

# Occultism in Horror Fiction: Ira Levin's "Rosemary's Baby"

---

**Skrletović, Sonja**

**Undergraduate thesis / Završni rad**

**2020**

*Degree Grantor / Ustanova koja je dodijelila akademski / stručni stupanj:* **Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences / Sveučilište Josipa Jurja Strossmayera u Osijeku, Filozofski fakultet**

*Permanent link / Trajna poveznica:* <https://urn.nsk.hr/urn:nbn:hr:142:027741>

*Rights / Prava:* [In copyright](#) / [Zaštićeno autorskim pravom.](#)

*Download date / Datum preuzimanja:* **2024-11-24**



*Repository / Repozitorij:*

[FFOS-repository - Repository of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Osijek](#)



Sveučilište J.J. Strossmayera u Osijeku

Filozofski fakultet Osijek

Studij: Dvopredmetni sveučilišni preddiplomski studij engleskoga jezika i  
književnosti i njemačkog jezika i književnosti

Sonja Skrletović

**Okultizam u horor književnosti: *Rosemaryna beba* Ire Levina**

Završni rad

Mentor: doc. dr. sc. Ljubica Matek

Osijek, 2020.

Sveučilište J.J. Strossmayera u Osijeku

Filozofski fakultet Osijek

Odsjek za engleski jezik i književnost

Studij: Dvopredmetni sveučilišni preddiplomski studij engleskoga jezika i književnosti i njemačkog jezika i književnosti

Sonja Skrletović

**Okultizam u horor književnosti: *Rosemaryna beba* Ire Levina**

Završni rad

Znanstveno područje: humanističke znanosti

Znanstveno polje: filologija

Znanstvena grana: anglistika

Mentor: doc. dr. sc. Ljubica Matek

Osijek, 2020.

J.J. Strossmayer University of Osijek

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Study Programme: Double Major BA Study Programme in English Language  
and Literature and German Language and Literature

Sonja Skrletović

**Occultism in Horror Fiction: Ira Levin's *Rosemary's Baby***

Bachelor's Thesis

Supervisor: doc. dr. sc. Ljubica Matek

Osijek, 2020

J.J. Strossmayer University of Osijek  
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences  
Department of English

Study Programme: Double Major BA Study Programme in English Language  
and Literature and German Language and Literature

Sonja Skrletović

**Occultism in Horror Fiction: Ira Levin's *Rosemary's Baby***

Bachelor's Thesis

Scientific area: humanities

Scientific field: philology

Scientific branch: English studies

Supervisor: doc. dr. sc. Ljubica Matek

Osijek, 2020

## IZJAVA

Izjavljujem s punom materijalnom i moralnom odgovornošću da sam ovaj rad samostalno napravio te da u njemu nema kopiranih ili prepisanih dijelova teksta tuđih radova, a da nisu označeni kao citati s napisanim izvorom odakle su preneseni. Svojim vlastoručnim potpisom potvrđujem da sam suglasan da Filozofski fakultet Osijek trajno pohrani i javno objavi ovaj moj rad u internetskoj bazi završnih i diplomskih radova knjižnice Filozofskog fakulteta Osijek, knjižnice Sveučilišta Josipa Jurja Strossmayera u Osijeku i Nacionalne i sveučilišne knjižnice u Zagrebu.

U Osijeku, datum

9.9.2019. god

Sanja Skrljević, 0122222315  
ime i prezime studenta, JMBAG

## Abstract

This paper deals with the representation of occultism in Ira Levin's novel *Rosemary's Baby* (1967). The treacherous nature of occultism is represented by a seemingly nice old couple next door who in fact worships the devil and are the leaders of a cult which wants to bring Satan's offspring to Earth. The novel uses the typical Gothic trope of a haunted house and also relies on other Gothic features to produce the feeling of horror. These Gothic features are: an old house with a dark past, an ancient prophecy of the Anti-Christ coming to earth, dreams bordering on reality, inexplicable events, and women in distress. By analyzing the Satanic cult, its members, practices, victims, and the Gothic pregnancy, the novel highlights the idea that the struggle between good and evil is essentially of a theological nature as good is represented in the form of Christianity and church, whereas evil is represented through the members of the Satanic cult who worship the Devil.

**Keywords:** Ira Levin, *Rosemary's Baby*, occultism, Gothic, horror fiction

## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	2
1  Mysticism and Occultism.....	3
1.1  Satanic Followers.....	4
1.2  Satanic Practices .....	5
1.3  Victims.....	7
1.4  Gothic Pregnancy.....	9
2  Christianity vs. Satanism.....	13
3  Setting .....	16
3.1  The Bramford.....	16
3.2  Dark Past.....	17
4  The Curse of <i>Rosemary’s Baby</i> .....	19
Conclusion .....	21
Works Cited .....	22



## Introduction

This paper analyzes the approach to occultism in Ira Levin's *Rosemary's baby* as an uncanny phenomenon, which appears in the safest place there is: one's own neighborhood and home. The horrific experiences Rosemary went through and her struggle with the occult take up the main part of the novel which successfully exemplifies occultism in horror fiction.

The first chapter offers a more comprehensive analysis of mysticism and occultism in the novel, both of which are determined by the Satanic followers and their practices. The followers are ordinary people, but their practices are dark. The victims exploited by the Satanic followers are also analyzed in this chapter. They are likewise ordinary people who become victims because they have either purposefully or inadvertently interfered with the work of the coven. In its final part, this chapter looks into the issues of Gothic pregnancy as represented in the novel, with the focus on its connections to gender roles and abortion.

The second chapter explores the eternal struggle between good and evil through the perspective of the novel. The novel highlights the struggle's religious aspect and depicts both the tension between good and evil as the conflict between Christianity, as a notable religion, and Satanism, as an evil cult, and their mutual interdependency.

Following that, the third chapter is dedicated to the typically Gothic setting of the novel. The Bramford is a Victorian building in which most of the plot takes place, and it will be described in all of its beauty, but the dark past of the building will also be revealed.

