

5. *Mothering a Demon:* Rosemary's Baby

Pleased to meet you,
Hope you guess my name.
But what's puzzling you,
Is the nature of my game...

– The Rolling Stones,
“Sympathy for the Devil”

THE ANCIENT EVIL ENTERS POP CULTURE

James Twitchell and Anne Williams, among others, have claimed that the twentieth-century Gothic has introduced us to at least one new motif: the “demonic child.”¹ The popularity of *The Exorcist*, by William Peter Blatty (analysed in chapter six), and its offspring in movies (such as *The Omen* series) gave the phenomenon wider attention, and different explanations were offered. Stephen King comments on this discussion, and argues that the new horror was rooted in social change. The end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s (King highlights the seven years from 1966 to 1972) were a turbulent period in the United States. Youth culture was developing new discourses and ways of living; rock music, sexual morals, values and attitudes in many ways collided violently with the “social and cultural conscience, commitment, and definitions of civilized behaviour,” as understood by the older generations. The Vietnam war developed this issue into a dramatic political confrontation. The new horror was born in this atmosphere of conflict between the young and the old, and King argues that “every adult” in America understood the subtext behind a horror film such as *The Exorcist*.² I would argue that these works of new horror have a much wider grasp, even on audiences outside this particular social context. Their use of demonic elements does employ different forms of social unrest as well as individual psychological anxieties, but the “external” and the “internal” are mixed; the demonic reveals elements of the other in the structures of the self.

¹ Twitchell, 1985, 300; Williams 1995, 18. – It is perhaps more accurate to characterise this as reinterpretation, rather than invention; the straightforward treatment of sexuality and aggression by modern horror powerfully modifies the more subtle associations of children with the demonic in earlier literature (see, e.g., Henry James's *Turn of the Screw* [1898]).

² King 1981/1987, 195-97.

Ira Levin's novel *Rosemary's Baby* (1967; "RB") is a vivid portrait of a period, and an ironic dislocation of that portrayal with its introduction of demonic elements. Levin has himself described his intentions as follows:

I tried to keep [the book's] unbelievabilities believable by incorporating bits of "real life" happenings along the way. I kept stacks of newspapers, and writing about a month or two after the fact, worked in events such as the transit strike and Lindsay's election as mayor. When, having decided for obvious reasons that the baby should be borne on June 25th [1966], I checked back to see what had been happening on the night Rosemary would have to conceive, you know what I found: the Pope's visit, and the Mass on television. Talk about serendipity! From then on I felt the book was Meant To Be.³

There had been some novels that tried to incorporate Satanic elements into a realistic, modern setting before, but *Rosemary's Baby* was the first to achieve really wide audiences.⁴ Partly this can be explained through the Hollywood connection; the synergy between a bestseller and a successful film was to be repeated in the case of *The Exorcist*.⁵ Despite its exotic occult elements this novel is also an exploration of "the common"; the married couple in the vortex of Satanic intrigue could be clipped from any fashionable, modern magazine – a handsome actor with his pretty, young wife. They are people whom it would be very easy to identify with in the reality increasingly mediated and constructed by the mass media.

In the first part of my study I have produced a model of the demonic as a field of heterogeneous figures, and blasphemous strategies that are generally used to articulate indirectly forbidden desires and moral or ontological conflicts of the self. The first goal of the analysis in this chapter is to identify and interpret how this novel articulates otherness, and how it generates different limits, or oppositions, which make transgressions possible. The second goal is to focus on one aspect of this field: how this text functions as a demonic text – that is, how it drives different subtexts or discourses into intertextual conflicts with each other, and produces the particular effect of blasphemous polyphony (as identified above, see pages 102-8). These two goals are here pursued simultaneously; the questions about the self or different transgressions operating in the novel are intertwined with the structure of the text.

The tension between the "believable" (realistic) and the "unbelievable" (fantastic) is carefully controlled in the text. There are different ways for the reader to interpret the progress of Rosemary Woodhouse's pregnancy, until

³ Quoted in *ibid.*, 338.

⁴ The Frenchman, J.-K. Huysmans, depicted in his *Là-Bas* (Down There; 1891) Satanism as an aspect of urban decadence; also the British author Dennis Wheatley wrote several novels that deal with occult and Satanic elements (including *The Devil Rides Out*, 1934; *To the Devil – A Daughter*, 1953; *The Satanist*, 1960).

⁵ *Rosemary's Baby* was directed as a film by Roman Polanski in 1968, immediately following the novel's success, and is very faithful to Levin's work.

the end affirms the supernatural explanation. Rosemary has become victim of a Satanist plot to evoke Satan, to impregnate a woman, and thereby give birth to an Antichrist. However, if we pay attention to how the self of the protagonist is articulated in the text, we can see the idea of a “victim” taking an ironic turn. The borderline between the fantastic and the real becomes leaky; the rejected otherness is not absolutely separate from the self.

