

Ms Helen Garner

Helen Garner is one of the finest of Australian writers. She has written highly personal novels, created from life with an attention to detail and imaginative richness; and she has written essays, journalism and other non-fictional work that explore the complexities of reportage.

She came to the University in 1961 from schooling at The Hermitage, Geelong, and completed an honours degree in Arts. After overseas travel she worked as a school-teacher in several Melbourne high schools, where her engagement in radical politics and especially the women's movement found expression in her teaching.

Helen Garner came to prominence as a novelist with *Monkey Grip* (1977), which was the first novel of its kind about alternative and inner urban life in Australia. Using a deliberate roughness of surface and design, it is a complexly shadowed novel about love and drug addiction, the two represented as alternative obsessions. Her next work, *Honour and Other People's Children* (1980), turned to the quiet minutiae of everyday life, and established her as a realist writer with formidable powers of observation. The musicality of her technique is evident in the stories collected in *Postcards from Surfers* (1985) and reached its apogee in *The Children's Bach* (1984), a novella of remarkable economy and precision. Subsequent works included *Cosmo Cosmolino* (1992) and *The Last Days of Chez Nous* (1993). The strength of Garner's dialogue is highlighted by her two filmscripts: one for Jane Campion's *Two Friends* and the other for Gillian Armstrong's *The Last Days of Chez Nous*.

In 1995 she published *The First Stone*, a widely debated account of a controversy at a college of the University. The shifts of perspective in the book contribute to the realisation that in this affair everyone suffered, and the authorial figure is herself caught up in this treatment.

Subsequent collections of essays show Garner to be, in all probability, one of the greatest essayists this country has produced. Her work confounds the distinction between essay and fiction. Her novels re-imagine characters who are drawn from life and events that occurred. She shows the real basis of what can be imagined, as well as the imagination that is needed for a compelling representation of what actually took place.