Finally, the last chapter deals with the curse which seems to have been awakened after the making of the film adaptation of the novel, also titled *Rosemary's Baby*. The curse brought down several victims, all of them connected to the film, and the chapter examines how the fictional occult events from the novel seem to have transcended the page and occurred in real life as well. The last part of the paper is the Conclusion which summarizes the thesis' findings.

## 1 Mysticism and Occultism

Mysticism is the key part of Ira Levin's novel *Rosemary's Baby* and it should first be determined what the term means. According to Roy Mousumi, mysticism has "come to represent some vague or ill-defined religious or spiritual phenomenon, especially associated with a belief in the occult" (1). From this, one can conclude that mysticism in today's society is closely related to occultism. Mousumi also explains the origin of the word, giving it a broader meaning:

The term "mysticism" has western origins with various historically determined meanings. It was derived from the Greek word *muo*, meaning to close or to conceal. Its derivative *mystikos* meant *an initiate*. In the Hellenistic world, mystical referred to secret religious rituals. A *mystikos* was an initiate of a mystery religion. (Mousumi 17)

Thus, there is a close connection to occultism where obscure groups of people practice secret religious rituals that often include worshiping the devil. Bauduin and Johnsson suggest that: "Occultism has its roots in the various heterodox religious movements usually referred to by the umbrella term 'Western esotericism'" (4-5). Occultism is not accepted by general society and the knowledge about it is available only to a small group of people.

However, despite the fact that the occult is not a part of mainstream culture, many people are interested in it: "The occult? Well, bizarre, mystical, acupuncture tales touch us all. Also, the prescient playfulness of Tarot decks and 'What's your sign?' make for interesting speculations" (Means 1059). The occult is unknown and usually not talked about. It seems innocent and awakens the people's interest to know more about the phenomena which they do not take seriously and only consider them a game.

*Rosemary's Baby* is set in such an occult environment, and Levin manages to show how terrifying and shocking the truth behind it can be to unsuspecting people. This helps create literary suspense: "Levin's works tend to revel in the mechanics of suspense and here he applies the alternation of concealment and revelation, which is central to the creation of suspense" (Griffin 2). Levin makes the "nice" neighbors the main antagonists of the story and shows us their practices and rituals. He also includes a demonic child, which even in the womb sucks the life out of his mother. In this, he combines motifs from various Gothic stories and folklore. According to Valerius, it is "a modern-day tale of witchcraft and demonic pregnancy, a Faustian story of destructive ambition, a tribute to Dracula in which

the unborn rather than the undead perniciously feed off the living” (116). Just like in the story of Faust, Rosemary’s husband Guy gives in to the worldly temptations of professional success and signs a contract with the devil regardless of the consequences it may have on his family. Its features show that *Rosemary’s Baby* belongs to the genre of occult fiction, and the following chapters will explain the elements of the occult more closely.

## 1.1 Satanic Followers

As Rosemary and Guy Woodhouse move in into their new apartment, it never occurs to them that they will share a building with the worshippers of the devil. However, the friendly old people who insist on helping them whenever they can turn out to be part of a Satanic coven. The story starts innocently enough as Rosemary and Guy are happy to move into their dream home where the neighbors are a bit nosy, but seem to be friendly and sincere. However, as the novel continues, the uncanny secrets are revealed. David Frankfurter explains how this adds to the story’s cleverness:

The brilliance of his story lies in the increasingly uncanny air—rational suspicion, innocent curiosity, and fear in equal parts—stemming from an utterly intangible threat. And as evil does begin to materialize behind innocence, as caring elderly neighbors in an apartment building turn out to lead a Satanic cult, we remain still at a loss as to what danger they pose to the pregnant mother to whom they’re being so nice. (75)

In fact, Roman and Minnie Castevet are no ordinary old couple. They are a part of a Satanic cult and Roman is the cult’s leader. In fact, Roman’s father, Adrian Marcato, was also a worshiper of Satan and was known as “[t]he man who said he conjured up Satan and was attacked downstairs by a mob” (Levin 164).

After Rosemary realizes who Roman’s father was, she also becomes aware that many people connected to Roman have an unnatural interest in her unborn baby: “Minnie, Roman, Guy, Mr Fountain, the Weeses, Laura-Louise, and a studious looking young Japanese with eyeglasses – all gathered under an over-the-mantel portrait of Adrian Marcato” (Levin 218). Everyone, including her husband, was part of the conspiracy. Even her gynecologist, Dr. Abraham Sapirstein, belonged to the coven and drugged Rosemary to calm her down and

stop her from getting suspicious: “I can give you some pills that will be more than adequate in these last few weeks” (Levin 170).

Roman and Minnie never change during the novel; they are always calm because they are convinced that they are doing the right thing: “The neighbors never change, Rosemary’s neighbors are caring, cultured, and elderly—very much the antithesis of those alien traits by which we normally recognize potential danger” (Frankfurter 79). Contrary to the expected, the members of the cult never react in such a way as to arouse suspicion of what they are trying to accomplish. The idea of an obscure and malevolent conspiracy going on right in one’s family and home without one realizing it is ultimately shattering and terrifying. Because of this, Frankfurter notes: “*Rosemary’s Baby* was obviously ahead of its time in offering such a revelation of Satanic conspiracy; many of the ideas it raises were not even picked up 20 years later” (78). Thus, it can be concluded that the uncanny notions that everyone can be a predator, even the closest members of your family, and that one never truly knows anyone represent the major source of occult horror.

## 1.2 Satanic Practices

Occultism is connected to obscure and secretive religious practices in which Satan is worshiped. In *Rosemary’s Baby* the coven also has its Satanic practices which it uses to interact with the devil. However, since their practices are condemned by the mainstream society because they are heretic, and frequently also by law, as they are sometimes violent or criminal, they have to be performed in secret. Thus, to keep their secret and to make Rosemary complacent, the coven drugs her from the very beginning, first with the charm that belonged to Terry and was given to Rosemary by Minnie after Terry’s death, and later with food and medication.

