

Utica Public Library

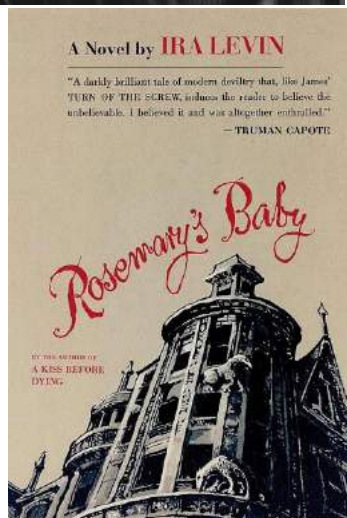
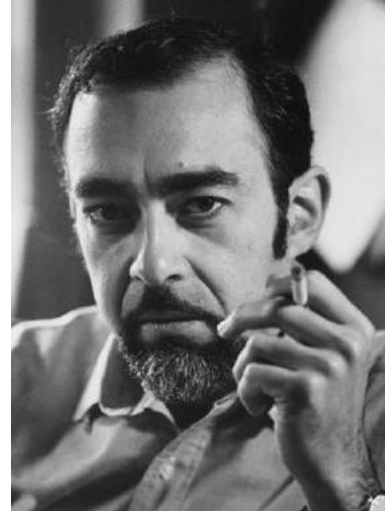
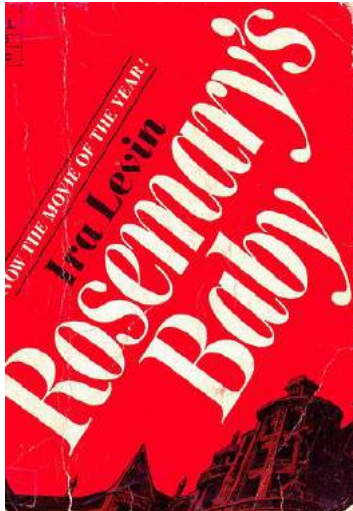
**20th CENTURY CLASSIC
FICTION
DISCUSSION GROUP 2020**

Saturday, May 16th at 1:00 pm,
Utica Public Library, 303 Genesee St.

Rosemary's

Baby

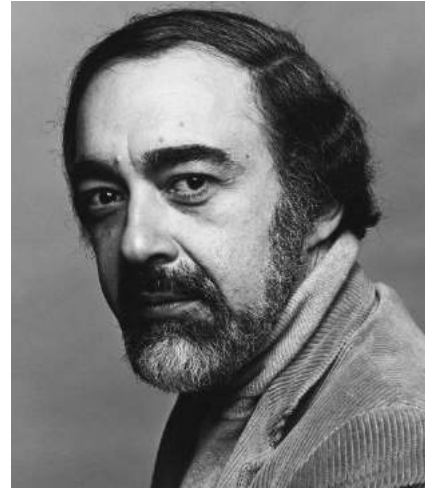
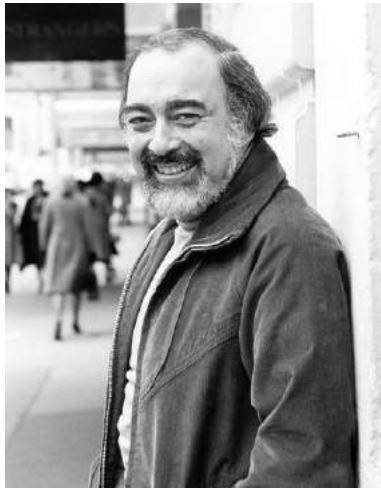
by Ira Levin



Included in this discussion handout:

- Basic introduction to *Rosemary's Baby* and Ira Levin
- Quotes of interest from the novel
- Character list
- Timeline of events in the novel
- Discussion questions
- *Rosemary's Baby*: the film (key scenes)
- *Rosemary's Baby*: the film characters (do they look as you imagined?)

Ira Levin and *Rosemary's Baby*



Ira Levin was born on August 27th, 1929 in the Bronx, NY. He studied at the Horace Mann school in NYC, Drake University in Des Moines, Iowa, & New York University.

His first novel, *A Kiss Before Dying*, published in 1953, won the Edgar Allan Poe Award for Best First Novel. Shortly thereafter, Levin did both the TV and stage adaptation for *No Time for Sergeants*. But it wasn't until 1967 that Ira Levin cemented himself in literary history. That year he published his suspense/occult classic *Rosemary's Baby*. The novel was a huge success and quickly became a bestseller selling over 4 million copies. *Rosemary's Baby* was praised by both critics and peers. It was made into a critically acclaimed film in 1968. Levin followed that success with three more bestsellers: *The Stepford Wives* (1972), *The Boys from Brazil* (1976), and *Sliver* (1991). All three were also made into films. The stage play *Deathtrap* was another hit for Levin. It is one of the longest running comedy-thrillers in Broadway history. Ira Levin produced 10 plays and 7 novels during a career of just over 50 years.

