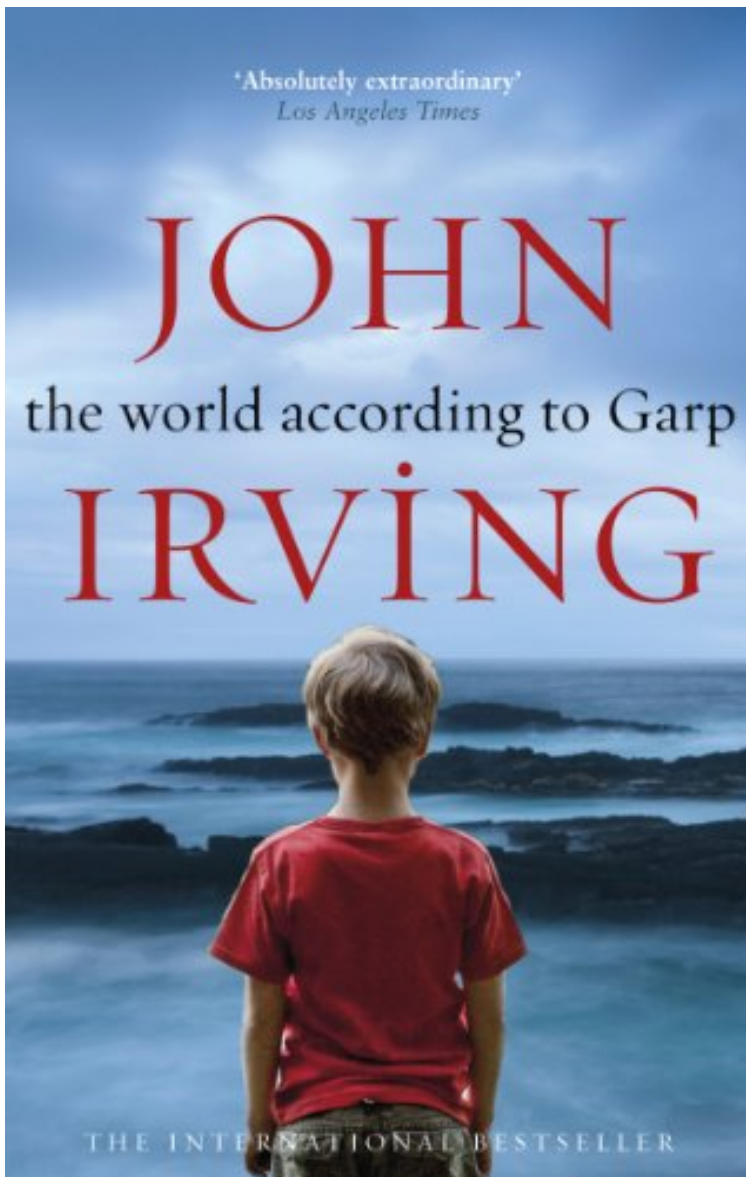


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# The World According To Garp



*Par John Irving*  
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## Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurThis is the life and times of T. S. Garp, the bastard son of Jenny Fields - a feminist leader ahead of her times. It is also the life and death of a famous mother and her almost-famous son; theirs is a world of sexual extremes - even of sexual assassinations. It is a novel rich with 'lunacy and sorrow'; yet the dark, violent events of the story do not undermine a comedy both ribald and robust. It provides almost cheerful, even hilarious evidence of its famous last line: "In the world according to Garp, we are all terminal cases."ExtraitChapter One Boston MercyGarp's mother, Jenny Fields, was arrested in Boston in 1942 for wounding a man in a movie theater. This was shortly after the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor and people were being tolerant of soldiers, because suddenly everyone was a soldier, but Jenny Fields was quite

firm in her intolerance of the behavior of men in general and soldiers in particular. In the movie theater she had to move three times, but each time the soldier moved closer to her until she was sitting against the musty wall, her view of the newsreel almost blocked by some silly colonnade, and she resolved she would not get up and move again. The soldier moved once more and sat beside her. Jenny was twenty-two. She had dropped out of college almost as soon as she'd begun, but she had finished her nursing-school program at the head of her class and she enjoyed being a nurse. She was an athletic-looking young woman who always had high color in her cheeks; she had dark, glossy hair and what her mother called a mannish way of walking (she swung her arms), and her rump and hips were so slender and hard that, from behind, she resembled a young boy. In Jenny's opinion, her breasts were too large; she thought the ostentation of her bust made her look "cheap and easy." She was nothing of the kind. In fact, she had dropped out of college when she suspected that the chief purpose of her parents' sending her to Wellesley had been to have her dated by and eventually mated to some well-bred man. The recommendation of Wellesley had come from her older brothers, who had assured her parents that Wellesley women were not thought of loosely and were considered high in marriage potential. Jenny felt that her education was merely a polite way to bide time, as if she were really a cow, being prepared only for the insertion of the device for artificial insemination. Her declared major had been English literature, but when it seemed to her that her classmates were chiefly concerned with acquiring the sophistication and poise to deal with men, she had no trouble leaving literature for nursing. She saw nursing as something that could be put into immediate practice, and its study had no ulterior motive that Jenny could see (later she wrote, in her famous autobiography, that too many nurses put themselves on display for too many doctors; but then her nursing days were over). She liked the simple, no-nonsense uniform; the blouse of the dress made less of her breasts; the shoes were comfortable, and suited to her fast pace of walking. When she was at the night desk, she could still read. She