The text is loaded with opposites from the very beginning. Rosemary and Guy Woodhouse have already signed a lease for a new apartment (“white cellblock,” as Rosemary says), when they are offered a four-room apartment in the Bramford (“old, black, and elephantine,” according to the narrator).⁶ The vulnerability of the young as contrasted with the tempting powers of the old are implicit already in the married couple: Rosemary is almost ten years younger than her spouse, and it makes her a bit uncertain.⁷ Time means also distance – there is a difference and imbalance of power between the male and female in this couple (Rosemary is portrayed as naïve, and Guy can easily hide his true, selfish thoughts and actions from her). The initial set-up in the novel delivers the following series of contrasted opposites:

Old	New
Black	White
Evil	Good
Male	Female

These oppositions are, however, not clear-cut or absolute; it should be noted that it is Rosemary who feels strongly drawn to the “black” Bramford. Guy would settle for the modern apartment they had already agreed to take. Nor can Guy be characterised as an unproblematically “evil” character from the beginning (and, Rosemary is not completely “good”). Rather, the opening setting is loaded with contrasts, tensions and distances which are going to mark the upcoming narrative.

Bramford is one element *Rosemary’s Baby* has inherited from the Gothic tradition, and adapted into a contemporary milieu. The Black Bramford is a displaced Gothic castle, planted at the heart of modern Manhattan. This building hides a witches’ coven and a history haunted by unexplained deaths. As Rosemary’s old friend, Hutch, tries to talk the couple out of moving into Bramford, it is the terror of the *ordinary* that finally seals Rosemary’s destiny.

‘Hutch,’ Rosemary said, ‘we’ve tried everywhere. There’s nothing, absolutely nothing, except the *new* houses, with neat square rooms that are all exactly alike and television cameras in the elevators.’

‘Is that so terrible?’ Hutch asked, smiling.

⁶ RB, 9-10.

⁷ RB, 27.

'Yes,' Rosemary said, and Guy said, 'We were set to go into one, but we backed out to take this.'⁸

The main activity in the novel focuses on the construction of home, and family. Rosemary builds her identity on the traditional role of a wife: she decorates their apartment, cooks, and waits for Guy, who is "away every day like other women's husbands."⁹ The house is the traditional Gothic symbol for the mind, or psyche, with its hidden rooms and underground cellars. The Black Bramford, with "all those weird gargoyles and creatures climbing up and down between the windows" is an image of the self, that Rosemary must explore in her road to self-knowledge.¹⁰ The questions surrounding identity are marked by these dark secrets, and thematised ambiguously in the text.

The identity of Rosemary is marked by transition. Before Rosemary became the wife of Guy Woodhouse, she was a Catholic country girl named Rosemary Reilly, from Omaha. Her two names indicate two identities, separated by marriage. Rosemary Reilly grew up in a strictly Catholic family, educated by nuns in "Our Lady," a Catholic school. Rosemary Woodhouse, on the other hand, is living in a city, married to an actor with a Protestant background, and defines herself as an agnostic.¹¹ There are several possible lines of fracture inherent in this change of identities; particularly, the change from a religious worldview into a secular one remains under suspicion – how deep has Rosemary buried her other side? The dualisms, oppositions and divisions thematised in the text offer starting points for interpreting its demonic elements.

The most striking dualism in the novel is its placement of supernatural elements at the heart of a realistic narrative universe. The ontological make-up of this world is closely related to the questions concerning the individual identities of the main characters. In its most traditional form, the supernatural reality and the mundane reality have been perceived as distinct from each other. Thomas G. Pavel – referring to the studies of Max Weber, Rudolf Otto, Roger Callois, Mircea Eliade and Peter Berger – has concluded that the "religious mind" divides the universe into two separate and different spheres (the sacred and the profane). Pavel has analysed the basic situation of fiction on the basis of "games of make-believe," and the dual structures of religion carry many similarities to those. A game of make-believe that includes the fictional element "dragon" can be called *existentially creative*: it displays a *salient structure* (in the figure of the dragon) which lacks a correspondent in the primary universe.¹² In the context of *Rosemary's Baby*, the devil and the Satanic witches with supernatural powers can be seen as these

⁸ RB, 22.

⁹ RB, 26.

¹⁰ RB, 17.

¹¹ RB, 26, 41.

¹² Pavel 1986, 57.

sorts of creative structure. They redefine the modern milieu through their difference.

Rosemary's Baby is not, however, organised according to this distinct dual ontology. Rather, it dramatises the conflict, or borderline between the religious and mundane spheres. As a work of fiction, Levin's novel plays with the ontological levels with much more freedom than any (solemnly) religious text could do. Pavel notes that whereas "the belief in the myths of the community is compulsory, assent to fiction is free and clearly circumscribed in time and space." The claims for eternal truth and the solidity of the religious narratives can also be contrasted with the openness of fiction to new constructions. Pavel compares fiction to games; new games always remain possible.¹³ The limit between the fictional and the non-fictional can, however, be transgressed. A work of fiction can have real-life consequences, and (on a more general level) the "fictions of identities" (narrative constructions of identity) affect how a personal identity is perceived. Pavel illustrates the transgression of fiction's limits with the myth of Pygmalion, the familiar story of a sculptor falling in love with a statue, and its subsequent coming into life as a woman (Galatea). According to Pavel, "cult and fiction differ merely in the strength of the secondary universe;" if fiction can evoke powerful responses, it may also have potential to have real-life consequences.¹⁴ This play between the real and unreal, or, fiction exceeding its limits, plays a significant role in *Rosemary's Baby*.

