

## CHAPTER 8

# ‘Unmistakably a book by a feminist’: Helen Garner’s *Monkey Grip* and its feminist contexts

Zora Simic

Helen Garner has written a book called ‘Monkey Grip’, about a woman called Nora who falls in love, passionately and most unwisely with a junkie. Hardly a ‘liberated plot’. Yet this is unmistakably a book by a feminist.

Sue King, *Vashti*, 1978

For Sue King, writing in *Vashti*, the journal of Melbourne Women’s Liberation, Helen Garner’s book *Monkey Grip* (1977)—like some other critics, she stopped short of calling it a novel—was clearly a feminist read. Nora, she observed, is ‘not overtly “political” in the sense of working for political change on the macro level, or even consistently working out the politics of everything that happens to her’. Nor can she, as a denizen of a ‘rather strange sub-culture’ be properly described as an ‘everywoman’. Yet for King, Nora was also ‘clearly recognisable as a woman whose central identity is her own’. ‘It’s just so nice’, she enthused, ‘to read a story where no one is married or wants to be; where people may on occasion be jealous or dependent, yet feel no entitlement to do so’. King devoured the book in 24 hours, but while her review came with a strong personal recommendation, she did wonder whether anyone beyond ‘an arty little sub group’ would relate to it. She concluded on a note of uncertainty: ‘is this something we have to pass through on the way to ... ?’<sup>1</sup>

---

1 Sue King, ‘Monkey Grip’, *Vashti*, no. 21 (Summer/ Autumn 1978): 35.

To the uninitiated, the ‘something’ captured in *Monkey Grip* is the sexual politics and social mores of bohemian inner-city Melbourne in the mid-1970s and in particular the intimate world of Nora, closely resembling Garner herself, who is a single mother in her 30s caught in a stop-start relationship with Javo, a part-time actor and full-time heroin addict. By the standards of middle-class Australia, Nora and her friends do not live conventional lives, though they mostly all seem to be originally from the middle class. They live in communal share houses, take collective responsibility for child-rearing (or they try to), dabble in creative projects, regularly drink and take drugs and experiment with new types of sexual and romantic relationships. Nora is frank about the pleasures and the costs of all of this and the general naivete of their pursuit: ‘we all thrashed about swapping and changing partners—like a very complicated dance to which the steps had not yet been choreographed, all of us trying to love gracefully despite our ignorance’.<sup>2</sup>

The final words of King’s review also speak to an impasse evident in feminist circles and wider society in the aftermath of the first heady years of the sexual and feminist revolutions. If women’s liberation had established that the personal was political, and if sex was supposed to be a source of liberation rather than oppression, what did this mean for everyday relationships? King’s ellipsis cautiously suggested an as yet unknown future in which some of the dilemmas featured in *Monkey Grip* may have been resolved. The questions Nora returns to, and discusses with her female friends throughout the book, revolve around finding a balance between freedom and attachment, the self and other, or loving men and being a feminist, intimately though not sexually involved with other women. At a time when the women’s movement in Australia and elsewhere was preoccupied with lesbianism within feminism, *Monkey Grip* was an emphatically heterosexual book that nevertheless resonated with committed feminist activists such as Sue King, one of the most energetic members of Melbourne Women’s Liberation<sup>3</sup>—the same collective Garner herself was earlier involved with, in a more tangential fashion.

2 Helen Garner, *Monkey Grip* (Melbourne: McPhee Gribble, 1977).

3 Melbourne women’s liberation began as a network of autonomous groups in 1970, then from 1972 there were monthly meetings held in the Women’s Centre in Little Latrobe Street. The newspaper of the movement *Vashti’s Voice* (later *Vashti*) ran from 1972 to 1981. In 1975, Sue King was employed as full-time coordinator, the first paid position in Melbourne Women’s Liberation. Emma Graeme, ‘Melbourne Women’s Liberation’, in *Australian Feminism: A Companion*, ed. Barbara Caine, Moira Gatens, Emma Grahame, Jan Larbalestier, Sophie Watson and Elizabeth Webby (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1999), 456–57.

Yet not all feminists, or as we shall see, literary reviewers, embraced *Monkey Grip*—a novel that was controversial on arrival and only grew more so after Garner won the National Book Council Award in 1978. The finer details of the mixed critical reception have been well covered elsewhere, and while I will necessarily revisit some of these responses, including as part of ongoing scholarly interest in the 'gendering' of Helen Garner as an author,<sup>4</sup> the main purpose of this chapter is to more closely consider the various ways *Monkey Grip* has been read, located and assessed as feminist. My most basic reason for doing so is because *Monkey Grip* has been oft-described as Australia's first feminist novel. While this status has been disputed, there is no doubt that it was the first novel by a writer associated with second-wave feminism to generate national attention and debate. The novel's 'adult themes', including casual sex and heroin addiction, made *Monkey Grip* an instant sensation. Further, its content, its publishers, the author's own feminist identity and the timing of its publication all ensured it was read in relation to feminism.

Relatedly, the novel is also a distinct product of the 1970s. Firstly, it was an 'everyday revolution' that enabled Garner to write the book in the first place. As she later told Jennifer Ellison:

I was living on the Supporting Parents Benefit [introduced by the Whitlam Government in 1973] for four years and it was during that time that I wrote *Monkey Grip*. It was the first time in my life that I'd had a lot of time each day and a bit of money coming in.<sup>5</sup>

More broadly, Judith Brett's assertion that *Monkey Grip* 'would not have been published a decade earlier and probably would not have been written' has been reproduced and extended by later observers, with Kevin Brophy adding it's doubtful the book would have been published 10 years later either—that is, post-pill, but pre-HIV/AIDS. As Garner's first literary biographer Kerryn Goldsworthy noted, 'the stages reached in the sexual revolution, in feminism, and in the ethos of communal households ... are mapped quite precisely in the *Monkey Grip* characters' conversation, behaviour and assumptions'.<sup>6</sup> Her most recent biographer Bernadette Brennan adds that *Monkey Grip* 'assumes a community of readers

4 Bronwen Levy, 'Women and the Literary Pages: Some Recent Examples', *Hecate* 11, no. 1 (1985): 5; Kerryn Goldsworthy, *Helen Garner* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1996).

