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**THE ABSENCE OF NUCLEAR FAMILY AND ITS
CONSEQUENCES
IN THE WORK OF JOHN IRVING**

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V Praze dne 10.4.2009,


.....

Thank my parents

Key words: nuclear family, parents, absence, consequence, deprivation

Abstract:

This thesis deals with one aspect of the literary work of the American writer John Irving, that is the frequent absence of nuclear family in his novels and its consequences. Irving's heroes grow up very often without either one or both parents and this thesis analyses how the deprivation has influenced them in their lives, especially in their adulthood. The beginning of the thesis presents at first theoretically the consequences of the absence of nuclear family in a human life and its basis is, in psychological literature, then it introduces John Irving and his work. The core of the thesis is the analysis of the selected novels where the theme is the most prominent.

Klíčová slova: nukleární rodina, rodiče, nepřítomnost, důsledek, deprivace

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Abbreviations used in the analysis / Zkratky použité při analýze

WAG – *The World According to Garp*

DFY – *Dick / Fugate*

WOY – *A Widow for One Year*

HNH – *The Heart of New Hampshire*

CHR – *The Cider House Rules*

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Abstract:

This thesis deals with one aspect of the literary work of the American writer John Irving, that is the frequent absence of nuclear family in his novels and its consequences. Irving's heroes grow up very often without either one or both parents and this thesis analyses how the deprivation has influenced them in their lives, especially in their adulthood. The beginning of the thesis presents at first theoretically the consequences of the absence of nuclear family in a human life and its basis is in psychological literature, then it introduces John Irving and his work. The core of the thesis is the analysis of the selected novels where the theme is the most prominent.

Klíčová slova: nukleární rodina, rodiče, nepřítomnost, důsledek, deprivace

Abstrakt:

Tato diplomová práce se zabývá jedním aspektem literárního díla amerického spisovatele Johna Irvinga, a to častou nepřítomností nukleární rodiny v jeho románech a jejími důsledky. Irvingovi hrdinové velmi často vyrůstají bez jednoho nebo obou rodičů a tato práce analyzuje, jak je tato deprivace ovlivnila v jejich životě, zejména v dospělosti. Začátek práce představuje nejdříve teoreticky důsledky nepřítomnosti nukleární rodiny v životě člověka a vychází z psychologické literatury, dále představuje Johna Irvinga a jeho dílo. Hlavní částí práce je analýza vybraných románů, ve kterých je analyzovaný aspekt nejsilnější.

Abbreviations used in the analysis / Zkratky použité při analýze:

WAG – *The World According to Garp*

UFY – *Until I Find You*

WOY – *A Widow for One Year*

HNH – *The Hotel New Hampshire*

CHR – *The Cider House Rules*

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INTRODUCTION

The aim of this thesis is to analyse one particular aspect of the work of John Irving, the absence of nuclear family, in his novels, and the consequences of this absence in the life of his characters.

The main source for this analysis are selected novels, where the theme is the most prominent, that is *The World According to Garp*, *The Hotel New Hampshire*, *The Ciderhouse Rules*, *A Widow for One Year* and *Until I Find You*. Irving's other novels are present in the thesis only marginally, chiefly for comparison or reference. However, the thesis also wants to introduce Irving's work more coherently, that is why all the discussed novels are at the beginning of each analysis introduced and compared not only from the point of view of the main theme, but also from a broader perspective. John Irving and his work are shortly discussed in chapter two.

The analysis is further based on psychological literature dealing with incomplete families, where one or both parents are missing, and the consequences that this arrangement can have on children growing up in such families.

The aim is certainly not to connect this aspect of John Irving's work to his own life and the analysis is focused purely on his fictional characters.

To conclude, the main objective is to analyse the life of Irving's characters influenced by the absence of nuclear family and to discuss how this deprivation has changed their lives.

1. NUCLEAR FAMILY AND THE CONSEQUENCES OF ITS ABSENCE

1.1. Nuclear family in the United States

As this thesis focuses on the absence of nuclear family in Irving's work, let us start by defining its crucial term. Nuclear family is defined as "a family group that consists only of father, mother and children" (merriam-webster). Its counterpart is the family arrangement called extended family, that is "a family that includes in one household near relatives in addition to a nuclear family" (merriam-webster).

The term nuclear family became a dictionary entry in 1947, nevertheless, in Western civilization, based on Christian values, nuclear family has always been a fundamental social unit. There existed other family arrangements, like extended migrant families, ethnic or Afro-American communities, or families living with non-related people, e.g. servants or lodgers, but nuclear family has been the most typical one.

The traditional idea about bygone times of a big, three-generation family living together under one roof is somewhat distorted, the majority of households arrangements were the nuclear ones, for many reasons: the mortality was higher and the life span shorter, so a three-generations family was not easy to come by. Also, young members often left their original family and migrated in their search of work (Luedtke, chapter Continuity and Change in the American Family).

If we focus on the period in which John Irving has been publishing his novels, i.e. from 1968 until now, it is evident that it is the period when family, its structure, functions and values have been undergoing several important changes, which started already in the

1950s, mainly due to large scale social changes. The divorce rates have been getting higher, the number of single-parent households has been rising, in general, there has been an increase in alternative family forms, like divorced parents, remarried parents, stepparents, stepsiblings, adoptive parents (Patner).

Incomplete families had existed even before. There have always been families where one parent died, or abandoned the family, the only difference being that people called it either separation or desertion and didn't find such a definitive solution as divorce. The social situation of people living in such families has improved, nevertheless, consequences of the disintegration of the nuclear family remain basically the same.

1.2. Consequences of the absence of nuclear family

The present age has brought many options, a huge freedom of choice, but it has also brought along a break-up of traditional values and certitudes, one of the spin-offs being the increasing erosion of the elementary nuclear family exceptional status.

As the Czech psychologist Čáp mentions, in adult age our personality, behaviour, relationships and ways of dealing with difficult situations are considerably dependent on our experience from childhood. There are cases, of course, of people who have changed to a great extent, no matter what their starting position was. But still it is the nuclear family which determines and influences the early development of an individual, especially in childhood and adolescence (Čáp 1996, 197). An incomplete or surrogate family is one of the conditions aggravating the upbringing in a family (together with long-term conflicts or tension between parents, a long-term illness of one of the parents, alcoholism or a long-term separation of a child from one or both of his parents) (Čáp 1996, 205).

Čáp also states that family, as a small social group, is the main factor of human development and that until adolescence, human identity is determined by the membership in a family. It is a natural environment into which we are born and which we cannot choose. Family provides us with models to be emulated or identified with, it shows the model of social interaction and communication and it engrains social norms in us. Family has also many general functions, the main ones being the economic function, the educative function, the reproductive function, the social function, it provides help and security to its members and it controls their behaviour. The family environment should provide for harmonious relations and stimulation, even though it is often not so (Čáp 1993, 271-274).

The socialization influence is the most important influence in human life. Socialization, a lifelong process of social training, affects personality development and the ability to live contentedly in human society. The most important socialization influence comes from the family, it is therefore evident that the absence of nuclear family deeply affects man's behaviour, abilities, attitudes, values etc. It is from our parents that we learn by imitation, identification and observation how to behave in various life situations. Therefore, if one or even both parents are missing, there is a wide gap for their children to fill and potential problems may arise (Pavelková).

Identification with a significant person (parent) increases the feeling of security and confidence and decreases the feeling of threat, whatever its reason is. Thus, the disintegration of a family is a very strong interference into the child's world and it strongly affects his / her attitude to the outer world as well as to himself / herself. What can happen is that small children blame themselves for this disintegration, they lose the safe home they have been accustomed to and they have to find an explanation why such an event happened, which often leads them into deep confusion. Moreover,

when a parent leaves a family, there is the absence of a personally significant male or female role. The child, missing the same sex parent, if he / she doesn't find another significant person to identify with, misses the experience of the adult behaviour of his or her own sex and doesn't know the typical signs of interaction among adult people of different sex, which can lead to problems in their future partnerships (Vágnerová 2000, chapters 5.5.3 and 6.1.3).

1.2.1. The absence of both parents (the theme in: *The Cider House Rules*)

According to Vymětal (69), children growing up without either parent are often the children who live in orphanages and who grow up without parental love and tenderness. We call them emotionally deprived children (as well as the children of unloving parents). These children have from the very beginning of their lives a negative experience with the world, as they cannot create a stable emotional bond to an adult person or a close relationship with somebody. As they grow up, they have grave deficits in their emotional lives and their basic attitude towards the world is distrust. They live their lives and their relationships rather perfunctorily and in this way they also bring up their children, if they have any. The emotional deprivation in early childhood stigmatizes a person for the whole life, even if the stigma may be diminished by ideal conditions later. The most important period in childhood for the child's development are the first three years of child's life. When the child is deprived at that time, little can be done later.

1.2.2. The absence of a mother (the theme in: *Hotel New Hampshire, A Widow for One Year*)

When it is a mother who is absent, and the child doesn't have another maternal person around him / her who would cover his / her

emotional needs, the child suffers from emotional deprivation and experiences problems in relationships to other people and also to himself / herself, mostly because he / she was not given the opportunity to absorb the emotional security and reliance in childhood. In general, such children have problems with their personal self-definition, they have low confidence in themselves and so they tend to have low self-esteem, they question their own significance and they have problems with socialization. "In a complete nuclear family, girls see their mother as a model for their future roles while boys regard her as a protector of their security" (Vágnerová 2000, 173). In an incomplete family, both the model and the protector are missing.

1.2.3. The absence of a father (the theme in: *The World According to Garp, Until I Find You*)

A father absent in a traditional family arrangement (where the mother is more important to the child in his / her youth, because she spends much more time with him / her and provides him / her with emotional security) is not such fundamental loss as the absent mother, nevertheless, it also has grave consequences. "In a complete nuclear family the father enables the child to free from dependance on the mother, as he represents another alternative of a secure relationship" (Vágnerová 2000, 173). Without a father, the tie between a child and his / her mother can become deformed, as it is too strong, especially with boys.

Sons miss their fathers because no one provides them with the models of male behaviour (unless the mother finds a substitute person in her environment, a grandfather, an uncle etc.), they have no one to identify with, they experience only maternal approach, which is usually loving, but only one-sided. The experience with

father's behaviour determines a boy especially in the development of his sexual identity (Vágnerová 2000, chapter 5.5.4).

Daughters without father miss a protector, a strong person, an authority in the outer world. If their father is absent, the development of the female identity is in danger, as they can't observe the behaviour of their father towards them, their mother, other women, and thus cannot experience the man-woman interaction, so important for the future partnerships. "The negative outcomes can include: fear of intimacy, intense feeling of guilt, and poor self-esteem. A father who is distant can have a profound, negative impact on his daughter's self-esteem and sexuality" (Junn 167).