did not miss the young college men, who were sulky and disappointed if you wouldn't compromise yourself, and superior and aloof if you would. At the hospital she saw more soldiers and working boys than college men, and they were franker and less pretentious in their expectations; if you compromised yourself a little, they seemed at least grateful to see you again. Then, suddenly, everyone was a soldier and full of the self-importance of college boys and Jenny Fields stopped having anything to do with men. "My mother," Garp wrote, "was a lone wolf." There was a popular joke among the nurses in Boston at that time, but it was not funny to Jenny Fields. The joke involved the other hospitals in Boston. The hospital Jenny worked in was Boston Mercy Hospital, which was called Boston Mercy; there was also Massachusetts General Hospital, which was called Mass General. And another hospital was the Peter Bent Brigham, which was called the Peter Bent. One day, the joke goes, a Boston cab driver had his taxi hailed by a man who staggered off the curb toward him, almost dropping to his knees in the street. The man was purple in the face with pain; he was either strangling or holding his breath, so that talking was difficult for him, and the cabby opened the door and helped him inside, where the man lay face down on the floor alongside the back seat, tucking his knees up to his chest. "Hospital! Hospital!" he cried. "The Peter Bent?" the cabby asked. That was the closest hospital. "It's worse than bent," the man moaned. "I think Molly bit it off!" Few jokes were funny to Jenny Fields, and certainly not this one; no Peter jokes for Jenny, who was staying clear of the issue. She had seen the trouble peters could get into; babies were not the worst of it. Of course she saw people who didn't want to have babies, and they were sad that they were pregnant; they shouldn't have to have babies, Jenny thought though she mainly felt sorry for the babies who were born. She saw people who wanted to have babies, too, and they made her want to have one. One day, Jenny Fields thought, she would like to have a baby just one. But the trouble was that she wanted as little to do with a Peter as possible, and nothing whatsoever to do with a man. Most Peter treatment Jenny saw was done to soldiers. The U.S. Army would not begin to benefit from the discovery of penicillin until 1943, and there were many soldiers who didn't get penicillin until 1945. At Boston Mercy, in the early days of 1942, peters were usually treated with sulfa and arsenic. Sulfathiazole was for the clap with lots of water recommended. For syphilis, in the days before penicillin, they used nearsphenamine; Jenny Fields thought that this was the epitome of all that sex could lead to to introduce arsenic into the human chemistry, to try to clean the chemistry up. The other Peter treatment was local and also required a lot of fluid. Jenny frequently assisted with this method of disinfecting, because the patient required lots of attention at the time; sometimes, in fact, he needed to be held. It was a simple procedure that could force as much as one hundred cc's of fluid up the penis and through the surprised urethra before it all came back, but the procedure left everyone feeling a bit raw. The man who invented a device for this method of treatment was named Valentine, and his device was called the Valentine irrigator. Long after Dr.

