

# The Novels of Ira Levin

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## **ABSTRAKT**

Tato práce se zabývá analýzou témat vyskytujících se v románech Iry Levina. Jmenovitě jde o díla: *Polib mne a zemřeš* (*A Kiss Before Dying*, 1952), *Rosemary má děťátko* (*Rosemary's Baby*, 1967), *Ten báječný den* (*This Perfect Day*, 1970), *Stepfordské paničky* (*The Stepford Wives*, 1972), *Hoši z Brazílie* (*The Boys from Brazil*, 1976), *Někdo se dívá* (*Sliver*, 1991) a *Rosemary a její syn* (*Son of Rosemary*, 1997). Sestává se ze čtyř částí, ve kterých je postupně představen Ira Levin, jeho díla, témata, kterými se daná díla zabývají, a na závěr je provedeno výsledné shrnutí.

Klíčová slova:

Americká literatura, Ira Levin, analýza díla, fikce, feminismus, technologie, dystopie.

## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis analyses themes occurring in the works of Ira Levin. It deals with novels: *A Kiss Before Dying* (1952), *Rosemary's Baby* (1967), *This Perfect Day* (1970), *The Stepford Wives* (1972), *The Boys from Brazil* (1976), *Sliver* (1991) and *Son of Rosemary* (1997). The paper consists of four parts in which will be introduced Ira Levin, his work, the themes of his novels and the final summary of the findings.

Keywords:

American literature, Ira Levin, novels analysis, fiction, feminism, technology, dystopia.

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## INTRODUCTION

Ira Levin is the Swiss watchmaker of the suspense novel: in terms of the plot, he makes what the rest of us do look like five-dollar watches you can buy in the discount drugstores.<sup>1</sup>

The quotation above comes from Stephen King, Levin's contemporary and colleague in a field of literature of mystery. The fact that almost all of the novels Levin wrote had been turned into movies only justifies his statement and shows this prolific writer in the light of public popularity.

His work includes famous novels such as *The Stepford Wives* (1972), *Rosemary's Baby* (1967) or *This Perfect Day* (1970), which are all going to be mentioned and scrutinized on the following pages, but also number of plays he wrote for a theatre or screenplays for television. Since the very young age, Levin followed his dream to become a writer and managed to make it his occupation. The novels he wrote are comprehensive, containing themes attractive for a reader, but simultaneously touching current issues of importance.

In my thesis, I will introduce Levin's novels and scrutinize the themes appearing in his writing. A greater emphasis will be made on his novel *This Perfect Day*, as I consider this book to be his best novel of the greatest importance, yet underappreciated. This is also one of the reasons I have chosen Levin's novels for closer study. I appreciate his work and believe he deserves more attention, as his novels deal with interesting issues and are not shallow, but rather current even nowadays.

Therefore, my goal is to display the persisting value of his novels, in which we can find the perpetual issues that outlast for generations. As I will argue, the themes appearing in his novels have still a great value and are rather visionary. Because of such a nature of his work, the narratives can be read repeatedly by many generations and still seem accurate.

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<sup>1</sup> Lee Glendinning, "Ira Levin, cult chiller author, dies at 78," *Guardian* (November 2007), <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2007/nov/14/books.booksnews> (accessed March 28, 2013).

## 1 IRA LEVIN

The purpose of the first chapter is to give more details on the author this thesis is focused on: Ira Levin. To provide a brief overview of his life and make the reader familiar with his past, because to understand writer's messages, it is always advisable to have background knowledge of the story of his life.

### 1.1 From Birth to Death

Ira Levin himself is not extremely well known author out of the United States of America, where his origin is, although the stories he created are quite popular worldwide. The main contribution on this has the fact, that most of his novels were adapted into featured movies and for today's audience films are usually more and easier accessible than books. Therefore the novels like *The Stepford Wives* (1972) or *Rosemary's Baby* (1967) are quite famous, but its book templates are sometimes forgotten.

Ira Levin, born on August twenty-seventh 1929 in the New York City, started his carrier as a screen writer for television networks. He did so even through by choosing this carrier he has violated the dreams of his father, about taking over the family toy-producing business. But Ira was determined to fulfill his vision of being a writer and he never gave up on this. Even when he was facing failures, mainly with his first and only musical produced, or some of his early dramas, which were not always appreciated, he stayed devoted to the path of a writer he has chosen. The responses Levin got on his works were quite divergent, but his novels were, in general, much more popular than his other projects, whether screenwriting or drama.<sup>2</sup>

The first published novel, *A Kiss Before Dying* (1953), was awarded the Edgar Award for The Best First Novel. On the other hand, his dramas were rather refused by the public interest, untill he came up with *Deathtrap* (1978). It is a story of a writer struggling to write down a screen play, who decides to kill his younger colleague and steal his work. This masterpiece is the longest running comedy on Broadway and brought Levin second Edgar Award. In total Levin produced seven novels and nine theater plays. He also created a musical *Drat! The Cat!* (1965), which was unfortunately refused by the audience and cancelled after a few shows. He also

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<sup>2</sup> See Margalit Fox, "Ira Levin, of 'Rosemary's Baby,' Dies at 78," *New York Times* (November 2007), [http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/14/books/14levin.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/14/books/14levin.html?_r=0) (accessed March 20, 2013).

participated on a number of screenplays and TV projects. When dying on November twelfth 2007 on heart attack, he was well-respected member of fiction writer's society.<sup>3</sup>

## 1.2 Writing Style

Considering the writing style in general, Levin uses rather simpler language, which is easy to comprehend and more probable to attract the ordinary reader. The novels are easy to read and the issues Levin tries to depict are mostly related to the current themes that troubled the society at that time. His easily transmitted thoughts allow readers of all ages and nationalities to connect into one wide audience. Irony of his work is that the movie adaptations of the novels became much more known than their written originals.

We can follow some unconventionality in his writing in the novel *Sliver*, where he is using mostly short sharp sentences, to create the feeling of modern straightforward place. By usage of this vocabulary, he creates in a reader feelings of being present in a tall and strict up to date building, where the story takes place in. In the novel *This Perfect Day* Levin plays with vocabulary. There is an extensive usage of neologisms in order to suit the new world and society he generates.

A voice of all the novels is equal. The voice is represented by the person who narrates the story, for example a character in the book or narrator him/herself. The linking voice of all the Levin's novels is third-person narrative, which is also called "heterodiegesis." In such a voice the usage of a third-person pronoun is crucial.<sup>4</sup> Moreover the author is omnipresent, which provides him with the privilege of inspecting into characters' minds and seeing their thoughts, fears and desires. A reader may perceive him as a godlike personality with overview above the whole world.<sup>5</sup>

## 1.3 Levin's Life in Historical Context

For the twentieth century America was symptomatic mainly a quick economic growth after the Second World War. This reflected in different aspects of social life. There was a great shift in

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<sup>3</sup> See Official Ira Levin's website, "Biography," <http://www.iralevin.org> (accessed March 20, 2013); Fox, "Ira Levin, of 'Rosemary's Baby,' Dies at 78."

<sup>4</sup> See Monika Fludernik, *An Introduction to Narratology* (London: Routledge, 2009), 98.