THE (HAUNTED) BUILDING OF SELF

In addition to Rosemary, the identity of her husband, Guy, is also uncertain, but in a different manner. He has changed his name from "Sherman Peden" into "Guy Woodhouse" for opportunistic reasons (the latter sounds more like an actor's name).¹⁵ The opening chapter of the novel presents Guy as a masterful liar; he is able to squirm out of a signed lease by rehearsing and performing a story of himself being needed in the war effort in Vietnam. The lie plays shamelessly with patriotic values, and implies that Guy could disregard other values, as well. This lie is nevertheless demanded by Rosemary, and she is, too, intertwined with the Pygmalion thematics. Guy is presented as an unprincipled character, who copes with the modern world by quickly adopting new roles. Rosemary is partly constructing herself an identity, partly she is an object (a Galatea shaped and influenced by others). "I'll make a duchess out of this cockney flower girl yet," her friend Hutch said, and signed her up for a night course in philosophy.¹⁶ The reference, of course, is to George Bernard Shaw's play *Pygmalion* (1913), and to the popular musical and movie versions that followed it ("My Fair Lady"; 1956

¹³ Ibid., 61.

¹⁴ Ibid., 60.

¹⁵ RB, 33.

¹⁶ RB, 18.

and 1964). The dualisms of old/young and evil/good are combined here into a confrontation between deception (Guy and the witches) and innocence (Rosemary).¹⁷ One dimension of Rosemary's story is concerned with the need for modern self-consciousness; adoption and construction of different roles are needed if one aims to succeed in modern society. This is, however, also a site for potential ambiguity and confusion: the self-consciously constructed roles have no moral foundation outside of themselves. They could be hiding malevolent intentions.

The unknown is terrifying, but it is also tempting. The dark, elephantine structure of Bramford is alluring to Rosemary: it has a name, and a history. The clinical anonymity of modern apartments is terrifying to her because it signifies a lack of identity – or lack of history (Rosemary's break with her past makes her responsive to this particular fear). Bramford is not only an old building; it has also old occupants. The conflict between the young and the old is very noticeable in this environment. Rosemary becomes an emphatically separate and isolated character, sharply contrasted to all the others. The separation could also mean a positive chance for self-discovery. It should be noted how intimate and personal the demonic elements are in this novel – they are centred on Rosemary's sexuality, her pregnancy and on questions of bodily and spiritual identity. The dark past of Bramford offers a sounding board for Rosemary's own (problematic) past. Rosemary has tried to separate herself from her Catholic past and upbringing; in this sense the experiences in Bramford could be seen as a monstrous "return of the repressed," as the supernatural and religious figures rise in their demonic guise. The Freudian expression can be justified with some evidence of the unconscious being thematised in the text. Despite being the modern, agnostic "Rosemary Woodhouse," a certain part of Rosemary still reacts "automatically": when a young girl (Terry) was found crushed on the sidewalk, Rosemary's right hand made an "automatic" sign of the cross.¹⁸ Similarly, Rosemary's longing to get pregnant leads into questions about the role of the unconscious. Rosemary rejects the use of contraception: "the pills gave her headaches, she said, and rubber gadgets were repulsive. Guy said that subconsciously she was still a good Catholic, and she protested enough to support the explanation."¹⁹

The pervasive irony in the text is produced through combinations of heterogeneous and conflicting registers. At this point it rises from Guy being simultaneously right and wrong (Rosemary is actually very conscious in her ruse to get herself "accidentally" pregnant). The integration between Rosemary's religiously marked unconscious and her conscious construction

¹⁷ The master of deception among all the liars is Roman Castevet, the leader of the Satanists. He can adopt almost any role with utmost cogency; he has also changed his name in a playful manner – by creating an anagram from the original "Steven Marcato." (RB, 147.)

¹⁸ RB, 36.

¹⁹ RB, 59.

of identity is defective, but in the world of *Rosemary's Baby* this is not the whole story. The impossibility of a subject to completely “coincide with oneself” is dramatised in this narrative into nightmarish proportions. As the story unfolds, Guy himself becomes a minor player in a Catholic fantasy which can easily be seen as Rosemary’s “subconsciously religious” mind extended and enlarged into the supporting narrative.

Rosemary had left in Omaha “an angry, suspicious father,” and a whole family who resented her violating the Catholic way of life, in marrying a Protestant, and even doing so in a civil ceremony.²⁰ The text informs us that Rosemary felt “guilty and selfish” in New York, and this guilt offers a way of reading the subsequent confrontation with the demonic. Freud’s theory of demonological neurosis points out that the figure of the Devil traditionally offers a channel for exploring repressed feelings towards the father.²¹ Rosemary’s situation has recently changed from a child’s dependency on her religious family into a young wife’s dependency on her husband. The consummation of the latter relationship would be having children together, but Guy is not willing to have this kind of bond. The hidden insecurities and denied religiosity are all given their expressions in Rosemary’s confrontation with the demonic. This crisis is set going in the night she finally becomes pregnant. The narration during this key episode is focalised through the drugged consciousness of Rosemary.