Valentine's irrigator was improved, or replaced with another irrigation device, the nurses at Boston Mercy still referred to the procedure as the Valentine treatment an appropriate punishment for a lover, thought Jenny Fields. "My mother," Garp wrote, "was not romantically inclined." When the soldier in the movie theater first started changing seats when he made his first move on her Jenny Fields felt that the Valentine treatment would be just the thing for him. But she didn't have an irrigator with her; it was much too large for her purse. It also required the considerable cooperation of the patient. What she did have with her was a scalpel; she carried it with her all the time. She had not stolen it from surgery, either; it was a castaway scalpel with a deep nick taken out of the point (it had probably been dropped on the floor, or in a sink) it was no good for fine work, but it was not for fine work that Jenny wanted it. At first it had slashed up the little silk pockets of her purse. Then she found part of an old thermometer container that slipped over the head of the scalpel, capping it like a fountain pen. It was this cap she removed when the soldier moved into the seat beside her and stretched his arm along the armrest they were (absurdly) meant to share. His long hand dangled off the end of the armrest; it twitched like the flank of a horse shuddering flies away. Jenny kept her hand on the scalpel inside her purse; with her other hand, she held the purse tightly in her white lap. She was imagining that her nurse's uniform shone like a holy shield, and for some perverse reason this vermin beside her had been attracted by her light. "My mother," Garp wrote, "went through her life on the lookout for purse-snatchers and snatch-snatchers." In the theater, it was not her purse that the soldier wanted. He touched her knee. Jenny spoke up fairly clearly. "Get your stinking hand off me," she said. Several people turned around. "Oh, come on," the soldier moaned, and his hand shot quickly under her uniform; he found her thighs locked tightly together he found his whole arm, from his shoulder to his wrist, suddenly sliced open like a soft melon. Jenny had cut cleanly through his insignia and his shirt, cleanly through his skin and muscles, baring his bones at the joint of his elbow. ("If I'd wanted to kill him," she told the police, later, "I'd have slit his wrist. I'm a nurse. I know how people bleed.") The soldier screamed. On his feet and falling back, he swiped at Jenny's head with his uncut arm, boxing her ear so sharply that her head sang. She pawed at him with the scalpel, removing a piece of his upper lip the approximate shape and thinness of a thumbnail. (I was not trying to slash his throat," she told the police, later. "I was trying to cut his nose off but I missed.") Crying, on all fours, the soldier groped his way to the theater aisle and headed toward the safety of the light in the lobby. Someone else in the theater was whimpering, in fright. Jenny wiped her scalpel on the movie seat, returned it to her purse, and covered the blade with the thermometer cap. Then she went to the lobby, where keen wailings could be heard and the manager was calling through the lobby doors over the dark audience, "Is there a doctor here? Please! Is someone a doctor?" Someone was a nurse, and she went to lend what assistance she could. When the soldier saw her, he fainted; it was not really from loss of blood. Jenny knew how facial wounds bled; they were deceptive. The deeper gash on his arm was of course in need of immediate attention, but the soldier was not bleeding to death. No one but Jenny seemed to know that there was so much blood, and so much of it was on her white nurse's uniform. T...Revue de presse "A wonderful novel, full of energy and art." *The Washington Post* "Nothing in contemporary fiction matches it. . . . Irving's blend of gravity and play is unique, audacious, almost blasphemous. . . . Brilliant, funny, and consistently wise; a work of vast talent." *The New Republic* "The most powerful and profound novel about women written by a man in our generation.... A marvelous, important, permanent novel by a serious artist of remarkable powers." *Chicago Sun-Times*