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ROSEMARY'S BABY

The Rise of a Satanic Society in the 1970s

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Introduction

As Mark Twain once said, "We may not pay Satan reverence, for that would be indiscreet, but we can at least respect his talents." Satan or Lucifer in the Christian society – that one commonly refers to as the West – has always been an omnipresent entity whose fallen state has been the subject since the 16th century of a certain fascination on the part of scholars and writers (Gascard 1994). It is of no surprise, then, that starting the end of the 1960s, the horror movie industry saw a new turn in its productions one currently refers to as The Exorcism Wave (Seeßlen/Jung 2006). Featuring movies such as THE EXORCIST (1973), or THE OMEN (1976), this cinematographic renewal gave horror movies a new breath and helped them attain a greater fame than ever seen before. It is at the beginning of this period that Roman Polanski, a French-Polish director who worked at the time in Hollywood, LA, released in 1968 what was often called the one of the scariest psychological horror films of all time: ROSEMARY'S BABY. The now classic movie can be said to have mirrored the social context in which it was produced, as well as the inner fears of the population of the West in a time when the USA was turning a page in history. In this essay, we will ask and answer the question of how ROSEMARY'S BABY provides an accurate representation of the American society at the time in the form and using the genre of the horror movie. In order to do so, we shall separate our analysis in three parts, of which the first will concentrate on describing the movie and its director's work, the second on analyzing the social context in which it came out and by which it was influenced, and, finally, the third will dwell upon the explicit and implicit fascination the population of the time had for Satan and how this fascination is reflected in the movie, especially in the process of horror.

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ROSEMARY'S BABY, the movie

Based on Ira Levin's 1967 bestselling novel of the same name, ROSEMARY'S BABY was a psychological horror film written and directed by Roman Polanski released on June 12, 1968. Featuring Mia Farrow in the main part, the 136 minutes US film chronicles the story of a couple, Rosemary and Guy Woodhouse, respectively a housewife and unsuccessful actor, who move into the Bramford, an imposing and yet antiquated building. Prior to their moving in, they are told by both the building's manager, Mr. Nicklas, and their friend Hutch of the seemingly disturbing stories that haunt the walls of the majestic structure. Despite the warnings, they decide to move in anyway and start their lives as a family. They then get to meet their neighbours, among which a young woman, Terry Gionoffrio, who is a recovering drug addict being hosted by an eccentric couple of neighbours, the Castevets. Shortly after meeting her and admiring the pendant she was given by her hosts, Rosemary returns with Guy one night to find that the young woman has committed suicide, throwing herself out of a seventh floor's window. The gruesome event however leads them to what seems to be a new happy encounter: Minnie and Roman Castevets themselves. Invited over for dinner, Rosemary finds herself less enthralled with her new friends than her husband, who forms a strong bond with the outwardly lovely couple. Minnie then gives Rosemary the pendant that the latter had admired on Terry as a good luck charm. As the time goes on, Guy is casted in the role he had previously been rejected from, as the result, however, of an unfortunate event: the actor originally casted is struck with sudden blindness and can no longer perform. He comes home and suggests to Rosemary that they have a baby. They plan a night to conceive and, as they are getting ready, Minnie comes to give them individual cups of chocolate mousse. Even though Rosemary throws hers away after a few mouthful, she passes out anyway and experiences a strange dream in which she is raped by what seems to be Guy at first, but she realizes is none other than a demonic presence, if not Satan himself. As she wakes up, she still bares the marks of her dream and is told by her husband that he conceived with her while she was unconscious in order not to pass the opportunity. Now pregnant, Rosemary's life seems more and more controlled by the Castevets. Her state in the first three months of the pregnancy deteriorates and, as her doctor feeds her abnormal nutrients, her friend Hutch is alarmed and researches the matter. Unfortunately, he falls into a mysterious coma before he is able to inform her of his findings and press her to run away. Even though the rest of her friends also encourage her strongly to consult with another doctor, one that was not recommended by her dear neighbours, she never does, especially as her state inexplicably once again improves. Three months later, Hutch dies and leaves a book on witchcraft to Rosemary, where he had previously written the cryptic message: "The name is an anagram." Rosemary deduces that Roman Castevet is in reality Steven Marcato, the son of a former resident of the building known to be a Satanist. Her whole world comes crumbling when she starts suspecting the entire neighbourhood of being part of a Satanic Cult who would be after her baby, and whom her own husband Guy, would be cooperating with in exchange for fame and oppor-