<sup>5</sup> See Fludernik, *An Introduction to Narratology*, 92.

people's values and it was an era of entertainment and freedom. As the modern technologies were approaching quickly, everything became faster, less private, more commercial and controlled. All of these changes had its pros and cons. As I will argue later in the text, Levin also dealt with these themes frequently, pointing out mainly the cons of new technologies arousal. Through the novels we can see a tendency of writing about the fears from the new technologies and science progressions. Therefore a dystopian theme is not rare in his novels. In almost every work written by him we can follow a recognizable pattern of fear of potential future technological threads, but he also puts into question the issue of women equality, abortion and another controversial topics.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> See Richard Gray, *A History of American Literature* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 753.

## 2 SUMMARIES OF THE NOVELS

In the second chapter of my thesis, I would like to introduce the novels written by Ira Levin, briefly summarize them and demarcate within specific genres. When talking about literary genre, it is necessary to state, what the word genre actually means. The term is widely used designation in many, mainly artistic, fields like drama or music. The term genre was derived from French and Latin and the meaning is described as “a class,” “kind” or “sort”. Genre serves as division and subdivision of works into different literary concepts.<sup>7</sup> This notion is traditionally described as formal convention allowing literary works to be classified within particular intertextual traditions. Different linguistic and also rhetorical features define each genre. It can be a way characters speak, what topic is the main theme or a particular form in which is the story written.<sup>8</sup>

Frow in his papers approaches genre as “a form of symbolic action: the genetic organization of language, images, gestures, and sound makes things happen by actively shaping the way we understand the world.”<sup>9</sup> He suggests the necessity of approaching a genre as a complex unit of elements appearing in the text which should be accessed accordingly.

The very basic classification of genre is division to fiction and nonfiction category. As the term suggests, the nonfiction category involves works, which are based on real facts, when on the other hand fiction is about characters or events that are not true. The lattermost category involves also Levin’s writing. For a further classification we can use such distinguishing features, which Frow lists in his work *Genre*, like a set of formal features, a thematic structure, a situation of address, a general structure of implication, a rhetorical function and physical setting.<sup>10</sup> The further classification of Levin’s work will be discussed on the specific novels below.

### 2.1 *A Kiss Before Dying*

*A Kiss Before Dying* (1953) was the Ira Levin’s first novel ever released and yet it was rewarded The Edgar Allan Poe Award in the category The Best First Novel in 1954. As another proof of his unusual success from the very beginning, the novel was turned into movie adaptations

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<sup>7</sup> See Trudier Harris, “Genre,” *Journal of American Folklore* 108, no. 430 (Autumn, 1995), 509.

<sup>8</sup> See Katherine Arens, “When Comparative Literature Becomes Cultural Studies: Teaching Cultures through Genre,” *Comparatist* 29 (May 2005).

<sup>9</sup> John Frow, *Genre* (London: Routledge, 2006), 2.

<sup>10</sup> See Frow, *Genre*, 9.

two times and the young American writer got a lot of attention afterwards.<sup>11</sup> This narrative, written by only twenty-three years old Levin, belongs to a genre of mystery, for which the typical features are revealing of secrets and a tension the narration evokes in a reader. There is usually a crime involved in the plot and the process of solving it is portrayed. In this case the crime is multiple murders.

The novel offers a story of a young student couple having a relationship in college. Everything seems fine, but the love in the relationship is not distributed equally. Dorothy Kingship is the one recklessly in love with her wicked classmate, Bud Croliss. In the flashbacks in the middle of the story, the reader finds out that Bud served in the Second World War, where he coolly killed a Japanese sniper, and this was not the last murder he was about to commit. His relationship with Dorothy is calculated, because of her wealthy father and a fortune he can make by marrying her. When he finds out Dorothy is pregnant, he wants to force her to undergo an abortion, because he knows that her father would disinherit her. As an answer to her refusal, he manages to get some drugs to kill her, claiming they are the abortion pills. But this option fails, because she refuses to swallow them.

Dorothy wants to keep the baby and get married. Desperate Bud sets up an evil plan in his mind and agrees to the wedding. Later on, when the couple is about to get secretly married, Bud takes Dorothy to the top of the building, where he pushes her down. The problem is seemingly solved. He lets the rumors around her death to calm down and starts to date her sister Ellen. She is still unable to believe that Dorothy committed suicide, which was the official police proposal of the case. She is sneaking around this mystery, so Bud kills her and commits the third murder in role to keep her quiet. To make the situation even more ridiculous, he starts to date the last of the Kingships sisters, Marion. His malevolent past is revealed after all by Gordon Gant, a former DJ from college, who finds evidences in Bud's house. Bud then dies, surrounded by Gordon, Marion and her father. His death is humiliating, as he drowns in a barrel of water in one of the copper manufacturing plant of Marion's father.

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<sup>11</sup> See Official Ira Levin's website.

## 2.2 *Rosemary's Baby and Son of Rosemary*

One of the most popular novels by Levin is *Rosemary's Baby* (1967), which was followed by the less favored sequel *Son of Rosemary* (1997). Two years later after publishing *Rosemary's Baby*, movie of the same title, by Roman Polanski, was released and well received by critics and vast audience. Mainly because of elements of fear and frightfulness, this novel belongs to the genre of horror fiction.

The story takes place in the 1970s in America. Guy and Rosemary Woodhouse just moved into a new apartment in Bramford, which has a quite frightful history. They have strange neighbors, Minnie and Roman Castevet, to whom Guy becomes very close. This new relationship results in odd behavior of Guy and Rosemary is confused. As expiation for his behavior, Guy offers Rosemary to have a baby she has been wishing for for a long time. The night they are attempting to conceive it Guy, with the help of Minnie Castevet, gets Rosemary drugged and she is raped by the Devil. Guy lets this happened because Castevets are the leaders of Satanist coven and they promised him a great career as an actor, if he bestows them the first baby of his wife.

Rosemary is struggling while being pregnant and visits a doctor. She relives him her fear of something being wrong, because she eats flash meat and experiences terrible pains during the pregnancy. Unfortunately, the doctor is also a secret member of the coven, so he claims such feelings are normal and prescribes her only herbs. With help of her friend, Rosemary finds out about the coven and tries to escape, but she does not know who to trust. In the end, she is found lying alone in the apartment, as she was told the baby died during giving the birth. She does not want to believe and finds out that the child is in custody of Castevets. Looking into the cradle, Rosemary sees she gave a birth to a devil.

The sequel *Son of Rosemary* begins in the year 1999, when Rosemary wakes up after a long lasting coma. One of the first things she sees is a button on the chest of a nurse claiming "I (hearth) Andy." When she comes to her senses, she finds out, Andy is kind of a living God everybody adores. Slowly she realizes it is her son she had begotten with the Devil and who is now turning thirty-three years old. Because of her longtime unconsciousness, Rosemary becomes very famous and so decides to talk in the TV show about her suspicion of Andy being her son. Thereafter, he immediately contacts his lost mother and they start a great relationship. Because they never really grow side by side, the behavior of Andy's is turning into the lust for Rosemary as a woman.