Rosemary slept a while, and then Guy came in and began making love to her. He stroked her with both hands – a long, relishing stroke that began at her bound wrists, slid down over her arms, breasts, and loins, and became a voluptuous tickling between her legs. He repeated the exciting stroke again and again, his hands hot and sharp-nailed, and then, when she was ready-ready-more-than-ready, he slipped a hand in under her buttocks, raised them, lodged his hardness against her, and pushed it powerfully in. Bigger he was than always: painfully, wonderfully big. He lay forward upon her, his other arm sliding under her back to hold her, his broad chest crushing her breasts. (He was wearing, because it was to be a costume party, a suit of coarse leathery armour.) Brutally, rhythmically, he drove his new hugeness. She opened her eyes and looked into yellow furnace-eyes, smelled sulphur and tannis root, felt wet breath on her mouth, heard lust-grunts and the breathing of onlookers.²²

The fantastic sex scene is closed by a brief dream episode, in which the Pope comes to see Rosemary at Jackie Kennedy’s request. In the reality of the novel the intercourse had taken place during the Pope’s sermon at Yankee Stadium. Guilty Rosemary tries to speak in a sad voice, “so that he wouldn’t suspect she had just had an orgasm.” The Holy Father gives his forgiveness, and hurries away.

²⁰ RB, 18, 26.

²¹ See below, page 151.

²² RB, 78-79.

This is the only direct confrontation with the Devil in the novel, and therefore of central importance. Again, an ironic (double) reading is invited by the text: Rosemary perceives the situation as an enjoyable love scene with her husband – but the reader is able to see the situation as a rape. The attributes of the raping creature are derived from the early, beastly version of the Christian Devil: it has sharp claws, yellow goat-eyes and a huge phallus. The powerful, phallic beast is emphatically sexual and masculine; it is more arousing than Guy, Rosemary's husband (this is the only occasion in the novel when she is said to be having an orgasm). Whereas Guy has been evading the idea of having children, avoiding the "dangerous days," this creature makes Rosemary pregnant in the first attempt. As the whole novel is called *Rosemary's Baby*, this pregnancy is pivotal for the work. The fantastic intercourse with the Devil is how Rosemary's desire to have a baby is represented in the text, and the Devil becomes a substitute of father – here as the literal father of Rosemary's baby. Psychologically, of course, this situation has its own, peculiar logic; as Rosemary left her own father, she also rejected God

Rosemary (Mia Farrow) studying her scratches from the previous night (from Rosemary's Baby; dir. Roman Polanski). © UIP/Paramount Pictures, 1968.

the Father.²³ Rosemary's modern marriage is haunted by hidden insecurities, primarily caused by the treacherous role-play that she herself is also involved in. Her conflicting impulses – to reject and repress the religious identity, and to hide the uncomfortable aspects of her modern identity – can be interpreted as the inner conflict motivating the use of a demonic figure. The Devil is the Other to both sides of Rosemary's self, an antithesis of God the Father, and an excluded delusion from modern, scientific reality.

Paradoxically, the fantasy of an intercourse with the Devil could have integrating potential for the liminal existence of someone like Rosemary. The demonic figure threatens both the religious and the modern, secular attempts at self-definition, and is therefore able to dramatise their limits. As I have pointed out in the first part of this study, demons as ambivalent opponents and interaction with them (possession behaviour in particular) have been traditionally used to transgress fixed social roles, and to alter social reality. The fiction of *Rosemary's Baby* has incorporated into itself an analogous structure in its pursuit of success as modern entertainment.²⁴ Rosemary even fits well into I.M. Lewis's observations as to how women and socially oppressed groups, particularly, find in demons some ways to express the inner conflicts of their social selves.²⁵ Rosemary is powerless and a victim for a large part of the narrative, but there is an interesting development in this area, as she comes to face her own connection with "demonic" powers. An analysis of how the heterogeneity figures in this novel can bring us closer to understanding this process.

The coincidence of the sex scene with the Pope's sermon is one aspect of the blasphemous strategy in *Rosemary's Baby*. The heterogeneous materials that amalgamate in Rosemary's dream – Pope, John F. Kennedy's yacht, black mass, women in bikinis – confuse the limits between holy and unholy. In the context of media celebrities, like Jackie Kennedy, even the significance of the Pope attains an ironic aspect. The Mass is also a huge media event, and Guy claims (with the other Satanists) that it is just "show biz."²⁶ The repeated references to the assassinated President, John F. Kennedy, and to the conspiracy theories evoke another context which contributes to the irony in the novel. The seriousness of Rosemary's plight is contrasted with scenes of the Castevet couple (the key conspirators) reading a conspiracy book critical to the Warren Report about the Kennedy assassination – or the

²³ Freud has analysed the psychological role of the Devil as a father-substitute (and God as the idealised father-image) in his article "A Seventeenth Century Demonological Neurosis" (SE 19, 69-105). See also below, p. 151.

