

**GARP'S ASCENSION THROUGH THE DIEGETIC WORLD ACCORDING
TO GARP BY JOHN IRVING**

Mikail PUŞKIN¹

Davut DAĞABAKAN²

Abstract

The main focus of analysis in the article is the evolution of the protagonist in relation to the complex system of characters in the diegetic world of John Irving's "The World According to Garp". Throughout the essay, Garp's maturation and evolution is being continuously analytically measured against the other characters masterfully aligned within the story by author to support the protagonist's growth, contrast and elucidate him. A typology of characters by their diegetic function is introduced, separating them into three main groups: people, creations, symbols. The linking reciprocal element between them is the protagonist, not only connecting all the characters, but also traversing through their roles on the way to his own posthumous ascension. Starting the novel as a regular human being, the protagonist is gradually transformed into a writer – creator of worlds and characters, to finally ascend into a symbol for the new world upon his death.

Keywords: postmodern fiction, existentialism, picaresque, American novel, traditional gender roles, bildungsroman

**JOHN IRVING'IN "GARP'A GÖRE DÜNYA" ESERİNDEKİ DIEGETİK ANLATI
DÜNYASINDA GARP'IN YÜKSELİŞİ**

Öz

John Irving'in "Garp'a Göre Dünya" eserinde, kahramanın kitabın diegetic anlatı dünyasındaki karmaşık karakter sistemiyle ilişkili olarak geçirdiği evrim, makaledeki analizin odak noktasını teşkil etmektedir. Garp'ın olgunlaşması ve evrimi, yazar tarafından kahramanın gelişimini desteklemek, onu kıyaslamak ve ona ışık tutmak amacıyla hikâyeye ustalıkla sıralanmış diğer karakterler karşısında, makale boyunca süreklilikle analitik olarak ölçülmektedir. Anlatısal işlevleri nezdinde, karakterlerin üç ana gruba ayrılması suretiyle bir karakter tipolojisi ortaya konulmuştur: insanlar, kreasyonlar ve semboller. Tüm bunlar arasındaki bağlayıcı işlevli ortak element olan

¹ Dr. Öğr. Üyesi, Ağrı İbrahim Çeçen Üniversitesi, Yabancı Diller Yüksekokulu, Mütercim Tercümanlık Bölümü, mpuskin@agri.edu.tr, ORCID: 0000-0003-0467-1699

² Dr. Öğr. Üyesi, Ağrı İbrahim Çeçen Üniversitesi, Yabancı Diller Yüksekokulu, Mütercim Tercümanlık Bölümü, ddagabakan@agri.edu.tr, ORCID: 0000-0003-0563-0960

kahraman, tüm karakterleri birbirlerine bağlamakla kalmaz ve ölüm sonrası yükselişine doğru ilerlerken, bu karakterlerin rollerinden de geçer. Romana sıradan bir insan olarak başlayan kahraman, kademe kademe dünyaların ve karakterlerin yaratıcısı olan bir yazar haline dönüşür ve sonunda, ölümü üzerine yeni dünya için bir sembol haline gelir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: postmodern kurgu, varoluşçuluk, pikaresk, Amerikan romanı, geleneksel cinsiyet rolleri

Introduction

The novel "The World According to Garp" can in its own right be considered one of the most interesting works of the second half of the twentieth century: a rare case, when deep and complex narrative in the very best sense was appreciated not only by the intellectuals, but by the mass reader as well. Having sold more than 6 million copies Irving (2018), "The World According to Garp" has enjoyed even wider public acknowledgement beyond the reading circles with the release of a multiple award winning and Oscar nominated movie by the same title in 1982. An eclectic postmodern novel combining the best elements of the zeitgeist paradigm on thematic, stylistic and ideological levels, it has also become a subject of a myriad of academic articles, with Google Scholar alone indexing an excess of 1500 titles (2020). That being said, the majority of research is focused on these more salient, intentionally provocative subjects (feminist ideology representation (Loudermilk, 2004, p. 66), (Brabcová, 2015, p. 24), violence (Lounsberry, 1982, p. 30), postmodern and post-postmodern narrative styles shifting (Kaarle, 2016, p. 1), (Blahút, 2011, p. 84), gender and sexuality (Remåker, 2015, p. 4), often leaving the more traditional analytical focus on the central figure aside. Current research addresses specifically the development and evolution of the protagonist systematically mapped against the other characters of the novel. In order to do so effectively, all other characters are grouped according to their roles and functions within the diegetic world of the novel.