Andy spends a lot of time with his newfound mother and his girlfriend Judith feels, he is losing interest in her. Therefore, she begins to investigate more about his background and history. After she reveals his dark secrets about the coven members he was raised by, she is dramatically murdered. But this homicide is not committed as a usual murder. She is stabbed with seven knives and surrounded by twenty-three silver objects. This is supposed to reflect the price for which Jesus was betrayed by Judas.

Rosemary's son is the leader of a worldwide respected charity and his plan is to spectacularly enter into the year 2000 by lighting special candles he produces. The candles are supposed to be lit at midnight New York time all over the world. This idea seemed magnificent to Rosemary, but she starts to have doubts about the dishonorable intentions behind this happening. Nevertheless, she does not manage to avert it, so when the candles are lit at the midnight 2000, a horror begins. A lethal virus is spread all over the world and inflicts the disintegration of human kind into small dust particles. The Devil Rosemary had a baby with comes back to the Earth and takes her away down to the hell. Out of the blue, Rosemary finds herself in a bed detecting, that the entire story of her and Guy moving to Bramford, having a baby and all the rest was just a dream.

### 2.3 *This Perfect Day*

The genre, into which *This Perfect Day* (1970) belongs, is dystopia. As John Frow claims: "Genres emerge and survive because they meet a demand, because they can be materially supported, because there are readers and appropriate conditions of reading, writers or producers with the means to generate those texts, and institutions to circulate and channel them."<sup>12</sup> The genre dystopia could be claimed to appear as a reaction to a current political situation and arrangements. I will be dealing with the term dystopia in more detail in the third part of my thesis when talking about dystopian themes in Levin's writing.

The novel is frequently compared to other great dystopian novels of the twentieth century, like Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) or Huxley's *Brave New World* (1931). For instance, in the paper of Olivia Ridley, where she points out similar features between societies in the novels above and also the resemblance of distinctive features of the protagonists. She suggests



that “the main characters are always cultural deviates, fighting for their beliefs against a repressive government.”<sup>13</sup> Considering the year Levin produced his novel, it is conspicuous that he got inspired by the dystopian novels written earlier. Nevertheless this fact does not make his work any smaller.

The plot of *This Perfect Day* is set into an apparently perfect society. Everybody in this world creates one big Family. The main idea is to be unified. Equal. Not to think on one’s own. The world is based on a drug control of the inhabitants. From a very young age, people are given bracelets with their “nameber” (combination of a number and a name) and become “members”, calling each other brothers and sisters. These bracelets serve as a tool for the drug distribution and evidence of a position of an owner. There are omnipresent scans by which members have to check whenever they go. The whole life of the global community is led and controlled by a central computer called the Unicom, handling data about all the inhabitants. This machine gives members the drug treatments, which cause their tranquility, obstruct the hair growth, suppress the physical features, which distinguish a male body from a female’s body, and minimize the sexual potency. The treatments are given in regular intervals and a dosage depends highly on individuals and their performances.

The appearance of members is unisex and to suppress the individuality even further, people are given only four names for each gender. For girls these are Mary, Yin, Peace and Anna, and four names for boys are Li, Karl, Bob and Jesus. These names are then followed by a specific number. To every inhabitant, there is one advisor assigned. The role of such a person is to prescribe members treatments, give advices about how to cope with problems occurring in their lives or suggest their working opportunities.

The main character is called Li RM35M4419, but his grandfather calls him Chip and tries to create the feeling of uniqueness inside of him. Chip’s grandfather has always wanted to destroy the Unicom. He was the one to help with the construction and has always been aware of bad effects it has on the inhabitants, who are being unconsciously distributed drugs. The maximum age of living is sixty-two years and there is nobody reaching a greater age. When Chip’s grandfather gets to this limit, he dies also, but there is something that lasts in Chip after his death. He wants to

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<sup>12</sup> Frow, *Genre*, 137.

find out more about the Unicom and about different possibilities of living his grandfather told him about.

In comparison with other members, Chip's behavior is slightly unconventional. He expresses emotions and doubts about the system as a whole. Because of his visible eccentricity, Chip is contacted by a group of equally minded people trying to violate the rules of the global society. Through given instruction he manages to avoid getting drugs and starts to think consciously with a clear head. After fulfilling this uneasy task, they make him member of their secret club, which is having meetings in an old museum. Here they have debates, share knowledge, read books and smoke cigars. So to say, they rebel against all the things Family disagrees with. But after a while, Chip feels he needs more than just smoking cigars and having a sexual pleasure. He wants to fight against the regime.

In the museum he finds an old map and figures out how they can manage to escape to distant island of incurables that may be free of the control of the Unicom. Unfortunately Chip's advisor finds out about his unacceptable behavior and all of the rioters are caught and put again on a drug treatment. Chip then begins his drugged life again, since there is an earthquake which makes his regular drug doze late. The postponing of an intake causes his awakening from the addiction and he discovers a ruse how to avoid the treatment again. He makes plans to escape and takes with him also Lilac, who was a member of the club and Chip was strongly attracted to her. Due to the drug deceiving Lilac's mind, he has to kidnap her, as she refuses to leave the Family voluntarily. On their secret pilgrimage to new and better world, she is rapped by Chip. He is not able to fight down his animal passion for Lilac, who has no lust to be involved in any kind of sexual relationship, as her sexual appetite is still suppressed on the minimum under the effects of treatments. After a long painful journey, Chip and Lilac manage to get to the island of incurables, which is place over which the Unicom has no power.

A group of people willing to make a journey to destroy the Unicom gathers on the island and finally wander towards this goal. When getting to a place, where the Unicom is preserved, they are finding out it is all just forgery and the world is led by a few people from the very centre of the Unicom. These leaders provided them with all necessary signals to make these rebels

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<sup>13</sup> Olivia Ridley, "The Future in the Classroom Today," *English Journal*, no. 6 (October 1983), 67.

come to the Swiss Alps, where the central computer is based. Such detection destroys all their ideas and Chip gets bitter. Pretending to be on the side of the men in charge of the Unicom Chip is in his mind secretly planning a destruction of the computer.

When months later another group of rebels, wanting to destroy the Unicom, approaches, Chip manages to destroy the computer by explosives once and for all. The ending of the story is open. Recreation from the addicted unified inhabitants with drugs poisoning their blood streams will take some time. But finally people will be free and the unification over.

## 2.4 *The Stepford Wives*

Thriller novel with satirical features called *The Stepford Wives* (1972) was turned into a popular movie in 2004, which was directed by Frank Oz and starred famous actors like Nicole Kidman or Matthew Broderick. But for the first time, this popular story was turned into the movie in 1975 by Bryan Forbes and got a lot of attention because of its controversial theme of feminism.