tunities helping his career. She shares her suspicions and is captured by Guy and her doctor, who bring her back home and sedate her. As she wakes up, she is told that she gave birth and that her baby had died. Persuaded of the contrary, she finds a hidden door leading to the Castevets' apartment and hears her baby's cries. As she enters the apartment in which a congregation made up of the building's tenants as well as her doctor are gathered, she advances towards the crib and is horrified at the sight of her baby's eyes. She is then revealed that her son is indeed that of Satan. Her husband explains that, as she had expected, he made a pact for fame and wealth in exchange for producing the Devil's offspring. As she is faced with the dilemma of having a child only half hers, Rosemary is told that she can still raise him as his mother, without having to take part in the cult. The film ends as she adjusts the blanket of her son Adrian and gently rocks his cradle with a small smile on her face.

The critics of the movie were almost unanimously positive, with some of the time's prominent columnists such as *The New York Times'* Renata Adler whose famous review still resonates today in the numerous studies of the film's legacy. Nominee and winner of two Academy Awards and four Golden Globes, the film was deemed in 2014 to be "culturally, historically or aesthetically significant" by the Library of Congress and selected for preservation in the National Film Registry, which officially granted the film a title it had been given by cinematographs for quite some time already: a classic.

Particularities of the movie and social context

If the movie was so widely acclaimed, it is not only due to the genius of its story, but also thanks to the particular filming style, that is, that of director Roman Polanski. Born in Paris and raised in Poland, the world-known survivor of the Holocaust is today considered to be one of the only "truly international filmmakers". His life and work reflected both a polyvalence in arts and an interest in the multiple genres and cinematographic techniques that have evolved throughout the last decades of the 20th century. His first feature-length film, "Knife in Water", was released in 1962 and was nominated for the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film. Ever since, he has been continuously acclaimed for his passion for the atmosphere of a particular scene and nearly photographic shots, through which perspire the different emotions he wants both his characters and public to feel and analyse. In ROSEMARY'S BABY, especially, he says himself that the reduced amount of sets and the play of colours was a way for him to, through movements of the camera, convey changes in the seemingly imminent danger that Rosemary incurred (Nocenti 2001).

Polanski's style has, as has previously been mentioned, evolved with its time and public, implying that the time and public had a particular requirement and reaction to certain subjects and techniques. In light of this, the interest of this essay now is to try and answer the question: How were the 60s and 70s a time for a change and how is that reflected in ROSEMARY'S BABY?

The Social Order of the 1960s and the 1970s

The 1960s and the 1970s in the United States of America were marked by a changing political, social and economic context.

The Cold War

One of the most famous event which influenced the course of history at that period of time is the Cold War, that is to say the political and nearly physical war which opposed the US against the USSR (Davis 2010). Starting at the end of the Second World War, the Cold War created a generalized feeling that one can only describe as paranoia, a paranoia that could only be nourished by the heavy anti-communist propaganda of the US government (Davis 2010). The idea that communists would come and take away Americans' freedom grew stronger, and was reflected in the genre of the horror film in movies featuring aliens and foreign invaders, such as INVASIONS OF THE BODY SNATCHERS (1956) or PLAN 9 FROM OUTER SPACE (1959). Both movies are a reflection of the general panic that society is being invaded without it knowing it, by a race that wishes to destroy it (O'Donnell 2003). In ROSEMARY'S BABY, we find this idea of the menace in disguise in the characters of the neighbours, the Castevets, who are responsible for Rosemary's demise without her knowing it for sure, leading to a sort of paranoia as to whom could be the ones to want to hurt her and how she could defend herself and the baby she is carrying.

Therefore, one could say that the idea of socialism and communism for the American society was seen as an end of the world, and yet that would be dismissive of the general movement for socialism in the West. One might think of May 1968, when students famously led a small revolution in the European states to have their rights recognized and change an overly conservative society, or the general movement in the West in support of Mao (Davis 2010). There is therefore a paradox that one finds again in the form of the neighbours and their sect which can be defined as both the attractiveness and the danger of socialism. Socialism seems to be here both to save and bind us at the same time, to give us all the same opportunities but to be a way of no-return. As such, Guy and Rosemary move into a building with an unknown past but a glorious frontage. Later on, Guy's entry into the sect seems like an evidence and Rosemary's quiet compliance with the treatment that has been given to her and her baby's fate at the end of the movie are both a scary reflection of a seemingly wrongly glorified image of the USSR or Communist China (Davis 2010).

