

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE2859

Garner, Helen

(1942 -)

Born 7 November, 1942, Geelong Victoria Australia

Occupation Journalist, Scriptwriter, Writer

Summary

Helen Garner is an award-winning Australian novelist, short story writer, screenwriter and journalist. After graduating from the University of Melbourne in 1965 she worked as a high school teacher. While teaching, she contributed to journals and worked in theatre. Her first novel *Monkey Grip* was published in 1977. It was an instant success, winning a National Book Council award in 1978 and being filmed in 1982.

Garner has successfully written both fiction and non-fiction. Considerable controversy attended the 1995 publication of *The First Stone: Some Questions about Sex and Power*, an examination of allegations of misconduct in a University college. In 1993, she won a Walkley award for her feature article on the sad death of a small child, Daniel Valerio.

Garner has written three scripts for Australian films: *Monkey Grip* (Cameron, 1982), *Two Friends* (Campion, 1986) and *The Last Days Of Chez Nous* (Armstrong, 1992). Along with her novels, short stories and journalism, these films have cast Garner as a central figure in the history of Australian film and literature.

She has written three true-crime books: first with *The First Stone*, about the aftermath of a sexual-harassment scandal at a university, followed by Joe Cinque's *Consolation*, a journalistic novel about the court proceedings involving a young man who died at the hands of his girlfriend, which won the Ned Kelly Award for Best Crime Book, and again in 2014 with *This House of Grief*, about Robert Farquharson, a man who drove his children into a dam.

Details

Garner was born in Geelong in 1942. She attended the Manifold Heights State School, Ocean Grove State School and The Hermitage. She graduated from the University of Melbourne in 1965 with a Bachelor of Arts, majoring in English and French. She then worked as a high school teacher between 1966 and 1972. In 1968 she married Bill Garner and was divorced in 1971.

In 1972, Garner was fired by the Victorian Department of Education for her publications in the magazine, *The Digger*. Throughout the 1970s, Garner also published in the Women's Liberation journal *Vashti's Voice*.

Her first novel, *Monkey Grip*, was published in 1977. The book was very successful, winning the National Book Council Award in 1978. In 1982, Garner wrote the script for the feature film *Monkey Grip* (Cameron, 1982). The film followed the lives of a small group of inner city people and how sex and drugs impacted their lives.

In 1980, she married Jean-Jacques Portail and divorced in 1985. She has also married and divorced Australian writer Murray Bail.

In 1986, her collection of short stories, *Postcards from Surfers*, won the 1986 NSW Premier's Literary Award and her novel *The Children's Bach* won the 1986 SA Premier's Literary Award. Also in 1986, Garner wrote the script for *Two Friends* (Campion, 1986).

In 1991, Garner wrote the script for the dramatic comedy *The Last Days of Chez Nous* (Armstrong, 1992). Produced by Jan Chapman, the film explored the relationship between two very different daughters and their father.

In 1993, her novel *Cosmo Cosmolino* was nominated for a Miles Franklin Award.

In 1995, her non-fiction *The First Stone: Some Questions About Sex and Power*, caused intense uproar amongst feminists.

Events

2001 - 2001

Inducted into the Victorian Honour Roll of Women

1993 - 1993

Best Feature Writing, 'Why Did Daniel Have To Die?', Time Australia

2005 - 2005

Non-Fiction Book, 'Joe Cinque's Consolation', Pan Macmillan

2017 - 2017

Feature Writing Long – 'Why she broke: The woman, her children and the lake' – The Monthly

Published resources

Resource

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Magazine article

Why Did Daniel Have To Die?, Garner, Helen, 1993

Site Exhibition

The Women's Pages: Australian Women and Journalism since 1850, Australian Women's Archives Project, 2008, <http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/cal/cal-home.html>

Resource Section

Helen Garner (1942 -), Flesch, Juliet and McPhee, Peter, 2002, <http://www.unimelb.edu.au/150/150people/garner.html>

Archival resources

National Library of Australia, Manuscript Collection

[Papers of Manning Clark, 1907-1992 \[manuscript\]](#)

[Papers of Helen Garner, 1990-2005 \[manuscript\]](#)

Mitchell and Dixson Libraries Manuscripts Collection

[Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance \(Australia\) - records of the W.G. Walkley Awards, 1956 - 1999](#)

[Women's Redress Press - book files, 1976-1996, including correspondence, contracts, readers' reports, reviews and photographs](#)

National Film and Sound Archive

[\[Garner, Helen : Interviewed By Steve Stockwell\]](#)

[The Last Days of Chez Nous : Original Release](#)

[Monkey Grip : Original Release](#)

[Two Friends : Original Release](#)

[\[Australian Film Commission : Documentation\] : \[Australian Film Commission : Script Laboratory : Women's Programme : Group Shot of Participants\]](#)

National Library of Australia, Oral History and Folklore Collection

[Helen Garner interviewed by Hazel de Berg in the Hazel de Berg collection \[sound recording\]](#)

[Interview with Helen Garner, author \[sound recording\] / interviewer, Sara Dowse](#)

Author Details

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