"The World According to Garp" continues novel naming and constructing tradition, which became particularly popular during the age of Enlightenment, when the very basis of the novel became associated with existence of the hero, whose life forms and drives the plot and whose name appears in the title of it. Among the most famous novels of this kind, one could name "The history of Sir Charles Grandison" by Samuel Richardson, "David Copperfield" and "Oliver Twist" by Charles Dickens, "The history of Tom Jones a foundling" by Henry Fielding. In particular, postmodern novel predecessor, Laurence Sterne's "Tristram Shandy" deserving a separate comparative analysis research. John Irving not only continues

this tradition, but also enriches it, by making the protagonist of the novel the creator of own artistic space, shifting narrative strategy to that of *künstlerroman* (McKay, 1992, p. 457) and becoming the character-idea. That is why it is important to find out how Garp relates to the system of characters in "The World According to Garp".

The system: closer look

Even though, like much of modern fiction "The World According to Garp" appears to be oversaturated with characters, their introduction into its diegetic universe is never coincidental, instead, they are linked within a rigid and logical structure. Therefore, it is the systematisation of characters that will make it possible to reveal an element, which makes the novel particularly harmonized and original – the protagonist.

Although in the beginning Irving is using traditional *bildungsroman* character building approach and narrative development model, Garp outgrows this framework as he matures, with Irving changing narrative style as well towards "a mid-century novel of manners" Wilson (1992, p. 1). At the same time, character structure establishment in relation to the protagonist is already initiated. As Sinan Altaş remarks, "Bildungsroman requires round and dynamic character typology in portrayal of its protagonist. This fine detail is all about representing a protagonist who is available for formation process, and who can change in inner or outer aspects within the light of experimentation that he or she goes through." (Altaş, 2019, p. 36).

It should be noted that Garp's dynamism, his multifunctionality provide the opportunity to compare Garp with other characters of the novel, rather than to counterpoise him to them (even his rival is an inversion, but not an opposition). The reason is that the main hero is represented in the novel in several hypostases: the human – the writer – the symbol, and according to these roles of Garp, the other characters are placed into three groups, based on their functions in the novel.

The characters of the first group are linked with the Garp-human. This group is the most common one. The reason why they are equal in terms of existential rights with Garp, is that these characters perform the same functions, as people perform to each other in real life. The group is the most numerous in the novel and is shown to us in detail. These people are usually close to the main character, being his family members, friends or enemies. Each of them somehow forms Garp's personality, enriches his life experience, makes him wiser and more tolerant to others.

The second group is linked to the Garp-writer and consists of purely fictional characters, the protagonist creates them within his own novels, provided to us by Irving inside

the "World According to Garp". They represent the traits of particular kinds of literature styles even clichés and represent evolution of the Garp-writer, being at the same time his reflection on the characters of the first group and his experience with them. They are essential for the understanding of "The World According to Garp" in the structural sense as well, because throughout their synthesis with Garp and characters of the first group, the reader has an opportunity to sense and reveal the presence of characters-symbols in the world of the novel, which will be defined below.

The characters of the third group are usually mentioned only a few times and are not necessarily personified in the novel. The main role of these characters is to represent a certain idea, emotion or intention. Characters of this group are embedded deeper within the diegetic world of the novel, they are the eternal symbols, existing as philosophies and points of view on life itself. Radically different from the characters of the first and the second groups, which live in the novel, whose lives are lasting with the temporal flow of the main novel or sub-novels. Characters of the third group (Marcus Aurelius, Vienna, Grillparzer, Under Toad...) are presented to the reader like flashes to vanish and appear again, yet they dominate whole parts of characters' lives.

