

'Honest message' of Garp is obscured in lengthy style

By Scott Kleager

Appropriately, I begin with an industrious, but unfortunate attempt at analyzing *The World According to Garp* by John Irving. I say "appropriately" because the book was a harrowing experience. The cause of my uneasiness is the honesty and straight-forwardness of its message. In fact, there were times when I was embarrassed at the way the main male character, T.S. Garp, reacted to various occurrences in his life concerning the women's movement.

book review

I would frown and recall when I had reacted just as badly as Garp in a similar situation. Any novel that makes me see the obnoxious nature of my mistakes is a novel with a good message. And this novel is one of them.

I say "unfortunate" because the novel is hopelessly complex. It's not so much that it was hard to understand, but rather that it was frustratingly real; complex as one's life is complex.

Also, the work has too much sex and violence in it for my liking. What is it with modern writers that induces them to include so much of this in their works? Although it's prevalent today, sex comes across on paper as crude and I see no reason why an author should become somewhat tasteless, as Irving does here, just to sell books. Alluding to sex is much more appealing. Also, blood is blood (no matter how you color it) and in this book red covers the pages at times, clouding everything else. I see no point in making the reader sick.

The main character is T.S. Garp, an

anxious writer, naturally paranoid. His wife, Helen, is warm, understanding and paranoid; Roberta Muldoon, a transsexual, a former pro football player, affectionate and paranoid; and Jenny Fields, Garp's mother who is a strongly determined woman, kind and *not* paranoid.

All of the main characters, with the exception of Jenny, live their lives in different forms of sadness and fear. But true to the consistency of the book, and true to life (maybe), is the fact that there is not too much in the way of good tidings. One gets a feeling of completeness, even if it's a doleful completeness, after finishing.

Garp is the focal point for several important themes that run through the work. Throughout the book, for example, he has trouble getting to the typewriter and although he becomes published during his life the urge just doesn't come often enough. It seems that he can only write if emotionally shaken in one way or another. His first published work, a short story, is written solely for the purpose of proving, to a then-young Helen, his worth as a writer. It works and they marry. Garp writes and publishes three more novels, all inspired by terrible experiences in his life.

Consequently, as the occurrences in his life become worse, his writing becomes sporadic, cynical and violently perverse. So much so, in fact, that he won't allow his sons to read anything he's written except his first short story.

HERE, I THINK, the author attempts to point out the importance of work to the psychology of any individual. Garp allows his loves and friendships to become the only thing of importance and his writing, rather than being remedial, only reflects his pain. I get the feeling that his shattered expectations in turn shattered his ability to write.

Garp never really understands his

mother's affection and participation in the women's movement. He never fathoms the people that hang around his mother. Garp sees women who cut out their tongues to express the liberation; he observes droves of transsexuals, bisexuals, homosexuals and lesbians.

"The world is crazy!" he observes. This, of course, is what one may call a "typical male reaction" and all through the work Irving portrays him as a chauvinistic boob, and in doing so, constantly puts a mirror in the fact of a male reader. But as matters will have it transsexual Roberta Muldoon, former tight end for the Philadelphia Eagles, befriends Garp thus saving him from a totally miserable life. And it's this fact that justifies reading the novel.

The World According to Garp was a difficult novel to get through; a very funny novel, and a very complex novel thematically. The style, though, is disappointing and unimaginative. There aren't very many images in it and it seems, at times, like a journal.

Compounding matters is its length, some six hundred pages, but if one can

bore through it then I think the book would be worth the reading.

What's really sad is the fact that most males will put it down at the first mention of "women's lib" and they are the ones who need to read it the most.

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It's October and the leaves are turning brown. It is a season of change — the clear, cold death of winter shines ahead of us. Soon we will be able to see our breath, frisk with small dogs in the snow, and roll our cars over on patches of black ice. With winter approaching and good jokes sure to be as scarce as summer birds, now is the time to lay in a winter's supply of jokes in the new October comedy issue of National Lampoon; and as for summer birds, you can probably mail away for them to Florida. Yes, the National Lampoon Comedy issue has enough rich, plump guffaws to keep you chortling right into spring. So go buy one now at your local newsstand or bookstore before David Frost starts nipping people's noses, making it a pain to go outside.



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