5 Jennifer Ellison, ed., *Rooms of Their Own* (Ringwood: Penguin, 1986), 134.

6 Judith Brett, cited in Kevin Brophy, 'Reviewing and Reputation: A Case Study in Public Perception: Images of *Monkey Grip*' (MA thesis, University of Melbourne, 1992), 8, cited in Goldsworthy, *Helen Garner*, 10–11.

versed in rock and literary culture', from Joni Mitchell and Jo Jo Zep through to the books and poems Nora reads, including Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* (1962) and Diane Wakoski's *The Motorcycle Betrayal Poems* (1971),<sup>7</sup> by then already established as feminist exemplars of semi-autobiographical writing not dissimilar to how *Monkey Grip* would come to be interpreted.<sup>8</sup>

In the spirit of interdisciplinary feminist scholarship that has encouraged attention to women's liberation as a 'cultural renaissance',<sup>9</sup> to 'popular feminism' (that is, feminism circulating in the public sphere)<sup>10</sup> and to the emotional affect of feminism in public,<sup>11</sup> this chapter focuses on *Monkey Grip* and its various feminist contexts, including the ways in which its author, and the contents of the book, were interpreted as 'feminist' (or not). Of particular interest is how Garner's fellow women's liberationists made sense of a book that thinly fictionalised attempts to reconcile heterosexual relationships with feminist politics. This discussion will necessarily involve consideration of the wider context of feminism in Australia. By the time *Monkey Grip* was released, some of the earlier optimism about the potential for feminism to transform not only women's lives but society more generally had dissipated for reasons both external and internal to the women's movement. I will return to this context in the final section of the chapter. The first part elaborates on the book's claims to 'first feminist novel' status and its transformation into a modern Australian literary classic. I then pan out to consider more broadly the place of writing within women's liberation and Garner's dynamic role within what has been described as a 'female revolution' within Australian literature, post-*Monkey Grip*.

7 Bernadette Brennan, *A Writing Life: Helen Garner and Her Work* (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2017), 45–46.

8 See, for example, Carole Ferrier's essay on Diane Wakoski's poetry in which she compared her 'intensely personal poetry' to Lessing's *The Golden Notebook*: 'it is hard to separate the persona of the central character from that of the author herself'. Carole Ferrier, 'Sexual Politics in Diane Wakoski's Poetry', *Hecate* 1, no. 2 (1975): 89.

9 Susan Magarey, 'Feminism as Cultural Renaissance', *Hecate* 30, no. 1 (2004): 231; Margaret Henderson, 'Wonders Taken for Signs: The Cultural Activism of the Australian Women's Movement as Avant-Garde Reformation', *Lilith* 17/18 (2012): 107–20.

10 See special issue of *Australian Feminist Studies*, 'Living in the Seventies' for a series of articles on popular feminism in Australia. *Australian Feminist Studies* 22, no. 3 (2007).

11 Victoria Hesford, *Feeling Women's Liberation* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2013), doi.org/10.1215/9780822397519.

While there was growing unease around the time *Monkey Grip* was published that the women's movement had lost some of its momentum, or at least its political influence as the Fraser Government (1975–83) wound back some of the gains of the early 1970s, the broader cultural impact of second-wave feminism was becoming more apparent. This was perhaps especially obvious in the literary field, hitherto dominated by white male authors, or at least at first glance. Part of the cultural and historical project of second-wave feminism involved recovering and recalibrating a longer tradition of Australian female writers, while the success of *Monkey Grip* indicated a growing reading public eager for women's stories, including feminist ones. Published in 1977, the same year as the bestselling US 'feminist novel' *The Women's Room* by Marilyn French, *Monkey Grip* was inevitably compared to it in some reviews; however, beyond their healthy sales, evident feminism and clearly autobiographical elements, the two books did not share much in common. *The Women's Room*, for one thing, was a much more brazenly ambitious novel: it was marketed as 'life-changing' and through French's focus on the politicisation of her protagonist Mira, the book encouraged the 'click' to feminist consciousness and many female readers, including some Australian ones, responded accordingly.<sup>12</sup> In contrast, *Monkey Grip* tended to inspire—initially at least—a more uneasy or qualified sense of identification among its feminist readership. Nor did *Monkey Grip* come to share *The Women's Room's* reputation as 'man-hating'—indeed, some readers, feminist and otherwise, thought that Garner or Nora let men too easily off the hook. What sort of book then was Australia's so-called 'first feminist novel' and how did Helen Garner come to write it?

## 'Pure pleasure and happiness'

*Monkey Grip* was released by independent publishers McPhee Gribble. The first edition appeared in hardcover and featured a striking photograph of a woman in a sunhat riding her bicycle. Literary scholar Brigid Rooney is not alone in her suggestion that the cycling woman on the cover of the first edition appears to be Garner herself, contributing to the early and

---

12 The reviewer of *The Women's Room* in *Vashti* praised the book as 'much more than a good read ... it is part of that subversive activity ... a growing feminist art'. Merrilee, 'The Women's Room by Marilyn French', *Vashti*, no. 22 (Autumn/Winter 1978): 14.

enduring impression that her work is at the least semi-autobiographical.<sup>13</sup> For some Garner fans, the bike is central not only to the contents of the book, but also to the story of its genesis—as the author herself has confirmed. Garner would later recount riding her bike from her share house in Fitzroy every day to the State Library of Victoria on Swanston Street in Melbourne where she would write until she had to pick her daughter Alice up from school.<sup>14</sup> She wrote the book over the course of a year and later recalled ‘to me, this didn’t seem like work, it seemed like pure pleasure and happiness’.<sup>15</sup> The vision of Helen Garner, or her fictionalised self, Nora, on her bike became part of the popular memory of the novel, aided by the 1982 film version that was replete with scenes of Noni Hazelhurst as Nora cycling between the share houses and music and theatre venues that made up her bohemian milieu. Historian Clare Wright describes the appeal of this image as capturing a moment in time when the ‘foot-binding has come off, the corsets have come off ... it’s about a freedom of access to society that is represented through her mobility on her bike’.<sup>16</sup> As Wright’s reflection suggests, *Monkey Grip* has been consistently read as a *zeitgeist* text and this was at least partly due to Garner’s candid evocation of female sexuality at a time when the social impact of second-wave feminism was being keenly felt or at least closely assessed. It was hardly surprising then that *Monkey Grip* was upon its release comprehended as a feminist book, though beyond this recognition there was less consensus about what this meant.

