

# Garp is a celebration deep and terrific



by David Stewart

I never read *The World According to Garp* by John Irving but after seeing the movie I think that this must be one of those rare cases when the film is better than the book. I can't envisage anything being much superior to this.

*Garp* is a realistic celebration of life. Unlike many recent Hollywood movies, which leave the viewer feeling good at the end of two hours by either neglecting to deal with the problems of life or by sloughing these problems off as minor or insignificant, *Garp* does not deny the hardships of human existence nor its complexity, but in the final analysis, revels in the gift of life no matter how ephemeral.

The principal roles are all strongly performed. Glenn Close, as Garp's mother Jenny Field, gives a brilliant performance in a role that requires her to bring to life a character who is basically absurd. Mary Beth Hurt as Garp's wife Helen is the epitome of the modern career woman but exudes just enough warmth and raw sexuality to justify her husband's interest in her. The minor roles, particularly those of the children Walt and Duncan and the family friend, transexual Roberta Muldoon, are equally well done.

But the star of the show is Garp, and Robin Williams is absolutely perfect in the role. Director George Roy Hill has successfully subdued Williams' manic mannerisms and

created a character that is as far from Mork as Ork is from Earth. Garp is the quintessential parent. His idea of a good time is to sit out in his car with his wife and secretly watch his children at play. He is a gleeful participant in life and therefore that life, even with its tragic moments, is an unqualified success.

The greatest stylistic triumph of this film lies in the way it incorporates its symbolism within the framework of the fiction. Not once does the director let the imagery take precedence over either character or plot. It is always placed within a human context. For example, early in the movie, shortly after the death of Garp's grandfather, the young boy goes down to the ocean and plunges in. His mother, watching from the house, worriedly yells after him to "be careful of the undertow" but allows him to face the danger alone. That this is an important moment in the boy's life is emphasized by the fact that the next time we see him he has become a young man. Later in the film, Garp tells his son Walt exactly the same thing in exactly the same circumstances. Walt animates this danger into a fearful creature, 'The Undertoad', who achieves substance in the gruesome Hallowe'en costume hanging on the back of the door in the boys' room. The point here is that life involves certain risks that must be faced alone. Therefore, when Jenny Fields leaves the relative safety of

her sanctuary to return to the real world, we are asked to see this positively. For her, it is a catharsis. Like Garp and Walt, before her she is facing the frightening Undertoad.

A group which also plays an important role in the symbolism of the movie are the Ellen Jamesians. These women have cut out their tongues in protest of an incident many years before when a young girl, Ellen James, had her tongue cut out after having been raped by two men. The Jamesians hate men universally and remove themselves monastically from the flow of everyday life. The Ellen Jamesians, in general, and one of their members, Pooh, in particular, are the antithesis of Garp. Their's is a denial of life, and it is not coincidental that, at the point of greatest trial in the lives of Helen and Garp, they most resemble the Ellen Jamesians. Both are scarred for their crimes by the inability to speak. Unlike the Ellen Jamesians, however, they respond to love and care

In closing, I must congratulate George Roy Hill for a job well done. In most dramatizations of novels, the director attempts to cram too much into a film. Here, Hill takes his time, choosing each scene judiciously and lingering over it just long enough for the viewer to become comfortable with the various characters. I thoroughly recommend this film. See it. I doubt you will see a better movie for a long, long time.

## Campus Activities

### Double Decker SUB

with the

"Good Girl Gone Bad"

# TERRY CRAWFORD

and

the **Heartbeats**



Saturday, Sept. 18, 9 p.m.

Tickets: \$4, on sale in SUB