The charm given to her to make her more fertile contains tannis root and smells disgustingly, which is why Rosemary refuses to wear it at first: “Within the pink was Terry’s silver filigree ball-charm and its clustered-together neck-chain. The smell of the ball’s filling made Rosemary pull her head away” (Levin 62). However, her husband talks her into wearing it by suggesting it would be impolite not to. Even though she senses that something is wrong and tries to protect herself, Rosemary is able neither to determine what is going on nor to prevent herself from being drugged, as the coven uses any opportunity they can to control her.

The night Rosemary gets pregnant, Minnie brings her chocolate mousse infused with some sort of a tranquilizing drug. However, due to its strange taste, Rosemary does not finish the desert, but throws it away. Later, during the impregnation ritual (in effect, during her rape), she partially awakes and hears Minnie say: “As long as she ate the mouse she can’t see nor hear. She’s like dead” (Levin 81). This confirms the reader’s assumption that Rosemary is right to be suspicious and that Minnie put something in the mousse to make Rosemary unconscious for the purpose of performing some kind of a ritual. Additionally, she sees Dr. Sapirstein holding a cup of blood with which Roman draws on Rosemary’s body. The whole coven is naked and singing: “all of them had been there, the whole coven, naked and singing in a circle around her. Had it been a real thing that had really happened? Roman in a black robe had drawn designs on her. Dr. Sapirstein had held a cup of red paint for him. Red paint? Blood” (Levin 217).

The drugging continues throughout the novel, that is, even after Rosemary gives birth; she takes the prescribed pills every day, hoping that they would make her feel better, but feels limp nevertheless. Only after she stops taking them and feels better immediately does she realize that they were sleeping pills: “Eight of them, all alike; small white tablets scored across the middle for breaking in half. Whatever they were, three a day had kept her limp and docile; eight at once, surely, would send Laura-Luise or Helen Wees into sound sleep” (Levin 213).

Finally, Rosemary finds out about the coven, due to the book Hutch left her: “They’ve got a coven here, Minnie and Roman, with Laura-Louise and the Fountains and the Gilmores and the Weeses; those parties with the flute and the chanting, those are Sabbaths or esbaths or whatever-they-are!” (165). She realizes that the parties the Catevets were having were in fact meetings of the coven, during which they performed their rituals. She heard Roman telling Minnie that they need “[a]nybody. As long as she’s young and healthy and not a virgin” (40), but did not know what it meant at the time. Later it turns out that they need a mother, a vessel to carry and give birth to the devil’s son. She first tries to convince herself, and everyone else, that Guy is the father of the baby, but after seeing it and hearing Roman’s words: “Satan is His Father, who came up from Hell and begat a Son of mortal woman! To avenge the inequities visited by the God worshipers upon His never-doubting followers” (220), she realizes that the father of her son is not human. According to the coven, her son has a purpose in this world, which was to exact revenge for the suffering of those who worshipped Satan, or as Roman explained it: “He shall redeem the despised and wreak vengeance in the name of the burned

and tortured!” (Levin 220). In this way, *Rosemary’s Baby* reveals the occult rituals and practices in which Rosemary was abused and victimized, but also shows that the cycle of abuse is a vicious one: the occultists feel abused and victimized because the society rejects them, and so they believe their goals and methods are righteous.

### 1.3 Victims

As seen in the previous chapter, the practices of the Satanic cult described in the novel usually include putting people in a coma and killing them. The cult can hurt people in various other ways, for example by making them blind, and they also perform rituals in which they summon Satan to rape women. This chapter will focus on the horrific ways their victims suffer.

The first victim mentioned in the novel is Mrs. Gardenia, the old lady who lived in the apartment 7E before Rosemary and Guy moved. It is revealed that she got into a fight with the Casteverts and shortly after fell into coma and died: “Mrs. Gardenia and the Casteverts had had a falling-out shortly after her arrival, and soon afterward Mrs. Gardenia had gone into the coma from which she never emerged” (Levin 30). It could be that she was initially also a part of the coven because the readers learn that she was supplying Minnie with herbs before she fell into a coma.

Something similar happens to Rosemary’s friend Edward Hutchins – Hutch, following a visit to Rosemary. Namely, his great knowledge and his genuine concern for Rosemary turned out to be a nuisance for the coven; as he became aware of their existence, he tried to warn Rosemary about it and the dangers they pose to her. So, in order to keep their existence a secret, they decided to get rid of him: “dead Mrs. Gardenia, who surely died of the same witchery that had frozen and killed poor Hutch” (Levin 213). Rosemary talked to Hutch the day before he fell into coma and he seemed fine, which is why his inexplicable state baffles even the doctors: “He’s in deep coma. The doctors haven’t been able to find out yet what’s causing it. He’s at St Vincent’s Hospital” (Levin 127).

There were other victims, too. Before eliminating Hutch, the coven killed Theresa Gionoffrio – Terry. Interestingly, she was initially rescued by the Casteverts. She lived on the street and was a drug addict before they took her in and helped her to find the right way: “I was starving and on dope and doing a lot of other things that I’m so ashamed of I could throw

up just thinking about them” (Levin 28-29). She felt indebted to them as she believed she was saved from a life of sin, but, in fact, she was just a perfect candidate for giving birth to the son of the devil. Her difficult life filled with vice made them believe that Terry will not be shocked by their proposal to give birth to Satan’s child and that she will accept their Satanic practice, but she rejects it. Possibly, it was her Catholic upbringing (Levin 29) that made her refuse the possibility to participate in such a ritual. In fact, Rosemary hears Minnie telling Roman the same night that Terry supposedly killed herself: “I told you not to tell her anything in advance” (40). It remains unclear whether she was killed by the coven in order to keep their secret, or if she committed suicide in order to escape them, but it is likely that she was killed as, being a Catholic, Terry would have found suicide sinful. In any case, the outcome is the same for those who refuse to meet the coven’s demands: death.