2. JOHN IRVING AND THE WORLD OF HIS NOVELS

2.1. John Irving in the context of American literature after World War II

The American Literature after World War II is immensely diversified, with no single main stream. There have been native American writers, black writers, the Beatniks, the representatives of Jewish literature, the postmodernist writers and many others who don't fall within any special category. In general, "writers in the United States are asking serious questions, many of them of a metaphysical nature. Writers have become highly innovative and self-aware, or reflexive. To put it another way: American writers, in recent decades, have developed a post-modern sensibility" (Van Spancheren 95). At the beginning of the seventies, when John Irving started to publish his books, there were still old currents, touched in addition by deep human dramas. "Concern with setting, character, and themes associated with realism returned. Realism, abandoned by experimental writers in the 1960s, also crept back. Soon the

1980s ensued, in which individuals tended to focus more on personal concerns than on larger social issues" (Van Spancheren 107). This is especially true about Irving, whose novels (primarily the later ones) can be mostly considered as a compliment to realistic writing and whose favourite authors and examples are Dickens, Davies, Trollope, Greene, and Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Gunter Grass among the living. (IG 35) In his own words: "I suppose you could say that I haven't ventured very far from Dickens" (IG 35). Irving has got a fondness for imitation of the narrative voices of many 19th century novelists, and he enjoys his storytelling and characterization. Irving's work represents fiction interested in real life, human dramas and strange, unforgettable characters, although his plots and heroes are often on the verge of credibility. According to Tom Williams, his Creative Writing teacher, he has a habit of attributing mythological proportions and legendary status to his characters, before the characters have done anything to earn such attribution (IG 96). Irving himself says, that "the imagination can select more plausible details than those incredible-but-true details we remember" (IG 142). His novels are in their form usually traditional, but his themes are at the same time - at least in some of his books - burning issues of modernity, like abortions (*The Cider House Rules*), fundamentalist Christian belief and religious bigotry (*A Prayer for Owen Meany*) or feminism (*The World According to Garp*).

2.2. John Irving's short biography

John Irving was born on 2nd March 1942 in Exeter, New Hampshire, where he also graduated at the Phillips Exeter Academy. Being dyslexic, he spent there five years instead of usual four, and he was admitted there chiefly because he was a faculty child. His stepfather, whom he calls his father, taught there in the History Department. At the age of nineteen, he spent a year at the University

of Pittsburgh, but then came back to his home state and entered the university there, where he began to take classes of Creative Writing, his tutor being John Yount. When he was 21, he applied to a study-abroad program and he enrolled for a year at the Institute of European Studies in Vienna. In 1964, he came back to the University of New Hampshire and married his first wife, Shyla Leary, with whom he has two sons, Colin (1965) and Brendan (1969). Being married and a father, his draft status was changed to 3A and he was kept out of Vietnam. Besides the birth of his first son in 1965, he became a published writer and he was given a teaching-writing fellowship to attend the Writers' Workshop at the University of Iowa, where he was a student till 1967. He graduated from the University of New Hampshire and in 1972 he returned to Iowa University as a teacher and stayed until 1975. His first teaching job was at Windham College in Vermont, where he worked as a teacher and a wrestling coach, and where he lived for most of the eighteen years of his first marriage. In 1969, he spent again a year in Vienna, where his second son was born. He also taught at Mount Holyoke College and at Brandeis. Before writing became his full-time occupation (i.e. for the writing of his first four novels) he had a full time job teaching Creative Writing and coaching wrestling, the only exceptions being an award from the Rockefeller Foundation and a Guggenheim Fellowship. His first novel was published when he was twenty-six and it sold 8000 copies, but it wasn't until the huge success of his fourth book, *The World According to Garp* in 1978, that he achieved acclaim both among critics and readers and he could become a full-time writer. Irving divorced his first wife in 1982 and married Janet Turnbull, his literary agent, with whom he has his third son, Everett, born in 1991. He lives in Vermont and Toronto. His life-long passion is wrestling, in which he was active (according to his own words, he was a half-decent wrestler) until 1976, and as a coach until 1989.

Both his older sons, Colin and Brendan, won the New England Class A title in wrestling, with their father as a coach.

So far, Irving has published two screenplays (for *A Son of the Circus* and *The Cider House Rules*, 1998), a collection of his shorter writing (*Trying to Save Piggy Sneed*, 1993), a memoir about his experiences in the world of movies (*My Movie Business*, 1999), a memoir about his writing and his wrestling (*The Imaginary Girlfriend*, 1996), a children's picture book (*A Sound Like Someone Trying Not to Make a Sound*, 2004) and eleven novels, some of which are the main core of this thesis:

Setting Free the Bears (1968)

The Water-Method Man (1972)

The 158-Pound Marriage (1974)

The World According to Garp (1978)

The Hotel New Hampshire (1981)

The Cider House Rules (1985)

A Prayer for Owen Meany (1989)

A Son of the Circus (1994)

A Widow for One Year (1998)

The Fourth Hand (2001)

Until I Find You (2005)

2.3. Irving's recurring themes

The main core of this thesis is to focus on one of Irving's recurring themes – the absence of a nuclear family in his books. However, this should not give the impression that Irving the writer (and possibly Irving the person) is obsessed with a single topic. Quite the contrary, his scope of writerly interests stretches across a wide range of subjects. It would therefore be safe to begin by outlining some other recurrent topics whose various modifications

can be found in John Irving's novels. Some of these are in effect related to the main topic of this thesis and thus quite relevant.

2.3.1. Strong heroines in Irving's fiction

It is fairly common in Irving's novels that we encounter female characters, not necessarily the main ones, who seem to be strong to influence their own destiny and also the other characters' lives.

Irving's only central female character is Ruth Cole in *A Widow for One Year*. Ruth is, according to the blurb on the book cover, 'a complex, often self-contradictory character – a difficult woman' (WOY). She is also strong: she has to deal with the absence of her mother, who abandoned her at the age of four, and so she grows up only with her father, bearing forever the burden of the child who had been conceived only as a surrogate for two dead sons. But to Ruth the miseries of her life represent a way how to become a strong, independent individual: it is, after all, written in the quotation by W. M. Thackeray at the very beginning of the book: "...as for this little lady, the best thing I can wish her is a little misfortune" (WOY). When she overcomes the loss of her mother and puts up with the fact that she has never been in love, not once in her life, she finds both.

Irving's other female characters that can be considered tough and strong heroines are Jenny Fields in *The World According to Garp* and Tabitha Wheelwright in *A Prayer for Owen Meany*.

In *The World According to Garp*, it was only in the third chapter that the author decided to make Garp the main character, and his mother, Jenny Fields, was consequently left a little less space. Nevertheless, she is one of the unforgettable characters in his work. Jenny Fields, a feminist who decides in 1942 to become a mother without a husband and to be nobody's wife or nobody's whore – or on a way to becoming one or the other (which is, of course, a quote from her biography, *A Sexual Suspect*), represents

the strength of women, especially of those who decide to live their life not exactly according to the rules of the society. She raises Garp without the support of her parents, who strongly disagree with her actions, and is at the same time fully employed as a nurse in a boys' school, which for a woman was not at all usual at the beginning of the fifties. When she later becomes a speaker and an icon of the feminist movement (although appointed to this unofficial position more by the other women than by herself, because in her own words "she was, first and foremost, a nurse" (WAG, 351), we feel her individual strength especially due to all the women, her adorers, who come to see her and who seek her help and support: she is perfectly able to live her own life without any reproaches or looking back, and more, she is able and willing to help the women who lack this immunity towards the outer world and the opinions of other people and who don't have the courage to live their lives according to their ideals and wishes.

That is not the case of Tabitha Wheelwright, character from *A Prayer for Owen Meany*, whose actions, if not exactly their motives, are quite similar to those of Jenny Fields. She also finds the courage to live in the same time period as a single mother (moreover, in a small town), she bears the other people's and her own mother's comments on her status and never reveals the identity of her son's father, who is the member of the same community, which would undoubtedly help her. In addition, she manages to be a loving mother to her son Johnny and also to Owen Meany, whose family is dysfunctional. She is probably the best mother in Irving's novels and it would be interesting to know how her character would have developed if she had not been killed by the foul ball.

2.3.2. Older women with younger men in Irving's fiction

Irving's fiction abounds in various types of sexual relationships, including adultery, the exchange of partners in two married couples, incest, lesbianism or the relationship between older women and young men (as Irving puts it, "the older women thing"). In some of his novels the theme is only marginal. In *The Hotel New Hampshire*, the relationship between the narrator John and Ronda Ray, the headwaitress and head maid who is the same age as his mother, illustrates nothing more than the beginning of his sex life. In *The World According to Garp*, when in Vienna Garp gets to know the prostitutes (who are fairly common in Irving's fiction), he is most attracted not to the young ones, but to the fifty-one years old Charlotte, and their relationship is not only sexual, but also a friendly one, still, it is nothing but an episode in his life and he is not further influenced by it. It is in *A Widow for One Year* where the older woman – younger man relationship is vital for the development of one of the characters, Eddie O'Hare.

In this novel, a sixteen years old Eddie falls in love with Marion, a married woman and a mother of a four years old daughter, with a passion of someone who is in love for the first time in his life, whereas for her he is above all a lively reminder of her two dead sons, who were approximately his age. When Marion leaves her family and home after this summer love affair, he is so deeply hurt by her loss that for the rest of his life he tries to find her and in the meantime he dates only older women, unable to forget her.

But this theme is the most prominent in his last novel, *Until I Find You*. The main character, Jack Burns, experiences a difficult period as a child, being sexually abused first by his older friend Emma, who forces him constantly to talk about his sexual awakening, which has not started yet, then at the beginning of his adolescence by a Mrs. Machado, a cleaning woman in her forties.

His childhood haunts him and complicates his further sexual relationships, which go on only with older women; while with his peers, Jack is incapable of any kind of relationship, as is demonstrated by his failure with Michelle Maher. In this novel, Irving, after several years of silence, deals again with a burning social issue, this time child abuse.

2.3.3. Wrestling in Irving's fiction

As was already mentioned, Irving's life-long passion is wrestling, and as such it is present in a number of his novels. Generally speaking, we can say about his fiction that it has autobiographical features to a certain extent: the narrator is sometimes called John (John Berry in *The Hotel New Hampshire*, Johnny Wheelwright in *A Prayer for Owen Meany*), one of his characters struggles with dyslexia, just like him (Johnny Wheelwright in *A Prayer for Owen Meany*), he describes a marriage similar to his first one (*The Water-method Man*, *The World According to Garp*), the settings are the same places where he has lived, e.g. Vienna (*Setting Free the Bears*, *The 158-pound Marriage*, *The World According to Garp*, *The Hotel New Hampshire*), New Hampshire (*The Hotel New Hampshire*, *A Prayer for Owen Meany*) or Toronto (*A Prayer for Owen Meany*, *A Son of the Circus*). And finally there is the wrestling, in which he has been involved both as an active wrestler and a coach. For his heroes, who are involved in wrestling (and not only the male characters), it is an inseparable part of their lives, and in the wrestling room important events of their lives occur.

In *The 158-pound Marriage*, one of the four characters, Severin Winter, is a coach of a school's wrestling team. The encounters with his lover (who, despite having only a little space in the novel, strongly influences the life of all four protagonists) take place in the wrestling room, and Irving introduces the atmosphere

well known to him, the atmosphere of the wrestling gym, a warm, private place with the soft mats, the smell of sweat and the feeling of intimacy. It is also there where the final reconciliation of the Winter couple happens. In *The World According to Garp*, wrestling is Garp's favorite pastime, his wrestling's coach daughter becomes his wife, their first son is conceived on the wrestling mat and it is in the wrestling gym where Garp is assassinated. And finally, in *Until I Find You*, Jack Burns learns to wrestle with a woman, who abuses him sexually for a long period of time and who thus ruins his future relationships with women. However, it could be argued whether mixed wrestling of this sort could actually be legitimately subsumed within the standard "wrestling" category.

It is therefore possible to say that the wrestling illustrates the most significant periods in the characters' lives.