Certainly *Monkey Grip* arrived with some feminist cachet, and Garner was already a rather sensational figure in her own immediate orbit. As independent publishers in a publishing scene still largely tethered to Britain and dominated by men, and even more so as young photogenic women with feminist leanings, Hilary McPhee and Diana Gribble had already generated significant media interest by the time Helen Garner arrived at their Melbourne office in 1976, with the draft of the novel in two folders in her bike basket.<sup>17</sup> Garner herself, while never a consistently committed activist and not yet self-identifying as a writer, had some

13 Brigid Rooney, *Literary Activists: Writer-Intellectuals and Australian Public Life* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2009), 153.

14 Fiona Tuomy, dir., *Helen Garner’s Monkey Grip*, documentary film, ABC TV, 30 September 2014.

15 Ellison, *Rooms of Their Own*, 135.

16 Tuomy, *Helen Garner’s Monkey Grip*.

17 In her memoir, McPhee described how the media covered the novelty of two women setting up a business together with a series of ‘Brains and Beauty in South Yarra’ stories. Hilary McPhee, *Other People’s Words* (Sydney: Picador, 2001), 154.

presence within Melbourne's counterculture, including among women's liberationists. She had appeared in the highly controversial 'junkie' film *Pure Shit* (1975)—the making of which she went on to fictionalise in *Monkey Grip*—and contributed nonfiction pieces for the alternative magazine *Digger*, including what would later become an infamous account of her sacking from the Victorian Education Department for giving an unscheduled sex education class to her 13-year-old students at Fitzroy High School. According to Garner, her anonymous article 'Why Does the Women Have All the Pain, Miss?'<sup>18</sup> led to her sacking once her identity was discovered. In protest, the Victorian Teachers' Association went out on a one-day strike in 1973. Garner was not reinstated and later fashioned the episode as both a bona fide feminist protest and the making of her career as a writer.<sup>19</sup> Garner was also active in the Women's Theatre Group as a writer and actor and contributed writing to *Melbourne Feminist Collection 1*, one of the earliest feminist publishing initiatives, and to *Vashti's Voice*,<sup>20</sup> as well as a poem in the trailblazing anthology of Australian women poets, edited by Kate Jennings, *Mother I'm Rooted* (1975).<sup>21</sup>

Garner's local infamy meant that when *Monkey Grip* was first released, it was in inner Melbourne that the first stirrings of disapproval were felt, as various acquaintances tried to decipher who was who among the barely concealed 'characters'. As noted in the *Australian Book Review* in 1978, when *Monkey Grip* first came out, 'it was actively campaigned against by some Melbourne people ... Ms Garner arouses in some people the dislike that used to be reserved for Germaine Greer'.<sup>22</sup>

18 Helen Garner, 'Why Does the Women Have All the Pain, Miss?', *Digger* 6 (November 1972): 4–8, reprinted in Helen Garner, *True Stories* (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 1996).

19 For a discussion of the wider significance of this essay in Garner's career, see Cath Darcy, 'What's in a Name?: Helen Garner and the Power of the Author in the Public Domain', in *Australian Literature and the Public Sphere: Refereed Proceedings of the 1998 Conference Held at the Empire Theatre and the University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba, 3–7 July 1998*, ed. Alison Bartlett, Robert Dixon and Christopher Lee ([Toowoomba, Qld]; Association for the Study of Australian Literature, 1998), 44–50.

20 Emma Graeme, 'Helen Garner', in Barbara Caine et al., *Australian Feminism: A Companion*, 425.

21 Helen Garner, untitled, *Mother I'm Rooted: An Anthology of Australian Women Poets*, ed. Kate Jennings (Fitzroy: Outback Press, 1975), 182. See also Ann Vickery, 'The Rise of "Women's Poetry" in the 1970s', *Australian Feminist Studies* 22, no. 53 (2007): 265–85. doi.org/10.1080/08164640701378596.

22 Elizabeth Riddell, 'A Year's Publishing', *Australian Book Review*, December 1978, 9.

Yet as with Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch*, *Monkey Grip*'s reach extended far beyond Garner's own town. While *Monkey Grip* never had the international impact of Greer's blockbuster polemic, Garner's novel became a major hit by Australian standards. Hardcover sales topped 4,000 within weeks, an astonishing figure for a debut novelist without the financial backing of a major publishing house,<sup>23</sup> and sales continued to increase after the novel won the 1978 National Book Council Award and after the release of the film in 1982. *Monkey Grip* is among a select group of Australian books that went on to become bestsellers and literary classics.<sup>24</sup>

Now over 40 years old, *Monkey Grip* is well established in the canon of Australian literature, including as a much beloved 'Melbourne' book.<sup>25</sup> It has never been out of print and its many editions include a Penguin Classic and British, US and French editions. The book has been the subject of a 2014 ABC documentary, numerous personal accounts of reading or rereading it and features prominently in surveys of Australian writing—most often, but not exclusively, as the paradigmatic novel of new women's writing from 1970 onwards, particularly in the domestic realist mode.<sup>26</sup> Within Australian literary history, *Monkey Grip* has been used to exemplify the bolder and more confident national culture that emerged in the post-Menzies Australia, the rise of 'sexy' fiction<sup>27</sup> and the turn towards the contemporary urban world as a rich source for storytelling. Not surprisingly, given its focus on alternative lifestyles, including drug use and addiction, communal housing and sexual experimentation, *Monkey Grip* has also been historicised as a 1970s 'time-capsule' and as a precursor to 1990s grunge fiction.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, the autobiographical elements of *Monkey Grip* ensured Garner a permanent place on writers' festival

23 McPhee, *Other People's Words*, 144.

24 Lucy Sussex, *Blockbuster! Fergus Hume and the Mystery of the Hansom Cab* (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2015), 135.