The next victim was the actor Donald Baumgard, who was Guy’s competitor for an important role. Guy wanted Donald’s role in the play, and he made a deal with the coven: if they help him get the main role, he will conspire with them to impregnate Rosemary with the devil’s son. Levin leaves their conspiracy fully “in-between lines.” It is never made explicit, but the readers fill in the gaps and construct the story for themselves, which contributes to the rising suspense. Not long after they strike the deal, that is, not long after he befriends them, he gets the desired role; namely, Donald Baumgard suddenly and inexplicably goes blind and cannot play the role anymore: “He’s gone blind. He woke up yesterday and – he can’t see” (Levin 68).

Of course, the most famous victim in the novel is Rosemary. As already mentioned, she was drugged by the coven on several occasions, but a particularly vile case of abuse occurred when she was drugged, brought to the Casteverts’ apartment, and raped by the devil in the impregnation ritual: “This is no dream, she thought, this is real, this is happening” (Levin 82). Because of the drugs she was given, she could not fully distinguish between reality and fantasy. She saw parts of her past with her sister Agnes, and she also had visions of the Pope and president talking to her, but she was never fully drugged and asleep, so that she still saw and heard what was happening around her. Nevertheless, she could not decide what was real and what was not: “Here fantasy and reality are not carbon copies of one another, but they are in close communication” (Valerius 122).

To conclude, the victims are typically people who somehow stand in the way of the coven or are needed to achieve the coven’s goals. They are eliminated either so as not to stop

them from bringing the devil's offspring to earth or so as not to expose their activities. Rosemary represents the means to accomplish their plan and she was constantly drugged and kept unaware of their plans because their initial choice, Terry, found out what they planned, and killed herself in order to prevent it (or was killed by them because of her refusal to comply with their extreme request). So, due to her ignorance and the coven's deviousness, Rosemary gets impregnated by Satan.

#### 1.4 Gothic Pregnancy

Rosemary Woodhouse is a stereotypical housewife who is responsible for keeping the house in order, making meals, and bearing an offspring. Indeed, she gets pregnant in the novel, but her pregnancy is not typical. Rather, her impregnation and its purpose represent the major source of horror and explain the nature of occult practices.

To begin with, it is important to explain the word "Gothic." The word itself had many meanings throughout history, but the meaning used today, which is relevant for the purpose of this paper, is explained by Longueil: "the term 'Gothic' . . . became at last, as a literary term, a mere synonym for the grotesque, ghastly, and violently superhuman in fiction which had become the outstanding feature in 'Gothic' novel writing" (459). This chapter will discuss the notion of the Gothic pregnancy in the novel in order to show that even the use of the motif of pregnancy shows the novel's Gothic nature.

*Rosemary's baby* was published in 1968, the year in which the Catholic Church issued the encyclical *Humanae Vitae (On Human Life)* which confirms the ban of artificial contraception and thus fosters the traditional outlook on women and their reproductive rights (Rengel 202). Despite the emerging Women's Liberation Movement, it was a time when it was still stereotypical that men pursue their career and women stay at home and take care of their children. Sullivan et al. explain Rosemary and Guy's relationship by suggesting that Guy is the man who finds his self-worth in the arts, whereas Rosemary does so by wanting to have a child:

Guy and Rosemary embrace the classic gender roles designated by American 1960s society for pursuing a sense of permanent self-worth. Traditionally, the arena of cultural sublimation through creative acts with lasting impact on society—art, politics, science—has been reserved for men, whereas women



have been relegated to obtaining symbolic immortality through the successful rearing of offspring. (192)

So, on the one hand, there is Guy who is the dominant one in their relationship and makes all the decisions. This can clearly be seen when Rosemary says that she told Mrs. Castevet that they would come and visit, but Guy rejects her by saying: “we don’t want to do that, do we?” (Levin 46). On the other hand, there is Rosemary, a good wife who decorates the new apartment, cooks for her husband, and makes sure that he is always happy and pleased. For example, after Guy comes home from work with the bad news that he did not get the wanted role, Rosemary does everything she can to make him feel good again: “Rosemary kissed him and installed him in his new easy chair with a melted cheese sandwich and a glass of beer” (Levin 45). Throughout the novel, Guy does rarely does anything like that for Rosemary, and when he does, he must point out what a good husband he is for doing so: “We’ll go. It’ll be my good deed for the day” (Levin 47).

The relationship between Rosemary and Guy is important because Guy makes a monumental decision which concerns Rosemary and would drastically affect her life without even consulting her about it. He decides to turn his own wife into a surrogate mother and to give her firstborn baby to the cult in order to get what he wants (professional success), and betrays her trust in doing so. More importantly, he does not give Rosemary the right to make decisions about her own body. This is a typical Gothic trope, as the early Gothic narratives implied a lustful villain’s “attack” on a young maiden’s body. Therefore, this pregnancy is described as a Gothic pregnancy: “It is a story of violence, deceit, and misappropriation of a woman’s body by people she trusts that makes pregnancy a Gothic spectacle” (Valerius 116).

At the time the novel was published, abortion was also a hotly debated topic, not least because of Pope Paul VI’s *Humanae Vitae*, but also in legislative circles. In the US, the law defined three instances in which abortion was legal, and, significantly, *Rosemary’s Baby* included all three reasons due to which a woman could legally get an abortion in the United States of America:

Her pregnancy hyperbolically involves not one but all three of the circumstances in which the American Law Institute’s model penal code provided for legal abortion: not only was she raped, but pregnancy compromises her physical health, while the third circumstance – potential birth defects – is established through anachronism. That is, until the twentieth

century, “monster” was a term used to refer to people born with congenital deformities, and copulation with the devil was one traditional explanation for the cause of monstrous births. (Valerius 125)

In the novel, Rosemary does not give consent to have sexual intercourse with the devil, but is drugged and abused, which means that she is raped: “Protest woke in her eyes and throat, but something covered her face, smothering her in a sweet stench” (Levin 82). During pregnancy, Rosemary constantly feels pain and it gets worse over time, so much so that her friend Elise said to her: “You look like Miss Concentration Camp of 1966” (Levin 143), suggesting to the reader how poorly Rosemary actually looks at that point and how the pregnancy was bad for her health.