3. THE ANALYSIS OF SELECTED NOVELS: THE ABSENCE OF A FATHER IN IRVING'S WORK

3.1. The absence of nuclear family in *The World According to Garp*

The World According to Garp is Irving's fourth novel, which he published in 1978 and which won him with the status of an acclaimed writer. It is hard to define what the novel is about, as there are many possible viewpoints: it can be viewed as a novel about a writer who struggles with his writing (interestingly, there are two writers in the novel, not only Garp, but also his mother) and thus we can perceive it as a metafiction: a book about writing books. Or, it can be perceived as a novel about marriage, about the perils of marriage, especially lust which gets hold of both Helen and Garp who have to deal with it and who are in the end severely punished for it. It is also a novel about relationships between men and women

and how difficult it is for the sexes to live and cooperate together. It was Irving's first book in which he introduced a burning social issue of its time, feminism, through the life of Garp's mother, Jenny Fields. It is also a novel dealing with the fear of death, particularly the death of the people we love, in this case, children. As Irving puts it, "It is a novel about being careful, and about that not being enough" (WAG, Author's Afterword 1999).

Finally, the novel is about a man who grows up without his father and has to deal with the situation, even if he doesn't consider it a problem.

In *The World According to Garp*, we encounter an incomplete family with a missing father, a family with only one parent, a mother. According to M.J.Campion we distinguish a category in the families of a single mother and her child which defines precisely the situation of Jenny Fields: "Lonely mothers, who deliberately want to be single and who have a child with a man, whom they never considered as a partner" (Sobotková 171). Nevertheless, the situation described in the novel is not usual in everyday life and it illustrates Irving's penchant for weird circumstances and conditions. Garp's mother, who decides to have a baby without a husband and to bring him up without any man, chooses as a father a patient in the hospital where she works, a patient who falls into one of her categories of patients, the ones already lost for life. "My father,' Garp wrote, 'was a Goner. From my mother's point of view, that must have made him very attractive. No strings attached'" (WAG 28). Jenny, and therefore also Garp, knows nothing about him. The figure of a father, one of two most important persons in a human life, is here completely effaced after the impregnation and his expected death shortly afterwards. He is present in the novel only as a name, which T.S.Garp gets after him, as approximately one half of the genetic code, with no role

afterwards, the main reason for this choice being his certain future disengagement.

Thus, Garp grows up only with his mother, with no attempt on her side to provide him with a father. We have already said that the absence of a father influences human behaviour especially in adulthood, but what precedes is the personality development in childhood and adolescence, which is usually stigmatized by this deprivation. For Garp, the problems he has to face as a boy are usually the innuendos on his origin and the fact that he is always regarded as an odd child, with people speculating on the absence of his father: "A boy without a father, some said, has dangerous mischief forever on his mind" (WAG 60). With Garp, these offences do not have any serious consequences: either he does not understand them, e.g. when as a small boy he is called a Jap in the allusion of his father's nationality, or his mother protects him from hearing them, or she paraphrases them to sound nice. However, such child feels that he is not like the other ones. "It's odd,' Garp wrote, 'that the family who would convince me of my own uniqueness was never close to my mother's heart'" (WAG 60). Garp, a steady and calm person like his mother, even in his childhood, takes nothing from these early outrages but a sense of uniqueness, which is not a bad result.

In psychological literature dealing with family life, J.M.Campion even claims that such single mothers create "a new way of parenthood, which produces a more open family. A mother who really cares about her child, is able to organize a good and supportive network of people, who are sincerely concerned about her and her child, help them and support them (and this experience is not a burden for them, but enriching experience)" (Sobotková, 172). "Other arguments that support this type of parenthood state that the children of single mothers do not have to experience the

shock after a divorce or sudden widowhood, that they are mostly – with older women – children, who are planned and wanted, and who therefore will not be in a disadvantaged position“ (Sobotková, 172).

Jenny Fields, who represents such a mother, is perfectly able to provide her child with an environment like this. As for the models of a male behaviour, when there is not the figure of a father present, there are plenty of them: Garp and his mother live in a boys' boarding school, with male teachers and male staff around, a career choice Jenny has once made mainly for that reason, when she interrupted all contacts with her family and thus denied Garp the possibility of contact with his grandfather. (In the families with no father, it is usually another male relative who takes on the role of the model of male behaviour to enable the child to see the interaction among sexes, the typical behaviour patterns and who provides him with a broader possibility of socialization.) Garp is influenced mostly by women in his life and two men, one of them being professor Tinch, his literary tutor, the other one being Ernie Holm, his wrestling coach and his future father in law, a person who resembles the most the role of a father, although it is not exactly explicit in the novel. When Ernie Holm dies, Garp takes over his job and continues in his work with wrestlers, which is a traditional thing to do for a son after his father's death: to continue his work and to pass on what he has been taught.

Speaking of Ernie Holm, he and his daughter Helen represent another type of incomplete family in the novel, one without a mother, who leaves them a few months after Helen's birth. Unlike Garp, who was told by his mother that his father had been a soldier and had died in the war, and who is contented with such an explanation, Helen lives with the story that her mother is looking for her, which makes it much harder for the girl: she still believes in her sudden

reappearance. "Helen Holm was forever on the lookout for nurses because she was forever on the lookout for her disappeared mother, whom Ernie had made no attempt to find" (WAG 83). She misses her mother in every way, her frustration is fully shown in the scene where she wrongly considers Jenny to be her missing mom and without any restraints or reproaches runs to her and hugs her. "Of course Helen would remember that first hug her whole life; however her feelings for Jenny might change, and change back, from that moment in the wrestling room Jenny Fields was more of a mother to Helen than Helen had ever had" (WAG 86). Luckily for Helen, she has a loving and sensitive father and so she doesn't suffer from the lack of love or care. Also, she was abandoned as a child and has no memories of her mother to torture her.

We shall deal with the topic of absent mother fully in the another chapter, concentrating on the novels where the children of the missing mothers are the major characters of the book, which Helen is not, compared to them. Nevertheless, let us briefly mention the consequences that this deprivation has caused to her.

In her adolescence, her problem arising from the family condition is mainly the feeling of having been rejected once and it manifests in her tough-mindedness and in not emotionally displaying herself to other people, not even to her father, for fear of being hurt again. When she reaches nineteen years, she agrees to marry Garp and thus creates a family of her own, which fills the gap of her emotional needs. She finally puts up with her mother's absence after the fatal car accident when she loses her own child. "But at least for a time, Helen would heal herself and her family. Never having a mother, and having had little chance to use Jenny Fields that way, Helen submitted to this period of hospitalization at Dog's Head Harbor. She calmed herself by nursing Duncan, and she hoped that Jenny would nurse Garp" (355).

We have so far discussed the reasons why there is only a mother present in the novel, the condition of the child and the mother when she became a single one, the disengagement of other relatives and the family relationships within a broader social environment. Garp represents a man who was able to deal with the absence of a father very successfully, as we shall demonstrate in further analysis. He denies the traditional hypothesis that a child needs a father to develop in a normal way. According to Sobotková "researches have not proved so far a direct connection between the absence of a father in the upbringing and the possible negative phenomena in the child's development" (175). As I have already mentioned and as she states, in the case of the father's absence it is mostly his role in the socialization that is pointed out. "It is repeatedly assumed that fathers are responsible for their children's socialization and other factors, such as the influence of other social environments, of media, or of the child's temperament, are neglected. ... Therefore, the mere physical presence of a father is not a guarantee of a healthy development of the child" (175).

In short, in spite of the traditional and usually valid presuppositions, the missing father does not have to necessarily signify any handicap: it is only one influence in the human life, the one that we can only speculate about, as we never learn what the person's life would look like if he / she had a father. The same applies to Garp, thinking about his life including a father is a pure hypothesis. We are interested in his life without a paternal figure and how it has influenced him, if it has at all.

The influence of the nuclear family we grow up in is significant in our adulthood and it influences various spheres of man's life, mainly his / her personality, behaviour in difficult life situations, relationships, the way he / she copes with problems.

3.1.1. Garp's personality

Personality can be characterized as "the totality of an individual's behavioural and emotional tendencies, broadly a distinguishing complex of individual or group characteristics" (Longman Family Dictionary). According to Vágnerová, "personality undergoes a regular and gradual change of psychic qualities and processes during one's life, and this transformation, that is to say the development of human personality, is continual" (Vágnerová 2003, 6). She also states that "every personality is a part of a certain environment" and that we always have to count on "an interaction of the individual and environment" (Vágnerová 2003, 6).

EXTROVERSION (THE INCORPORATION IN HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS)

Garp is a person with no problems in human communication or social relations. He goes to school, he is in contact with other students and also with Helen and Cushie Percy, the eldest daughter of one of the academy teachers and the girl with whom Garp experiences his first sexual adventure. Sons of single mothers are said to be more dependant on the mother that is usual for a child, but he does not fit into this pattern. Still, there is one interesting feature: "It would be years before Garp noticed that he didn't have any friends" (WAG 116). He is so used to the solitary life his mother leads, that he becomes the same. But that is not necessarily the consequence of living only with a mother, that might easily be seen as a consequence of his mother's nature. Later in his adult life, he eventually befriends Roberta Muldoon, and he enjoys the meetings of Helen's friends, the Fletchers, but he never becomes a person with many friends. He is happiest at home, only with his own family, his job being also a solitary one.

Concerning the dependence on his mother, it is only a financial one. In his early adulthood, a married starting author with a

wife still studying and a baby, Jenny supports them financially, but that is all, they all live their independent lives. (That independence is, of course, also Jenny's credit, as she is not the type of single mother who is attached strongly to her only child and thus prevents him from living his / her own life: she is perfectly able to give Garp his own space and at the same time is always ready to give a helping hand when needed, for example after the fatal accident.)

AFFABILITY (THE QUALITY OF HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS)

Garp is also a very sensitive person: we don't find in his personality the emotional coldness and aloofness that could result from his father's absence, from the deprivation. Evidently, his mother has succeeded in giving him enough love for both parents, proving that it is mainly the quality, not quantity, of parenting that counts. He sincerely loves his mother, his wife and above all his children. It is him who convinces Helen to have children at such an early age by promising to her that he would take care of them, and he does so. His love for them is demonstrated mostly through the fear he feels, through his apprehension about their safety. Unfortunately for Garp, safety (as well as lust, which is interconnected with that topic within the novel) cannot be planned or controlled.

"If Garp could have been granted one vast and naive wish, it would have been that he could make the world safe. For children and for grownups. The world struck Garp as unnecessarily perilous for both" (WAG 265). T.S.Garp, since the moment when his first child, Duncan, was born, experiences a never-ending apprehension for his safety, for his health, and this feeling intensifies even more after the birth of his second son, Walt. Garp, ever-conscious of safety, becomes obsessed with the thought that the danger is everywhere, even at night, at their home. "Garp sometimes fell asleep listening to Walt's chest, and he would wake up, frightened, when he could no longer hear the thump of the boy's heart; but the

child had merely pushed his father's heavy head off his chest so that he could roll over and sleep more comfortably. Both the doctor and Helen told Garp, 'It's just a cough.' But the imperfection in Walt's nightly breathing scared Garp right of his sleep. ... Garp now dreamed only of horrors happening to his children" (WAG 317). As a father, Garp is so loving that he is almost overprotective. He watches and listens to his children when they are asleep, he wonders what possible dangers do await them in the outer world, one day he even goes to guard his son when he spends night at his friend's whose mother doesn't seem to Garp as a suitable parent and a good babysitter. "With the children Garp was instinctively generous, loyal as an animal, the most affectionate of fathers; he understood Duncan and Walt deeply and separately. Yet, Helen felt sure he saw nothing of how his anxiety for the children made the children anxious – tense, even immature. On the one hand he treated them as grownups, but on the other hand he was so protective of them that he was not allowing them to grow up" (WAG 250). Garp even thinks himself to be psychologically unfit for parenthood: what if their most dangerous enemy turns out to be him? And that, partly, becomes true, when Walt dies and Duncan loses his eye in a car accident caused by Helen and Garp. The Under Toad, a concept created by Walt because of misunderstanding the word "undertow" (and in reality, Irving's son's Brendan coinage) and an expression signifying something sinister coming, "was neither green nor brown, Garp thought. It was me. It was Helen. It was the colour of bad weather. It was the size of an automobile" (WAG 445). It is a paradox that after so many worries about the health and life of his children it is himself and Helen who cause the worst accident in their children's lives.