25 John Bailey, 'Melbourne by the Book', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 August 2012, [www.smh.com.au/entertainment/books/melbourne-by-the-book-20120811-2412n.html](http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/books/melbourne-by-the-book-20120811-2412n.html); Nina Gibb, 'Radiant Badlands', *The Lifted Brow*, no. 19 (September 2013): 16, 18–19.

26 Delys Bird, 'New Narrations: Contemporary Fictions', in *The Cambridge Companion to Australian Literature*, ed. Elizabeth Webby (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 183–208, [doi.org/10.1017/CCOL0521651220.008](https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL0521651220.008).

27 Kenneth Gelder, 'Sex in Australian Fiction 1970–1987', *Meanjin* 47, no. 1 (Autumn 1988): 125–34.

28 Margaret Henderson, 'Sex, Writing, and "The River Ophelia." (The River Ophelia: Four Views)', *Hecate* 21, no. 2 (1995): 65; Kirsty Leishman, 'Australian Grunge Literature and the Conflict Between Literary Generations', *Journal of Australian Studies* 23, no. 63 (1999): 94–102, [doi.org/10.1080/14443059909387538](https://doi.org/10.1080/14443059909387538).

panels about writing the self and others. Indeed, Garner's authorial 'I' has arguably been the most debated aspect of her writing career with numerous analyses dedicated to assessing her self-presentation as a writer and the influence that she yields but is sometimes reluctant to claim.<sup>29</sup>

Literary scholars Kevin Brophy and Kerryn Goldsworthy, among others, have given ample coverage to the early reviews, particularly the hostile ones, and for good reason—this corpus of commentary provides vivid evidence of the shock of the new, that is, the 'women's writing' that was emerging from feminism, as well as setting the tone for some of the later assessments of Garner's work. In making sense of it, some critics failed to comprehend *Monkey Grip*'s radical form and content. As Brophy noted, of the four broad categories of reviews—'the love story, the feminist-in-love story, the story of sex and drugs in the counter-culture, and finally, the story of Helen Garner's life'—the first wave of critiques overwhelmingly presented the novel as a love story, a feminising effect that has continued to plague Garner's career in various ways, even as this simplistic reading of *Monkey Grip* has faded and Garner's literary reputation has grown.<sup>30</sup>

Interestingly, some of those who advanced the 'love story' description of *Monkey Grip* did so in the context of challenging the book's extra-textual reputation. For example, the *Age* reviewer John Larkin countered that while some people are 'treating it as some sort of drug directory', it is, in fact, he argued, a 'distillation of the incredible eddying, the ebbs and flows, of human relationships'.<sup>31</sup> Barbara Giles, poet and publisher of the female-focused (but not explicitly 'feminist') literary journal *Luna*, made a similar point, while adding that Nora's dilemma is not unique to feminism, or even particularly feminist, but rather about 'the usual feminine bind of responsibility for bringing up a child, of love which makes demands on her, and her attitude is not so different from that of strong women always'.<sup>32</sup>

29 See, for example, Brennan, *A Writing Life*; Darcy, 'What's in a Name?'; Goldsworthy, *Helen Garner*; and Rooney, *Literary Activists*.

30 Kevin Brophy, 'Helen Garner's *Monkey Grip*: The Construction of an Author and Her Work', *Australian Literary Studies* 15, no. 4 (1992): 271, doi.org/10.20314/als.fca3ca5d39.

31 John Larkin, 'Different Style of Living and Surviving', *Age* (Melbourne), 22 October 1977, 24, cited in Brophy, 'Helen Garner's *Monkey Grip*', 271.

32 Barbara Giles, Reviews, *Luna* (1978), 42, cited in Brophy, 'Helen Garner's *Monkey Grip*', 272.

For Giles and others, *Monkey Grip* was also a failed love story about flawed people—as Brophy notes, adjectives used to describe it included perverse (by Irina Dunn, writer, activist and later a Senator, writing in the progressive publication *Nation Review*), tedious and hopeless (according to journalist Penelope Rowe, who took strong objection to the style of parenting in the book) and repellently egocentric (Peter Corris).<sup>33</sup> Negative or ambivalent critics tended to focus most on the sex and drugs depicted in the novel and, following from this, either concluded the lives of a minority countercultural group are unable to illuminate themes of universal interest or relevance (what Ronald Conway described as ‘her musings amid a narrow sick drug sub culture’ in conservative publication *Quadrant*<sup>34</sup>) or, relatedly, that the book’s close attention to a particular social world closely resembling the author’s own disqualified *Monkey Grip* as popular literature, even if Garner’s talent was somewhat begrudgingly acknowledged. Conway concluded his review with ‘Ms Garner has some future as a writer capable of deep insight ... [i]f she can step outside the waning counter-culture ... which this novel partly celebrates’.<sup>35</sup>

Another oft-cited mixed review of this kind was from crime writer Peter Corris, titled ‘Misfits and Depressives in the Raw’ and published in *The Weekend Australian* in November 1977. His claim that Garner essentially just published her diaries—in other words, she had not written a ‘real’ novel—was one she would both combat and clarify in subsequent interviews.<sup>36</sup> Like Conway, Corris somewhat condescendingly acknowledged Garner’s talent (‘Ms. Garner is a very good writer of English’) while being generally dismissive of what he read as an unapologetic conflation of author and her subject: ‘This is an audacious book for it assumes that the reader will share the author’s absolute fascination with herself’. And to sign off: ‘Can she [Garner] write about something other than herself?’<sup>37</sup>

For some of Garner’s feminist readers, including those who would come later, Corris’s criticisms were typical of male literary gatekeepers who did not value women’s writing, take women’s lives seriously as a literary

33 Irina Dunn, ‘The Fringe and the Core’, *Nation Review*, 3 November 1977, 17; Penelope Rowe, ‘Friends in Need’, *24 Hours*, January 1978, 64; Peter Corris, ‘Misfits and Depressives in the Raw’, *Weekend Australian*, 5–6 November 1977, 12, all cited in Brophy, ‘Helen Garner’s *Monkey Grip*’, 272.