Individualization and the End of the Family

The 1960s and the 1970s were arguably the golden years of capitalism and the rise of individualism as opposed to the long reign of communities and the family. One of the first reasons could be said to be the rise since the 1920s of women's rights in the USA, and especially feminist movements such as the "Women's Lib" movement in the 1960s, 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s. In 1953, Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* breaks

through the public arena, bringing the problem forward. As a result, organizations such as the National Organization for Women, were created in 1966 and worked to change the structures of society so that women could achieve economic, political, and social equality. The scare for the strong leading woman is very easily recognizable in the arguably scariest character that one can see, attacking the very innocent young housewife that is Rosemary: Minnie Castevet (Burnautzki 2013). Minnie is intrusive, eccentric if not dominant. She acts womanly, even motherly with the Woodhouses, while seeming very dominant and decisive. Her central place inside the Woodhouse family as well as the satanic sect also elevates her to a scariest position: that of the corrupted mother (Fisher 1992; Burnautzki 2013). In a sense, she is a reflection of what Rosemary wanted to be at first, and the polar opposite of Rosemary's dreams towards the end. Indeed, if the mother has as much power as the father, if she is as scary, who is there to take care of the family? To nurture it and consolidate it? The idea that the woman has been corrupted by a Satanic invasion is the idea that the family is coming to an end (Brittnacher 1994; Seeßlen/Jung 2006).

If the family is coming to an end however, so is the community. The rise of individualism in the 1970s with the idea that men ought to care about work and making money before the family is reflected all the way to popular culture, as one can see in the release of songs such as Bachman-Turner Overdrive's "Takin' Care of Business" in 1973. It seems that the *I* replaced the *We* and yet it did so by binding itself to a new type of community: that of the other self-interested individualists (Davis 2010). "Rosemary's Baby" perfectly illustrates this in the person of Guy Woodhouse, whose wish to emancipate and "take care of business" led to reconnect with a new, corrupted community of satanic worshipers. By giving up his family, he found a new one, a scarier one, whose price is higher than the simple cries of a baby: it is his soul he sold.

These ideas of individualism and capitalism are both the result of the Enlightenment's and the Industrial Revolution's main thinkers. One can think of the influence of Voltaire, as well as that of Mill and Bentham. Philosophy, that is, thinking for oneself, has brought forward the idea that individuals had the right and should have the power to decide their fate. The newly-founded reign of money over faith is a reflection of this secular idea that God is over, and that men are gods, or at least can be – at a certain price (Seeßlen/Jung 2006). Typically, Guy Woodhouse is of those men. Trying to elaborate a strategy in which he can make the most of his world and his ability, he took the easy way out and sold something that, for him, was not useful, to an entity representing the greatest evil. However, Guy is now forever bound by his lust, as if this idea that men had the possibility to act like gods was but a trap, a trap to Satan's lure.

As Satan rises from the new social order of the 1960s and the 1970s, this essay will now solve the issues of relating those social events to that rise and of explaining how Satan places himself as a reflection of society's inner fears.

The Power of Satan

The rise of what was perceived since the Middle Ages by Christian Churches as satanic values in the American society of the 1960s and 1970s raises the question of the newfound power of Satan and the lost power of God. Whether explicitly or implicitly, the figure of Satan places himself in the front scene of the American – and one might even say Western – cultural revolution.

Satanic Pop Culture

In order to analyse the rise of Satan in a given society, one might choose to focus on analysing that society's pop culture (Gascard 1994). If not for Rolling Stones phenomenal hit in 1968 "Sympathy for the Devil", the success of hard rock figures such as Ozzy Osbourne and his world-famous rock band Black Sabbath, whose shows were pondered by regular satanic practices, reflected the general interest of the society for the decadence and the transgression that one could find in the idea of a devil. This idea was in this sense only further reinforced by the renewed rise in exorcisms as well as satanic sects in the USA, in Germany and in France (Gascard 1994). On the first hand, the multiplication of exorcisms also came hand in hand with their intensification in practice, leading, for example, to the death of a 17-year-old girl in 1966 due to a series of exorcisms spread on several consecutive months (Gascard 1994). On another hand, sects such as The Final Church Sect, also known as the Manson Family, whose famous head priest Charles Manson was convicted of Roman Polanski's wife's, Sharon Tate's, murder, believed more and more in the rise of apocalyptic times where the devil would rule and the law of the strongest would be back in place. In a climate of such interest for the devil, it is of no surprise then that movies such as "Rosemary's Baby", "the Exorcism" or even "the Omen" saw the light of day, especially in an era where everything was turned on its head, even the most fundamental of all cultural aspects: religion (Gleiberman 2010; Seeßlen/Jung 2006).