CONSCIENTIOUSNESS (PURSUING ONE'S OBJECTIVES)

Garp's major objective and the aim of his life has always been to become a writer. "A real writer, as Helen had said" (WAG 92). To

fulfill this goal, he works hard. He writes short stories, he discusses them thoroughly with Helen and Mr. Tinch, he even goes to Europe for one year to get new experience and inspiration and to enjoy the solitary confinement of a writer's life. We can watch the problems the writers face (both Garp and Jenny) in the creative process and the creation of his first serious short story, *Penzion Grillparzer*. Later back in the USA, married and with a child he takes care of, he still pursues his aim to become a good writer: "Garp joked that he called his first novel *Procrastination* because it had taken him so long time to write it, but he had worked on it steadily and carefully; Garp was rarely a procrastinator" (WAG 188). Both his first two novels are written with their author taking care of small children, which proves the degree of determination he has.

Later, after the loss of Walt, it is on the contrary his writing and his third novel that give him the possibility to cope with the loss of his son, through the crude and vulgar book he writes. It was "Garp's deliverance from insanity" (WAG 416).

EMOTIONAL STABILITY (THE CONSTANCY OF AFFECTIONS)

Garp's feelings are not only stable, they are also deep and intense. The affection he feels towards his sons has already been demonstrated, and the same applies to Helen, "the first and last woman Garp loved" (WAG 538). Garp succeeded with Helen in creating what he never had – a complete and functioning nuclear family, mainly thanks to the love they both felt for each other, otherwise, it would not have been possible for them to overcome their infidelities and its consequence, the death of Walt. Shortly before his death, after fourteen years of their marriage, Garp finds composedness and is happy with Helen, all his lust and thoughts of other girls or women having been left behind.

3.1.2. Garp's behaviour in difficult life situations and his ways of coping with the problems

Behaviour is "the manner of conducting oneself, or, to be more specific, it is anything that an organism does involving action and response to stimulation, that is to say the response of an individual, group, or species to its environment (merriam-webster)". It is normal that people, in the course of their lives, get sometimes into difficult life situations and then it depends on their personality and also on their previous life experience, on their upbringing and family development how they deal with them. Difficult life situations can have positive influence on a man (they can strengthen us, both physically and mentally) or negative influence (and then a neurosis or a psychosomatic illness can occur) (Čáp 1993, 126).

By the term difficult life situation we can label the failure to satisfy any of the basic human needs, like : the elementary human needs, the need of security and safety, sexual need, the need of stimulation, the need of social relations and affections, the cognitive needs. The frustration arises from the deprivation of any of the needs (Čáp 1993, 127).

Garp has to deal with difficult life situations arising from the loss of security and safety of his close relatives. It is one of the viewpoints of what the book is about: the fear of the death of the beloved ones, and, more generally, the fear of other ways through which we can lose the people we love.

Garp's difficult situations start with the discovery of his wife's infidelity. But there is not much space in the novel devoted to his way of coping with it, because very shortly afterwards Garp, together with Helen, has to face a much worse situation, the death of Walt and the mutilation of Duncan caused by both of them, which puts the infidelity matter aside. In general, people have two possibilities of how to cope with difficult life situations: one of them is aggression

(towards oneself or towards others), the other one is escape (Čáp 1993, 128). Garp chooses the aggression: he writes his third novel, *The World According to Bensenhaver*, "about the impossible desire of the husband to protect his wife and child from the brutal world" (WAG 417), a novel full of violence, rape and murder, which releases his tension and the guilt that he feels. "Garp knew what terror would lurk at the heart of his book" (WAG 364). "He wrote a novel *The World According to Bensenhaver*, into which all his other feeling flew. ... It is as if Garp's grief has made his heart perverse" (WAG 373).

Compared to the loss of one's child, the death of a parent is not so difficult to bear, the novel does not describe how Jenny's assassination affected Garp emotionally, we only learn the material results. Garp mourns his mother sincerely, but we can feel that he is tougher and also more resigned to what is going on around him, after what has happened. "Ever since Walt died, wrote T.S.Garp, my life has felt like an epilogue" (WAG 457).

To conclude, we can say that Garp's reactions to the difficulties he experiences in his life are perfectly normal and they are not affected by the fact that he was brought up only by his mother.

3.1.3. Garp's relationships

We can say that the absence of a father has not affected the quality of Garp's relationships in a negative way. As the proponent of attachment theory, John Bowlby, puts it, "the earliest bonds formed by children with their caregivers have a tremendous impact that continues throughout life. Attachment serves to keep the infant close to the mother, thus improving the child's chances of survival. The central theme of attachment theory is that mothers who are available and responsive to their infant's needs establish a sense of

security. The infant knows that the caregiver is dependable, which creates a secure base for the child to then explore the world“ (Van Wagner).

Garp, having obtained this security for his future relationships in childhood, thanks to his mother, manages to lead successful and fulfilling relationships with his closest folks, i.e. Helen, Duncan and Walt.

His marriage with Helen is a loving and caring one and it would probably last a long time if it were not for Garp's unexpected death. At the age of thirty-three, after fourteen years of marriage, "Garp was happy with Helen. He wasn't unfaithful to her, anymore; that thought rarely occurred to him" (WAG 493). Their relationship is a stable and good one and they manage to overcome everything together, all that in spite of the fact that they are both from incomplete families.

His relationship with his children is above all loving, as has been described above.

3.1.4. Conclusion

The aim of this chapter relating to *The World According to Garp* was to discuss the absence of nuclear family and its consequences in there. After analyzing the personality, the relationships and the behaviour in difficult life situations and coping with the problems of the main hero, T.S.Garp, in his adulthood, we can say that there are no negative consequences of the deprivation in his life (however, it would be interesting to follow the hero's personal development in the following years, if it were not for his early death). Garp became a good man, caring for his family and being able to live with only one half of his origins known to him. (It is, of course, easier to live without such thoughts if a man has always known that his / her father is definitely dead and there is no way how

to retrace him. Still, maybe his father's family could have been found or contacted, but Garp never even tries to do that, which shows that he is well-balanced and concentrated on the life that is going on now, not on the past.)

It is undeniable that this is also his mother's lion's share. She was capable of living the life of a single mother without any burden of it lying on her son (although she decided deliberately that she wanted to be a single mother, she could have found it unbearable facing the reality of it, which she did not). She was able to provide the two of them with good living conditions herself, and what is more important, she was able to give her son enough love and affection although she could never take a rest, with her parents openly resenting her way of life and Jenny therefore resenting them and severing all connections. She probably found all her strength thanks to the fact that it was her own will and this will has never changed. As a mother, she succeeded in raising her child into an independent and at the same time sensitive person who is able to live his own life and who has enough love for his own family, which is an achievement where many complete families fail.

To conclude, it was his mother's decision that determined his life to be without a father, and it was his mother's effort and success that there were no consequences of this decision and of this deprivation to the life of T.S.Garp in his adulthood.

3.2. The absence of nuclear family in *Until I Find You*

In his last and by far the most voluminous novel, published in 2005, Irving confirms his lifelong obsession with the theme of an incomplete family and ways in which it can be compensated for. Moreover, he adds a history of child abuse and thus opens another burning issue in his work. However, there is a certain shift, which

P.Gray defines aptly: "Irving has not been shy in the past about telling his readers what they should think – particularly strong didactic streaks run through *The Cider House Rules* and *A Prayer for Owen Meany* – but here he leaves the question of Jack's early sexual indoctrination murky" (Gray). Nevertheless, the novel holds together by another overall idea: that our memory is very unreliable and that we have to search for the truth on our own, if we want to be a calm and satisfied person, not haunted by the past. It is a novel "about obsession and loss, truth and storytelling, the signs we carry on us and inside us, the traces we can't get rid of", as we can read on the blurb on the book cover (UFY).

Interestingly, there are also other themes in the book that were already present in his previous novels. From *A Prayer for Owen Meany*, we find a person reminiscent of Owen Meany (here – the littlest soldier) or the Toronto school (here – St. Hilda's). From *A Widow for One Year*, we remember Amsterdam with its prostitutes and the older woman thing, as Irving calls the attraction of the main hero to older women. Nevertheless, the main theme is related to the absence of nuclear family, to the absence of safe and protected childhood, and in the dedication the author makes this absolutely clear: "For my youngest son, Everett, who made me feel young again. With my fervent hope that when you're old enough to read this story, you will have had (or still be in the midst of) an ideal childhood – as different from the one described here as anyone could imagine" (UFY). Let us leave behind the most favourite journalistic and Irving's least favourite question of how much this book is autobiographical, and let us instead focus on the absence of nuclear family in the life of the main character, the actor Jack Burns, and its consequences in his life. As Paul Gray puts it, "...the novel reiterates the central premise of most of Irving's fiction: all childhoods, even the most pampered, can seem scary". Yet, the

length of the novel is not caused by such exhausting description of Jack's quest for the truth and for his father, it is due to Irving's special liking for complicated plots with many detours and many minor characters, which culminates in this book.

Just like in *The World According to Garp*, we encounter an incomplete family with a missing father, a family with only one parent, a mother, and only one child, a boy. However, the situation in *Until I Find You* is completely different. At the beginning of the book we are led to believe that Jack Burns, four years old at that time, lost his father William because he abandoned him and his mother Alice deliberately. Alice makes her son believe that his father is an irresponsible womanizer who runs away from them when they try to find him and who destroys other girls' lives on the way, just as he had destroyed Alice's. Later, the reader finds the truth when Jack Burns finally learns that his father never wanted to leave him, that he had only been forced to do so by Alice. When William chose not to live with her but with another woman, there was no way for him to be in contact with Jack: the child was used by her as bait, but his father refused this blackmail after long trying to change Alice's mind, even though the loss of his son literally broke his heart.

The family situation can be therefore characterized like this: "Lonely mothers, who have children out of broken relationship (either because of the divorce of marriage, or the break up of unmarried partners). Attitudes towards this group are ambivalent. On one hand there are accusative and moralizing attitudes saying that the women haven't succeeded in keeping up the marriage, however unsatisfactory, because of the children. On the other hand, it is said that for the benefit of children it is better to finish the conflict and unsatisfactory relationship and to live with the children in an incomplete family, but in relative peace. The result of the mingling of these and other opinions is a general opinion that such parenthood

is not optimal, but it is in today's society often unavoidable" (Sobotková 171).