34 Roland Conway, ‘Lost Generation’, *Quadrant*, May 1978, 77.

35 Conway, ‘Lost Generation’, 77.

36 See, for example, Helen Garner, ‘I’, *Meanjin*, no. 1 (2002): 132–35.

37 Corris, as cited in Brophy, ‘Helen Garner’s *Monkey Grip*’, 275.

theme, understand female literary traditions or recognise genuine literary innovation—including in relation to similar experiments by men. A decade later, speaking in the context of a still-raging debate in the Australian literature scene about women's writing,<sup>38</sup> Garner's friend and fellow writer Drusilla Modjeska speculated that perhaps one of the reasons that *Monkey Grip* was 'poorly reviewed but widely read' was not 'only because it was about communal houses and feminism and dope and sex and rock and roll but because it didn't follow the old-fashioned narrative shape of conflict and climax and resolution'. Rather, *Monkey Grip* 'sloped along following the rise and fall of tension and desire'; a new(ish) way of writing to be sure, but then again 'such narratives were hardly remarkable in the mid seventies, even in Australia'.<sup>39</sup>

For Brophy, critical preoccupation with Garner's subject matter and her autobiographical impulses has muted alternative readings of her work.<sup>40</sup> Brophy wanted to encourage 'vigorous, openly political and feminist' interpretations of *Monkey Grip* and advanced one of his own: rather than reiterate the oft-made parallel between drug addiction and addiction to romantic love, Brophy argued that Garner presented the 'patriarchal value system—the ideology that socialises us from childhood'—as 'the overwhelming addiction suffered by characters who are wanting to reinvent social relations'.<sup>41</sup> As for Garner, she would later suggest that it was precisely these sorts of qualities that endeared readers to the book. Feminism, and the 'whole ethos of collective households', she told one interviewer, had got her 'out of a big mess at a certain point in my life' and for people who did not 'live like that', the depiction of this world was part of *Monkey Grip's* attraction—'the fact that there were these open households where people cared about each other and tried to create some sort of alternative to the family'.<sup>42</sup>

38 In 1986, writer and reviewer Gerard Windsor sparked a minor controversy with his contentious address at Writers' Week at the Adelaide Festival 'Writers and Reviewers', later published in the literary journal *Island* alongside a series of responses from some of Australia's better-known reviewers. Within a general critique of the 'factionalism' of Australia's reviewing culture, Windsor attributed the 'transparently enthusiastic encouragement' women writers were perceived to be receiving as having a 'sociological' rather than literary explanation. What Windsor called [Beverly] 'Farmer/ Garner territory—domestic pain' appealed, he said, primarily to women who were part of or had grown up with the women's movement. See Gerard Windsor, 'Writers and Reviewers', *Island* 27 (Winter 1986): 15–18.

39 Drusilla Modjeska, 'The Emergence of Women Writers since 1975', Sydney Writer's Festival January 1987, *Australian Feminist Studies* 2, no. 4 (1987): 120.

40 Brophy, 'Helen Garner's *Monkey Grip*', 280.

41 *Ibid.*, 278.

42 Ellison, *Rooms of Their Own*, 140–41.

*Monkey Grip* made such an immediate and also lasting impact that literary critic Gillian Whitlock would describe the rising popularity and status of women writers in Australia in the 1980s as evidence of AMG—After *Monkey Grip*. Further, Garner’s success and that of other women’s writers who emerged or were rediscovered from the late 1970s—including Kate Grenville, Sara Dowse, Jessica Anderson, Thea Astley, Olga Masters and Elizabeth Jolley—was also ‘related to a series of effects produced by the re-emergence of feminism’.<sup>43</sup>

## First feminist novel...?

Women’s liberation in Australia and elsewhere created feminist readers and writers. Reading and writing were integral to consciousness-raising and within the women’s movement, journals, magazines and newspapers were launched, small presses inaugurated and writing and reading groups formed. Subscription lists charted the explosion in new titles by, for and about women, and feminist bookshops stocked them. Women’s writers’ festivals, poetry readings and book launches were opportunities to find and promote new work, and to meet other feminists. Some women writers from the past were rediscovered and many contemporary female writers were championed. A specifically (and increasingly sophisticated) feminist literary criticism began to develop. More generally, feminism also helped to expand the market for women’s writing, so much so that by the 1980s major publishers were developing lists of women’s fiction and/or subsuming feminist presses into their operations (Garner’s publishers McPhee Gribble, for example, were bought by Penguin).<sup>44</sup>

The turning or tipping point from feminists championing women’s writing, or more particularly women’s fiction, in their own publications and within their own circles to established male authors and critics grumbling about the ascent of women writers came with the publication of *Monkey Grip*, which was marketed as having the power to ‘change women’s lives’, just as Marilyn French’s *The Women’s Room* (1977) was in the United States.<sup>45</sup> As already noted, the book was published by McPhee Gribble, the Carlton-based publishing company that began in 1975. One

43 Gillian Whitlock, ed., *Eight Voices of the Eighties: Stories, Journalism and Criticism by Australian Women Writers* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1989), xiv–xv.

44 Zora Simic, “‘Women’s Writing’ and ‘Feminism’: A History of Intimacy and Estrangement”, *Outskirts* 28 (May 2013), [www.outskirts.arts.uwa.edu.au/volumes/volume-28/zora-simic](http://www.outskirts.arts.uwa.edu.au/volumes/volume-28/zora-simic).