In 2003 Levin was awarded *The Grand Masters Award* by the Mystery Writers of America and the *Bram Stoker Award* for lifetime achievement. Stephen King stated that Levin was “the Swiss watchmaker of suspense novels.”

Ira Levin died of a heart attack on November 12th, 2007. He was 78 years old.

Scholar and editor, David Pringle, had this to say about *Rosemary's Baby*: "this sly, seductive impeccably-written horror novel ... is an expertly constructed story, a playwright's book, in which every physical detail and line of dialogue counts."

***Rosemary's Baby*: QUOTES OF INTEREST**

“You’re a *marvelous* liar.”

Rosemary to Guy

“This is no dream, she thought. This is real, this is happening.”

Rosemary (during the dream/rape)

“It was awkward and charming and sincere, like his playing of the cowboy in *Bus Stop*.”

Rosemary describing Guy’s explanation (as to why he hasn’t been looking at her)

“Guy, when he heard the news, turned bloodless gray and was silent and self-enclosed for several hours. Rosemary was surprised by the depth of his reaction.”

Guy's reaction to the news of Hutch's death

“That’s the main thing at this stage,” Dr. Sapirstein said, “keeping you happy.”

Dr. Sapirstein trying to calm Rosemary's qualms about the Castevelts

“Listening to the stirring baby, he betrayed an excitement that was unexpected in a man who had guided hundreds upon hundreds of pregnancies.”

Rosemary's thoughts on Dr. Sapirstein's reaction to the baby moving within her

“Roman came in holding the arm of a robust, handsome, dark-skinned man in a snow-white suit and white shoes. He carried a large box wrapped in light blue paper patterned with Teddy bears and candy canes. Musical sounds came from it.”

A description of one of the special guests attending the gathering to celebrate the birth of the demon child

“They promised me you wouldn't be hurt. ... I mean, suppose you'd had a baby and lost it; wouldn't it be the same? And we're getting so much in return, Ro.”

Guy's "justification" for offering his wife to the coven as Satan's child bearer

Rosemary's Baby

MAIN CHARACTERS

Rosemary Woodhouse – the protagonist, a young wife living in NYC

Guy Woodhouse – Rosemary’s actor husband
Minnie Castavet – a neighbor of Rosemary & Guy at the Bramford
Roman Castevet – Minnie’s husband
Hutch – a good friend of Rosemary
Dr. Sapirstein – a renown obstetrician recommended by the Castevets
Terry Gionoffrio – a young woman who lived with the Castavets
Donald Baumgart – an actor & peer of Guy
Dr. Hill – Rosemary’s initial obstetrician who eventually betrays her
Grace Cardiff – Hutch’s friend
Dominick Pozzo – Guy’s vocal coach
Laura-Louise – a good friend of the Castavets
Argyron Stavropoulos – a wealthy Satanist who travels far to see the baby
Andrew – Rosemary’s demon child

Rosemary’s Baby
Timeline of events in the novel
(spoilers are present)

- Rosemary & Guy Woodhouse (an actor) move into the Bramford apartment building
- Rosemary meets Terry Gionoffrio in the laundry room
- Terry is found dead outside of the Bramford, the result of an apparent suicide
- Rosemary & Guy become acquainted with neighbors Minnie & Roman Castavet
- Guy gets the part he wants in a play when the actor playing the part suddenly loses his vision
- Rosemary is drugged and the dream/rape occurs
- Guy is suddenly a sought after actor with new opportunities springing up
- Rosemary goes to Dr. Hill and discovers she's pregnant
- The Castavets insist that Rosemary be cared for by their friend, Dr. Sapirstein, during her pregnancy
- Dr. Sapirstein directs Minnie to make a vitamin enriched drink for Rosemary
- Rosemary develops sharp & severe pains
- Rosemary's friend Hutch goes to visit her and is alarmed by her emaciated appearance
- Hutch plans to meet Rosemary again the next day but inexplicably falls into a coma
- Rosemary's pain is constant & she develops a taste for raw meat
- Rosemary throws a party for all their younger friends
- Guy & Rosemary argue over the advice of her girlfriends & the severe pain stops
- Guy's career as an actor continues to flourish
- Hutch dies and his friend, Grace Cardiff, gives Rosemary a book that Hutch wanted her to have
- After looking at the book, Rosemary gets out a Scrabble set & figures out the anagram
- Rosemary wants no further contact with the Castavets, the Castavets leave on a world trip
- Rosemary starts to piece things together after meeting Dominick Pozzo & she calls Donald Baumgart
- Rosemary leaves the apartment, goes to Dr. Saperstein & then to Dr. Hill
- Dr. Hill betrays Rosemary, and Dr. Saperstein & Guy take her back to the apartment
- Rosemary goes into labor and has the baby at the apartment