²⁴ There does not seem to be any absolute or clear-cut limits between "mere entertainment" and those discourses that are dedicated to "serious" expression of some culture's concerns or myths. On the contrary, if entertainment grasps the attention of its audience (as *Rosemary's Baby* and *The Exorcist* did) it has found its own ways to address some significant questions.

²⁵ See above, page 30.

²⁶ RB, 52.

grotesquely comical *Jokes for The John*.²⁷ The theme of paranoia is developed in the text with simultaneous ironic intertextual complications on this theme. Guy, to give another example, compares Rosemary's growing distrust and hysteria to Senator McCarthy's paranoid theory of a communist conspiracy infiltrating American society.²⁸ The status of paranoia and realism is ironically reversed, as Guy's "common sense" is revealed as lies, and Rosemary's real weakness lies in not being paranoid enough.

LOCATING THE LIMITS, DIVIDING THE HETEROGENEITY

The demonic tradition in myth and literature is very rich, and it is significant which of its elements have been woven into this novel. As the setting is a modern, urban milieu, one could presume that a modern version of the Devil would do (a suave, sophisticated Mephistopheles, perhaps). On the contrary, *Rosemary's Baby* confronts us with an animalistic creature which seems mainly capable of wild sex and lustful grunts. The whole motif (having sex with the Devil) is taken from the medieval fantasies of the Witches' Sabbath. Because the literary tradition of a sophisticated Devil is so strong (built and developed by such writers as Milton, Goethe, or Dostoyevsky), this can not be a fortuitous incident. Rather, the primitive Devil illustrates the same underlying structure of heterogeneity and contradictions which characterises the use of opposites young/old, good/evil, holy/unholy. The very ancient and primitive comes here into contact with the modern, and, furthermore, the sexual intercourse makes the whole division problematic. The Devil here is essentially a phallic god, a fantasy of uncivilised (and amoral) sexuality; a fantasy of having sex with a beastly figure is a powerful gesture of transgression, of leaving "civilised" humanity and functioning only in the area of instincts and the body.

One must also ask, whose fantasy this transgression is? Considering this from the character's (Rosemary's) point of view, it is clear that she does *not* desire to have sex with the Devil; rather, this is her worst nightmare. On the other hand, the text lays stress on Rosemary's enjoyment, of her having an orgasm; the scene is articulated ambiguously in terms of both desire and violence. Anne Williams's remarks on the Male Gothic are pertinent here; Ira Levin's novel employs the motif of female victim and demonic sexuality in a manner which suggests both sympathy and pleasure in connection with the rape scene. One possible interpretation could focus on the female victimisation, and read *Rosemary's Baby* as a patriarchal fantasy: Rosemary's naïveté and helplessness fulfil traditional male expectations of female behaviour, and the end of the novel even shows her (though hesitantly) accepting her prescribed position in the Devil's party. However, this would mean simplifying Rosemary's role and her complex links to the demonic elements in

²⁷ RB, 56.

²⁸ RB, 151.

the text. Following Andriano, I shall produce a more “positive” reading of this Male Gothic work.

Andriano emphasised that the female demons in his texts actually stood for the forbidden female elements in the male psyche. Analogously, the masculine Devil in *Rosemary's Baby* is open to various interpretations: it is a symbol of sexuality and may well represent repressed sides of Rosemary's self. The intercourse with the Devil initiates a crisis, which makes Rosemary painfully aware of otherness in her life. However, the demonic Other is not tied to either sex; the Devil is not only an image of irrational, frightening male sexuality. Instead, this Protean figure is able to embody fears towards the body itself. Our biology is, after all, fundamentally “unconscious” in the sense that we have no control nor clear knowledge of the “corporeal” reality inside ourselves.²⁹ *Rosemary's Baby* gives the internalisation of demonic horror a concrete shape in Rosemary's pregnancy.³⁰

The history of demonic imagery is a history of heterogeneity, and the pregnant mother with her coalescence of two organisms is a potent symbol of this condition. It is perhaps the single most important innovation in *Rosemary's Baby* to harness the (often unspoken) uncertainties inherent in motherhood in the service of horror. The demonic Other is now rearticulated as the baby, who is simultaneously a part of Rosemary, and someone else – a liminal being. An important concept for the modern Gothic has been “body horror,” which has been applied mainly to the “Splatterpunk” variety of ultra-violent, naturalistic movies and texts following George A. Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), and reaching its culmination in the works of David Cronenberg and Clive Barker. The movies of David Cronenberg illustrate especially well the “internalization and recognition of fears as generated by the self,” that Rosemary Jackson has discussed. *Rosemary's Baby* can be seen as an important precursor to such works as Cronenberg's *The Brood* (1979), a bizarre story of an angry mother “expressing” (quite literally) her hatred by giving birth to monstrous killer babies. Cronenberg has himself analysed the impulse behind this variety of horror (and perhaps all horror) as based on the paradoxical division/unity between mind and body: mind is rooted in body, and body, on the other hand, can develop physical illnesses as expressions of mental ill feelings. According to Cronenberg, all cultures have tried to find ways to accommodate and explain this dual reality somehow in their systems of thought, but none has been able to make humans completely whole, unbroken.³¹

