**Evaluating and Analyzing the Genre of *Rosemary’s Baby* (1968)**

The transition to the Industrial Revolution improved urbanization, transportation and productivity which are typical characteristics of the modernist period. The 1960s created a unique climate for hybridity of genres and popular culture, redefining cinema in Hollywood and the American subculture of entertainment. People during this period engaged in unprecedented cultural transformations, religious change (1960s The Religious Crisis), thinking and living in ways which acted as a catalyst for avant-garde art, literature, cinema and other countercultures to become progressively modern. Inspired by a novel by Ida Levin, *Rosemary’s Baby* (1968) chronicles themes of religion, witchery and popular culture following the protagonist Rosemary Woodhouse (played by Mia Farrow), the wife of Guy Woodhouse (played by John Cassavetes) who prepares to give birth in a community full of conspiracy and supernatural abilities, through the genre of “horror noir” and “psychological thrill,” ultimately a “paranoid fiction” (Newton 2014; Adler 1968; Meehan 2010). Through varied mythologies, conventions of recurring symbols and motifs regarding witchcraft and satanism, eerie visual and auditory iconography and high noir stylistic elements throughout the film, the director -- Roman Polański -- presents *Rosemary’s Baby* as a genre of horror noir and psychological thriller that attracts and acts upon the changing popular culture and self-discoveries during the modernist period.

In *Rosemary’s Baby,* Roman Polański presents vivid portraits of countercultural mythologies of the 1960s to emphasize the horror noir and psychological thriller genre the film exhibits. During the 1960s, religion and believing in a holy, godly creator -- predominantly present in protestant or catholicism -- remained as a quintessential part of modern, American culture and past generations. However, by reintroducing unorthodox ideologies of satanism, a religious practice worshiping Satan in replacement of God, and psychological witchcraftery, Polański creates an uncanny atmosphere and plot that reaches the innermost fears of the society. At the beginning of the film, Rosemary is presented as a conventional, female, white American during the 1960s. She is catholic, married and youthful identified by her wedding ring, classy attire and her impulsive desire to move to a larger, more expensive house despite their unsteady financial state. However, once she gets involved with the Castevets who mention hypocrisy against religion casually, she progressively loses her innocence, husband, sanity and youth as the Castevets are part of a secret conspiracy of witches and satanists. The notion that hidden conspiracies and cults could secretly exist in modern America not only provoked imaginations and chaos to the society during the modern period, it also possibly foreshadowed future conflicts and panics regarding religious beliefs, cults and satanism. Furthermore, losing important, prideful things to a woman -- her child, innocence, husband, sanity, religion and even youth -- are all generic myths that portray horrifying, countercultural occurings that modern society during the 1960s and even today, particularly women, would agree that it is a tragedy, highlighting the horror aspect of the genre. Throughout the film, spontaneous deaths of those around Rosemary serves as a myth and repeated warning of supernatural or evil activity. It also serves as a symbolic meaning of danger or perhaps death of the protagonist later in the film. The fear of the unknown and death brings a sense of uneasiness and panic as these deaths were deliberately tampered under witchcraft and satanism, illustrating the psychological thriller aspect of the genre. The protagonist undergoes emotional distress due to their loved ones, neighbors and co-workers mysteriously dying. Recurring symbols and myths of death, presents the audience with “several false freights” and “ominmous” moments, adding to the “story of fantasy and horror” (Alder).