Jack's situation is special, because until his discovery of the truth, which comes when he is an adult man in his thirties, he has been living believing that his father, whom he never even has seen, abandoned him deliberately, which is a feeling difficult to live with, and which Alice makes even more painful by further shaping of William's image – the womanizer, the ink-addict, the irresponsible man, the one who never attempts to find and contact them. Thus "Jack must grow up without a father. But with the shadow of his absent father always looming, Jack sets off in search of the truth" (blurb on the book cover, UFY).

The first part of the analysis will therefore focus on the first half of the book, which describes Jack's childhood, adolescence and early adulthood lived without a father and which also describes the ways how he dealt with this deprivation. Later, the consequences of the father's appearance and the influence of his existence in Jack's adulthood will be discussed.

3.2.1. Jack's life without father

Jack grows up in Toronto only with his mother, he attends former girls' school and is surrounded mostly by girls and women. (That's what his real education consists of: relationships with older women.) In spite of his mother's view of his dad, he misses him and tries to find ways how to incorporate him into his life. As a school drama actor, he finally finds a way – he creates his audience of one: "Jack's audience of one was his father, of course. From the moment he imagined William, Jack could command every inch of the stage; he was on-camera for the rest of his life. Once Jack could imagine his father in the shadows of every audience, he could perform anything" (UFY 208). What's more, his father always seems to be

very close, as the others often remind Jack of him with their remarks of their resemblance and their curiosity, whether Jack is going to be like him or not. Jack in fact lives with a virtual image of his father created by other people, which is a mixed blessing. On one hand, he at least learns something about him, on the other hand, his absence hurts all the more. His mother, except for her story about his leaving them, utterly refuses to discuss him.

When he is an older child, he is confronted with the fact that his mother has formed a relationship with the mother of one of his friends, Emma. Jack experiences a difficult period. His mother lives openly with a woman, Emma forces him to talk to her about his sexual awakening, which has not started yet (again, this has to do with her persuasion, which is shared by many girls and women, that he is going to be a womanizer just like his father and she wants to see it), and when finally his adolescence begins, Jack is abused by Mrs. Machado, a cleaning woman in her forties, for several weeks. Having thus frustrating childhood and having never experienced normal family life, Jack is happy to leave Toronto to study in Redding and then Exeter. He still knows nothing about his father and feels very uncertain because of it. "At ten, Jack was increasingly curious about his father; that William had been demonized made the boy afraid of himself and who he might become" (UFY 339). To summarize it, Jack's main problem resulting from his situation is his unfamiliarity with his father's personality and because of that, he constantly feels insecure and precarious.

Still, Jack's years at boarding schools are probably the happiest in his life, although his childhood haunts him and complicates his first sexual relationships, which go on only with older women; with his peers, Jack is incapable of any kind of relationship. He quite easily becomes a famous movie star, only to realize how alone and unbalanced he is, even in his adulthood: that is still the

shadow of his absent father looming. When Emma, his best friend, roommate and a kind of family to him, dies, he meets his mother again and, finding out that she's dying, he sets off on the search for truth, as she is the only link to his father, a link that may break at any moment, which would mean that he would never find his father: such vision scares Jack very much. He is well aware of the fact that not finding his father would mean not finding his own identity ever. Jack's journey, imitating the journey he had once undertaken with his mother on the fake pursuit of his father, is like pieces of truth puzzle being put together. This and her final confession function as a kind of therapy for him, maybe even a better therapy than the one he has been having with a psychiatrist, since he realized that he is not able to live knowing nothing about his father. When he learns that his father never wanted to leave him, he feels more secure, but also more vulnerable, because he still has not found him and he knows that to find him is the only way to restore his new life.

3.2.2. Jack's father appears

As the title and the length of the book may suggest, his quest for his father is, in the end, successful. The ending is not surprising; the whole book would become a farce if he did not find him. The ending is not cataclysmic either; we knew all along the way that finding his father means a new life for Jack Burns, a life without insecurity and suppressed loneliness. Jack was very eager to find his father, yet as the pieces of the truth puzzle locked together, he also became quite anxious: "He kept thinking about the other William – the one he would have loved but was afraid to meet" (UFY 769). Yet, it is not him who makes the last step. Jack has started the search, but it is his stepsister Heather who contacts him and enables him to meet William, particularly for William's sake. Having found not only a father, but also a sister gives Jack his long-wanted peace and

sense of completeness, and not only to him, but also to his father. Even though William had long ago forgiven Alice, it was not possible for him to forget his son. "Jack had stopped acting. He was just Jack Burns – the real Jack Burns at last" (UFY 944). For the first time in his life, he realizes that he is happy.

What is important and essential above all is the assumption that everything is all right once we have finally found where we belong. "It was after midnight in Los Angeles – too late to call Dr. Garcia at home. But Jack didn't need to have a conversation with his psychiatrist. He would call her office and leave a message on her answering machine. 'Thank you for listening to me, Dr. Garcia,' Jack would tell her" (UFY 1035).

3.2.3. Conclusion

The aim of this chapter which deals with *Until I Find You* was to discuss the absence of nuclear family and its consequences in that particular novel, that is to say how the significant part of life lived without father has influenced Jack Burns.

Unlike Garp, Jack never put up with his father's absence, because he knew for sure that he was alive and lived in the belief that he had been abandoned by him. Also, his mother was not such a strong personality as Jenny Fields and although she loved her son, she was not able to help him with this issue, even though it was only because of her that he had been deprived of his father. Therefore, unlike Garp, Jack had troubled childhood, adolescence and adulthood, each period of his life in a different way:

As a child, he is obsessed with the father's absence and he tries everything he can do to have him somehow, if only fictitiously, in his life.

In his adolescence, which is a period difficult on its own, he experiences constantly the uncertainty and insecurity flowing from

the fact that he does not know anything about his father, except his negative features, and is afraid to have inherited them, and also from his low self-esteem, caused by the fact that he believes in his father's unconcern about him.

As an adult, Jack is alone, unhappy and unbalanced. (All of that could be perceived as a result of the sexual abuse, which he experienced as a child, but as we mentioned, Irving does not develop this theme fully further in the book, instead, as Jack grows up, the author focuses more and more on the theme of the missing father, therefore we have focused mainly on that, too.)

In *The World According to Garp*, the book ended by Garp's death. Here, the book ends by the reunion with the father, which, in a way, is a parallel to death and rebirth: Jack's old life is finished and a new one begins.

4. THE ANALYSIS OF SELECTED NOVELS: THE ABSENCE OF A MOTHER IN IRVING'S WORK

4.1. The absence of nuclear family in *A Widow for One Year*

"I hold a novel accountable for a good story, and by a good story, I mean one that's a little too complicated and twisted and circumlocutious to be easily encapsulated in a newspaper or television story", said John Irving in 1998 (Mudge). Certainly, he succeeded in writing a good story in *A Widow for One Year*, published in 1998. He decided to tell the story chronologically, which he hadn't done since *The Hotel New Hampshire*, and also to "structure the story in the manner of a play, with three distinct and separate moments of time: we see Ruth as a four year old girl, we see her as a thirty-six year old unmarried woman – successful in her career but struggling in her relationships – and we see her five years

later when she is a forty-one year old widow with a child who, not coincidentally, is the exact age Ruth was when we first met her and when her mother abandoned her“, said he (Mudge).

The last sentence brings us to the theme that is relevant to this thesis. Ruth, Irving's only female central character, was abandoned by her mother at the age of four and had to deal somehow with the situation, until her mother returned unexpectedly after thirty-seven years of absence. Further, according to Irving, it is a book about “a woman's sexual past and the choices in her sexual past that make her uncomfortable“ (Mudge), it is, again, a book about writing (not only Ruth, but other characters are writers there: her father Ted, her mother Marion, Marion's lover Eddie, Ruth's friend Hannah), it is also a book about grieving parents and the relentlessness of grief and despair. And many other plots can be found in there – a detective story, a love story - Marion and Eddie's as well as Ruth and Harry's one. “Yet, despite its multiple thematic threads and multilayered text, *A Widow for One Year* is essentially about the various ways in which we all deal with grief; how the passage of time, and fate's uncertain touch, can bring enormous change to our lives; how love can bring hope and redemption“ (Shindler).

4.1.1. Ruth at four

When Marion abandons her husband Ted and their daughter Ruth in the first part of the book, the Cole family, dysfunctional already (“We're what an idiot sociology major would call a dysfunctional family,' Ruth said“ (WOY 367)), suddenly changes into an incomplete family with one child and without mother. “A man usually becomes a lonely father when the children's mother dies, abandons the family or is seriously ill and therefore cannot take care of the family“ (Sobotková 176). The reasons why women abandon their families are not specified. With Marion, the reason is the fact

that she has not been able to overcome the loss of her two sons, not even after having another baby, Ruth, whom she conceived only on Ted's pressure. "Marion had always known that the child was lost to her. She had never wanted Ruth" (WOY 107). Knowing that her marriage is not functional because of Ted's affairs and her inability to overcome what happened to their children and knowing that she is not able to love her own daughter fully, as she is still lingering in the past with her two dead sons, she decides to leave, and after divorce she never wants custody of her own daughter, she never goes to see her, she just wishes to be on her own. "Grief is contagious," Marion began again. "I didn't want you to catch my grief, Eddie. I really didn't want Ruth to catch it" (WOY 656). To avoid being a bad mother, Marion rather chooses not to be mother at all. This is probably the only thing where Ted and Marion share their opinions on Marion's abandonment. Ted puts it this way: "Your mother was terminally depressed, and she knew it. She knew she would have a terrible effect on you. It's an awful thing for a child to have a parent who's always depressed" (WOY 385).

As for Ruth, "A four year old has a limited understanding of time. From Ruth's point of view, it was self-evident only that her mother and the photographs of her dead brothers were missing. It would soon occur to the child to ask when her mother and the photographs were coming back" (WOY 180). That is all we know about Ruth's state of mind when her mother abandoned her. The consequences of it are not evident until the moment when we meet Ruth again, as an adult woman.

According to Vymětal (69), as regards the creation of the inner stability and the basic way of relating to other people, the quality of the attachment between a child and a mother in the first years of life is very important. With Ruth and her mother, this attachment was rather chaotic and uncertain, due to Marion's

indifferent attitude to the child and her own mental imbalance. Luckily for Ruth, she had her father Ted around who loved her (because he had coped better with the loss of his sons and was therefore able to love a child again) and who gave her the so much needed emotional security and reliance. The researches published in Sobotková show that men are not any less able to take care of children than women are, they just do it in a different way. "Men as well as women know how to take care of children – their success depends on their personality and personal history, on the circumstances, financial security and supportive net, which is available. Men have a different way of parenting, but it is not a better or worse way. Children can feel equally satisfied in the care of loving father as well as in the care of mother" (Sobotková 177).

Ted was a good father. When Ruth was a child, he never neglected her and she loved him for it. As she says, "at least he was there" (WOY 309). (In fact, we know from the book that he wanted so much to be her father that he arranged Marion's affair with Eddie to be sure that he would get the child's custody.) He had succeeded in his parental role: Ruth became a good person, without problems with her personal delimitation, with confidence in herself and in her work. And Ruth had a kind of mother – Conchita Gomez, who worked with her husband for Ted, virtually raised her.