To understand the system of characters of the novel, the relations between Garp and these groups should be investigated in detail. The most important characters of the first group are Jenny Fields, Helen Holm and Michael Milton (as well as Garp himself). These particular characters play the most influential role in the life of Garp, representing the most important statuses – the mother, the wife and the rival, hence Garp is represented as the son, the father and the husband.

The mother

John Irving devotes the first chapter of "The World According to Garp" completely to Miss Fields. Jenny, Garp's mother, is so different from her son that they can barely agree on anything with each other and yet, Garp inherited many of her traits of character. Jenny spends all her life in a nurse uniform, which means much more than just clothing. That is why when tragedy comes to Garp's house, all his family goes to the domain of his mother – Dog's Head Harbour - "to nurse each other" (Irving, 1998, p. 373). "Like his mother, perhaps - a nurse at heart" (Irving, 1998, p. 154), Garp possesses the talent of pacifying people – the spirit of mercy penetrates Garp's books and sometimes his life. This is most clearly evidenced in Vienna, when Garp is visiting prostitute Charlotte, who is dying of cancer. Just as a doctor treats disease, Garp treats her from the fear of ultimate death. Garp makes Charlotte feel, that there is someone, who will remember her after she dies. It was wisely noticed that we live

eternally in our children, that's why Garp tells the personnel of the hospital that Charlotte is his mother.

At the same time, radicalism is just as common for Jenny as compassion. She is overflowing with hatred for and misunderstanding of the male lust "In this dirty world you are either somebody's wife or somebody's whore - or fast on your way to becoming one or the other" (Irving, 1998, p. 154). Which is why she becomes a host and a role model to all sorts of feminists. Just like her compassion, Garp inherits Jenny's radicalism: "he had properly bullied every fast driver in the neighbourhood" (Irving, 1998, p. 243) and had started a little war in newspaper, so filled with hatred that the readers, "were intelligent enough to recognize a personal vindictiveness in his criticisms of the Ellen Jamesians" (Irving, 1998, p. 521). It is symbolic that the fanatics become the reason for the deaths of both the son and his mother.

The wife

Helen Holm is Garp's wife. She is always by his side, but their relations are not those typical for a husband and a wife. Having grown up without a mother, Helen assumes a traditionally male role in the family – she sets the rules for her husband. Meanwhile, Garp, brought up by his mother alone, plays subdominant role in relations with Helen. To begin with, Helen tells Garp that he should become a good writer, in order to marry her, and that is what Garp is working hard on until he finally writes his, no doubt, best novel "The Pension Grillparzer". All traditionally female jobs in their family are done by Garp: he is the one who cooks and raises their children, worries about their each step. Garp is a kind of a housewife. At the same time, Helen earns money for the family, drives the car and is responsible for fixing it. Even in bed "lovemaking made Helen sleepy" (Irving, 1998, p. 261), which emphasizes a stereotypically male model of behaviour, "with Garp talking" (Irving, 1998, p. 261), which underlines Garp's stereotypically female model of behaviour in their intimate life as well.

Irving shows the reader that for a short time such positions suit both of them. Even the fact that Helen starts to date a lover doesn't seem to change much: she keeps setting the rules for him as well: "We'll go to your apartment, nowhere else", "I want it clean", "We can only use your car", "You'll have to get one" (Irving, 1998, p. 320).

Meanwhile, together with infidelity a much more terrible evil quietly creeps into the house of Garp. Helen's infidelity is just a consequence of hidden pathology following from inversion of traditional functions of husband and wife, the man and the woman: while a man should be strong, the force of a woman is in her weakness.