45 Delys Bird, ‘Women Writers, Gendered Readings, Literary Politic’, *Southerly* 57, no. 3 (1997): 115.

of their first publications was by Melbourne folk singer and anti-war and women's rights activist Glen Tomasetti—*Thoroughly Decent People*, released to mostly positive acclaim in 1976, and another contender for the 'first feminist novel', though its focus on 'the stultifying gentility of daily life in Melbourne in 1934'<sup>46</sup> made it a less obvious selection, including among feminists.<sup>47</sup>

McPhee Gribble were not an exclusively feminist publishing company—they also published Tim Winton and Murray Bail, among others—but they were feminists and active in the burgeoning feminist publishing scene, for instance as part of Sisters Publishing, a wider collective of feminist identified publishers that launched in 1979 with a book club and subscription mailing list. For Garner having McPhee Gribble as publishers was crucial: 'If I'd had to take *Monkey Grip* to a male publishing company, ... it would have been thrown out immediately as being too emotional'.<sup>48</sup> She also shared that she had shown an earlier draft to some male publisher friends who 'returned it to me some days later looking very embarrassed and said it was over emotional'.<sup>49</sup>

Garner would later claim she was genuinely shocked by the strong reactions to *Monkey Grip*, but McPhee Gribble certainly seemed well aware that *Monkey Grip* promised to be a sensation. They took great care with the publication and with publicity—at least insofar as the latter was in their control. They also took risks with new talent, while displaying a keen commercial sense for books that captured new audiences. In 1979, they published a book by two teenagers, Gabrielle Carey and Kathy Lette, called *Puberty Blues*. *Monkey Grip* and *Puberty Blues* can be read as 'success stories despite (but also paradoxically, in some senses, because of) the odds'. As Bronwen Levy elaborates, 'attempts to silence each book failed. The louder the cries of disapproval from the literary pages ... the higher rose the sales'. Each novel posed a conundrum for some mainstream reviewers, namely could such 'seedy' and subcultural subject matter—whether share house living and loving in Carlton in the mid-1970s or teen sex and surfing in Cronulla in the same period—be worthy of genuine literary treatment.<sup>50</sup>

46 Hilary McPhee's description, *Other People's Words*, 139.

47 The reviewer in *Vashti* criticised aspects of the book as 'non-feminist' because the aggressive patriarch antagonist was explained away in Freudian terms. B.P., "'Prostitutes" and "Decent People": Two New Books', *Vashti*, no. 17 (Summer 1976/77): 26.

48 Ellison, *Rooms of Their Own*, 144.

49 Ibid.

50 Levy, 'Women and the Literary Pages', 5.

*Monkey Grip* has been popularly identified as the ‘first feminist’ novel to come out of Australia, or at least to break through to popular consciousness, particularly after it was awarded the National Book Council Award in 1978. Following this, Drusilla Modjeska would drily note later, ‘that strange creature women’s writing was suddenly visible and talked about as though it was a new event’.<sup>51</sup> As several feminist literary scholars have pointed out, the ‘honour [of being the first feminist novel in Australia] probably goes to *All That False Instruction*’,<sup>52</sup> published by Kerryn Higgs under the pseudonym Elizabeth Riley in 1975 by Angus and Robertson. It was a very different book to *Monkey Grip*. Garner’s book demanded to be read in the wake of women’s liberation, as the protagonist Nora struggled to reconcile her love for the ‘bludger’ Javo with the allegedly progressive sexual politics of her inner-city countercultural milieu. In contrast, *All That False Instruction*, subtitled in its first edition as ‘A Novel of Lesbian Love’, was set a decade earlier in the pre-feminist conformist 1960s. It does conclude, however, with the arrival of New York women’s liberationist Jody, ‘sprouting the radical feminist rhetoric of Melbourne in 1973’—a late-in-manuscript inclusion Higgs made after she workshopped her draft novel with the feminists she met in Melbourne after she returned from living in London for a few years.<sup>53</sup>

For various reasons—whether being published first or taking as its focus a lesbian life, to name two obvious ones—*All That False Instruction* was also assessed more favourably, less ambivalently and more often within women’s liberation journals than *Monkey Grip*. Most women’s movement publications featured substantial reviews of *All That False Instruction*, with the majority of these noting that however conventional formal aspects of the novel may at first appear, its focus on a lesbian woman elevated the novel to a more radical and thus feminist level. In *Scarlet Woman*, Deirdre O’Sullivan compared it favourably to French lesbian feminist Monique Wittig’s futuristic novel *Les guérillères*, published in French in 1969 and translated into English in 1971, due to a shared ‘imaginative dimension’. Crucially, for O’Sullivan, the protagonist Maureen Craig’s ‘awareness that the male can never be an adequate alternative in her life to women’ ensures ‘the book plots its vision for the lesbian’ and in doing

51 Modjeska, ‘The Emergence of Women Writers since 1975’, 118.

52 Bronwen Levy, ‘Editorial’, *Hecate* 21, no. 1 (1995): 4.

53 Kerryn Higgs, ‘The Life of Riley’, *Southerly* 61, no. 3 (2001–2): 93.

so 'deserves to be communicated and read'.<sup>54</sup> Meanwhile, in a three-and-a-half-page assessment in women's studies journal *Refractory Girl*, Suzanne Bellamy reflected on her own identification with Maureen as a contemporary who came of age before 'the new women's movement and lesbian consciousness had ... really surfaced in Australia'. 'It would be good to know', wrote Bellamy, 'how a non-contemporary felt about the book',<sup>55</sup> thereby flagging a dilemma also acknowledged by other feminist reviewers of new feminist-related titles, including *Monkey Grip*.

Taking the attention paid in feminist publications as an index, *All That False Instruction* then was clearly recognised as a serious political and literary milestone. It was also published at what was arguably the peak of debate in the women's movement about the place of lesbians in Australian feminism, beginning with the Hobart Women's Action Group Paper 'Sexism in the Women's Movement Or—Why Do Our Straight Sisters Sometimes Cry When They Are Called Lesbians' presented at the Mt Beauty feminist theory conference in 1973 and reprinted in several movement publications over the next couple of years, commensurate with the increased focus on the 'lesbian' question.<sup>56</sup> Higgs's workshopped coda to the novel was also reflective of both her own intensifying commitment to women's liberation and of the new visibility of lesbian sexuality and politics in some parts of the Australian women's movement. From this perspective, *All That False Instruction's* status as 'first feminist novel' is ensured, both chronologically and politically.

The debates the book generated within feminist circles and among feminists were another complicating factor for the 'first feminist novel' status of *Monkey Grip*. These sometimes questioned the sort of feminism evident in the book or whether *Monkey Grip* could be classified feminist at all given, for instance, Nora's relationship with Javo or, in the words

54 Deidre O'Sullivan, 'A review of Elizabeth Riley's *All That False Instruction*', *Scarlet Woman*, no. 3 (February 1976): 27.