Story begins with a couple moving from busy New York to calm town of Stepford in Connecticut. Joanna Eberhart, the main character, is a professional photographer and moves to Stepford with her husband Walter and two children. Because she is very active member of society, she is immediately searching for some club to attend, but she finds just club strictly for men. She is surprised with the fact, that there are no women who want to participate in a political or any other kind of events. All of the wives she gets in touch with are submissive house maids who care just about the family life, making households perfectly clean and being in a great shape. Nevertheless Joanna finds a friend, who moved to Stepford recently, called Bobbie. They are investigating in this strange case and cannot figure out, why women in that town behave so bizarre. Later on, Bobbie goes to a second honeymoon with her husband and when she comes back, she becomes the very same obedient Stepford wife. Joanna sees there is a problem in the club and finds out, that the president is a former employee of the Disney Park, who created robotic figurines. In the Male Association, they create perfect robotic women - passive, obedient and beautiful. Joanna wants to leave Stepford, but it is too late and Walter manages to catch her with the help of other members of the club. In the end, Joanna turns into one of the perfect Stepford wives.

## 2.5 *The Boys from Brazil*

*The Boys from Brazil* was first published in 1976 and it is the story of Jewish Nazi-hunter based on existing entities. The main character, Yakov Liebermann, was inspired by a figure of Jewish activist Simon Wiesenthal. The reader is able to trace more characters, obviously based on the real persons, like Adolf Hitler or Doctor Josef Mengele, with references to events concerning their lives and mainly the events connected to the Second World War. A genre the novel belongs to is thriller and partially mystery, as it has elements of suspense and tension, which are typical for thriller narrations, but it also deals with a crime, which is being solved in the story.

The story is set into the 1970s. The main character is Yakov Liebermann, who is Jewish so called Nazi-hunter from Austria. One night he receives a call from his friend Barry informing him about a great disaster that is going to happen. He claims that a group led by Doctor Mengele is going to kill ninety-four sixty-five-year-old men. But he does not manage to give him full information about what is going on, because meanwhile he is killed by the Nazi group he has been spying on. Barry was secretly recording their meeting on a tape and found out about their savage plans. Lieberman is confused after receiving this message and does not know how to deal with it, so he just forgets about the whole phone call.

When he finds out Barry was murdered, he starts to suspect it may be a real issue he was talking about and investigates the case. The only facts, his companion manage to transmit him, were, that all of the victims are the same age at the day of the murder and they all are civil servants. He is trying to find the connections between victims, but cannot find any. While giving a lecture on university, he tries to get students involved and ask their opinions on this as a hypothetical situation. One of the students, Klaus van Palmer, understands that this is not just a hypothetical situation and craves to be involved in the case. Lieberman has no other option than to agree.

Lieberman starts to investigate all the deaths of sixty-five-year-old men and visits their widows. The situation is desperate, as there is no potential connection between them. Once he accidentally succeeds to see sons of two of the dead men and he is amazed to find out that they look identical. The boys even have common interests. But when asking further questions about them, their mothers start to be uncomfortable and refuse to talk about the sons. This is the point when the case starts to make sense. As he investigates further, he ascertains that Mengele, who was performing a lot of experiments on Jewish people during the Second World War, is trying to

create a successor of Hitler's. Boys, who were conceived by Brazilian women and adopted by families from Europe and America, have been created very comparable life conditions to the ones Hitler used to have. This should have affected their lives the same way and shape their characters, so the boys can become a future Hitler's substitute and finish what he did not manage to. All of them like some sort of art, nevertheless it was music or painting, and all of their fathers should have died at the age of sixty-five.

Lieberman gets information straight from Mengele, when they meet at home of a man who is supposed to be killed next. Mengele is sure about getting Lieberman from his way and continuing his secret mission, but is shot and later on killed by dogs. The Jewish Nazi-hunter has names of all the families rising up the genetically modified children and is facing a crucial moral decision. To kill the boys, who may once become a future threat or to let them live and hope their genes of Hitler's will never find their way on the surface. After difficult decision making, he flushes papers with the names into the toilet. If he decides to get rid of these boys, his personality would not be any better than Hitler's was.

## 2.6 *Sliver*

Psychological thriller *Sliver* (1991) is based on a very accurate theme by the time it was published and still persistent nowadays, regarding the loss of privacy and intimacy in the world cluttered with new the high technologies. The movie adaptation directed by Phillip Noyce was released in 1993.

The narration takes place in nowadays New York in the tower block high building. People call it *Sliver*, as it is of a similar shape – tall and sharp. The owner, Pete Henderson, rents modern apartments, in which are installed cameras in every room. None of the residents knows about it and whenever a suspicion occurs in minds of subtenants, Pete takes care of putting them out of his way. Kay Norris is moving in and Pete falls in love with her. They start a relationship and the time he does not spend in her company, he dedicates satisfying his voyeur cravings for privacy of others in a room, which is especially made for this purpose and is full of monitors on which he can control all the habitants.

When Kay finds out about his deviation, she is shocked on the first place, but later joins him in his entertainment. Before Kay moved in, there have occurred some accidental deaths, which keep occurring by the time she lives there. They were always considering people Pete had

problem with. Therefore Kay starts to suspect him and discovers video tapes with recordings of Pete murdering. She gets scared and wants to report him to police as soon as possible, but because the phone calls are monitored also, she has to wait so Pete has no suspicion. He manages to discover she have seen the tapes and wants to kill her. Fortunately, when he is about to do the homicide, Kay's neighbor appears and pushes him down the window.

### 3 THEMATIC ANALYSIS

The aim of the following chapter is to depict the themes Levin incorporated in his novels. A *Glossary of Literary Terms* defines theme as a term that “is more usefully applied to a general concept or doctrine, whether implicit or asserted, which an imaginative work is designed to incorporate and make persuasive to the reader.”<sup>14</sup> Simply stated, a theme is a major idea that an author incorporates in his/her writing. There is usually some main issue an author is trying to portray in writing and it may be expressed implicitly or explicitly. Also it is natural that a work may involve more than one theme.

As the endemic problems of contemporary societies were reflected in numerous novels through the last quarter of the twentieth century, this phenomenon of presenting them in writing was also not avoided in Levin’s work. Issues troubling the society the most were for example the epidemic of drug addicts, race related issues, homelessness, sexual abuse or the question of abortion.<sup>15</sup> The lattermost mentioned appears in Levin’s writing multiple times and is accompanied by other subjects like women’s liberal, patriarchy in society or a fear of new technologies. These themes will be the subjects of scrutiny accompanied with a great emphasis on a dystopian theme, which occurs mainly in the novel *This Perfect Day*.

#### 3.1 Abortion and Sexual Freedom

In *Rosemary’s Baby*, the illustration of a dispute of abortion is present, because it is historically situated into the age of criminalization of abortion. Karyn Valerius examines this novel in her paper ““*Rosemary’s Baby*”, Gothic Pregnancy, and Fetal Subjects” (2005) in relation to unwanted pregnancy. She claims that the movie of the same title, directed by Roman Polanski in 1968, which was much more widespread to common audience than the book itself, made a great contribution in a public support for abortion.

The author argues that the character of Rosemary represents women forced to keep the unwanted baby. She does identify herself with the opinion that women are not allowed to have abortion even in the case of the baby being a consequence of a rape or burden for the woman in her current life situation. The novel shows serious negative impacts the unwanted baby could bring

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<sup>14</sup> Meyer Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 8<sup>th</sup> edition (Boston: Thomson, Wadsworth, 2005), 170.

