tradition, inhabiting a Gothic framework while simultaneously rendering it strange and new. That is, much like Lovecraft's writings, Carpenter's film employs the Gothic's enclosed confines and tropes (mirrors, an old Church setting, and supernaturalism) and shifts them in favour of novel genre strategies. Here, as everywhere else, we have identified the breakdown of a heretofore assumed binary (the horror of the self vs. the horror of the cosmos). This chapter has

highlighted the formal advances Carpenter makes by granting filmic expression to Lovecraft's philosophy: *Darkness* is a work of Gothic-cosmic cinema.

Having established the film's philosophical framework and literary lineage, we have discussed *Darkness*'s role within its own contemporary sociocultural milieu. Specifically, we have shown the ways in which the 1980s American wave of Satanic panic informs the film's plot and philosophy. Mobilizing Eugene Thacker's term "demonology" (an ontological strategy for thinking the unthinkable, or absolute nullity), we have stressed *Darkness*'s dealings with Satan and the demonic. Ultimately, although absolute nullity is implied by the film's apocalyptic overtones, and by the slime's erasing of its hosts' humanity and subjectivity, *Darkness* also features a noteworthy sense of positivism: specifically, contagion and alien propagation. Thus, while reframing the film's binary-disrupting concerns within the context of Satan and demonism, we introduce the term "exuberant demonology" to describe Carpenter's cinematic strategies of representing the unthinkable. This fixation on rethinking binaries also works itself out in the film's dealings with God and the Devil, revealing both figures to be mutually responsive parts of a dynamic engagement, rather than opposite sides of a metaphysical equation. We have also recognized within Satanic panic another means of discussing epistemophobia, in that the ultimate truth of this cultural movement is that its targeted, fearful energies are contained within the very group who seeks to stifle them out. Further, we have found within Anton Szandor LaVey and his antecedent William Blake the opportunity to scrutinize the close proximity between human and animal. While Judeo-Christian religiosity argues for a holy sanctity inherent to the human subject, Satanism defiles this notion and reveals the human to be merely one animal among many. This chapter therefore makes two key interventions into horror scholarship—first, it reinterprets Thacker's demonology as "exuberant demonology," paying heed to the horror

genre's capacity for complicating and entangling binary relations; second, it reads LaVey's Satanism as a complex philosophical framework with worthwhile applications for genre studies. To date, LaVey's writings have typically only been afforded cursory discussion in horror scholarship.

This project therefore advances multiple key concepts which, although particular to *Darkness's* modus operandi, offer possibilities for horror research at large. We should consider the applications of "epistemophobia" and "exuberant demontology" as they relate to other prominent, contemporary genre films and novels; one sees the opportunity not only in the works of H. P. Lovecraft and Thomas Ligotti, but also in those written and directed by Kiyoshi Kurosawa, Kathe Koja, Rob Zombie, Nicole Cushing, and Stephen King (among others). With King in mind, consider this thesis's applications to two of his explicitly Lovecraftian late-career novels, *From a Buick 8* (2002) and *Revival* (2014). *Buick's* titular car acts as a conduit for unthinkable violations in the form of dimension-crossing creatures, and the book's narrator approaches many of the philosophical problems advanced by Lovecraft and Carpenter. Consider one scene that acts as an inverse of the above-discussed dissection from Lovecraft's *At the Mountains of Madness*; rather than studying an alien visitor for its unique attributes, King's characters seek to destroy it. This scene speaks intently to epistemophobia (consider how often the word "know" appears here), and also to the horrific and binary-disrupting possibilities inherent to exuberant demontology. This passage stages a group of human characters confronting their own reflections in the eye-stump of an aberrant creature that they have just attacked:

[T]he stump rose up and for just a moment, in the center of my head, *I saw myself*.
I saw all of us standing around in a circle and looking down, looking like
murderers at the grave of their victim, and I saw how strange and alien we were.

How *horrible* we were. In that moment I felt its awful confusion. [...] Did it know *where* it was? I don't think so. Did it know why Mister Dillon had attacked it and why we were killing it? Yes, it knew that much. We were doing it because we were so different, so different and so horrible that its many eyes could hardly see us, could hardly hold onto our images as we surrounded it screaming and chopping and cutting and hitting. (King, *Buick* 372)

Of course, this passage interrogates the boundaries of “self” and “other,” using the metaphor of reflection in a manner recalling *Prince of Darkness*—by locating the human characters within the creature’s eye-stump, King foregrounds their own alien and anti-humanist behaviour. I use the term anti-humanist here because, as opposed to the ideal post-Enlightenment human, King’s characters seek not to know, but to extinguish that which threatens their existing knowledge’s limited parameters. While these people thus act out of aversion to knowledge, the narrator infers some form of understanding within the murdered creature. So too does the eye-stump act as a screen or a mirror much in the same way as the reflective surfaces of Carpenter’s *Darkness*, sending the human subject’s horrific and repressed true nature back to itself. King’s later novel *Revival* presents similar elaborations on epistemophobia, and it also offers expressions of the link between cosmic horror and pre-human (insect) alterity; the book climaxes with the narrator’s glimpse of a dread-inducing afterlife. Expecting heaven, the character instead faces “a sterile world below hollow stars, a charnel kingdom where guardian ant-things sometimes crawled and sometimes stood upright, their faces hideously suggestive of the human” (King, *Revival* 380-1). King even follows up this dense, cosmic image of human-animal connection by invalidating our moral safeguards: “*This horror was the afterlife, and it was waiting not just for the evil ones among us but for us all*” (381). In King’s late-career horror, then, we see another genre-specific

engagement with the false simplicity of humankind's moral systems. Convenient organizations of "good" and "evil" do not suffice in the face of horror. In both *From a Buick 8* and *Revival*, this engagement comes from a place of epistemophobia.

While these preliminary readings of Stephen King's work most obviously suggest further literary research, my thesis has crucially demonstrated the ways in which multiple forms (cinema, fiction, and philosophy) might be read closely and in concert with one another. We can already see this necessity in *Buick*'s references to "images" and screen-like reflections, and in both *Buick* and *Revival*'s explicit dealings with the philosophically oriented concept of epistemophobia. Ultimately, this cross-disciplinary work benefits rigorous horror scholarship: we find that the horror of philosophy and the philosophy of horror approach many of the same questions and problems, and that cinema and literature offer medium-specific means of articulation. Although terms such as "thinking the unthinkable" and "producing negative knowledge" might read initially as self-annihilating paradoxes, we find possibilities for probing the limits of thought within this study's multiple vantage points. Studying the border between what is knowable and unknowable provides new modes for thinking epistemology, ontology, and horror. In Stephen King's late-career works, we can see one opening for future research—but that project, like this one, would be best served by acknowledging its connections to other literature, and also to cinematic and philosophical texts. Even despite epistemophobia's cautioning, horror scholarship will continue breaching those forbidden thresholds of thought.

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