²⁹ *Gothic Bodies* by Steven Bruhm (1994) explores the spectacle of suffering and other forms of emphatic physicality as an important aspect of the Romantic tradition. He writes that the “obfuscation of boundaries between inside and outside, and the deconstruction of the central self that such obfuscation implies, are most readily accomplished by the pained body whose experience as other becomes so forcefully one's own” (p. 148).

³⁰ Several scholars have recently paid attention to the way women's procreative power has the capacity to evoke a specifically “internal” horror. See below, page 163.

³¹ Cronenberg 1992, 79.

The body/mind division, and its more abstract counterpart, nature/culture, are thematised in *Rosemary's Baby* as uncertainties surrounding Rosemary's pregnancy. Rosemary's doctor (Abraham Sapirstein, also part of the conspiracy) tries to convince her, that pregnancy is a state during which the unnatural becomes natural:

'Please don't read books,' he [Dr. Sapirstein] said. 'Every pregnancy is different, and a book that tells you what you're going to feel in the third week of the third month is only going to make you worry. No pregnancy was ever exactly like the ones described in the books. And don't listen to your friends either. They'll have had experiences very different from yours and they'll be absolutely certain that their pregnancies were the normal ones and that yours is abnormal.'³²

Sapirstein tells how important it is to satisfy all one's cravings during pregnancy; "You'll be surprised at some of the strange things your body will ask for in these next few months."³³ Rosemary's body, in fact, becomes so strange that Rosemary feels alienated from herself. Her pregnancy has made her a concrete embodiment of the conflicts and the heterogeneity permeating the structure of the novel. This can be seen in the pelvic pains she is soon continuously suffering; the disruptive forces start their work in her body. The novel is organised in three parts, and they all develop their conflicts into a climax. The conclusion of the first part focuses the conflicting powers into Rosemary's body: her conscious mind is grateful for the pregnancy and (evoking the memory of the religious "Rosemary Reilly") she makes a wish: "If only prayer were still possible!" Her body, however, has now a "mind of its own;" she realises that she does not only want, but she *needs* the tannis root charm given to her by the Satanists. "The smell of the tannis root had changed; it was still strong but no longer repellent."³⁴ The reader is made aware that Rosemary is no longer *one* (if she ever was). Instead, her body, her conscious mind, her religious childhood – all sorts of potentially conflicting elements that make up her heterogeneous self – are making her practically a polyphonic battlefield.

In the second part of the novel Rosemary's pains get gradually worse, but Dr. Sapirstein never stops assuring that they are just a part of a "normal" pregnancy – they will go away soon. The ceaseless bodily pain deprives Rosemary of all her strength and initiative. She cannot keep in contact with her friends and drifts under the guardianship of Guy and the Casteverts. An important turning point in the novel is the moment when Rosemary sees her image in the side of a toaster; she has been "chewing on a raw and dripping chicken heart – in the kitchen one morning at four-fifteen."³⁵ This signals Rosemary's degradation into a primitive, weak-willed *object* – a tool used by

³² RB, 99.

³³ RB, 99-100.

³⁴ RB, 96.

³⁵ RB, 123.

unconscious or unrecognised powers, instead of making conscious decisions by herself. Her counteraction is to organise a party for “young” people. (“This is a very special party. You have to be under sixty to get in,” states Rosemary ironically.³⁶) She fights to sustain some conscious control and sense of identity in the middle of the struggle raging both in her body and mind. Early in the novel, after all, Rosemary’s dream conveys Mrs. Castevet’s words: “Anybody! Anybody! [...] All she has to be is young, healthy, and not a virgin.”³⁷ The Satanists have no regard for Rosemary’s individuality, they are only interested in her body. The special terror in Rosemary’s situation emerges from not being certain if one’s body is really one’s “own”: fully possessed and controlled by the conscious personality. The demonic otherness is transferred from an external threat into symptoms of the internal division (the unclear borderline between “mind” and “body”).

The second part gradually builds up a powerful tension between Rosemary’s developing initiative and the efforts of the conspirators to keep her under control. Initially, Rosemary gains a remarkable victory by organising her party, rejecting the strange herbal potion Mrs. Castevet prepares for her (or, rather, for the demonic baby in her womb), and finally openly protesting against her treatment. The pain she has been suffering comes to an end at the very moment Rosemary is finally able to state her own will.³⁸ The conflict between “natural” and “unnatural,” however, is not resolved; it is rooted in the inarticulate borderline between ‘I’ and ‘not-I.’ This conflict comes into a violent confrontation at last, when the Satanists capture Rosemary after her failed attempt to escape. As she is injected with an anaesthetic and begins to lose consciousness, she can finally see the “unnatural” in her situation: “This wasn’t Natural Childbirth at all [...]” The reader can fill in the rest of the irony: neither was her baby going to be “Natural,” and – ultimately – Rosemary’s life and its discontinuities proved that she was quite “Unnatural,” herself.

