

## FEMINISTS ASSAULT JOHN IRVING

(1942- )

With *Garp*, Irving set free the bear of his soul in a style blunt, agonized, extravagant, and bravely comic. A satire of radical Feminism in the 1970s, it generated a mass cultural reaction characterized in the popular media as “Garpomania.” Irving suddenly became a big success, a cultural hero, and even a sex symbol. He appeared on the cover of *Time* (31 August 1981) as the handsome “Garp Creator.” *Garp* provoked extreme reactions, pro and con, that confirmed its vision of extreme conflict between the sexes. Feminists at the time were acting like men made them want to vomit and “Garp” sounds like vomit. Some readers disliked the exaggeration and violence, others disapproved of the explicit sex, and Feminists hated everything about it. T. S. Garp is not Irving, but the novel does reveal the author in its tones and form, transcending autobiography while deriving its passion and satirical inspiration from what comes through as deeply personal. Irving is a male feminist liberal in his public life and *Garp* is feminist in a humanistic spirit that is critical of intolerance and fanaticism. He was courageous to publish such a Politically Incorrect novel at a time when Feminists were taking over literary publishing.

British feminist John Fowles published a much darker satire called *Mantissa* in 1982 that is not funny, casting radical Feminists as Nazis. Additional satires of Feminists by Americans include *The Witches of Eastwick* (1984) by John Updike and *White Noise* (1985) by Don DeLillo, both novelists who were safely established and had less to lose than Irving did in 1978. Feminists at 13 publishing houses were able to censor the major British novelist Kingsley Amis’s *Stanley and the Women* in 1984 and who knows how many works by unknown male writers. Feminist editors at Scribner’s censored, stole, rewrote, and reversed the meanings of Hemingway’s last novel *The Garden of Eden* (1986).

Since the 1980s it has not been necessary for Feminists to assassinate male writers. They have simply censored them: “Literary quality became secondary to representational issues....By the end of the 1980s, every publisher had complied with the demands of the [Feminist] critics....The goal of the language police is not just to stop us from using objectionable words but to stop us from having objectionable thoughts.... For twenty-five years, give or take a few, we have lived with this system of silent censorship.”...(Diane Ravitch, *The Language Police* [Knopf 2003]: 158, 87, 96)

The following 9 Politically Correct liberal critics--except for novelist John Gardner--miss, dodge, ignore, and avoid discussing the major theme that made the novel hugely popular--its satire of radical Feminism. They even avoid the word *feminist!* They are just like the liberal media, too partisan and cowardly to report the truth. They are afraid to poke the snake with a stick. This is like reviewing *Moby-Dick* without mentioning the white whale. If they were reviewing the ride of Lady Godiva they would not mention that she was naked.

Michael Hollister (2022)

"9 Critics Discuss *The World According to Garp* (1983)"

"*Garp* is one of those novels that can be viewed either as a serious work of art or as a book for a mass audience, containing, as it does, the requisite sex, strange violence, and concern with great questions of the moment (e.g., feminism)."

John Gardner

*On Becoming a Novelist*  
(Harper & Row 1983) 108

Michael Hollister (2022)