The Cult of Satan

The satanic sects in the 1960s and 1970s showed a similar organization to the Catholic Church, while maintaining itself as a mirrored opposite. Instead of preaching the Good and the Order of God, the Satanic Sect aims at spreading chaos and sin. "Rosemary's Baby" provides a perfect example of this in the form of the sect formed by the Woodhouse's neighbours. At the first glance that Rosemary and the public has of them, the sect is reunited in a circle, naked, and are watching Rosemary in having sexual intercourse (Pearson 1968). This erotic element remains as Rosemary later gives birth in their apartment again. The idea that one ought to cover up to go to Church, while one ought to dress down to enter a Satanic congregation also raises the question of the reason why one might join both, which are, yet again, mirror-opposites. While members of the Church are forward-looking, thinking of their after-life, Satanists have a very "here and now" vision of their world (Pearson 1968). Their aim would be more materialistic, such as fame, money or even living forever, instead of preparing the ground for their lives of happiness in heaven.

Following this reasoning, these rituals were, like that of the Christian Church, reflected in the process of a Black Mass, at the centre of which stood the priest and the witch, two key elements to gaining a connection with the greater evil. While the mass at Church seems natural, even nurturing to its attendants, the Black Mass is a place where the attendants are nurturing Satan through an unnatural, magical process which requires sacrifice (Gascard 1994; Brittnacher 1994).

One could push the analysis further by looking at the very foundation of the Christian Church: The Bible. In ROSEMARY'S BABY, a woman whose name contains "Mary" is impregnated with the son of the Devil and gives birth to him under the eyes of the Devil's messengers. What is more, the power of Satan has been shown since the Old Testament as being spread through women, and especially, women's sexuality (Gascard 1994; Seeßlen/Jung 2006). This misogynistic conception of the female gender, as has been said earlier on, is turned around during women's sexual revolution (Brittnacher 1994). If women are therefore portrayed as a central figure of the Satanic Church, it could be analysed as a result of their ambiguous place in the Christian Church and in The Bible. As such, Minnie Castevets seems to be the perfect woman and reveals herself as one of the head members of an organization whose aim is to bring down chaos upon the world (Burnautzki 2013).

This perfect parallel between the most read books of all times and the fear of a generation further underlines the danger that Satan presents: not only is he back, he is here to take the place of God, and he has already started in the form of money.

Capitalism and The Power of Money

On his deathbed, in response to a priest asking him that he renounce Satan, Voltaire, a leading figure of the Enlightenment and well-known liberal, famously said: "*Now, now my good man, this is no time to be making enemies*." If Voltaire answered with eloquence and irony, he meant no less than this: I spent my life defending what the Church defined as the greatest evil to humanity, and if I am now to go to hell, I might as well keep in Satan's good graces. Lust being one of the seven sins, it is easy to see how the new central position of money and success in raises the question of the idea that capitalism and consumer society would be seen as dangers to humanity as being a product of Satan. The new society, as such, supports the unity against the individual, of socialism against capitalism, seen as the death of humanity, and the idea that the Satanic Pact was that of selling one's soul and family against money and fame (Pearson 1968). In 1973, as the Pope famously warns the world of the return of Satan on Earth, the world is becoming more sinful to the eyes of the Catholic Church than it ever was before. War, sex, drugs, debauchery are all integrative parts of the popular culture of the Americas. From Woodstock to the rising culture of dancing and clubs, which are reflected in movies such as Saturday Night Fever Academia and Wall Street rise once more (in the South of Manhattan) as the leading forces of the country. However, the fear remains: we are consumers, but are we consuming each other?