<sup>15</sup> See Gray, *A History of American Literature*, 753.

to women and in what strange position they can find themselves in. Valerius claims that “To attribute Rosemary’s fears and suspicions to psychosis is to refuse a political interpretation of the narrative by failing to recognize any meaningful relation between the narrative and historical reality.”<sup>16</sup>

The issue of abortion is in this context closely connected to a sexual freedom of an individual. Rosemary is raped by the Devil involuntarily. She has no other choice as she is being under effects of drugs. The evil baby, ruining Rosemary’s body and mind, is a stigma of the diabolical act.

The pain settled down to a constant presence, with no respite whatever. She endured it and lived with it, sleeping a few hours a night and taking one aspirin where Dr Sapirstein allowed two.<sup>17</sup>

The awaited pregnancy brings Rosemary solely pain, sleepless nights and worries. These feelings presented are a portrayal of what a raped woman with no chance for abortion may experience.

### 3.2 Feminism

The novel *The Stepford Wives*, which was released in 1972, is considered to be “the iconic popular feminist text of the decade”<sup>18</sup> for the feminist movement of 1970s and three years later was turned into a movie by Brian Forbes. In this particular novel, Levin develops the idea of women being removed control over their own fate completely by turning them into female robots. Such complete loss of self-respect and rights incensed number of women inclining towards feminism and gave them the strength to be heard even louder.

A newcomer of Stepford, Joanna, investigates further why the women’s club was not working and asks the former president of the club, Kit Sundersen: “Were the Women’s Club meeting more boring than housework?”<sup>19</sup> and gets an expected reply. “No, but they weren’t as useful as housework.”<sup>20</sup> The attitude of men, who has the power over the town, towards women

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<sup>16</sup> Karyn Valerius, ““Rosemary’s Baby”, Gothic Pregnancy, and Fetal Subjects,” *College Literature* 32, no. 3 (Summer, 2005), 120.

<sup>17</sup> Ira Levin, *Rosemary’s Baby* (London: Pan Books, 1968), 102.

<sup>18</sup> See Jane Elliott, “Second-Wave Feminism, Domestic Labor, and the Representation of National Time,” *Cultural Critique*, no. 70 (Fall, 2008), 33.

<sup>19</sup> Ira Levin, *The Stepford Wives* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2004), 41.

<sup>20</sup> Levin, *The Stepford Wives*, 41.



is clearly stated. They should stay home and take care of children, cooking and cleaning. They are not here to be involved in any important matters.

Women in the novel *The Stepford Wives* are pictured rather as things than as living creatures with feelings and passions. They are depicted as creatures, which are supposed to be ornaments for decoration and maintaining the households than living as thoughtful individual personalities. Joanna realizes this fact when watching her smiling neighbor putting a t-shirt into the laundry basket.

Like an actress in a commercial. That's what she was, Joanna felt suddenly. That's what they all were, all the Stepford wives' actresses in commercials, pleased with detergents and floor wax, with cleansers, shampoos, and deodorants.<sup>21</sup>

The women in town of Stepford are like unified copies. They all fulfill expected gender roles, like taking care of household or children, and have no autonomy over their lives. Scientific achievements cause a loss of individuality and women's subliminal attitude to life. The role of patriarchic power is represented by the Men's Association, which suppresses women of Stepford by brainwashing and turning them into a *fem-bots* (robotic women). To sum up, the main issue is an inequality of the sexes.

### 3.3 Patriarchy

Patriarchal society is such a community, which is "...male centered and controlled, and is organized and conducted in such a way as to subordinate women to men in all cultural domains: familial, religious, political, economic, social, legal, and artistic"<sup>22</sup> Theme connecting all the novels is a strong notion of patriarchy. There is always some figure of a *greedy man*. The character or characters in this position are mostly displayed as selfish beings satisfying their own personal needs at the expense of females. They tend to put their own welfare and fame on the first place and do not care about the interests of women at all. Such characters try to reach their goals, not considering the rights of their counterparts. This phenomenon occurs in every novel of Levins', therefore I will analogically analyze each one to declare this statement.

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<sup>21</sup> Levin, *The Stepford Wives*, 40.

<sup>22</sup> Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 94.

In *A Kiss Before Dying* Bud Croliss is portrayed as a narcissistic young man who is willing to try all the possible means of killing his girlfriend, because of her pregnancy, which does not suit into his picture of a future. He even starts the relationship with her on the purpose of getting rich, as her father is a very wealthy man. When he does not succeed to kill her by drugs, he pushes her cold-bloodily down from a building.

The patriarchic power relationship in *Rosemary's Baby* is between naïve young Rosemary as the protagonist and an antagonist, presented here by the Satanist coven, including the protagonist's husband Guy. From his position of a supposedly sane man, who is not affected by any maternity changes like she is, he and Doctor Sapirstein assert their paternity views and convince Rosemary of her silliness and psychotic moods to be connected to the pregnancy. Guy uses Rosemary as a mean to get to his dream carrier as an actor, as he bestows her body to the satanic coven.

In *This Perfect Day* the patriarchal dominion is not presented so perceptibly. There is no exact figure of a greedy man, but it can be understood that the main constraint is reflected through the Unicom, which has control over the whole population that is obliged to be obedient and follow the rules. The main protagonists of the Family are four male politicians, who symbolize the unity and intelligence of the global community. They are Christ, Marx, Wood and Wei. They are celebrated and highlighted in various public speeches and songs.

“Christ, Marx, Wood, and Wei  
Led us to this perfect day.  
Marx, Wood, Wei, and Christ;  
All but Wei were sacrificed,  
Wood, Wei, Christ, and Marx.  
Gave us lovely schools and parks.  
Wei, Christ, Marx, and Wood.  
Made us humble, made us good.”<sup>23</sup>

As it is visible, the power is distributed by leading men. Their superiority and uniqueness is noticeable in their names, which do not follow the pattern of classical naming within the Family, which is four names for boys and girls. Chip, the main character, is here presented also like a powerful male figure, who can take what he wants. As for example when he violently kidnaps

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<sup>23</sup> Ira Levin, *This Perfect Day* (New York: Random House, 1970), 5.

Lilac, who has no other option than to undergo his pressure and leave the Family, and later on satisfies his sexual lust on her defenseless reluctant body.

The town of Stepford, in the novel *The Stepford Wives*, is a stereotypical patriarchal society. Women are excluded from the society completely by the fact that there are actually no real women, as they are replaced by fem-bots. The few living newcomers do not have much time before their minds are reprogrammed and their bodies exchanged for perfectly shaped imitations. The Men Association plays genuinely important role in Stepford and is seen as an instrument to suspend a feminist progress and concurrently substituting their vision of a male ruled future. Males of Stepford consciously brainwash their wives and turn them into fem-bots to fit their expectations from family live. Such a relationship means to them obedience, readjustment and constant service provided. Individual thinking is not welcomed.

The novel *The Boys from Brazil* shows the pitiless figure of Mengele creating a new successor of Hitler's, who would continue with the work of destruction that Hitler started. He believes this may be the only sufficient and strong leader, who can bring the Aryan board back to life. In this case, there is not exactly patriarchal power in a sense of men being superior to women. Nevertheless there is the figure of earlier mentioned *greedy man* embodied by Doctor Mengele, who controls his malevolent plan to wipe out the *inferior* races through genetically mutated Hitler's successors.