Finally, medieval superstitions and beliefs contended that birth defects were caused by sexual intercourse with the devil and drawing from anachronistic beliefs, Levin implies that Rosemary’s literal intercourse with the devil is bound to result in the birth of such a baby. In the end, when she sees the baby she screams because his eyes are not human: “His eyes were golden-yellow, all golden-yellow, with neither whites nor irises; all golden-yellow, with vertical black-slit pupils” (Levin 220). Because of all these circumstances, the idea of abortion becomes acceptable to the reader: “*Rosemary’s Baby* addresses itself to an audience invested in the sentimental ideal of motherhood, exploits that investment to produce a horrified response, and thereby makes abortion compelling” (Valerius 125). At the same time, the novel subtly questions the Church’s attitude to pregnancy, abortion and woman’s body. Namely, although it is clear that Rosemary is Catholic and a believer, her faith does not save her from the Devil nor does the coven’s attitude to women’s pregnancy differ in any particularly obvious way from the Church’s attitude. In both cases, the woman has no right to her bodily autonomy and giving birth is her ultimate purpose, even if it means life-long suffering for her.

Throughout the novel there are hints that point to an abnormal relationship between the fetus and Rosemary, and the idea of her eagerly awaited motherhood is fully overshadowed by her suffering. Her initial desire to become a mother and her belief that this is her purpose in life are rendered both ironic and tragic through all the circumstances connected to her pregnancy. The fetus feeds on Rosemary as a vampire feeds on his victims draining life out of her, and Hutch makes a remark that points to this: “You look as if you’ve been drained by a vampire. Are you sure there aren’t any puncture marks?” (Levin 115). The

fetus, just like a vampire, depends on the mother, a living human being, for food and the woman is nothing more but an incubator for the parasitic fetus: “*Rosemary’s Baby* gothicizes this parasitic relation by casting the fetus in the role of vampire, the traditional parasite of literary and cinematic horror; instead of the undead, in *Rosemary’s Baby* it is the unborn that maliciously feed off the living” (Valerius 131). Like vampires, the fetus has not yet crossed the border to life, whereas in the case of a vampire this uncrossed border is death. Both are still parts of the world of the living, cannot be killed, and need living humans to survive:

Nonetheless, like the undead, who continue to inhabit the world of the living although they are not alive and who cannot be killed although they are not dead, the unborn are liminal entities. Both the undead and the unborn exist in a transitional state defined by a threshold that has not been crossed, death in one case and birth in the other, and both require living human beings for sustenance. (Valerius 131-132)

Ultimately, all the events that lead to and occur after the conception, testify to the fact that Rosemary’s pregnancy is indeed a Gothic one. She was literally raped by the devil and forced to give birth to his child. The fetus was feeding off of her, endangering her health, and she still did not want to get an abortion and give up on motherhood, nor would she be allowed to do so. As shown in the case of Terry, death is the only way for a woman to escape or avoid unwanted pregnancy both in the realm of the established Church and in the realm of its heretic opposite, the Satanic cult.

## 2 Christianity vs Satanism

Despite the subtle criticism of the Church visible in the treatment and representation of female sexuality and pregnancy, Christianity is nevertheless shown as the proper choice. Namely, the eternal conflict between good and evil is shown as the conflict between Christianity and Satanism. To make the opposition clear, Levin describes Rosemary as coming from a Christian family, whereas her opposing side consists of the Satanic followers, whom her husband Guy joined.

It is interesting that the Bramford, home of the leader of the coven and most of its members, is owned by the Church: “The Bramford is owned by the church next door” (Levin 18). The Catholic Church that is situated next to the Bramford owns the building, which should suggest the building’s connection with holiness and Christ. Yet, its inhabitants are there to worship Satan and the Bramford is the place where Anti-Christ is born. On the one hand, this symbolizes the eternal connection between good and evil as Lucifer, the Fallen Angel, was created by God and is his child. On the other hand, it also symbolizes the evil Angel’s defiance and rejection of God and His laws. To show their contempt of and superiority over the Church, but also their inherent connection with it, the coven lives and meets in the building owned by the Church.

Furthermore, both Terry and Rosemary are raised in the Catholic faith, but distanced themselves from God during their life: “Terry was, like Rosemary, Catholic but no longer observing; she was anxious, though, to get a ticket to the papal mass to be celebrated at Yankee Stadium” (29). The Pope was visiting New York and neither Rosemary nor Terry had tickets to go see the Pope live, even though they come from Christian families. In fact, Rosemary confesses that her religion meant more to her in the past, but not as much after leaving her family house: “Religion doesn’t mean as much to me now as it did back home” (Levin 73). However, her name – Rosemary – may be said to contain certain important Christian meanings: the rose, Mary as Mother of God, and the rosary. An additional proof of her connection with Catholicism is the fact that she still respects the Pope and watches his visit on TV. This shows that Satanists are intent on corrupting even those who are close to God, perhaps them the most.