The third part of *Rosemary’s Baby* is short when compared to the other two. It presents the denouement of the plot, and an *Anagnorisis*, a revelation of true identities. Rosemary has lost all her illusions concerning the people surrounding her; they are Others, their goals and values are radically different from hers. Her outburst is violent: “You’re lying. You’re witches. You’re lying. You’re lying! You’re lying! *You’re lying! You’re lying! You’re lying!*”³⁹ This is exactly what has been going on during most of the novel. After her realisation Rosemary is ready to adopt an active role – she has recognised who are her opponents, and can define herself by reacting against them. She hides the sedatives her guardians are treating her with, prays, dopes her guard, and arms herself with “the longest sharpest knife” she can find. She is actually behaving like a champion of faith, invoking the power of God in her

³⁶ RB, 124.

³⁷ RB, 42.

³⁸ RB, 135.

³⁹ RB, 187.

desperate venture: "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! Oh Jesus, dear Jesus, help me save my innocent baby!"⁴⁰

"HE'S MY CHILD" – FACING THE ENEMY

The most scathing irony, of course, has been saved for last. Rosemary's facing her "innocent baby" turns into a shock as she looks upon him/it – unable initially to decide *what* she has given birth to. "A tail! The buds of his horns! [...] Those eyes! Like an animal's, a tiger's, not like a human beings! [/] He *wasn't* a human being, of course. He was – some kind of a half-breed."⁴¹ Rosemary had suppressed all suggestions of herself being involved with some forms of otherness even when she was pumping "thin faintly-green fluid that smelled ever so slightly of tannis root" from her breasts.⁴² The figure of the demonic child finally makes it emphatically clear that she cannot escape from otherness without destroying herself and everything she loves.⁴³ Rosemary is dramatically acting out the break or rupture in the structure of subjectivity; in her case the problem of identity is intertwined with questions of religion, which makes the demonic imagery especially appropriate. The potential for internal conflicts in the constitution of self, however, lies at a more general level, inherent already in our acquisition of language. A child is the traditional image of innocence; the demonic child is a startling reminder that this "innocence" is a cultural construction. In the (post)modern world of *Rosemary's Baby* there no longer exists pure Nature, untainted by the uncertainties of language (or culture). The demonic baby with its "buds of horns" and "tiger's eyes" is a powerful image of the threatening and thrilling potentials of transformation in the human make-up. It is a symbol of borderline existence: the impulses from the body ("the animal") or from the collective unconscious ("the supernatural") are constantly threatening the conception of a unified, autonomous subject. The disturbing strains in the demonic baby go, in other words, much deeper than would be explained just by referring to the "shock value" which the novel may have created in the tense, but perhaps more innocent atmosphere of the 1960s.

The interpretation of conflicting heterogeneity as the key element in *Rosemary's Baby* can be amplified by reference to its discursive heterogeneity. The most important subtext in the novel is that concerned with the legends surrounding the Antichrist. Bernard McGinn has followed the development of this tradition from the third century B.C.E. to the present in his

⁴⁰ RB, 192.

⁴¹ RB, 202.

⁴² RB, 189.

⁴³ Rosemary considers this possibility: "The thing to do was kill it. Obviously. Wait till they were all sitting at the other end, then run over, push away Laura-Louise, and grab it and throw it out the window. And jump out after it. *Mother Slays Baby and Self at Bramford.*" But a personal pronoun is quickly displacing "it"; "He was her baby, no matter who the father was. [...] Killing was wrong, no matter what." (RB, 202.)

study *Antichrist: Two Thousand Years of the Human Fascination with Evil* (1994). The Antichrist has been used to direct fear and hatred towards some powerful external enemies, but early on, the real meaning of the Antichrist was to be found “among us,” from within. According to McGinn, this is something that has been insisted on by the early Church Fathers, through medieval poets down to modern novelists and psychologists.⁴⁴ The special dread associated with this figure comes from the “Antichrist’s” necessary intimacy with “Christ” – the most dangerous enemy is the one who masquerades as a friend, the most dangerous lie the one which is almost indistinguishable from the truth. McGinn illustrates this with a quotation from the Letters of John:

Children, it is the last hour [*eschatê hôra*]. You heard that Antichrist is to come: well, now many Antichrists have made their appearance, and this makes us certain that it really is the last hour. It was from our ranks that they went out – not that they really belonged to us; for if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us [...]. Who, then, is the Liar? None other than the person who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such is the Antichrist [*ho antichristos*]: the person who denies the Father and the Son.⁴⁵

This is the first occasion this concept has been used, and the context is one of internal division: there had been a severe split among John’s followers (circa 100 C.E.), and the letters were written against these “false Christs and false prophets.” Elaine Pagels’s study *The Origin of Satan* also emphasises how Satan was perceived in his most hateful form in other Christian sects.⁴⁶ The figure of Antichrist traditionally crystallises into itself the motifs of rebellion, blasphemy, and deception;⁴⁷ it is interesting to see how *Rosemary’s Baby* rearticulates this element in its modern narrative.