In *Sliver*, Pete, the owner of the building, has control over all the business happening around in the apartments. His power is not noticeable on the first instance, but as his girlfriend and also subtenant Kay learns later on, he is invisible master of the occupants and his options are endless. Via cameras he watches over every single resident of the apartments he rents. Kay finds out about the murders he had committed, but is caught almost simultaneously by Pete. Then she understands, there is no chance of deliverance and the multiple murderer has absolute control over her fate.

### 3.4 Abuse of Modern Technologies

As Ira Levin was raised in the twentieth century, during the era of fast arousal of new technologies and approaches to the life itself, he reflected his fears from the coming technological epoch in his works. From most of his novels emanates a great respect he had towards science and

innovations, which are for the world presented more as a potential threat than a positive step forward.

The main theme of the novel *Sliver* is living in a virtually controlled world. A fear of being watched and an arousal of a new phenomenon of voyeurism are represented in the narration. These phenomena are closely connected to the coming out of new technologies allowing people to watch others and control their lives. With alike properties, human beings became more powerful and can control each other. Levin sends a message about a thread of increasing obsession. Pete, the main character, is not able to control his addiction to watch another people's private life anymore. He is living in unreal world surrounded by lives of others. When Kay, his girlfriend, finds out about his obsession, she persuades him to cut off this addiction. Pete shows her the cameras few times and afterwards she is slowly growing addiction in herself as well. Such a usage of technology is seen as an abuse of its power, as the primary use should not be to spy on others' privacy and invade it.

The fears of coming of modern technologies are apparent also in other works like *The Boys from Brazil*. Here are displayed the possible threats of genetic modifications, cloning or other non-natural interventions to a human body. Doctor Mengele's vision is to take control over the world and finish the racial sorting that Hitler has started. He plans to fulfill this by genetic manipulations using Hitler's clones. This attitude corresponds with the creation of female robots in *The Stepford Wives*, where women are substituted by narrow imitations of themselves. The perfect *fem-bots* are able to replace and make even better copy of the prime wives of Stepford.

Another technological thread is portrayed in *This Perfect Day*, where the whole global community is suppressed under the control of the central computer. People are being brainwashed and maintained in a constant state of drug stupor.

### 3.5 The Concept of Dystopia in Levin's Novels

Through the work of Ira Levin, we can follow a recognizable pattern of trying to create a new kind of society, which ends up being as a dystopian picture. To understand the term *dystopia*, it is necessary to explain first the concept it has been derived from. Thomas Moore's *Utopia* (1516) is the cornerstone of all the following literary tendencies. This was originally neologism and after changing the meaning many times, it finally entered the dictionaries as a specific definition. According to *A Glossary of Literary Terms* by M. H. Abrams utopia designates "the class of

fictional writings that represent an ideal, nonexistent political and social way of life.”<sup>24</sup> The term utopia is being used for creating new subgenres like “eutopia,” “dystopia,” “anti-utopia,” “ecotopia,” “euchronia” and a lot of others. This process is still developing and there is no point we can say this creation is over, as literature itself is continuously developing, but the connection between all of these expressions is the effort of creating an alternatively organized society. For our sake it is enough to introduce another two offshoots, which are dystopia and anti-utopia.

The chief difference between utopia and dystopia is that the utopian view is supposed to be positive. The intention and efforts are heading towards a positive conclusion for the particular depicted societies, when on the other hand the dystopian communities are more doomed to suffer (many times unconsciously) under the domination of evil high power.

The first usage of term dystopia is ascribed to John Stuart Mill and is dated back to 1868. He used it in his speech as he was stated a contrary perspective to utopia.<sup>25</sup> Dystopia refers to unreal places which are worse than the real ones and show reader the possibility of circumstances taking different turns. The writers want recipients of their message to understand that it is our moral and social responsibility whether the future takes a wrong or right direction. In such a world, as the dystopian is, the negative political and social evolution is superior. This literature is meant to frighten the readers, but should leave a room for hope. The term “anti-utopia” is frequently used interchangeably with expressions “dystopia” and “negative utopia.” As contrast to these terms we can see “utopia” or “eutopia,” which is described as a place meant to be good.

### 3.5.1 *This Perfect Day*

In the text below I would like to describe the specific features of a dystopian narration and present them on examples from the novel *This Perfect Day*. I will scrutinize the crucial features which are fundamental in the discourse.

The majority of dystopian literature criticizes the author’s existing society and expresses the need for change.<sup>26</sup> As I was mentioning before the encounter of a fear of a technological and scientific progress and possible threats, such motifs are also presented in *This Perfect Day*. A

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<sup>24</sup> Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 337.

<sup>25</sup> See Fátima Vieira, “The Concept of Utopia” in *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*, Gregory Claeys (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2010), 3-27.

<sup>26</sup> See Vieira, *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*, 141.

mindset of society in discourse is set on the necessity of drug intake in order not to get sick. But the possibility of sickness is only a figment implanted to their heads through the central leading system, which integrated into society through generations. If anybody refuses treatments, her/she is seen as already sick person who needs even higher dosage of a drug. When Chip, the main character, does not get his regular treatment, he gets immediately anxious: "I'm sick, he thought. I'll get all the diseases; cancer, smallpox, cholera, everything. Hair will grow on my face!"<sup>27</sup> The regime operates with fears of the citizens going physically and mentally ill, getting lethal diseases and being excluded from the Family if refusing treatments. In such an example we can observe the overall manipulation and brainwashing.

The ostensibly sick members of the Family are represented by "incurables." They have mostly left to different places, where the Family has no control, to distant islands or just disappeared. These former members are not able to come back to the society and the society would never even accept them again. The former members are considered sick and contagious, because they do not get any treatments, as small children explain in following dialogue.

"Where do they live?" another girl asked. "On mountaintops," the boy said. "In deep caves. In all kinds of places where we can't find them." The first girl said, "They must be sick." "Of course they are," the boy said, laughing. "That's what 'incurable' means, sick. That's why they're called incurables, because they're very, very sick."<sup>28</sup>

Violating restrictions and behaving against the set system is seen as a sick manner and people generally try to avoid this topic in their conversations as well as talking about violence or fighting, which is seen as a sick behavior. When little Chip asks his mother about the "incurables," quizzing if the story about them is really true, she gets anxious and replays: "No, it isn't. No. I'm going to call Bob. He'll explain it to you."<sup>29</sup> Complete obedience from the inhabitants of dystopian worlds, which is sporadically challenged by a rebellious individual, is another common theme of such a literature. In order sustain a social control, the system usually rely upon technological and scientific inventions.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Levin, *This Perfect Day*, 160.

<sup>28</sup> Levin, *This Perfect Day*, 12.

<sup>29</sup> Levin, *This Perfect Day*, 14.

<sup>30</sup> See Gregory Claeys, "The origins of dystopia: Wells, Huxley and Orwell" in *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*, Gregory Claeys (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2010), 107-131.