"Her father was a 'sexual predator', Ruth told Eddie, but he had been 'halfways decent' as a father" (WOY 309). So we can see that Ruth has been equally influenced by her mother's absence as well as by the permanent father's presence, that is to say, in her adulthood, her behaviour and her relationships are the result of both her parent's influence: Marion's main influence on Ruth is her departure and her absence, Ted's influence is ambiguous: Ruth appreciates what father he has been and hates what a womanizer

he is. "There was nobody Ruth Cole loved or hated as much as she loved and hated her father" (WOY 380).

4.1.2. Ruth at thirty-six

At thirty-six, Ruth is a single woman with successful literary career but not so successful personal life. She distrusts her judgement in men and finds herself more that often in questionable relationships. Her attitudes towards partners and children can be summarized by the sentence "She never concealed the fact that she was uncertain about marriage, and more uncertain about motherhood" (WOY 260). However, her attitude towards her mother and the fact that she abandoned her is, at least outwardly, indifferent. "I'm not looking for her. If she were looking for me, she would have found me. Since she's the one who left, I would never press myself on her. If she wants to find me, I'm the one who's easy to find" (WOY 253). But there are evidences that she is not so balanced. In her books, there are, for example, no mothers, and, what is more interesting, there are also no fathers: as Ruth admits in her inner thoughts, she does not know how to deal with her father, about whom her feelings are sorely mixed and whom she visits only rarely. She is capable of admitting to herself that her failures with men have had to do with their complicated relationship. For example, "Ruth basically hated arguing with men. It reminded her of arguing with her father" (WOY 301). Beyond, she arranges a reunion with Eddie O'Hare, her mother's ex-lover and a witness to the thirty-two years old events of the summer Marion abandoned her. Besides her father's point of view, which is characterized by the fact that he doesn't care for Marion, she needs to hear about her mother from someone who loved her and what is more, who still loves her.

Ruth, thinking for the first time of marrying and considering the possibility of being a mother, needs more than ever to understand

her mother's motives for her act to be able to decide whether she is fit for both marriage and parenthood. Eddie, unlike her father with his cynicism about Marion, finally manages to assure her that her mother had loved her, by telling her about the main Marion's fear which made her go: that her daughter might be like her, which she had not wanted. Although the question *What worse thing could a mother do than to leave her child?* is still not answered for Ruth, that is something she understands very well: she also does not want to be a mother if she is going to be a bad one. The truth, which is revealed to Ruth after many years of speculating and theories on her mother's leaving (how her dead brothers had robbed her mother of her capacity to love another child; how Marion had been afraid to love Ruth, out of fear of losing her only daughter to some calamity of the kind that had claimed her sons), helps her considerably not only in the specification of her relationship towards her mother and understanding her, but also in her reflection about marriage and motherhood: "Maybe I shouldn't be afraid that I'd be a rotten wife. Maybe I wouldn't make a bad mother" (WOY 310).

With the image of her mother somewhat restored, Ruth still cannot get rid of the feeling that her mother must one day, probably one of the days significant for Ruth, turn up. So far, it has not happened, nevertheless, Ruth goes on expecting to hear from her, which means that she still has not stopped thinking of her mother and has not stopped to wish to meet her one day. The feeling of being rejected as a child is not so easy to be suppressed by rational arguments and the little girl, who was once abandoned and who is still jealous of her dead brothers, who became her mother's demons, still lives inside Ruth: "She's my mother, for Christ's sake!' Ruth had cried in the cab. 'I'm the demon she should be trying to deal with!" (WOY 313)

We see that for Marion the demons are her dead sons. For Ruth, her demon that keeps haunting her more than her unsuccessful relationships with men is the question *if she wants a child*. At the age of thirty-six, there is not much time left, still, she knows from her father two facts that make her wonder if it is a good thing for her to have a child: she is aware of the fact that having a child means living in constant fear that something will happen to the child, and she cannot get rid of the idea that if her mother had “failed the mother test” (WOY 330), so could she. Ruth wishes ardently to have someone to discuss these issues with: “Now, even more than when she’d been a child, Ruth wanted to talk to her mother. Damn her, anyway! Ruth thought. Ruth had long ago resolved that she would not go looking for her mother” (WOY 331).

Yet her resolution is not so easy to adhere to. The hope that one day she will come looking for her is deeply rooted in Ruth, who feels her life go by and who knows that there are not many significant events to come that would bring her mother back, if she wants to appear during one of them: Ted’s funeral, where she is expecting Marion to show herself, but she does not; her wedding, where the situation repeats; and the birth of her child. Finally, she decides to marry, which is a big step for her, signifying an end to her previous bad relationships, and acknowledgement of the fact that her family history is still more powerful than her relationships history: “How could she ever considering giving up men? To an even greater extent, it was women she didn’t trust” (WOY 355).

Ruth is a strong person: not even the discovery of her mother’s identity as a writer, which is revealed not by her name or photo, but by the scenes described in her books, so similar to the stories that once happened to the dead Thomas and Timothy, makes her change her mind: with Eddie, they agree to give Marion all the time she needs. It is evident from her books, which are probably a

sort of therapy for her, that she still dwells in the past. But that does not mean that they are happy with the decision. Eddie feels only sorrow for Marion's not showing up, and Ruth is, especially after her baby boy's birth, vexed with her mother. "Then Ruth would fall back to sleep – often wondering why her mother hadn't made an appearance, now that her father was dead. Didn't she want to see the baby? Ruth would wonder. Not to mention me! It made her so angry that she tried to stop wondering" (WOY 512). Notwithstanding, she loves being a mother, her motherhood calms her as she feels that everything is as it should be and that the story had come full circle. The only thing that surprises her in her parenthood is how much she loves her baby: for someone anxious not to be a bad mother, that must be a relief.

And knowing what is it to grow up without a mother, and being a mother herself, she cannot help but wonder what happened to the daughter of the murdered prostitute in Amsterdam (the daughter who, we come to know, existed only in the prostitute's imagination).

4.1.3. Ruth at forty-one

When we meet Ruth at the age of forty-one, there is still no sign of her mother looking for her. Ruth is angry: when her mother does not show up after her husband's funeral, she, in a way, writes her off, and we cannot blame her: her son is at that time precisely the same age she had been when Marion abandoned her, and this makes her even more unforgiving towards Marion. Ruth simply cannot imagine the lack of love her mother must have felt. "I'm not interested in her!" Ruth had said" (WOY 573). However, her one-year long widowhood softens her feeling towards her mother. The grief for her dead husband and the heightened love for her only child persuade Ruth that what her mother did had certain sense in it: she simply could not bear the idea of losing another child, after the boys'

death, therefore, she hadn't wanted to love Ruth to avoid the possible future loss. "All at once, why her mother had left her began to make sense" (WOY 584). As a widow and a mother, Ruth finally has both the experience and the imagination to believe it.

So it is a letter to her mother, her first attempt to contact her, with what she puts an end to her year's grief, and it is when she falls in love for the first time in her life and is immensely happy when she finally, during her second wedding, stops to be on the lookout for her mother. Both the letters from Eddie and Ruth to Marion unanswered, they gave up expecting to hear from her for good. Marion in Ruth's thoughts transforms from the mother who abandoned her to a mother who had a very unhappy life for which Ruth feels, in the middle of her own happiness, very sorry. "Oh, Mommy," Ruth said, to the cold stars, 'come enjoy your grandson while you still can'" (WOY 641).

When Marion shows up, after thirty-seven years, it is paradoxically not because of any significant event in Ruth's life or because she suddenly wants to meet her, but that does not matter. What is important is that Ruth is at last truly prepared to meet Marion, when she appears. She has always wanted to, but it would be with anger and sorrow that she would meet her earlier. At the age of forty-one, knowing how lucky she had been in her life with only a little misfortune compared to her mother's life, with a son she loves very much, with the experience of widowhood and with the right man by her side at last, she is able to meet her mother with love and forgiveness.

4.1.4. Conclusion

A Widow for One Year is in Irving's work a book which deals the most with the absence of a parent in a person's life. The story is framed by the abandonment and reappearance of Marion and

despite of her absence, she is constantly present in the story due to Ruth's thoughts of her and Ted and Eddie's memories. As in *Until I Find You*, Ruth, as well as Jack, meets her missing parent in the end, in contrast to *Until I Find You*, we do not know how that affects her in her future life.

During the thirty-seven years that Ruth had to live without her mother, she was strongly influenced by her absence. The most difficult thing for Ruth was to understand how her mother could have done it, even though the reasons for her act were explained to her by her father and by Eddie, and also how her mother could not come back in the important periods of her life.

That Ruth became a good person with confidence in herself and her work was only her father's merit, because he was a good and loving father to her and in such cases the consequences of the mother deprivation are not so serious. Still, Ruth experienced some in her adulthood: she felt very uncertain about her potential motherhood, with the image of her being a bad mother haunting her. Also, she does not trust women, due to the breach of trust she experienced in her childhood, when she trusted her mother completely and then Marion abandoned her.

Ruth finds peace only after her own experience of motherhood and grief of bereavement, when she is finally able to understand Marion, forgive her and live her life undisturbed by the previous deprivation.

4.2. The absence of nuclear family in *The Hotel New Hampshire*

The Hotel New Hampshire is Irving's fifth novel, published in 1981, three years after *The World According to Garp*. It was Irving's first book which he wrote as a full-time author and he managed to write a first-rate family saga about the Berry family and their

adventures in Maine and New Hampshire, USA, and Vienna, Austria. After *The World According to Garp*, told in the third person, Irving returned here to the first-person narration which he used in his first three novels, and so we get to know the Berry family through the eyes of John, the middle of the five children. He tells us their story in chronological order.

There are certain elements present in the book that we can find in the others, too. There is a bear, there is Vienna with its prostitutes and there is New England, an eastern region of the United States consisting of Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont (newengland.com). And again, one of the characters, Lily, is a writer.

Bears: Irving first introduced bears in his books in *Setting Free the Bears*, where the hero's aim was to release all the animals from the Vienna ZOO. Later, he included a bear in *The World According to Garp*: not in Garp's life, but in his first story called *The Pension Grillparzer*. He used the same motif – a family encounter in a hotel with a very strange bear, who in fact is a woman in disguise – in the second part of *The Hotel New Hampshire*.

Vienna is a motif inspired by his studies at the Institute of European Studies in Vienna in 1963 which repeated in all his first five novels: he was evidently strongly influenced by the city, its atmosphere and German language and used it as a partial or complete setting for his plots. The prostitutes, if they appear in Irving's book, are usually the Vienna prostitutes and they and their environment is described really closely, so closely that the prostitutes from *The World According to Garp* and *The Hotel New Hampshire* melt in the reader's memory. Another book, where the world of prostitutes is prominent, is *A Widow for One Year*, where they are set in Amsterdam.

New England, also a geographical motif, is really prominent in his work. Irving makes use of the environment he knows very well – he was born in New Hampshire, he studied there, he now lives in Vermont. We can find New England in all his novels except *Setting Free the Bears* and *A Son of the Circus*.

As it is a family saga, the story is focused especially on the members of the family, and the novel is about their individual stories interconnected together. We follow Win and Mary's (the parents) love story, John and Franny's incestuous desires, Frannie's rape, Frank's struggle with the admission of his homosexuality and his taste for taxidermy, Lily's creative process as a writer, Egg's obsession with costumes. The central plot is the creation of the family hotels – the first Hotel New Hampshire in USA, where the family is still complete, then the second Hotel New Hampshire in Vienna, after Mary and Egg's death in an airplane crash – and the individual stories of the family members form the subplots, together with other characters present in the book: Freud, Susie the bear, Junior Jones or Chipper Dove.