In fact, Valerius describes Rosemary’s impregnation as: “a perversion of the Christian narrative of the Immaculate Conception in which Satan impregnates a mortal woman in order to become human and intervene in world history” (116). Rosemary fights for her religion in

the end and wants to reestablish the natural order, where good defeats the evil: “When Rosemary clears out her closet and steps through the literal and symbolic border between her apartment and the Castevets’ world, she is confronting all that is uncanny and abject in a hope to re-instate natural order/control” (MacDonald 17). She even starts to pray to God and asks for his forgiveness and help: “Oh Father in heaven, forgive me for doubting! Forgive me for turning from you, Merciful Father, and help me, help me in my hour of need” (Levin 213). Sullivan et al. explain that, in the end, Rosemary has to give in to her husband and the coven because, as a Catholic, she believes in obeying her husband, relies on love and motherhood, and because she cannot kill anyone, not even herself and her demonic son:

Because Rosemary stakes her self-worth entirely on the domains of love and motherhood, she has no option when betrayed by Guy and exploited by the Satanists but to surrender to their alternative worldview, abandoning the conventional moral worldview in which she was raised. (197)

Despite the claim that she has to surrender to the alternative worldview, it may also be argued that she, in fact, accepts the Christian idea that a woman cannot be free or make decisions that would benefit solely herself, but that she must always keep in mind the benefit of others, most notably, her family. However perverse, it seems that the coven enforces the same doctrine toward women as the Church, and regardless of her choice to turn toward either religion or heresy, the outcome will be the same for Rosemary: she has to have the baby.

As an opposition to Christianity represented by Rosemary, Satanism and evil are embodied by the coven. Satan appears once in order to impregnate Rosemary and is later seen as Rosemary’s son at the end of the novel, but his works are everywhere in the story: “True, the Devil does appear briefly to impregnate Rosemary and then in the form of the demonic infant. Yet the evil emerges primarily in the form of a Satan-worshipping cult” (Frankfurter 80). Rosemary trusts Guy the most, but he was “a marvelous liar” (Levin 4), which is why he was able to hide the truth about the cult for so long and even make Rosemary think that she only dreamt that she was raped. In the end, the Satanic followers repeat their mantra: “God is dead and Satan lives! The year is One, the first year of our Lord! The year is One, God is done! The year is One, Adrian begun” (Levin 221). They are announcing that a new time has come: the time of Anti-Christ. As the Catholic Church counts years after Christ’s birth, so the Satanic followers start to count them after Anti-Christ’s birth.

In the novel, Rosemary is represented as too weak to defeat the evil, so she has no other option but to stay with her son. The son of the devil is born and Rosemary, who is the

representative of good, nevertheless decides to raise him, whereby she accepts the victory of Satan.

### 3 Setting

When talking about the setting of Gothic and horror fiction, there is almost always an old building with a dark past that represents the main setting of the plot, which awakens a sublime feeling, one of the major Gothic features. Immanuel Kant defines the sublime in the following way:

The sublime must always be large, the beautiful can also be small. The sublime must be simple, the beautiful can be decorated and ornamented. A great height is just as sublime as a great depth, but the latter is accompanied with the sensation of shuddering, the former with that of admiration; hence the latter sentiment can be terrifyingly sublime and the former noble. (17)

The Bramford is exactly such a building; it is a beautiful, old Victorian building which awakens the sublime in the reader because of the big apartments, which compel you to come live in them, but also because of the terrifying events that happened inside of it.

#### 3.1 The Bramford

The Bramford is a large Victorian house which makes it the perfect setting for a horror novel and a place of gathering of a cult. When Rosemary and Guy get the news that “a four-room apartment in the Bramford” (3) has become available, they are delighted. The Bramford is their dream come true and they immediately decide to get out of the lease they signed the previous day and accept the new offer.

The Bramford is indeed described as a beautiful building which was exactly where Rosemary wanted to live: “The Bramford, old, black, and elephantine, is a warren of high ceilinged apartments prized for their fireplace and Victorian detail” (Levin 3). She said that the other apartment was a “white cellblock” and that she “liked it” (Levin 4), but never loved it like she would the Bramford, even though the apartment in the Bramford was smaller than the first apartment. This is the first instance of the Bramford’s inexplicable attraction, despite its old age and black colour. Significantly, the apartments in Bramford were originally large, but were later divided into smaller ones, which made it possible to make secret passageways – another Gothic feature – from one apartment to the other:

This apartment has four rooms, two baths and five closets. Originally the house consisted of very large apartments – the smallest was a nine – but now they’ve almost all been broken up into fours, fives, and sixes. Seven E is a four

that was originally the back part of a ten. It has the original kitchen and master bath, which are enormous, as you'll soon see. It has the original master bedroom for its living-room, another bedroom for its bedroom, and two servant's rooms thrown together for its dining-room or second bedroom. (Levin 5)

The apartment 7E in Bramford is ideal for a young couple who will soon be planning to have a child. As they examine the apartment, Mr. Micklas even notes that there is a perfect space for their future child: "It's an ideal child's room, with a full bathroom and a large closet. The whole set-up is made to order for a young couple like yourselves" (Levin 5-6). The halls were dark green: "Rosemary and Guy stepped out – into a dimly lighted hall-way walled and carpeted in dark green" (Levin 6). This can be connected to the meaning of the word green "as 'naive', 'gullible', or 'foolish'" (Ferber 88), referring to Rosemary who was naïve, fell for the trap of the cult, and accepted the apartment.

Despite a seemingly idyllic beginning, there were signs from the very beginning of the novel that something was dark or wrong about the place. They "saw a dead light bulb in a cut-glass sconce and a patched place of light green tape on the dark green carpet" (Levin 6), showing that the place was not as beautiful as Rosemary describes it. Rosemary has to do the laundry in the basement of the building and she says to Hutch: "The basement is kind of creepy" (Levin 31), and it did not help when she and Terry were there and "[g]lass crashed somewhere in the basement" (Levin 27). In line with the Gothic tradition, apart from being old and scary, the Bramford also had its secret passageways: "there was a secret way from one apartment to the other" (Levin 213). That is how the Casteverts and other members of the coven could go in and out of Rosemary's apartment without permission.

