

# The analysis of Postmodern aspects in John Irving *The World According to Garp*:

## A Study

**Manivannan R**, Assistant Professor, Department of English, Panimalar Engineering College, Chennai.

John Irving is a well-known author, novelist and filmmaker born in Exeter, New Hampshire on March 2, 1942. First as an athlete and then as a coach, Irving was a part of the Exeter wrestling program. It made him disciplined and determined, according to Irving. In many of his works, his wrestling interest is also prominent. In the National Wrestling Hall of Fame, Irving was 'An Outstanding American' (1992). He studied at Pittsburgh University for a year after moving to Austria where he registered at Vienna University. He traveled throughout Europe and gained experiences that his novels later revealed. He moved to America and became a graduate in 1965 at New Hampshire University. In the early sixties, Irving researched at the workshop of Writers at the University of Iowa and obtained an MFA from the Creative Writers program. Irving's first written job was a novel that was released in 1968 when he was 26 years old called 'Setting Free the Bears.' The second and third novels by Irving have also been 'The Water-Method Man' and 'The 158 Pound Marriage.' *The World According to Garp* (1978) was released as Dutton's first novel and immediately became a success and ranked as a cultural sensation becoming a best-seller. John Irving, now a very successful name in the globe of literature, introduced his next novel, 'The New Hampshire Hotel.' This had mixed reviews but was adjusted rapidly into a movie.

The story was mostly set in New England in 1942. The primary protagonist, an exceptional Jenny Fields girl, is a nurse from a wealthy family who refuses all the possibilities the time could offer her-college education, a boyfriend, and people in particular. She does not consider herself a feminist; however, her personality reflects some of the feminist concepts such as "individual liberty and women's right over their own bodies." (Larsson, p. 15) As a nurse, Jenny looks after troops who have been wounded by the war, most of the time deadly. Although Jenny does not feel the least need for any kind of sexual or other connection with man, at one stage she actually starts to feel the maternal need, and for that purpose she conceives with a deadly injured soldier, Technical Sergeant Garp, and hence her son, T.S. Garp has been born. The way she conceives the child is morally questionable as the soldier is at the stage of a tiny baby mentally. Jenny thinks, however, that she gives Garp a happy life-end and there is nothing wrong with the manner it occurred in her eyes. Jenny is a single mother residing in a hospital apartment with her son, and in all those years she encounters a number of unpleasant confrontations with others who tend to criticize her and create presumptions because she has no dad for her son. Fortunately, Jenny has a very powerful view about it and has no issues explaining it to others. She is therefore regarded as a social outsider and sexually suspected, moreover. She later writes an autobiographical book *A Sexual Suspect* based on her life experience that achieves excellent success. Jenny appears to be the spokesman of the women's movement based on this book and thus creates a center for women who are exploited and abused. T.S. Garp graduates and marries professor Helen Duncan from the University, with whom he also has kids. An interesting fact about having children in Garp and Helen is that Garp is the one who stays on maternity leave and cares for the children full-time, which was not an ordinary case at the time. Within their marriage, there are several sexual matters and one of them turns into a tragedy. It is the affair of Helen with her student that causes a car accident in front of their house and kills one of their children while her other brother and the student both suffer continuous injury. To recover, the family moves to Jenny's women's core that has suffered some sort of men's oppression in the past and wants to isolate itself from men. She does not consider herself a feminist; however, her personality reflects some of the feminist concepts such as "individual liberty and women's right over their own bodies." (Larsson, p. 15) As a nurse, Jenny looks after troops who have been wounded by the war, most of the time deadly. Garp also writes Bensenhaver's controversial book *The World*, which is heavily affected by the setting in which Garp writes the novel, and deals primarily with Ellen Jamesians' rape and open criticism.

Jenny is murdered by a man who hates females during a government feminist conference, and Garp is murdered by Bainbridge Percy, Cushie Percy's sister, who is Garp's first lover and a friend of adolescence. As Garp suggests, Bainbridge Percy has always been a little strange. She is twenty when she chooses to enter the radical group of Ellen Jamesians and cut her tongue. She loves Garp, like all Ellen Jamesians, for the criticism he is making against this group, and that's why she chooses to kill him. She goes to the gym where Garp wrests and shoots him twice, which Garp doesn't survive. At the moment, Garp is thirty three just like Helen, their daughter Jenny is three, and Duncan is thirteen.

Helen has been living on her own for many years until she dies in her sleep owing to disease. Duncan also lives a lengthy life, but because of his sense of humor he dies ironically. He dies laughing at his joke for a fresh transsexual at a party coming-out. With a weapon, Roberta Muldoon is killing herself. Of all the protagonists, Jenny Garp is the one who lives the longest. She becomes a physician, is married once and is remarried in time. She spends several years working intimately with the Connecticut Tumor Registry to investigate cancer. She intends to "go to the cancer's bottom." She'd, in a sense. It'd kill her. "(Irving, p. 608)

"A doctor who sees only terminal cases." In the world according to her father, Jenny Garp knew we must have energy. Her famous grandmother, Jenny Fields, once thought of us as Externals, Vital Organs, Absentees, and Goners. But in *The World According to Garp*, we are all terminal cases. (Irving, p. 609)

Every protagonist dies in a manner he or she deserves, as Irving seems to punish his characters for what they're doing in their life. In addition, their deaths are ridiculous or tragicomic in a manner that makes the end as extreme as the entire tale is.