The incomplete family represented here is a family who lost a mother and one child in an accident which changed a happy and functional family unexpectedly into an incomplete one, but still quite numerous: the father was left with four children. Moreover, in a foreign country. Contrary to the novels already analysed, this loss happens not at the beginning, but roughly in the middle of the story, we can therefore analyse how the lives of all the remaining family members have been influenced and what consequences the loss have caused to Win – father of Egg and husband of Mary, and Frank, Frannie and John – children of Mary and siblings of Egg. Thus, Win Berry can be characterized as a single father with children, single because of his wife's death. Their family situation

and behaviour after the safe landing in Austria of the first part of the family and the plane crash of Mary and Egg can be described according to Sobotková: "If a new family is a result of a life crisis, the first step is to reorganize the family, find a new family identity and start the process of stabilization. Essential is to define or redefine the family boundaries, as the family members take on plenty of new tasks and responsibilities. In a family of a single parent, it is necessary to keep in mind the psychological presence of the other, though physically absent parent. In thoughts, in memories and in behaviour of the single parent the absent one can have a significant role for a long time" (Sobotková 178).

The new Berry family becomes more united than ever: they all have to face the sorrow and the pain and settle in new city, new schools, new job and new people. They didn't have a fair start – only a day and a night before the news of Mother and Egg reached them, but they were lucky in finding friends in the second Hotel New Hampshire to help them: Freud and especially Susie the bear, who became a sort of mother the the children, all of them teenagers at that time: "...and we were forced into an intimacy with her that was unnatural because we would suddenly need to turn to her as we would turn to a mother (in the absence of our own mother); after a while, we would turn to Susie for other things" (HNN 286). Moreover, with their status of motherless children, both the prostitutes and the radicals, the only people present in their environment, treat them well.

As regards the changes of the individual members of the family, the death of mother and Egg influenced deeply all of them, although on the outside it looks that they only gave up their habits. Frank gave up for good his hobby, the taxidermy, as it reminded him of the death, and adopted for some time an attitude of nihilism. Lilly, who took "mother's and Egg's deaths as a personal punishment for

some failure deep within herself" (HNH 305), resolved to change completely her personality. John gave up swearing, knowing that it would please his mother. And Franny decided to become a mother to all of them: "From now on, I'm mainly a mother," Franny said. "I'm going to take care of you fuckers – you, you, and you," Franny said, pointing to Frank and Lilly and me. "Because Mother's not here to do it" (HNH 307). Even their father accepts this change of roles. The death of his wife and his son made him a different person, at least towards his children: "He seemed as lost to us (as a father) as Mother and Egg, and I think we sensed that he would need to endure some more concrete suffering before he would gain his character back. ... For seven years, we missed our father, as if he had been on that plane" (HNH 361).

That is how the dead mother is constantly present in their lives, in spite of her absence. It sometimes seems that she and Egg are present in everything, such deep is the grief all of them feel. They see her in a prostitute's collection of china bears that rivalls hers, they are sensitive to phrases that concern *missing* anyone or anything, it is difficult for them to hear about *the ocean*. Franny adopts her mother's shrugs and looks to please her father and to comfort the others. Mother and Egg are as silent ghosts – always present with all the remaining members of the family. If they create a bond to anything, they cannot help but think how Egg or mother would like it, and they cannot help but wonder if their mother would love them after years, as adults and changed.

The most influenced person in the Berry family is the father, and it is natural. Win Berry lost his wife, his partner for life, and he lost her in a difficult period, during moving from one country to another, with uncertain prospects and children still not grown. He has got support in them, but he is not one of them. And he lives in constant fear that anything could happen to them, like it happened to

Egg. He finds certain consolation in the company of one of the radicals, the one with the voice similar to his wife's, but his grief is not so easily consoled. He spent twenty years with his wife by his side and without her, he is unable to look in the future. "It was apparent to me, then, what the seven years had done to Father: he had lost the decisiveness he must have had that night in Dairy, New Hampshire, when he took my mother walking in Elliot Park and snowed her with his vision of converting the Thompson Female Seminary to a hotel. ... And now I could see what sorrow had cost Father" (HNN 386).

In their adulthood, Frank, Franny, John and Lilly still miss their mother and Egg, knowing that they will not ever be able to forget them and that their death was a dividing line in their lives. Not by chance is Lilly's first novel, which is much autobiographical, ended by the plane crash, as well as the real plane crash ended one happy period of their lives. But we find that the loss has made them stronger and they stick together strongly, and even more strongly after Lilly's suicide. Except for Lilly, who felt too small (in both literal and figurative meaning) to succeed in the world and who committed suicide, they all become strong personalities, leaving the adolescent fears behind them. Frank does not hide his sexuality and is satisfied with what he is. Franny manages to deal with the rapist, Chipper Dove, and moves to a successful movie career and a happy marriage with Junior Jones. John, after overcoming his desire for Franny, lives happily with Susie and his father, and everything seems to be as it should be. As John as a narrator puts it, "I hope this is a proper ending for you, Mother – and for you, Egg" (HNN 519).

4.2.1. Conclusion

Sorrow is like a red thread going through this novel. Like the Berry brothers and sisters often say among themselves, sorrow floats and sorrow can take any shape in the world. The children managed to come to terms with the loss of their mother, although it happened in a difficult period for them (they were in the midst of adolescence, and they were in a foreign country), but the grief never left them. What is important is that it has not influenced their lives negatively: they were not grief stricken and unable to live, they managed to go on and in addition become a support for their widowed father – the one person affected the most. Their big advantage was that they were like a little community, and in the company of close people it was easier to deal with the situation. Lily's suicide is more a result of Lily's dissatisfaction with her own life, writing and appearance than a result of the mother's early death and it would probably happen all the same.

To conclude, the death of their mother and Egg strengthened the remaining family members (and left them with everlasting sorrow).

5. THE ANALYSIS OF SELECTED NOVELS: THE ABSENCE OF BOTH PARENTS IN IRVING'S WORK

5.1. The absence of nuclear family in *The Cider House Rules*

The Cider House Rules is Irving's fifth book, published in 1985. Thirteen years later, he adapted the book into a screenplay and it became a movie which was rather successful. A year later, Irving even won the Best Adapted Screenplay Academy Award for this screenplay. Its title refers to the rules pinned to the wall of the cider house that nobody obeys, because nobody from the apple

picking crew can actually read and the rules are therefore useless. In the same way, the characters in the novel do not act according to general conventions, but according to rules they agree on among themselves.

The novel can be best described as a bildungsroman – a novel about maternity, education and the formation of the main character. One of Irving's favourite authors is Charles Dickens, whose books are a perfect example of the bildungsroman (e.g. *Great Expectations*, *David Copperfield*); in *The Cider House Rules*, Irving honoured Dickens with writing a novel similar to his style. Let me again quote what he said about Dickens in his memoir: "I suppose you could say that I haven't ventured very far from Dickens" (IG 35). Moreover, he actually included *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations* in the novel as a book which is read to the orphans in the boys' department of the orphanage before sleep (for the girls' department, Irving chose *Jane Eyre*, another novel of formation, whose main hero is, as well as *David Copperfield*, an orphan).

Besides, it is one of Irving's provoking novels dealing with an actual issue – abortions, in this case. Irving was not afraid to express, if only in the book, his opinion: the novel is clearly in favour of the women's right to have an abortion, in favour of their freedom of choice (but also in favour of the doctor's freedom of choice: Homer Wells represents the ones who refuse to perform an abortion, Wilbur Larch the ones who do not).

The main character of the novel is Homer Wells, an orphan left in the orphanage of St. Cloud's, a boy who never knew his parents and who could only wonder what possible motives had led his mother to leaving him in an orphanage and never coming back.

When a child grows up without either parent, it is most often a child in an orphanage or another government institution (Vymětal 69). According to Čáp, the upbringing of such children have always

been a difficult social problem: the children suffered the so-called psychic deprivation in childhood, the critical period for this deprivation being the age from six to fifteen months. The most distinctive manifestations of the deprivation are connected with the disturbance of emotional relationships and substantial limitation of social interactions (Čáp 1993, 275 - 277). Homer Wells spent his entire childhood since his birth in the orphanage, not only the critical period, and we shall see how it influenced his relationships and social interactions in the analysis. But he had one advantage on his side: he had been the favourite orphan of the orphanage workers, Dr. Wilbur Larch, Nurse Angela and Nurse Edna. A child popular with the institution workers is far more often in the interaction with the adults than another, unpopular child. Therefore, if a child is popular, he / she can develop just like a child in a normal family (Čáp 1993, 276). All the boys in the orphanage are well-liked by the staff (in fact, the whole orphanage is described in an idealized way, the problems mentioned are just minor ones and there are no unpopular orphans, which is rather unlikely in real life), but only Homer has this special position, gained mainly by his three returns from unsuccessful adoptive families. At the age of twelve, he simply becomes "The Boy Who Belonged to St. Cloud's" (CHR 13) and the oldest unadopted child there.

5.1.1. Homer's adolescence

Thus Dr. Larch and both nurses function as a kind of family to Homer: they are his surrogate family and this state is further fixed by the fact that neither of them has a family of their own, therefore, they are more attached to Homer (and other orphans, too) than they would be if they had one. "Homer Wells was different; he was loved – by Nurse Angela and Nurse Edna, and by Dr. Larch, in spite of himself – and Homer Wells not only knew that he was loved, he also

probably knew that he loved these people“ (CDH 129). Particularly Wilbur Larch treats Homer as if he were his own son. When it is clear that he will never be adopted, Homer helps to run the orphanage and later Wilbur Larch helps him enter into the medical profession and makes him a skilled obstetrician. He hopes to keep the boy in St. Cloud’s forever and giving him a job there is the most that he can do to succeed in this effort. “What Larch dreamed of was that Homer would venture out in the world and then choose to come back to St. Cloud’s“ (CHR 154). As regards Homer, he feels at home at St. Cloud’s and once he gives up the hope of finding an adoptive family, it gives him inner peace, albeit temporary. “For Homer Wells, it was different. He did not imagine leaving St. Cloud’s. The Princes of Maine that Homer saw, the Kings of New England that he imagined – they reigned at the court of St. Cloud’s, they traveled nowhere; they didn’t get to go to sea; they never even saw the ocean“ (CHR 99). The only thing haunting Homer at this period, and only occasionally, is the desire to know who his real parents were, the desire to know why they did not wanted him, but as this desire can never be satisfied due to nonexistent records of the biological parents in the orphanage, there is nothing he can do about it and that helps him not to think about them. “Homer Wells had spent many years wondering if his mother would ever return to claim him, if she even thought about him, if she was alive or dead“ (CHR 481).

Homer’s main problem in his adolescence (whose end is considered to be the twentieth year of a man’s life (Čáp 1993, 143)) is rather his isolation – he has no peers among other orphans, because everybody else had been adopted, except Melony, the girl of the same age but of much wilder character than Homer has.

Melony’s fate is one of the three subplots in the novel and for Homer her later appearance in his new life means the return to his origins, therefore she is an important character. The second subplot

is the life of Wilbur Larch, Homer's surrogate father, whom we shall also observe. What these three characters have in common is the fact that they do not have their own nuclear family; Homer and Melony are orphans and Wilbur Larch's parents are dead and he has no wife or children of his own. Of these three characters Homer is the most independent one: he is not so attached to Melony as she is to him and he does not need Wilbur Larch as much as he needs him, but that does not mean that he loves him less. The third subplot is about the apple picking crew at the Ocean View, especially about the incestuous relationship between Arthur Rose and his daughter Rose.