The rival

This violation of natural relations in Garp's family had caused the emergence of Milton, who dared to write to Helen "from the first time I saw you, I wanted to be your lover" (Irving, 1998, p. 294), though he was just an average student in her group and later - "occasionally liked to treat her with some force" (Irving, 1998, p. 346). Violence as the substitute of force is one of the most terrible, malicious things in the world, in Irving's opinion. This evil makes Garp involved, provokes him to react adequately: he takes children to the movie by force, orders Helen (which has never happened before) to stay at home and not to meet with Milton, "He would have struck her if the children hadn't burst into the room" (Irving, 1998, p. 337). The price, which Garp and Helen pay for this violence and lies is a death of their child.

The image-verdict to violence becomes Garp's rival and antipode Michael Milton, whose destiny represents the type of men, for whom force is not linked with creative energy expression or with care for others, but with the desire for violence and domination in themselves: "He was aggressive in the way only someone, who believes totally in himself can be aggressive" (Irving, 1998, p. 293). Though Garp never actually meets this character, their comparison is of a great importance: if we look at the inverted image of Michael Milton, we will see Garp. A creator by nature, he expresses his rich life experience in the books. In contrast, Michael Milton is a barren superficial flower, who can only express himself in the desire to rule and produce impression, expressing life experience in his clothes: "it appeared that he'd bought all the clothes for his lifetime there, they were the kind of clothes that even the Americans of Garp's day at Steering referred to as "Continental" (Irving, 1998, p. 292).

"The body of Michael Milton was an elegant body, when dressed; unclothed, he resembled no animal so much as he resembled a heron" (Irving, 1998, p. 293), while Garp is often shown to the reader as a muscular wrestler, sporty runner, who does not pay much attention to his appearance, to the effect his clothes produce,- he goes for comfort. That is why trainers are his favourite footwear. Such an inconsiderable, from the first sight, detail takes so much space in description of the character in "The World According to Garp" not by mistake. It reveals deeper relations between Milton and Garp's points of view of the surrounding world, expressed in the books of the second.

When Milton is interested in producing effects on the surrounding world, Garp goes for the deep emotional and intellectual impact on the readers of his novels. Garp does not care that much to make his books nice, easy to read, but he is trying to make them useful for the

inner world of the reader – he prefers practical value to the decorativeness of the surrounding world.

Garp stores a huge internal potential and he expresses it in his books, his motto is “I am – the world”. While for Michael Milton the motto is “I am – I am”. His entire internal world is wasted, being spattered around, that is why John Irving “castrates” this character, thus forcefully eliminating the leak. It becomes the verdict to the destructive basis, partially personified by the character.

While Garp and Helen become reborn having passed this terrible test. Now the wife is bringing up the daughter, and the husband is doing male jobs only – he is building the house and is earning a living for the family. From now on, Garp's pains and suffering are splashed out on the pages of his novels.

“A dream within a dream” (Poe, 1849): novels by Garp

As it was noted before, Garp-writer is reflected in the characters he creates. Before proceeding with the detailed investigation of some characters of this group, it should be noticed that the structure of “The World According to Garp” is in itself rather original: apart from the description of the life of the main character, six other compositions of Garp are “inserted” in the novel with the different degree of detail. The most emotionally important moments of Garp's life push him to create these novels. Thus, the structure of the novels can be represented in the following scheme:

- Death of prostitute Charlotte - “The Pension Grillparzer”
- Birth of his son - “Procrastination”
- Double unfaithfulness game - “The second wind of the cuckold”
- The feeling of the real unfaithfulness of his wife - “Vigilance”
- Death of his son - “The World According to Bensenhaver”
- Death of the mother and assassination attempt on Garp himself - “Illusions of my father”

Therefore, the world of Garp's books is a reflection of the real world in which live the characters of the second group. The role of the world of books is to add what the reality lacks and thus to harmonise it. That is why when the life of Garp is quiet and carefree, he cannot write masterpieces and the characters of his books are drawn indistinctively, Irving places only plot of such novels in “The World According to Garp”. But when Garp is experiencing the key moments of his life, which change his point of view on the surrounding reality, they are reflected in detailed, complicated characters of his book. These are the circus actors of

Szolnok from "The Pension Grillparzer", nervous father-runner, alone with reckless drivers from "Vigilance", Bensenhaver, Hope Richardson and Oren Rath from "The World According to Bensenhaver". Thus, the characters of the second group represent the writer's evolution of Garp from flourishing extravagant vivid fantasy, romantic perception of the world, through humour and grotesque – to the harsh violent realism and in the final to the attempt to create utopia.