### 3.2 Dark Past

In addition to its unsettling appearance, the Bramford also has its dark past to go with the old Victorian building. It was even called "Black Bramford" (Levine 15) and people stayed away from that place. The first thing that strikes the reader as odd in the apartment, which also signals that there are certain mysteries connected with the place, is the closet that could not be accessed because a secretary was put in front of it: "There's a closet behind that secretary. I'm sure there is. There are five: two in the bedroom, one in the second bedroom, and two in the hallway, there and there" (Levin 9). The closet seems normal at first, but



towards the end of the novel it is revealed that the secretary was put there to hide a hidden door, that leads to their neighbors, the Castevets.

There were several ominous events in the Bramford before Guy and Rosemary moved in, but the neighbors did not mention those to the new tenants. In fact, most of the events that happened in the Bramford are revealed to Rosemary by her friend Hutch:

The Bramford had rather an unpleasant reputation early in the century ... Along with the Isadora Duncans and Theodore Dreisers,' he said, 'the Bramford has housed a considerable number of less attractive personages. It's where the Trench sisters performed their little dietary experiments, and where Keith Kennedy held his parties. Adrian Marcato lived there too; and so did Pearl Ames. (Levin 14)

Although his death takes place before the beginning of the novel's story, Adrian Marcato is most important for the novel. He was a man who "practiced witchcraft ... He made quite a splash in the eighteen nineties by announcing that he had succeeded in conjuring up the living Satan showed off a handful of hair and some claw-parings" (Levin 15). He worshiped Satan, even summoned him to earth on one occasion, which terrified everyone, and he was killed shortly after the event. Hutch did not stop at this; his research led him to a more recent event: "In 1959 a dead infant was found wrapped in newspaper in the basement" (Levin 15). Despite its gruesomeness, and the awareness that "at the Bramford awful things happen a good deal more frequently than 'now and then'" (Levin 16), the couple still decided to stay in the Bramford. However, the realization of the dark past and present of the Bramford intensifies the uncanny feeling that the building provokes in the reader and foreshadows future horrific events, just like in typical Gothic texts.

#### 4 The Curse of *Rosemary's Baby*

Ira Levin's novel did not go unnoticed in the world. Only a year after its publication, the novel was adapted into a movie with the same title, now considered to be the genre's classic. Interestingly, certain ominous events occurred after the release of the film that can be connected to the story of *Rosemary's Baby*. Namely, it is believed that during the shooting of one of the darker scenes in the film, a "curse" was cast on the actors and crew of the film made by Roman Polanski in 1968.

To start off, the director of the film, Roman Polanski, was married to Sharon Tate who was pregnant with his child when she was "brutally killed on Aug. 9, 1969, by members of the Manson 'family'" (Iati), a year after the film was made. Not only do the circumstances of her death remind one of the plot of the film, but they also caused widespread fear among actors, "causing many people in Hollywood to fear for their own lives and casting a shadow over the counterculture that had fueled Manson's cult" (Iati).

Although Tate's murder was certainly the most famous, that was not the only death connected to the film. The composer of the film's musical score, Krzysztof Komeda, died at the age of 38, only months after finishing his work. He fell from a cliff and "[a]fter the fall, Komeda went into a coma and languished for some time before finally passing away" (Shelton), which is very similar to the way both Mrs. Gardenia and Rosemary's friend Hutch die in the novel.

Furthermore, the actress who played Rosemary, Mia Farrow, also suffered a blow during the making of the film; she received her divorce papers on the set: "Instead of working something out with Farrow, he sent his lawyer to the set of *Rosemary's Baby* and had Farrow served with divorce papers" (Shelton). Her husband, Frank Sinatra, wanted them to work on another film together, and she wanted to do both films. This did not satisfy Sinatra as he wanted her full commitment, so he decided to divorce her. This level of egocentrism is reminiscent of Guy's extreme ambition because of which he was ready to sacrifice his wife (her bodily integrity and her child) to Satanists in order to achieve professional success.

Additionally, Roman Polanski, the director of the film, had to flee the country because he raped an underage girl:

While guest editing the French edition of *Vogue* in 1977, Polanski came across the then 13-year-old Samantha Geimer whom he coaxed into posing for a

series of photo shoots. During the second photo shoot, which took place at Jack Nicholson's house, Polanski plied the girl with champagne and half a Quaalude before raping her multiple times. (Shelton)

His treatment of the girl echoes the way Rosemary was treated in the novel and film: drugged and raped.

Even the writer of the novel, Ira Levin, was not spared. He was left by his wife and was attacked by the Catholics because of alleged mockery of religious practices in his book. Even though he never believed in the things he wrote in *Rosemary's Baby* because he knew it to be fictional, he became terrified as the years passed, regretting the fact that he wrote the book (Counter).

Finally, Dakota, one of the most famous buildings in New York which was used as the exterior for the Bramford, was the building in front of which John Lennon was shot in 1980. Even though John Lennon was not directly connected either with the novel or with the film, a connection was still made by conspiracy theorists and superstitious people:

Lennon may have not had anything to do with *Rosemary's Baby*, but he was friends with Mia Farrow and when the Manson Family murdered Sharon Tate they wrote "Helter Skelter" on the wall in blood. "Helter Skelter" is one of the songs on the White Album which Manson used as a blueprint for his "revolution." 11 years after Tate's murder, Lennon was murdered outside of the apartment building when Mark David Chapman fired five rounds into the singer's back. (Shelton)

As can be seen from all these events, the novel was not only a horror fiction story, but also affected people connected to it in the real world. It became a cult classic, both in the medium of text and film. This only makes the story even more horrific and relevant for the reader as the sense and atmosphere of the uncanny transcends the pages of the novel and enters the actual life.

## Conclusion

*Rosemary's Baby* is a novel about occultism, which gives us a close look at the Satanic followers and their practices. The followers are described as ordinary people and they could be everyone, like Minnie and Roman, the nice old couple next door. They are using drugs, rape, and other means to get what they want, in this case, to bring Satan's offspring to earth and get revenge for their persecuted fellow cultists. Their victims usually include people who get in their way, like Mrs. Gardenia or Hutch, or the ones who have to be eliminated to achieve their goals, like Guy's enemy Donald Baumgard. Rosemary and Terry were used by the cult for reproductive purposes which highlights the conservative view of women as mere child-bearers. Rosemary's Gothic pregnancy is a result of rape, and her life was almost sucked out of her by the fetus.