A manipulation through language, where it serves as a powerful ideological tool, is in the discourse demonstrated in the prohibition or rather moral aversion against using words connected to violence and aggression. Word like “fight” is familiar to members, but they never use it, because such a behavior is not common, moreover it is prohibited. Nobody has a need to act violently because of the tranquilizers members get in their treatments. On the other hand, vocabulary connected with copulation and sex in general are widely used by people of all ages in every day conversations. For example in a dialogue of Chip and a member called Mary, she uses explicit word for a sexual intercourse with no embarrassment, as it is seen natural to refer to it so explicitly. “The girl you fucked last night, Anna.”<sup>31</sup>

Another feature of dystopian novels is the suppression of one’s individuality, which is mostly created via eugenic engineering of person’s behavior, frequently done by some kind of biological or drug manipulation.<sup>32</sup> In this particular narration we can trace the beginning of this oppression in form of the inhabitants being called members, brothers or sisters. They do not appear as people or human beings, but as members of the system. To this phenomenon contributes the fact of having solely eight names for both genders, which are afterwards completed with a special number. Unification is uppermost and celebrated, for instance in this poem familiar to every member:

One mighty Family,  
A single perfect breed,  
Free of all selfishness,  
Aggressiveness and greed;  
Each member giving all he has to give  
And getting all he needs to live!  
One mighty Family  
A single noble race,  
Sending its sons and daughters  
Bravely into space.<sup>33</sup>

Also the appearance of the members is unified by the drug intake. Men do not grow a facial hair and women do not develop breasts. Female body is more of a masculine type. Members are

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<sup>31</sup> Levin, *This Perfect Day*, 41.

<sup>32</sup> Claeys, “The origins of dystopia: Wells, Huxley and Orwell” in *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*, 107-131.

<sup>33</sup> Levin, *This Perfect Day*, 97.

meant to be unisex and unified in their appearance. Therefore, when Chip interrupts his treatment, he is facing a problem of his facial hair growing. Because such a phenomenon is unique and nobody is officially able to experience it, there does not exist any equipment which one can use to get rid of the hairs. Chip creates a provisional razor by himself and gets rid of his facial hair in order not to create suspicion. Later on Chip joins a community, which is not under the treatments. The women in this group have breasts and their shape is more of a female like, which attracts all men in the group, as they have never seen any physical characteristics like that on any other female counterparts.

Members do not decide about their fate, as it is chosen for them by the Unicom. Everybody gets classified for a job, education and even hobbies. The real genetic family is pushed behind and as long as a member is able to work, he/she moves away from a family to a place determined by the Unicom. The reproduction is controlled and women get contraception along with their regular dosages of drugs. Only the computer along with an advisor can decide whether members are ready to start a family on their own. In such portrayals the weakening of traditional family ties is quite significant. The relationships between relatives are here replaced by the whole nation as one big Family. Parents give up on their role of the closest people and they serve just as a mean to raise the children and bring them to adulthood.

The only person in Chip's family, who is trying to keep a close relationship to him, is his grandfather Jan. He had a strong disagreement with the Family and the whole set system of unity. He ironically explains Chip about life within the Family and tries to make him realize that what is happening to society is wrong. "Look at them! ... Exactly the same! Isn't it marvelous? Hair the same, eyes the same, skin the same, shape the same; boys, girls, all the same. Like peas in a pod. Isn't it fine? Isn't it top speed?"<sup>34</sup>

When discussing the intimate or emotional relationships, the dystopian approach is always quite unique and distant. In this particular novel the Family has also quite a non emotional approach to life and people, which is reflected in the intimate relationships between inhabitants. They change the partners freely and sex is for them something to keep them healthy and enjoy a pleasurable moment once a week, as the day for having sex is scheduled for every Saturday. The

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<sup>34</sup> Levin, *This Perfect Day*, 20.



act itself is no emotional performance. If person is too emotional or reflects any signs of unusual happiness or any other feelings, the suspicion of being sick occurs, so he/she undergoes treatment to solve such problems. People are so manipulated, that if they experience any unusual feelings, the only solution for them is to call the advisor and ask for more treatments. The real reason for their unwillingness to express their sexual pleasure is the tranquilizers they are give that minimizes their sex-drive and sexual appetite.

The restriction of free movement, like traveling or just a plain a leaving house, is monitored by omnipresent scanners. Members use their bracelets to check by the scanning machines and by this approve their presence at workplace or anywhere else. People scan when entering buildings, rooms or when taking food or getting goods they desire. There is no currency in the world, so money is not involved in anything. Whatever the members need or want, they can get, if their working performance and the life in general is good enough. The Unicom then decides, whether they deserve the object of their desire or not, and if obtaining of the commodities is healthy for them or not. The same system applies to traveling, when one has to ask first for permission and the computer decides whether the journey can be realized or not.

For instance Chip has a roommate Karl, who is also kind of a deviant and helps to shape Chip's opinion about the community as Papa Jan did. Karl likes to draw, but this may be seen as an undesirable behavior in the manner he performs it. His paintings involve animals or human, but these are not perfect. And such paintings, which are not precisely the same as the reality is, are considered being failure and unnecessary. But Karl does not mind. He just enjoys his habit, which later on turns into addiction.

Because Karl draws too much, he is forbidden to be given more paper and charcoals as he needs according to the Unicom, so Chip agrees he will bring some on his account. On each picture Karl draws an A in a circle. The reader may perceive this as an obvious hint in connection with rebellious anarchists' movement, as Karl was kind of a silent anarchist of the global community also. Anyhow he gives the explanation for it in a dialogue with Chip. "It stands for Ashi... That's what my sister calls me."<sup>35</sup> Chip finds it a pity that Karl was not classified to be an artist: "It's a shame you weren't classified an artist." "I wasn't, though, so I only draw on Sundays

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<sup>35</sup> Levin, *This Perfect Day*, 48.

and holidays and during the free hour. I never let it interfere with my work or whatever else I'm supposed to be doing."<sup>36</sup>

Karl is one of the individuals that secretly rioted against the regime. His revolt involves his drawings. He starts to draw members without bracelets, women with breasts or even people performing violent acts. Such a discovery scares Chip so extensively he reports him to his advisor and Karl disappears from his life. But he realizes his act was not correct and since then the feel of guilt grows inside him. This is one of the deeds shaping the main character's personality and forms a personal opinion about the regime. That is the moment of familiarizing with the incorrectness of a way of life of the Family. Chip is aware that the Family would consider his thinking wrong and would give him more treatments, so he remains silent.

He was outwardly a normal and contented member of the Family. He did his work well, took part in house athletic and recreational programs, had weekly sexual activity, made monthly phone calls and bi-yearly visit to his parents, was in place and on time for TV treatments and adviser meeting. He had no discomfort to report, either physical or mental. Inwardly, however, he was far from normal.<sup>37</sup>

Chip felt guilt, which was considered quite atypical. But his action would be considered as the only right thing to do. He helped a sick member to put himself together.

### 3.5.2 *The Stepford Wives*

*This Perfect Day* may be considered as Levin's major dystopian work, as it is precisely formed on the rules of this genre, but we can follow his inclination toward this specific theme also in other novels, such as *The Stepford Wives*. This particular novel does not display a whole nation being under the control of totalitarian regime, but rather a new society being established by males in just one town called Stepford. In that town, ridiculous masculine dream is coming true. The male community is creating fem-bots from their wives, so they look perfect, clean, fulfill men's desires and do not bother the opposite sex at all.