The Pension Grillparzer

The first impression of Garp's youth becomes Vienna, which is the place where he starts living an independent life. Meanwhile, he is surrounded by banality and vulgarity - prostitutes, hospital, decadence... That is the why flamboyant youthful fantasies, the aspiration to see the true beauty and depth of human mutual relations are transferred into the world, opposite to reality – the world of "Grillparzer" and its heroes.

The characters of "The Pension Grillparzer" from the first sight may seem miserable and sad, annoying and hooligan-like. It seems that the destiny itself prevents them from living a happy life, "as if they had always been staging a ludicrous and doomed effort at reclassification" (Irving, 1998, p. 171). A man, walking on his hands, a bear-monocyclist, a singer and fortune-teller with mysterious gypsy woman may form a perfect circus, the one, which, as it seems, is bound to be popular, yet they live a poor and unsuccessful life. Maybe that is because they need more from their life, they do not want to limit it to financial success. Szolnok circus actors are like children, they steal an inspector's car, commit a crime just to have a joyful phantasmagorical night ride around the city: "The singing driver, the man on his hands beside him – waving out of the window with his feet. And in the back, separating the dream man from his former wife [...] the old bear slouched like a benign drunk" (Irving, 1998, p. 172). All characters of "The Pension Grillparzer" are deeper, more considerable and mysterious, than their poor social life.

Vigilance

John Irving almost ignores (and makes us ignore) the "Procrastination" and "The Second Wind of the Cuckold", calm and predictable life puts the sharp writer's mind of Garp to sleep and he cannot produce anything worthy. Thus, the second work, known to us is "Vigilance". Garp becomes vigilant to any small detail himself, - he can feel the unfaithfulness of his wife and is writing a story to banish grave thoughts, laugh at his own seriousness and make Helen laugh, who, by the way (!), doesn't want to read it, preferring at that moment miserable "works" by Milton. Circumstances of Garp's life, new conditions and tasks, he defines in "Vigilance", determine the changes in the characteristics of the heroes of the story:

they are simplified, grotesque-satiric. The delicateness of "Grillparzer's" characters is replaced by rude physiology: "The sweat from my hard sprint, by now drips off my moustache [...] only a father, who genuinely fears for his children would run so hard, would stare like such a maniac, would wear such a cruel moustache" (Irving, 1998, p. 305). Dirty humour enters the story: "The man explained: "We crossed our balls". That the fat man was referring to some bizarre sexual experience seemed unlikely. I assumed that the fat man was referring to bowling" (Irving, 1998, p. 306). Heroes of this story are already far from being romantic, but not yet realistic, that is because the life (in its dreadful form) is just knocking on the door of Garp's family world, but has not yet entered the house.