When the demonic baby (the “half-breed”) is introduced in the final climax of the novel, the language starts to show signs of heterogeneity. The normal prose is infected with the capitalised language of myth, ritual and doctrine:

She looked at them watching her and knife-in-hand screamed at them, ‘*What have you done to his eyes?*’
They stirred and looked to Roman.
‘He has His Father’s eyes,’ he said.
[...]
‘Satan is His Father, not Guy,’ Roman said. ‘*Satan* is His Father, who came up from Hell and begat a Son of mortal woman! To avenge the iniquity

⁴⁴ McGinn 1994, 4.

⁴⁵ 1 John 2:18a-19d, 22; McGinn uses Raymond E. Brown’s translation (*The Epistles of John*, 1982; Ginn 1994, 55).

⁴⁶ See above, p. 40-41.

⁴⁷ McGinn 1994, 43.

uities visited by the God worshippers upon His never-doubting followers!

[...]

'Go look at His hands,' Minnie said. 'And His feet.'

'And His tail,' Laura-Louise said.

'And the buds of His horns,' Minnie said.

'Oh God,' Rosemary said.

'God's dead,' Roman said. [...] '*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's begun!*'⁴⁸

The contrast between contemporary reality and religious myth is so profound, that the text achieves its most blasphemous effects just by combining these two. Rosemary's pain and anxiety are mixed with the farcical comments of elderly ladies singing the praises of a mutant baby's tiny horns or his tail. Stephen King remembers a student comment when he was teaching the book at the University of Maine to an undergraduate class: "ten years later Rosemary's baby would be the only kid on his Little League team who needed a custom-tailored baseball cap."⁴⁹ The strength of the reader's identification with the tormented Rosemary enables one to read even this combination of incompatible elements; the demonic child is not presented as an unconnected element. Instead, it focuses all of Rosemary's fears, uncertainties and contradictions into one figure. The Satanic chanting and the praise to the Antichrist give the confrontation with otherness a discursive shape. The farcical dissonances make sure that the mythical Other is not articulated as totally alien and detached. The final irony lies in Rosemary's (relatively easy) acceptance of the demonic, when she has finally been allowed to face it, and to see the otherness for what it is.

Rosemary's thoughts find ways to accommodate her sentiments for the little demon: "He couldn't be *all* bad, he just *couldn't*. Even if he was half Satan, wasn't he half *her* as well, half decent, ordinary, sensible, human being?"⁵⁰ Rosemary remains an ambiguous figure even at the end of the novel. She is seduced to join the Satan's party through her desire to be a mother, desire to love. At the same time, she is decisively not a victim any more; she attains a position of authority, and gives the baby a name of her own choosing. "His name is Andrew John. He's my child, not yours, and this is one

⁴⁸ RB, 198-99.

⁴⁹ King 1981/1987, 335. – The future fortunes of Rosemary's baby did not trouble only this student; in 1997, Ira Levin finally published a sequel that offers a closure (sort of) to the original story. *Son of Rosemary* updates the milieu to that of year 1999, and links the Antichrist narrative to Millenarian concerns. The paranoia and anxiety of Rosemary's ambiguity in relations to 'significant others' have remained the same. The final resolution transforms this sequel into a classical Oedipal fantasy, and may be deemed as betraying the tenets of the original novel. The 1990s' context shows an increased tolerance towards 'taboo' areas (such as incest, sexuality in general, or drugs) and, subsequently, the relative lack of interesting tensions connected to these areas.

⁵⁰ RB, 204.

point that I'm not going to argue about. This and the clothes. He can't wear black all the time.⁵¹ The oppositions between what is natural and unnatural (the supernatural, the bestial, all that is rejected from the "normal") break down as the demonic is brought into a dialogue with the conscious and the ordinary. In this sense Satan's baby in *Manhattan* is able to articulate very well some of the different conflicts and uncertainties lurking in the construction of a modern self.

To summarise the analysis in this chapter, I conclude that *Rosemary's Baby* supports the view that the demonic functions in modern horror are in intimate relation to the problematic differentiation/undifferentiation of the self from the Other. The independent, modern and secular identity of Rosemary Woodhouse is attacked and questioned by the demonic otherness both from outside and within her self. In the novel's ambiguous ending, Rosemary is able to find herself as an active agent reacting against the witches, the external threat. At the same time, however, she has to face the otherness from within; her demonic baby is a "half-breed" of herself and the mythical Other. The heterogeneity of the baby articulates the hidden tensions and insecurities structuring her "modern" self. Some of the borderlines between myth and reality, old and new, good and evil are shockingly transgressed and, in this process, their existence as significant cultural categories are both questioned and reconfirmed.

The next chapter continues such explorations, but without the humour that Levin's novel was still capable of displaying.

⁵¹ RB, 205.