

# Gold Coast Book Lovers

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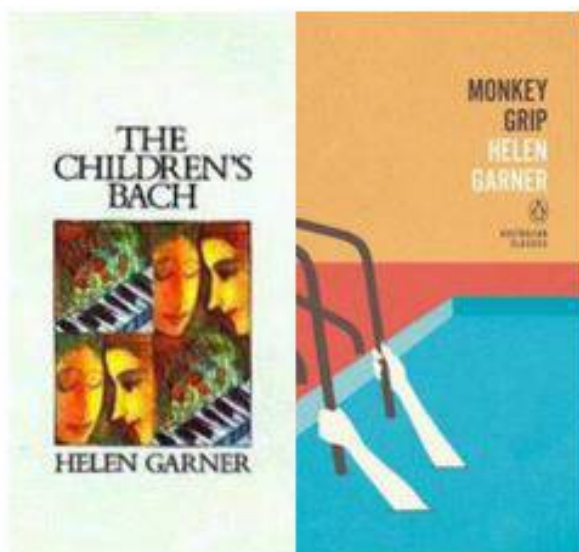
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## April 2018



This month we discussed two books by acclaimed writer [Helen Garner](#): [Monkey Grip](#) and [The Children's Bach](#). As an admirer of her writing, I wanted to go back to her early fiction to see if it was still relevant.

Both books are beautifully written, but the novella *The Children's Bach* is probably the best. It was published in 1984 and it was her third published book, and her second novel. Very well received at

the time, its theme is what happens when a self-contained family that apparently lives happily, must suddenly deal with outsiders and some of their past relationships. We all loved this delicate book.

As [Bernadette Brennan](#) says in [A Writing Life: Helen Garner and Her Work](#),

“Garner has credited the women’s movement for giving her the licence to write about ‘what happens in people’s houses’ rather than more obviously political or historical topics, like ‘The War or that kind of thing: huge subjects, mighty things’. The politics of human, and of gendered, relations informs the drama of *The Children’s Bach*.”

*Monkey Grip* was a controversial book when it was published in 1977, not only due to its themes, but also because it was partly based on her journal. Despite being a seamless read, many felt that a novel shouldn’t be based on a journal, as if Garner had just published it without doing any additional work. Re-rewriting a journal is also writing, especially when the result is as good as this one.

Most of the book club members thought that *Monkey Grip* was a bit outdated and the effect of reading it was nowhere near as strong as when they first read it, many years ago. If one considers the historical background and the counter-culture of Melbourne at the time, this book reads as an interesting novel with a confident Australian voice.

Helen Garner (née Ford, born 7 November 1942) is an Australian novelist, short-story writer, screenwriter and journalist. Garner’s first novel, *Monkey Grip*, was published in 1977, and immediately established her as an original voice on the Australian literary scene. She is known for incorporating and adapting her personal experiences in her fiction, something that has brought her widespread attention, particularly with her novels, *Monkey Grip* and *The Spare Room* (2008).

Throughout her career, Garner has written both fiction and non-fiction. She attracted controversy with her book *The First Stone* (1995) about a sexual harassment scandal in a university college. She has also written for film and theatre and has consistently won awards for her work including the Walkley Award for a 1993 Time Magazine report. Two of her works have been adapted into feature films: her debut novel *Monkey Grip* and her true crime book *Joe Cinque’s Consolation* (2004) – the former released in 1982 and the latter in 2016.