The World According to Bensenhaver

When real tragedy enters Garp's home, the last of the finished works comes to life: "The World According to Bensenhaver". Rude, merciless reality, which rushed in the life of Garp, literally penetrates the flesh of the novel and its characters, this rude hyperrealism is running out of the author's control – the emotions, which Garp accumulated inside are finding their own way on to the paper... For example, Bensenhaver, planned by Garp to be "as distant from his personal anxiety as the police inspector is distant from the crime", from "someone, even Garp could understand" (Irving, 1998, p. 364), turns out to be some sort of the author's ideal. This character represents, a certain kind of justice, which Garp would want to exist – an immediate and absolute justice, where there is no way for the criminal to get away with his crime and for the victim to be unfairly punished. That is why Bensenhaver removes the condom from the dead body of the rapist, he did not "want someone suggesting that it might not have been a rape" (Irving, 1998, p. 410). Garp knows that the real life is not always like that. In "The World According to Bensenhaver", he reminds us about a paedophile maniac, who shaved his moustaches, to become unrecognisable for his small victims. Having gotten away with his crime, he will be some kind of the prototype for Oren Rath. The very name "Oren Rath" sounds a bit like as if someone, who does not have front teeth, pronounces it "Rath". Yet we know that the "moustache rapist" "had no upper teeth; the horse had kicked them out" (Irving, 1998, p. 196). Yet it won't be fair to say that Garp copies his characters from real people, no – it is the violence, which splashes out on the pages in the same form in which it comes into life.

Illusions of My Father: the end

Garp shall never finish his last novel, yet, John Irving gives us quite a number of clues, concerning its content. Garp somehow repeats the destiny of Goethe's Faust, whose effort to create his own world turns out to be illusion, the price of which is death. Garp

chooses the genre of his future novel as utopia not by mistake, even the name of it is "Illusions of My Father". The book remains unfinished; the attempt of the hero to create a new world turns out to be another one, last, illusion, the price for which is the death of its creator. Yet, the price, which Garp pays is not in vain, by his death he turns the utopia into life, thus making himself equal with the characters-symbols of the third group, taking his place in the eternal chain of the spiritual race of humanity. Together with him in this line stand "the old grey city", Vienna, "a cadaver", "a dressed-up corpse in an open coffin" (Irving, 1998, p. 161), and Marcus Aurelius, according to whom "in life of a man, his time is but a moment, his being an incessant flux, his sense a dim rushlight, his body a prey of worms, his soul an unquiet eddy, his fortune dark, his fame doubtful" (Irving, 1998, p. 124), and the Under Toad, the terrible messenger of death, who turns out to be an old friend, when this death comes to Garp himself.

Death of Garp begins a new era in "The World According to Garp" - with it a different accent is placed on the characters of the first group. Those, who remain in the world after Garp - will be slightly symbolic, hence Garp after his death will become a character of the third group, obtaining qualities and representing ideas of one of the most important symbols of all times.

Garp dies at the age of 33, no matter how strange it may sound, dies a kind death, killed by one of Ellen Jamesians, against whom he was fighting all his life, but whom he managed to defeat only after his death. At the same time, calmness and harmony enters the world. Just like Jesus Christ, born from a "pure" conception by his mother. Garp dies at the age of the messiah and leaves the old world with 12 of his apostles. As Jesus Christ, with his death, he purifies this world, forcing its rebirth, thus creating a new world, in which there is a place for everyone, and the life of everyone goes beyond simple existence. This life is beautiful and complete, purified by the death of the creator, human suffering and kindness. All his works are at the same time commandments, commandments of a man, who believes that people just need to be taught to be kind. Happiness in the world according to Garp is here, on earth - it is in the ability to love, feel compassion for others and live in harmony with everything and everybody. "In the world according to Garp we are all terminal cases" (Irving, 1998, p. 570), yet there is a place for everyone. That is why this world is so diverse, inclusive and comprehensive. This is the world according to Stuart Percy, lively and direct; and the world according to Jenny Fields - world of sterility but mercy; and the world according to Mrs Ralph - a world gone to look for a partner, sad and phantasmagorical, and the world according

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to "Grillparzer", Marcus Aurelius, Vienna, Bensenhaver... "Don't worry - so what if there is no life after death? There is life after Garp, believe me" (Irving, 1998, p. 539).

As it has been said before, Garp is in the centre of the novel's universe, while other characters are placed around him. The closest ones are the characters of the first group - living people, who surround Garp, they are donors for the second group characters - products of creation of Garp-writer. And, finally, the third group, characters-symbols, being self-sufficient, finally includes the main character, who, by becoming demiurge, of his own world, is associated with one of the most important symbols of humanity – Jesus Christ.

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