Homer's isolation is caused by the missing social contacts which children from families acquire at schools, at hobby groups or from their parents. Homer has no such possibilities and no other place where to go, he has got no official education and no connections: "Where was the society where Homer Wells could fit in? wondered Wilbur Larch" (CHR 152). By making Homer "of use" (CHR 55) he hopes to keep the boy with him forever: although it is Homer who grows up without parents, he is not the only one in the book without nuclear family. Wilbur Larch represents a character who was brought up in a family, but has no family of his own in his adulthood and we shall see what consequences the departure of his surrogate son Homer will have. "Oh God, thought Wilbur Larch, what will happen to me when Homer has to go?" (CHR 176)

And of course, one day Homer has to go, not because of any particular external reason, but because he feels that he has to know also other environments in order to live his life fully. "Oh, please! He felt his heart say to him. Oh, please, let me leave!" (CHR 227) This decision is not primarily connected with the fact that he is an orphan, it is a normal phase of human development. According to E. H. Erikson, the most important task in our adolescence is to define who

we are, to find our own identity and the meaning of our life (Čáp 1993, 145). To do so, it is often essential to leave home and try to live completely differently and that is exactly what Homer does in taking advantage of the offer to go to work in an apple orchard, offered to him by Wally Worthington and Candy Kendall, a young couple with unwanted baby seeking help at St. Cloud's. The sudden departure of Homer reveals how strong the tie between him and Wilbur Larch is. "Homer Wells cried because he'd never known how nice a father's kisses could be, and he cried because he doubted that Wilbur Larch would ever do it again – or would have done it, if he'd thought Homer was awake" (CHR 176). If it had not been evident enough before, at the end of his adolescence Homer Wells knows for sure that he has a father and Wilbur Larch knows that he has a son. Homer Wells leaves for his new life knowing where he belongs and that, for an orphan, is an important step.

5.1.2. Homer's early adulthood

At the beginning of this period of his life, which is between the twentieth and thirtieth year of a man's life (Čáp 1993, 143), Homer Wells is most of all happy, enjoying the change in his life perspective and the change of environment. "Homer Wells would have made that summer last the rest of his life if he could have" (CHR 304). In his early twenties the fact that he grew up as an orphan has no significant influence on him (thanks to the fact that he received enough love by Wilbur Larch and the nurses), he lives and feels the same way any of his contemporaries would do: he tries to find his place in society and he tries to find a partner (but falls in love with Candy whom he cannot have). "Homer Wells, twenty-one, breathing in the steam from the hot tea, sat waiting for his life to begin" (CHR 379).

Nevertheless, there are moments when he is torn between his new and old life and feels distressed. He misses the place he came from and he misses Wilbur Larch very much and at the same time knows that he cannot and does not want to go back to the orphanage. There is a deep sense of uprooting in him caused by the fact that in spite of all the love he got in St. Cloud's, it had never been his home and that he had never had any. "Home, thought Homer Wells. He knew that for the Bedouin – come from nowhere, going nowhere – there was no home" (CHR 325). Many sounds, images or smells remind him constantly of the place where he grew up and in many situations his different background causes unusual reactions. "For Homer Wells, who'd grown up in a world without fathers, it was a shock to hear that anyone who had a father would call his father stupid, even if it was true" (CHR 358). When Wally volunteers to go to war, Homer cannot understand it: his own life has been so far sensational enough and all he wants is to have a calm and undisturbed one. "Would an orphan ever worry that he was spoiled, or untested? Is an orphan ever bored, or restless – or are those luxurious states of mind?" (CHR 376)

The fact that he grew up in an orphanage is most evident in the social interactions with other people. Homer, although he is a smart man, often does not understand sarcasm or irony or do not recognize why his behaviour is sometimes considered as unusual; these awkward situations happen mostly when he is with his girlfriend, Debra Pettigrew, and he is not able to decipher any of the codes hidden in her speech or behaviour. In the same way he fails to communicate openly with Candy, whom he loves, and in addition he is torn between his love for her and his loyalty to Wally. "Reality, for orphans, is so often outdistanced by their ideals; if Homer wanted Candy, he wanted her ideally" (CHR 479).

When Candy becomes pregnant with Homer's child, he discovers that even more than wanting her he wants the child, but the situation is not good for them to marry and have the child, with Candy's boyfriend Wally missing (and later found alive) in the war. They leave for St. Cloud's for a few months, pretending to be there of use during the difficult war time, and Candy gives there birth to the baby, "neither an orphan nor an abortion" (CHR 528). Homer and Candy go on in pretending – they come back with the boy, called Angel, and a story that they have adopted him together. Homer Wells, an orphan himself, is not strong enough to bear the consequences of his behaviour and rather makes from his own child an orphan, too. Angel Wells grows up convinced that he is adopted, that his biological parents had abandoned him and that Homer and Candy are only his adopted parents. Candy marries Wally and of course, Homer is punished for the state of affairs which he himself helped to happen. "He was an orphan who'd had a family for less than a month of his life, and he was not prepared to not have a family again" (CHR 545), but it is exactly what happens. Although he has a son and he has a woman whom he loves and who loves him, he does not have a family, because the son thinks that he had been adopted and the woman, Angel's mother, is married to another man.

It is the meeting after fifteen years with Melony, who recognizes at once whose child Angel is, that reveals to Homer how the situation is unbearable and wretched, and how he had betrayed his own son. "I got eyes," Melony said. "I can see what it's like – it's like shit. It's ordinary, middle-class shit – bein' unfaithful and lyin' to kids. You of all people – you, an orphan," she reminded him" (CHR 612). After revealing the truth to his son and to Wally, Homer has to go, and the only place he can return to is the orphanage; the story of his life is to end where it began. "It was clear to him – where he was going. He was only what he always was: an orphan who'd never

been adopted. He had managed to steal some time away from the orphanage, but St. Cloud's had the only legitimate claim to him" (CHR 626).

MELONY

As regards Melony, the girl with exactly the same starting position in life as Homer, i.e. an orphan, she represents a character who has not coped so well with the absence of nuclear family in her life. As we have mentioned, a family can to a certain extent be substituted by the attention and love of the institution's staff, but Melony, a very difficult girl since her childhood, was never a popular child and had never received so much attention and love as Homer did. She was not even expected to be "of use" (CHR 55). That probably caused that she became an uprooted, insensitive and hard person many people are afraid of. For her the most important person in her life was Homer Wells, whom she even forced to promise that he would not leave the orphanage without her (which he did, in the end). With his departure she loses the only significant person in her life and therefore leaves the orphanage too in order to look for him. "I'm gonna find you, Sunshine" (CHR 289). Her feelings concerning Homer are a mix of anger for his betrayal and sorrow that he is not with her anymore. "'Right,' said Melony; this echo of Homer Wells nearly brought tears to her eyes" (CHR 347).

Melony is lonely on her way to find Homer and therefore vulnerable. A few attacks on her person, both physical and verbal, are the cause of her further reservedness and outward cruelty; not surprisingly, she is not popular with other people whom she meets on her part-time jobs. She is in a vicious circle of looking for love and not finding it. As well as Homer, she has no social experiences people in her age usually have: she has never been to movies, she has never eaten out. That is probably the strongest influence of the orphanage Melony and Homer came from: they have no idea what

normal life looks like. When Melony befriends Lorna, her co-worker at the shipyard, it is for her in her twenties the first friendship in her life, a relationship not based on dominance as were all her relationships with other girls in the orphanage. Their friendship is solid and stable and when they become lovers eventually, Melony finds her inner peace. "A permanent couple, an orphan's ideal" (CHR 523). Lorna's infidelity reveals the old hard Melony and their break-up after fifteen years causes that Melony sets again off to find Homer Wells (and in their last meeting, change the course of his life).

Melony, in the end, finds love with Lorna again and she dies in a happy period of her life, with a life-partner by her side.

WILBUR LARCH

For Wilbur Larch the departure of Homer causes the same emotions as it did for Melony: he is caught between anger that the boy left him after everything he had done for him and sorrow that he cannot be with him anymore. Their relationship is maintained via correspondence, but that is not enough for him. He understands that the boy needs to live somewhere else, but is not able to cope with his absence which after a few months seems to be not temporary but permanent. The greatest grief in Wilbur Larch's life is caused by the fact that he found someone to be his family and then lost him. "It was the first burial that Wilbur Larch had wept over; Mrs. Grogan knew that his tears were not for Clara. Larch wouldn't have buried Clara if he'd thought that Homer Wells would ever be coming back" (CHR 382). When Homer Wells comes back in the end, Dr. Larch is already dead.

5.1.3. Conclusion

When both parents are missing in the character's life from its very beginning, he / she does not have to deal with their loss like the

heroes of *A Widow for One Year*, *The Hotel New Hampshire* or *Until I Find You* had to; Homer Wells and Melony had to deal with the parents' complete absence and their everlasting unconcern in addition to it.

Homer Wells' life was unhappy at its beginning, but then he got lucky: the workers in the orphanage became his surrogate family and gave him much love, and he gave love to them in return. All this enabled him to become a good and sensitive man and if his further life was not exactly how he imagined it would be, it was not primarily the consequence of the absence of nuclear family. The consequences of this absence for Homer were mainly the constant feeling of uprooting, because he felt his whole life like a bedouin not knowing where his home is (although he had two of them, in fact) and the strong wish to live his life undisturbed and peaceful (because he had enough of emotional turmoil in his childhood) which led to the fifteen-year long situation during which his own son grew up as an adopted orphan.

Melony represents an orphan whose life did not turn out to be as good as Homer's did. She remained unadopted as well as Homer, but the lack of love and interest in her childhood and adolescence which she spent in the orphanage (whether it was the reason of her difficult character or its consequence) made her an insensitive and hard person, the one everyone is afraid of and the one who is therefore a loner. But she also managed to be happy when she lived in a lesbian relationship in her adulthood.

In conclusion we can say that what Melony and Homer shared was the feeling that they belonged nowhere. Never knowing who their parents were and where they came from, they both found it difficult to find their own place in the sun without compromises.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis was to analyse one aspect of the literary work of John Irving, the frequent absence of the nuclear family in his novels and its consequences. After analysing the five novels where the theme is the most prominent, we can say that John Irving successfully avoided repetition, as he was original in every of them and elaborated various destinies of his heroes, whose shared trait is the absence of one or both parents.

Only one of them, T.S.Garp, represents a man who has not been influenced by his father's absence, due to his mother's strong personality and the fact that he always knew for sure that his father was dead. Ruth Cole and Jack Burns, who grew up without one parent and later, in their adult age, found him / her, were deprived during that period of their lives which they spent without them: Jack Burns' personality was an uncertain one and the fact of not knowing his origins made him unhappy and unbalanced; Ruth Cole self-confidence was very fragile, as she could not understand why her mother had abandoned her completely as a child. The Berry children, who lost their mother in their adolescence, represent people who come to terms with the loss and who were even strengthened by it. Finally, Homer Wells, an orphan, is a man who in spite of all the love he received from other people did not manage to overcome the constant feeling of uprooting and who returned to the orphanage in the end.

The subject matter discussed is present, if only marginally, in the majority of Irving's other novels, too. This shows how the theme of incomplete families features prominently in John Irving's work and although his novels are pure fiction and his characters are only imaginary, we can say that they reflect an issue that has been topical for many years.

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