Throughout the film, the myths of evils are represented through scenes of unexplainable instances and conventions which Rosemary later learns and reveals as a result witchcraft and satanism. The film begins with the young couple moving into Mrs. Gardenia’s old house after she mysteriously dies of a stroke. As the couple observes the apartment, Rosemary finds the apartment strange, riddled with dead herbs, a mysterious note written by Mrs. Gardenia, “I can no longer associate myself anymore,” and even a heavy wardrobe that obstructs the secret passageway between her apartment and the Castevets, the apartment clearly presents the image of an abandoned, haunted house. The unusual objects and small warnings such as the blocked passageway, suicidal notes and dead herbs perhaps symbolize that Mrs. Gardenia wanted the next tenants to not be “associated” with the Castevets and the conspiracy. Throughout the film, frequent “natural” death acts as a recurring motif; Rosemary learns that these natural deaths are determined by the coven who has the ability to blind, deafen, paralyze and ultimately kill the chosen victim if their possession is stolen or taken. Because death of characters around the protagonist is a universal myth of horror films, by including scenes of her new, friendly neighbor Terry committing sucicide out-of-the-blue and Mr. Hutch, her close male companion, passes away suddenly, the director induces terror towards the audiences as society fears extremely sudden deaths of loved ones. Polański presents the power of knowledge and the unknown against the audience in order to heighten fears through imagination rather than traditional scenes of gore, blood and violence. By deliberately controlling the amount of knowledge that Rosemary and the audience obtains, it adds a combination of intensified anticipation, suspense and psychological grief that modern society fears, justifying the genre as a psychological thriller and horror. After Terry’s death, as a welcoming gift, they give Rosemary a good luck charm with a pungent, tannis root. However, later she learns that it is a fungus called the devil’s pepper that was used amongst the covent members. The fact that the Castevets manipulate and deceive innocent, unsuspecting people, illustrates that *Rosemary's Baby* engages in basic tenets of modernism by questioning and challenging the Natural Law Ethics and nature of people in a realistic point-of-view. Because the film is more subjective and less omniscient, the audience only knows what Rosemary knows and feels what she experiences, making the audience act as a detective, evaluating “rational and comforting qualities” as well as “elements within the film to connect the dots” (Newton).

The first half of the film captures Rosemary's eager anticipation for her new apartment and baby, presenting the psychological thriller and horror noir genre through varied auditory and visual iconography. At the beginning of the film, aerial shots of barren, gloomy buildings are overlaid with an eerie lullaby that gradually increases in volume with clashing, distorting xylophones and high-pitched bells. By incorporating non-linear sounds paired with a higher pitch and volume, it produces clashing, unpleasant harmonies, generically associated with the genre of horror and thriller to produce a specific reaction relating to fear. The abnormally, distorted frequencies also cause the audiences to become more alert and sensitive to what will happen next. As the couple enter the old apartment complex, the shabiness and exhausted building is exaggerated through universally creepy sounds of elevators rattling, creaky floorboards and doors and the random piano playing in the background. Throughout the film, an unknown stranger repeatedly plays the song Für Elise, perhaps foreshadowing the intense, emotionally clashing relationship that lies ahead for the Woodhouse couple. The creaky floorboards and doors as well as the cramped elevator also bring a sense of uncomfortableness and claustophicness to the audience due to the unsafe, space invasive and fragile environment of the apartment. Because these sounds of creaks and rust have been stylized and repeated over time to illustrate an unkempt, haunted house, the audience immediately can infer that *Rosemary’s Baby* genre as a horror.

Throughout the film, the closet serves as a motif that connects the human and satanist world. For the majority of the film, the closet is portrayed as a mysterious yet normally functioning closet, full of shelves, daily household necessities and towels. However, it turns out that there is a hidden door behind the closet, connecting their houses to the Castevets. This vividly solidifies her suspicion that her husband and the others in the community are working together to serve Satan as well as hiding her baby. While the baby is never actually presented on the screen, the sounds of the baby crying and the crib rattling illustrate the typical image of a newborn baby. By not revealing the iconography of the closet until the final scene of the film, the director creates a psychological fear of the unknown due to the absence of information and uncertainty of what lies ahead.

The film highlights the themes related to paranoia and catholicism during the 1960s through nonfilmic interexual stylistic elements and shooting. The high noir genre is easily identifiable through Rosemary’s pale makeup, stark outlines, bleak tones and styles throughout the film. This tendency is highlighted when Rosemary becomes pregnant with Satan’s child. As her pregnancy continues, she increasingly looks pale, ill, losing weight and “just awful,” which are all abnormal characters in a typical pregnancy. Her simple attire, short hair and pale makeup amplify the high noir style of contrast in comparison to her previous bright, colorful image she presented at the beginning of the film. Even the repeated visual motifs of blood and the words relating to satan highlights the conflict between human nature and satan. Because the blood of an unborn baby holds more power, Rosemary is objectified as a sacrifice to Satan by the sabbaths (those who use the baby’s blood and flesh for rituals) and her husband. Themes of modernism are underscored through the advertisement and New York Times magazine portraying society's challenging statements such as “Is God Dead” and “Satan lives.” Iconographies and formal elements of Satan and statements of religion -- incorporated to add fear and horror -- raises concerns and awareness towards the audience, making them believe that these certain events are possible and “worse in reality” (Newton). Furthermore, the 1960s introduced a period of hybrid, modern genres. This is clearly presented through the incorporation of sudden genre changes in certain scenes. For example, when the couple acts intimate and lovey-dovey, the genre immediately changes to the direction of romance; however, when the director portrays a creepy, under-angle shot of the husband staring directly at the camera with a sinister smile, a perspective that is not replicated throughout the film, the genre switches back to horror. The husband appears threatening as if he is towering above Rosemary. The modern period experimented with varied, contrasting genres and elements in order to portray deeper complexity in plot and appeal to a greater range of audience.