The novel suggests that in the eternal conflict between good and evil, evil prevails. The Anti-Christ is born and Rosemary is not able to kill herself or her newborn to prevent the evil from winning. Instead, she decides to raise the son of the devil and be his mother. In many ways, her decision and the child's involuntary conception seem to be reminiscent of Christ's conception, and the treatment of women by the Satanic cult echoes the perception and treatment of women by the Catholic Church. The eerie atmosphere is enhanced by the setting; the Bramford, a beautiful Victorian building with its dark past connected to cannibalism, witchcraft and mysterious deaths, awakens the sublime in the reader and is the perfect setting for a horror fiction novel.

In line with the popular perception of occultism as a secret malevolent practice, the ominous events connected with the making of the 1968 film *Rosemary's Baby* are interpreted as a consequence of a curse by some kind of an evil force. The film's composer died after falling from a cliff. Mia Farrow got her divorce papers while she was still on set of the film. Roman Polanski fled after raping a young girl, and even Levin himself started to get affected by the curse. Finally, in 1980, John Lennon was killed in front of the Dakota building which was used to represent the Bramford. In this way, the idea of occultism transcended the pages of the novel and entered real life, making both the novel and, particularly, the film cult classics.

### Works Cited

- Bauduin, Tessel M., et al. *The Occult in Modernist Art, Literature, and Cinema*. Palgrave MacMillan, 2018.
- Counter, Rosemary. "The Most Cursed Hit Movie Ever Made." *Vanity Fair*, 1 June 2017, <https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2017/06/the-most-cursed-hit-movie-ever-made-rosemarys-baby>. Accessed 1 Sept. 2020.
- Ferber, Michael. *A Dictionary of Literary Symbols*. Cambridge UP, 1999.
- Frankfurter, David. "Awakening to Satanic Conspiracy: *Rosemary's Baby* and the Cult Next Door." *Academia.edu*, 18 Nov. 2008, [https://www.academia.edu/7047714/Awakening\\_to\\_Satanic\\_Conspiracy\\_Rosemarys\\_Baby\\_and\\_the\\_Cult\\_Next\\_Door\\_from\\_Eckel\\_and\\_Herling\\_eds.\\_Deliver\\_Us\\_from\\_Evil\\_London\\_Continuum\\_2008](https://www.academia.edu/7047714/Awakening_to_Satanic_Conspiracy_Rosemarys_Baby_and_the_Cult_Next_Door_from_Eckel_and_Herling_eds._Deliver_Us_from_Evil_London_Continuum_2008). Accessed 14 Sept. 2019.
- Griffith, Christian. "*Rosemary's Baby* and Martin Heidegger's *Language*." *Academia.edu*, [https://www.academia.edu/5350508/Rosemarys\\_Baby\\_and\\_Heideggers\\_Language](https://www.academia.edu/5350508/Rosemarys_Baby_and_Heideggers_Language). Accessed 9 Sep. 2019. Accessed 14 Sept. 2019.
- Iati, Marisa. "Actress Sharon Tate Was Young, Beautiful and Pregnant. Then Charles Manson's 'Family' Arrived." *The Washington Post*, WP Company, 9 Aug. 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/history/2019/08/09/actress-sharon-tate-was-young-beautiful-pregnant-then-charles-mansons-family-arrived/>. Accessed 10 Sep. 2020.
- Kant, Immanuel. *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime and Other Writings*. Cambridge UP, 2011.
- Levin, Ira. *Rosemary's Baby*. Corsair, 2011.
- Longueil, Alfred E. "The Word 'Gothic' in Eighteenth Century Criticism." *Modern Language Notes*, vol. 38, no. 8, 1923, pp. 453-460, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2915232>. Accessed 14 Sept. 2019.
- MacDonald, Billy. "The Uncanny Baby, Reproduction, and Parenthood in Cinematic Horror." *Academia.edu*, 2013,

[https://www.academia.edu/5832949/The\\_Uncanny\\_Baby\\_Reproduction\\_and\\_Parenthood\\_in\\_Cinematic\\_Horror](https://www.academia.edu/5832949/The_Uncanny_Baby_Reproduction_and_Parenthood_in_Cinematic_Horror). Accessed 14 Sept. 2019.

Means, Harrison J. "Books for Young Adults: Science Fiction, Fantasy, and the Occult." *The English Journal*, vol. 62, no. 7, 1973, pp. 1059–1060, DOI:10.2307/813633.

Rengel, Marian. *Encyclopedia of Birth Control*. Oryx, 2000.

Roy, Mousumi. "Reflections On the Study of Mysticism as A Category." *Scholarly Research Journal for Interdisciplinary Studies*, vol. 5, no. 43, 2018, DOI:10.21922/srjis.v5i43.11387.

Shelton, Jacob. "All The Spooky Evidence That *Rosemary's Baby* Is, In Fact, A Cursed Movie." *Ranker*, 11 Dec. 2017, <https://www.ranker.com/list/rosemarys-baby-curse-facts/jacob-shelton>. Accessed 28 Aug. 2019.

Sullivan, Daniel, et al. "Toward a New Understanding of Two Films from the Dark Side: Utilizing Terror Management Theory to Analyze *Rosemary's Baby* and *Straw Dogs*." *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, vol. 37, no. 4, 2009, pp. 189–198., DOI:10.1080/01956050903227902.

Valerius, Karyn. "*Rosemary's Baby*, Gothic Pregnancy, and Fetal Subjects." *College Literature*, vol. 32, no. 3, 2005, pp. 116–135., DOI:10.1353/lit.2005.0048.