55 Sue Bellamy, 'Fucking Men is for Saints', *Refractory Girl*, June 1976, 33.

56 For example, the Hobart Women's Action Group article was published in the 'lesbian issue' of *Refractory Girl* in the summer of 1974, published in tandem with Lesley Lynch's article 'Mythmaking in the Women's Movement' in which she argued that the lesbian/heterosexual/bisexual divide that she felt was undermining US feminism was threatening to do so in Australia. In a retrospective assessment, Susan Tiffin notes the 'issue of lesbianism' largely disappeared from *Refractory Girl* after the special issue but not from the Women's Movement, which 'continued to struggle to rethink feminism and feminist practice in the light of the challenge the lesbian issue posed'. Susan Tiffin, 'Lesbianism—an Early Controversy', *Refractory Girl*, nos 44/45 (1993): 76–84.

of feminist writer and academic Suzanne Edgar, writing in the *Canberra Times*, a ‘male chauvinist bloody pig ... conveniently concealed by the alternative conventions of total personal autonomy’.<sup>57</sup>

## What the feminists thought

The three judges for the 1978 National Book Council Awards—*Monkey Grip* was awarded first prize followed by Aboriginal writer Kevin Gilbert’s groundbreaking memoir *Living Black*—included two high-profile feminists: feminist author and publisher Joyce Nicholson, author of the recent bestselling sociological study *What Society Does to Girls* (1975); and writer Anne Summers (the third judge was *Australian Book Review* editor John McLaren). The judges’ report read:

This book was neither an easy nor an early choice. Its subject matter—heroin addiction, inner city communal living and obsessive love—has been criticised and even regarded as distasteful by some reviewers, and did arouse some resistance among the judges ... Yet the book destroys these doubts. It is in fact beautifully constructed ... The author is not disillusioned, but utterly honest in the facing the dilemmas of freedom, and particularly of social and sexual freedom for women trying to create for themselves a role which will recognise their full humanity.<sup>58</sup>

Anne Summers was of course herself a recent feminist publishing sensation at the time following the publication of *Damned Whores and God’s Police* in 1975, and would go on to provide the blurb on the 1978 edition released to coincide with the win—‘the best Australian novel this year’.

In general, feminist responses to the book were more receptive than those of the book critics of the mainstream press though not uniformly, and among those who endorsed the book there also tended to be two quite distinct tendencies: positive or over identification with Nora’s story as resonant with personal experience, or praise for a new kind of women’s writing (the latter view tended to come later). For example, for Pam Gilbert, writing in defence of the book following criticisms it was not worthy of a major literary prize on the basis of its ‘diary-like’ form, it was important to note the feminist innovation of the form:

57 ‘What Our Reviewers Said’, *Canberra Times*, 14 October 1978, 17.

58 Judges Reports, ‘National Book Council Awards for Australian Literature’, *Australian Book Review*, October 1978, 30.

[T]he text lies at the boundaries of two discursive forms: the discourse of literature and the discourse of the personal diary. It has to be pulled back into the framework of literature, if the personal, self-confessional diary form is to be read as universally significant.<sup>59</sup>

Gilbert's assessment was part of a larger suite of feminist literary critique that reclaimed *Monkey Grip* as a work of art.

In *Womanspeak*—a Sydney-based magazine launched in 1975 with the aim of reaching the 'everywoman' beyond 'the radical media belt'—Lesley Morgan, like Peter Corris and other mostly male reviewers, classified *Monkey Grip* as 'more a diary than a conventional novel' and easily conflated Garner/Nora. For Morgan, the book does not have 'any great message to impart' and nor 'is it self-consciously part of a growing genre of feminist novels'. Rather, where Garner succeeds is in holding up what to 'many of us' is a 'realistic social mirror'. Despite being set in a very specific scene—'Melbourne's urban, literary, Pram Factory hangers-on, drug culture set'<sup>2</sup>—*Monkey Grip* also captured for Morgan a wider resonance for heterosexual feminist women:

In part it's the old story of women repeating the same self-destructive patterns despite their conscious feminism ... Many feminists face this dilemma on a very pragmatic level. There is a large gap between intellectual understanding of feminism and living as a feminist.<sup>60</sup>

If, for Morgan, *Monkey Grip* is an 'at times oddly non-intellectual, unreflective book', it also 'touches a nerve' she extrapolated out to other readers, 'a nerve to relate to our own experience'.<sup>61</sup> In a feminist publication that championed women's writing without being at the vanguard of feminist literary criticism, and that generally avoided lesbian issues, *Monkey Grip* was a highly relatable book for feminists, but also—by virtue of a perceived lack of intellectualism—not easily assimilated into the genre of self-consciously feminist books.

For some feminist critics writing in the mainstream or wider press, *Monkey Grip* was clearly a book *about* feminism and of primary interest to women trying to live a more authentic life in the aftermath of women's

59 Pam Gilbert, *Coming Out from Under: Contemporary Australian Women Writers* (Sydney: Pandora, 1988), 10.

60 Lesley Morgan, 'Monkey Grip by Helen Garner', *Womanspeak* 3, no. 5 (March–April 1978): 29.

61 Morgan, 'Monkey Grip by Helen Garner', 29.

liberation and the Sexual Revolution. According to Goldsworthy, among feminists *Monkey Grip* was widely read as a book about the gap between theory and practice prompted by feminist consciousness and new ways of living and loving such as the 'theoretical desirability of sexual freedom and the painful realities of jealousy, competition and rejection'.<sup>62</sup> Or as Rosemary Creswell, in an arrestingly titled review 'Survivors among the Primal Screamers', put it: 'The life of Nora in *Monkey Grip* is the battleground of a full scale-war between psycho-social conditioning and the ideologies of feminism and counter-cultural communal living ... The result: a series of uneasy, mostly token truces'.<sup>63</sup> While Creswell saw Nora's ideological struggles played out in her love life to complicated and resonant effect, Veronica Schwarz in the *Australian Book Review* offered a more optimistic, perhaps even utopian reading of the feminism on offer in *Monkey Grip*: 'Nora is a feminist in a world of feminists ... the posturing and pretences of the wider sex role culture are absent'.<sup>64</sup> As Brophy has noted, however, this was quite an idiosyncratic reading of *Monkey Grip*, a ringing endorsement of alternative ways of living, rather than the common sympathetic assessment of the book as focused on painful and human, rather than political, conflicts.<sup>65</sup>