The article “Horror Noir: Where Cinema’s Dark Sisters Meet'' asserts the common trait of evil, ominous sisters are similarly present in horror films. This is certainly the case for *Rosemary’s Baby* as the community of Brandford is infamous for having a bad reputation of tenants such as the Trench Sisters, who are rumored to be two proper victorian ladies who had dietary experiments with children, ultimately raising them and eating them. The film is classified as psychological horror as information is deliberately held back. Even the fact that the appearance of the demonic newborn is never clearly shown, the audience can infer that the baby takes Satan's eyes and features based on a short image reflected off of Rosemary’s eyes. Furthermore, the film’s mysterious plot and the “preternatural menace lurking” at New York retrogresses to the “Val Lewton horror noirs of 1940s” (Meehan 206). Because the audience is presented in the familiar, bustling streets of New York, the barren and dull buildings come across as odd. The addition of canted angles throughout scenes of rape and dream-sequence, unbalanced frames distorting the size and closeness of an object, and eeiere asethetics bring a sense of unease by presenting the oppositie characteristics and expectations of a recogizable location.

Additionally, because Guy Woodhouse (played by John Cassavetes) is known for part-taking roles of serious plots regarding crime, monochromatic colors and thriller, the audience can also infer that the genre of *Rosemary’s Baby* will reflect his specialities that highlight his characteristics - sharp, masculine and charismatic.

*Rosemary’s Baby* is an elaborate, horror noir, psychological thriller that brings out the unorthodox themes of religion and cultural expectations during the 1960s. While the film also intertwines moments of romance and comedy, throughout the generic myths, varied styles, auditory and visual iconography and conventions associated with horror, the film presents exceptional content, aesthetic and story line that reflects the changing modern times of technology, cultural beliefs and productivity in an unusual, freighting way. Shifting from postclassical period of monochromatic color and continuing the trend of genre experimentation, *Rosemary’s Baby* is a classic film that paved the way for other horror noir films since “its inceptions in S*tranger on the Third floor* (1940) and *The Maltese Falcon* (1941)” highlighting unorthodox themes of vulnerability, religion, self-discovering, set within the fictional world of fascinating cultures of America during the 1960s (Meehan 206).

**Works Cited**

Meehan, Paul. “Horror Noir: Where Cinema’s Dark Sisters Meet.” Horror Noir, McFarland &

Company, Incorporated Publishers, 2010.

This book (ProQuest Database) discusses major films in the notion and genre of “Horror Noir.” It analyzes the common similarities and differences of major horror films. Throughout, the book mentions themes of satanism and villandry in *Rosemary’s Baby*. It also touches on the noir costume designs emerged from the gothic culture, adding to the horror noir genre.

Newton, M. (2014, Feb 08). Review: ARTS: Paranoid celluloid: 'if I'm wrong, I'm insane. if I'm right, it's worse': In conspiracy films and TV dramas - from rosemary's baby to state of play - solving the crime does not bring peace. Michael Newton investigates a rich cinematic genre. *The Guardian* Retrieved from http://libproxy.usc.edu/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.libproxy2.usc.edu/docview/1496084033?accountid=14749

“The Screen: 'Rosemary's Baby,' a Story of Fantasy and Horror; John Cassavetes Stars With Mia Farrow.” *The New York Times - Breaking News, World News &amp; Multimedia*, nyti.ms/2IsV6eZ.

This newspaper article from New York Times includes a brief synopsis and labels it as a moderate horror film. The critic describes the film lacking in freight; however, she adds that the genre horror is amplified by the imagination of the audience and the nature of the film.