- Rosemary is told she gave birth to a baby boy, but the baby didn't survive, she doesn't believe this
- Rosemary discovers the passage connecting the 2 apartments, and finds the baby in a black bassinet
- Roman tells Rosemary that Satan is the baby's father, not Guy, the baby is a horned, clawed, tailed demon
- Initially horrified and repulsed by the demon child, Rosemary gradually takes a motherly stance

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1) How does Levin desaturate the ominous quality of the coven?
How would you describe the Castevets and their friends?
Describe various ways in which they are presented to the reader.
- 2) The novel was written in 1966. What were the prevailing attitudes and mind-sets about women, motherhood & pregnancy? How does this tie into the label of a horror story? Are those attitudes & mind-sets the same today?
- 3) Levin has a radically different writing style from many 20th century authors such as Edith Wharton, Vladimir Nabokov, & John Steinbeck. Describe Levin's writing style. How does it work with this particular story? What facet & literary motif of his style makes the story accessible and real (especially to readers in 1967). Does this same motif make the story "dated" to current readers?
- 4) Why do you think Dr. Hill betrays Rosemary? How do female stereotypes/archetypes play into this?

- 5) Why does the demon rape appear more like a dream to Rosemary? What has happened just prior to the rape? How does Levin tie the dream/rape into the last chapter?
- 6) What were the first clues that you, as a reader, felt were indications that something was not right at the Bramford? What are your thoughts on Levin's details and use of clues? Did you like the pacing and exposition of clues?
- 7) Some current critics take issue with Rosemary as a female character. Do you see her as a victim? Do you think she's proactive & has agency? Do you perceive her as weak? Why do you think she has moments of self-doubt?
- 8) What are your thoughts on Guy?
- 9) What do you think happens after the book ends?

***Rosemary's Baby* (1968): the film, starring Mia Farrow**



Minnie gives Rosemary the tannis root charm that belonged to Terry



Rosemary awakens after the dream/rape & discovers scratches on her body



Rosemary makes a chilling discovery with the Scrabble pieces



Rosemary's reaction upon seeing the demon child

***Rosemary's Baby* (1968): CHARACTERS**

Do the film characters match the way you envisioned the book characters?



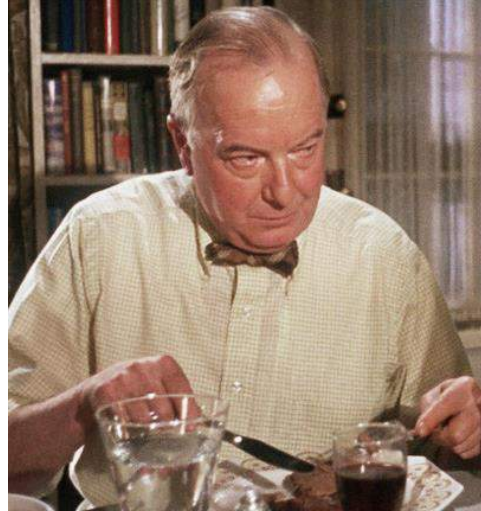
**ROSEMARY WOODHOUSE
MINNIE CASTAVET**

GUY WOODHOUSE

Gordon
Mia Farrow

John Cassavetes

Ruth



**ROMAN CASTAVET
SAPIRSTEIN**

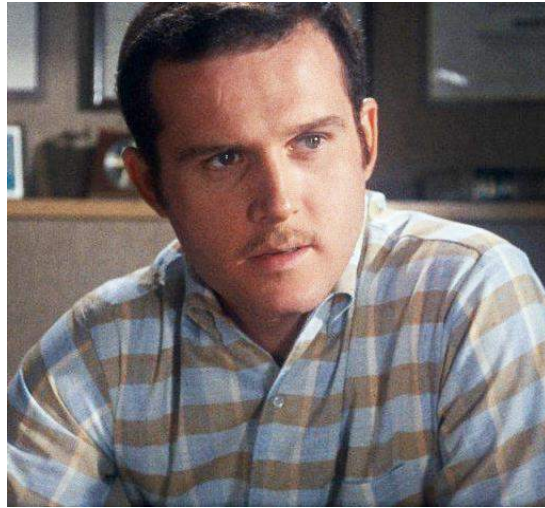
Sidney Blackmer

HUTCH

Maurice Evans

DR.

Ralph Bellamy



HILL

LAURA-LOUISE

Patsy Kelly

TERRY GIONOFFRIO

Angela Dorian

DR.

Charles Grodin