A feature of dystopian genre we can observe is for example the biological manipulation, through which males of the Stepford want to achieve what they consider perfect community. Such a society should consist of obedient women and they manage to succeed in this goal of theirs.

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<sup>36</sup> Levin, *This Perfect Day*, 48.

<sup>37</sup> Levin, *This Perfect Day*, 59.

When a newcomer Joanna is trying to get in touch with other female inhabitants of Stepford, she always gets negative response from women of Stepford, like: “Thanks, I’d like to, but I have to wax the family-room floor,”<sup>38</sup> or other refusals considering the work around the households and serving their men.

The women of Stepford are actually robots created to give their husbands pleasure and to take care of the house being clean and the food being prepared. Joanna does not understand their behavior and tries to find out the reason for it, asking her neighbor: “Are you happy now. Tell me the truth. Do you feel you’re living a full life?” “Yes, I’m happy. I feel I’m living a very full life. Herb’s work is important, and he couldn’t do it nearly as well if not for me.”<sup>39</sup> This strange anti-utopian society does not seem to change to any worse or better. Joanna is trying to investigate the case of the strange women’s behavior, but in the end she ends up as one of the non-living creatures as her female neighbors are; a Stepford wife.

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<sup>38</sup> Levin, *The Stepford Wives*, 8.

<sup>39</sup> Levin, *The Stepford Wives*, 41.

## 4 SUMMARY

From the analysis of the main themes Levin was dealing with, appearing repeatedly in different mutations in the novels, it is apparent that they are of a current nature. This declares the fact that the mostly displayed issues reflected ongoing events in the USA. Such themes, which I have discovered and analyzed on the previous pages, are for instance the question of a birth control, the feminist movement, which was a hot topic of the second half of the twentieth century, or the closely related question of patriarchal supremacy. Another enduring theme that was incorporated in his novels is a possible technological and scientific threat to the society, like genetic mutations or robotics.

Levin offered via his novels a metaphorical mirror to readers of the second half of the twentieth century, but this mirror persists to be current even nowadays, after almost half of the century. To enforce his messages, he used a thrilling atmosphere, suspense and horror features, which is declared by the kinds of genres he had chosen. These were mostly connected with genre of mystery or were in a close connection to it. He mostly operates with fears, which he is enforcing in both readers and the main characters.

Despite the fact that the novel *The Stepford Wives* was first published more than 40 years ago, the theme depicted seems to be increasingly accurate. As it was mentioned previously, the dystopian literature frequently deals with the author's existing society and presents the necessity of change. We can approach this particular novel from two points of view. There is a critique of so called Stepford wives, who may, in this case, present the perfect housewives of American households. It criticizes a pressure put on women to be perfect and have strength to take care of a household, husband and kids, and to fulfill all these tasks with grace, be positive and good looking. A woman, which is able to succeed in such a task, is here presented by a fem-bot, who is an ideal from a man's point of view, but in reality it is only a body without real feelings and emotions. The message in this narration is targeted on men, who are putting too much pressure on their wives in order to be "perfect". We can also approach it from the point of view of science, where a threat of possible substitutability by machines is portrayed.

I see this theme rather accurate nowadays, because the visionary pictures of the twentieth century are slowly gaining clearer shapes and our existences are controlled by technology. Without the technological features in our life, the society would be out of control and a chaos

would arise. Or would the life as we know it be possible without the electricity, computers, planes, electronic devices and other technological treats?

In *The Stepford Wives* Levin shows, how even people can be replaced using a modern technology. This substitution is driven by an ideology of the minority of males in Stepford, which is fulfilled on expenses of women. It suggests possible dangerous when technology is treated not accordingly and how it can turn into a malevolent ideological tool. Therefore this novel did not lose its value, but rather obtained even more importance.

How science can serve ideological purposes is also the main theme of *This Perfect Day* or *The Boys from Brazil*. In the lattermost, the ideology behind genetic cloning is to develop a future Hitler's successor, who would continue in extermination of Jews and fulfill the idea of the pure Arian race. On the other hand, in *This Perfect Day* the ideology is to create a satisfied nation and generate people, who are unisex, perfect, have no problems or diseases and are happy under any circumstances. However may this seem as a positive idea, what is good and sufficient for one does not have to be enough for another. The society portrayed in the novel is brainwashed and drug addicted, and these are the means through which the central computer Unicom suppresses the inhabitants.

In the twenty-first century we are surrounded by numerous technological devices and we cannot imagine our lives without them. Most people do not take into consideration that such technical instruments, which are primarily meant to make lives easier, can turn into an object of the biggest thread. Such as the Unicom and drugs in *This Perfect Day*, cameras in *Sliver* or genetic modification in *The Boys from Brazil*.

*Rosemary's Baby*, on the other hand, deals with the issue of cults and sects, and the danger it may carry along, which is described on young innocent Rosemary being overpowered by witch coven. The ideology of conceiving the Devil which later on takes control over the world is illustrated in this particular novel. Also the theme of a male and female equality, which appears multiple times through the novels, plays a significant role.

Because of an enduring value of the themes mentioned above, the novels of Ira Levin will never, or probably not in a near future, be out of date. Readers can still relate to the issues pictured in the novels and learn a lesson to avoid such a behavior in their own lives. According to my analysis I can conclude that the themes Levin was concentrating on are contemporary and

sustain to be accurate even further. Therefore I claim his writing to be visionary. To what extent would his ideas be implemented can show just the future.

## CONCLUSION

The main purpose of this bachelor thesis was to categorize novels of Ira Levin, discover the themes presented and establish their enduring value.

To begin with, I made a brief summary of the novels Ira Levin produced and continued with the thematic analysis. The most frequent and crucial themes, which I discovered in Levin's novels, were the issue of abortion and sexual freedom, feminism, patriarchal supremacy, abuse and fear of modern technologies and dystopian features in his work. To support his themes, he used fictional narrations mostly with features of mystery genre.

I see the possible technological threats and fear of its abuse as the crucial theme involved in his novels, as it is repeatedly used in many different forms. Via frequent usage of horror and mystery features, Levin creates a feeling of terror in readers and gives more emphasis on the threats he is suspecting. The targets of his themes were mostly current issues, which still persist as never ending disputes in our society. An example of such an issue is for instance a birth control problem, which arose in the second half of the twentieth century and is still frequently discussed topic, or patriarchal supremacy, which is claimed by feminists to be dominant in nowadays society. The possible horrific scenarios of the future world, which he presented mainly in *This Perfect Day*, are a great mean to make readers stop for a while and think about their own life and to which extent do they surrender to the political system. The novels may improve their awareness and social responsibility to the community as a whole. Because such issues are enduring and constantly discussed, the benefits of his writing are hard to deny.

In the end of my thesis, I summarized my findings and stated the opinion towards Levin's work. According to this, I can conclude that the themes, on which was Levin concentrating, are contemporary and sustain to be accurate even further. Considering his visionary views on the society's development, it is possible that his novels will be rediscovered in a near future and will appear in the scope of interest again.

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