Some of the American fiction novels had made a noticeable difference in the 1960s. There was no formal consensus among authors on how to name this stage, only the critics were coining it with the title of "postmodernism" in an effort to discuss this fiction straightforwardly. In this portion of the job, in connection with the novel *The World According to Garp*, an effort is being made to identify prevalent postmodern characteristics. First of all, Albert J. La Valley suggests the "new literature" shows a "fresh awareness" that was "influenced by the breakdown of our culture, its traditions, and its justifications of the American social structure." (Wilson, p . 74) Postmodern literature was appointed as a "literature of fatigue" by John Barth, who literally categorized it as a "literature of exhausted opportunities" and said he meant nothing associated to physical, moral or intellectual tiredness because of the real "fatigue." (Wilson, p.74) What he meant in this style was to exploit certain opportunities. What Barth also claimed was that the authors of the time came to despair as they realized that possibilities in the form of fiction could be limited as a number of possibilities had already been explored. The desperation they feared in Barth's opinion, however, effectively prompted new, fresh job with initial and notable concepts. Barth holds that it has become an "creative victory." "Intellectual dead end" confronts the achievement of "a new human job." Postmodern literature includes eccentric features, black humor in comparison with realism by "evoking echoes of unreal emotions from the pastures of our persona, feelings that we can experience today only in dreams or moments of great terror stress, perhaps when our" ordinary "functioning breaks down." The bizarre derives from the "emotional strength" and is based on realism principles that aim to penetrate the characters deeply. (Wilson, p. 75)

*The World According to Garp* is an illustration of previous postmodern texts in which John Irving performs with mid-century American manners comedy's modernist types. The novel's start includes powerful aspects of modernism while the last third is a pure postmodern novel complete of black humor and strange violence. An example of postmodern black humor and bizarre violence is the radical feminist group of Ellen Jamesians who are physically hurting themselves when they cut their tongues to express their support for the little girl who is raped and had her tongue removed so that she couldn't talk about it. Irving ridicules radical feminism and points out the strange thing that females can do because of the oppression of men. The accident that occurs because of Helen's affair is another instance of black humor in the novel. First of all, it occurs because of Helen who is quietly suffering from Garp's affairs all those years, and it ends up in tragedy when she begins an affair. Second, the scenario the accident is going through is strange. Garp come home with kids, play their favourite game

of turning off the headlights and driving on the steering wheel with no hands, just letting the vehicle go down the mountain to the house. At that moment, Helen gives her student the last fellatio because without that he doesn't want to leave her. The tragedy comes when Garp's vehicle hits their vehicle, and Walter's son is dead, another son loses his eye, Garp and Helen are wounded, and the student is partially penectomized. It seems that Irving intends to punish his characters for everything they have done and utilizes strange characteristics to keep their destiny ironic.

Sexuality, sexual outsiders and sexual violence are another postmodern characteristic typical of *The World According to Garp*. Jenny Fields is a significant instance of an outsider in sex. It is not evident why she is totally opposed to sexual intercourse and sees sexual needs merely as a lust. She wants to be independent and not supported by anyone but herself, which also includes any kind of sexual intercourse she just doesn't need or want. The only sexual intercourse she experiences is conceiving her baby, which is accomplished in an absurd manner. Sexual assaults are also a vast component of the novel, for example when Garp discovers a raped girl in the park while jogging, or when little Ellen James is assaulted by a group of males who have removed her tongue, or the females of the Ellen Jamesians group who have experienced brutal episodes in their life with boys. Sex as such is a major theme in the novel. Irving retains people's sexual diversity and how it can effectively impact the life of people. Jenny who is resistant to sexuality, or Garp who, on the other side, is fascinated by sexuality and is absorbed by it. Roberta Muldoon finds her sexuality in a distinct body, so even though she was born a guy, she transfers herself into the body of a woman. Gender issues are one of the elements of postmodern literature that is widely used by Irving.

Another typical feature of the post-modern wave is self-consciousness that we can see in Jenny Fields and Helen Holm's character in *The World According to Garp*, both self-conscious and seeking to achieve their goals. The novels are sometimes concerned with looking for the person's understanding, figuring the intent of one's being in the same world, for example, which is more of a problem for the group of Ellen Jamesians, who are clearly searching for their own identity. The deep circumstances of life and death are important examples of postmodern extreme subjects in the novel. It is linked with Garp's neurotic anxiety about the safety of his children and his excellent desire for a safe place for the globe. Garp thinks that you must be constantly alert because with every move you take, there is a danger of imminent disaster. The risks faced by Garp, however, are generally "home grown." The car accident that occurs and kills one of his children and permanently wounds the other corresponds to Garp's biggest fears. In addition, the accident is triggered by Garp being angry at the student's affair with his wife himself. Irving defines this tragic accident using grotesque impacts as one of the deaths of Garp's son and the other severely wounded, and after effect with Garp's vehicle, Helen's lover suffers from a partial penectomy in the vehicle. Helen's compassion for her rejected student lover, who needs the last fellatio before he leaves for good, is the cause of this accident, and Garp's habit loved by the kids to leave the coasting of the vehicle with the lights off on his driveway. As Willbern argues, Irving's intention seems to have been to punish all marriage betrayal participants, setting up the context and current events in detail so that the reader can be horrified by the massacre while admiring the composition method of the writer. (Willbern, p. 82) Willbern also says:

It is perhaps a question of control. Characters in *Garp* are vulnerable to all manner of bizarre events. Accidents, assaults, injuries, and illnesses and strike at any time in this hap-hazard world. Yet the unpredictable events are carefully arranged and composed by the author, and neutrally recounted by the omniscient narrator, so that they seem inevitable results of prior occurrences, or necessary consequences. (Willbern, p. 82)

Overall, the novel includes a number of postmodern characteristics such as sex problems, emotions of guilt, emotions of fear, marital identity, sexual sins, and punishment, making the novel unique, bizarre, and convincing.

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