The character of Guy Woodhouse in "Rosemary's Baby" reflects this fear of the consumer consumed, especially as he and his wife have to give one of the most precious thing to a family, the baby, to a group of people hungry for its powers. To reach fame and to have a successful career, one ought to give up their very means to survive forever, that is their offspring (Brittnacher 1994; Fisher 1992). The calm through which Guy explains to his wife the Satanic Pact he has made, as if he had signed a new contract with any company, is a reflection of the implicit perception of the wrong enthusiasm with which the world would walk towards its own destruction (Brittnacher 1994; Gascard 1994).

Satan is Within all of Us

If Satan is so intrinsic to a society that now relies on the individual rather than the guidance of the holy figure, is the individual then the bearer of Satan himself? Since the end of the Second World War, the level of horror that humanity had committed struck the world back to a reality where humans were not necessarily inherently good, and had become the ultimate evil. As a result, psychological, atmospheric types of horror movies where the evil was depicted as a part of anyone rose, starting with the all-time classic PSYCHO (1960) by Alfred Hitchcock. In an interview on ROSEMARY'S BABY, Polanski explains how he reproduced the thinking through which the atmosphere of each room, each set, was meant to give an implicit key to the public as to how the story was developing. The colour of the walls, for example, was purposefully chosen as yellow, and the disposition of the furniture was meant to emphasize or decrease the tension present between Rosemary and her husband and neighbours (Benjamin 2010). Similarly, the tension increases through the psychological state of Rosemary and the horror itself is reflected through her state of mind. In a sense, the public is invited to feel, think, and fear like she does for her life and her baby's (Fisher 1992).

Psychological horror and the conception of an Evil that rests within us is descendant from the early 20th century, when Dr Sigmund Freud introduced Psychiatry and Psychotherapy to the world. Through the depiction of one's mind as composed of an unconscious, controlling matter and through the interpretations of one's dreams as the expression of that unconscious, he was able to solve issues the way the Church would have done before. In a sense, Psychiatry is the new Exorcism, that is freeing of the mind's dark thoughts, with the exception that one is scientific while the other is spiritual. The rise of science is at the heart of modernism and the idea that the world can be controlled and fully understood by humans at the core of secularism. However, while, at the time, medicine and psychology are starting to gain recognition among the general population, the concept of sorcery remains in the Church. The idea that life and death could be in the hands of something else than God's led to the thought that a human who is able to control that must have made a pact with the devil. In ROSEMARY'S BABY, the mysterious death of Hutch as well as the sudden blindness of the originally chosen actor for Guy's part are signs of the unnatural force Satan has over life and death, similar to God's punishment of sinners.

Science is therefore a reflection of the lust of a community whose members are all connected with an evil force. Through the idea that the individual has the power to think and be, we let our inner bad in and we created thousands of demons impersonated by humans, humans who are here to corrupt society. Satan as presented in ROSEMARY'S BABY is more of an ideal of life, a means to an end, than it is an entity with thoughts. Satan is what remains strong, it is the only force that still has the power to change things. The scariest plot twist of Rosemary's story is not her husband's betrayal or her child's true nature, it is her peaceful resilience to the probable end of her life and, by extension of humanity for the pleasures of the now. Satan is back, and she, or rather humanity, let him in passively, in their slow corruption to Modern Times.

Conclusion

If ROSEMARY'S BABY is world-widely recognized to be one of director Roman Polanski's signature films, this essay has also shown that it can very well also be described as a signature horror movie of its own time. Indeed, not only does it reflect Polanski's personal experience with a certain societal order, it also very much mirrors the inner fears of a community of people whose subjection to a new social order of the individual and the rational in a time of uncertainty that was that of the Cold War has led them to a certain renewed fascination with occultism and the entity of Satan. At the limit between myth and reality, ghost and a projection of our unconscious, Satan places itself as a central piece of the American Society in the 1970s, especially in horror movies where it can thrive at what it does best: scare "the Hell" out of people.

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Filmography

THE EXORCIST (USA 1973, William Friedkin)

INVASIONS OF THE BODY SNATCHERS (USA 1956, Don Siegel)

THE OMEN (UK/USA 1976, Richard Donner)

PLAN 9 FROM OUTER SPACE (USA 1959, Edward D. Wood Jr.)

PSYCHO (USA 1960, Alfred Hitchcock)

ROSEMARY'S BABY (USA 1968, Roman Polanski)

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