These responses also implicitly suggest, to varying degrees, that the time was right for *Monkey Grip*—that it came out in the aftermath of the second wave, of the optimism of the early 1970s in Australia. While the origins of the book are sometimes described with reference to the social and cultural policies of the Whitlam Government—including the Supporting Mothers Benefit that allowed Garner to write the book in the first place—the book was published in a period of backlash and retreat in the wake of the Whitlam dismissal. By 1977, there was a new conservatism in Australian life as Fraser's Liberal Government won a second landslide victory. It was also in that year that the Royal Commission on Human Relationships, originally commissioned by the Whitlam Government in 1974, released its final report; its release on the one hand bringing into public conversation previously taboo topics such as abortion, incest

62 Goldsworthy, *Helen Garner*, 39.

63 Rosemary Creswell, 'Survivors among the Primal Screamers', *National Times*, 13 March 1978, 30, as cited in Brophy, 'Reviewing and Reputation', 273.

64 Veronica Schwarz, 'Multiplying and Dividing', *Australian Book Review*, June 1978, 17.

65 Brophy, 'Reviewing and Reputation', 273.

and teenage sex, and on the other offering all sorts of opportunities for conservative commentators to blame a purported decline in morality and an increase in family breakdown on divorce.<sup>66</sup>

What is particularly striking in reading through feminist periodicals and writings of the time and in the decade after—for *Monkey Grip* was continually referenced throughout the 1980s as the foundational text of what became known as the 'Woman's Decade' in Australian literary fiction—was how often the book was talked about or around rather than directly to. As Levy noted when later assessing the claim that *Monkey Grip* was the first feminist novel in Australia, 'most of the feminist debates at the time on this question were not published'.<sup>67</sup> Reappraisals or feminist defences of the book also took note of wider 'talk' about *Monkey Grip*'s feminist credentials, as in a 1979 survey article on feminist publishing by Susan Higgins and Jill Matthews in literary journal *Meanjin*. Their biographies note their academic and feminist credentials and the authors go on to make both political and artistic claims for *Monkey Grip* as justifiably 'feminist'. *Monkey Grip*, they shared, was perceived in some quarters to be 'not feminist enough, in that [it] excused the oppressive behaviour of their male characters and made the heroines too dependent on their men'. However, they argued, 'the intimate realism of the writing, the close and sympathetic observation of social behaviour bar [the author] from expressing polemically [her] awareness of the sexual politics involved in relationships between men and women'. Further, the critical examination of the way cultural norms such as domesticity and romantic love ensnare women or are deeply internalised 'makes it legitimately, even necessary to describe [*Monkey Grip*] as feminist'.<sup>68</sup>

The assessment from Higgins (later Sheridan) and Matthews reflects an assured confidence about the possibilities of feminist writing, as well as an intervention in what was by then an already somewhat exhausted question: what constitutes feminist writing? Given its success and eventual recognition as a classic and/or trailblazing novel, *Monkey Grip* played a pivotal role in the evolution of these questions—about form

---

66 For more detail on the royal commission, see Michelle Arrow, "'Everyone Needs a Holiday from Work, Why Not Mothers?'" Motherhood, Feminism and Citizenship in the Australian Royal Commission on Human Relationships, 1974–1977', *Women's History Review*, 25, no. 2 (2015): 320–36, doi.org/10.1080/09612025.2015.1083225.

67 Levy, 'Editorial', 1, 4.

68 Susan Higgins and Jill Matthews, 'For the Record: Feminist Publications in Australia since 1975', *Meanjin* 38, no. 3 (September 1979): 328–29.

and content, in relation to both politics and art—within both Australian feminism and Australian literature. That some of her earliest feminist readers, such as Sue King in *Vashti* and Lesley Morgan in *Womanspeak*, each identified the book's 'realism' about heterosexual relationships under feminism as both the source of its appeal and its possible limits as a bona fide feminist book with the capacity to speak beyond inner Melbourne or the women's movement, or to consciousness-raise, is in retrospect not so much a case against *Monkey Grip* as 'feminist' as testimony to the novel—and Garner's capacity—to challenge and transform assumptions about both feminist writing and literature in general. Where each reviewer was unequivocal was in recognising that Garner was onto something, namely the difficulty of reconciling theory and practice, a theme the author traces back to her days at *Digger* magazine and that would recur in subsequent fiction and nonfiction,<sup>69</sup> including what would become possibly the most divisive book among Australian feminists of the late twentieth century, *The First Stone* (1995).

## Conclusion

Kevin Brophy observed in 1992 that Garner's first novel had grown in stature beside her, which he described as 'curious' given the mixed critical reception the book initially received.<sup>70</sup> Brophy was writing before the publication of Garner's nonfiction book *The First Stone* (1995), a highly personal account of a sexual harassment case at the prestigious Ormond College at the University of Melbourne. The controversy that erupted over the book—one expression of which manifested as a purported generational war within Australian feminism that pitted the hardened warriors of women's liberation such as Garner against their younger, more easily wounded third-wave 'daughters'<sup>71</sup>—recast both *Monkey Grip* and Helen Garner within Australian feminism and feminist memory, while also enhancing her status as a public intellectual. For many feminists, Garner's empathy in *The First Stone* for the college master and her comparative

69 Goldsworthy, *Helen Garner*, 38–39.

70 Brophy, 'Helen Garner's *Monkey Grip*', 271.

71 For a full account of *The First Stone* as media event, see Anthea Taylor, *Mediating Australian Feminism: Re-reading the First Stone Media Event* (Oxford & Bern: Peter Lang, 2008). For an astute analysis of the faux-generationalism of *The First Stone* within Australian feminism, see Mary Sponberg, 'Mother Knows Best? Bridging Feminism's Generation Gap', *Australian Feminist Studies* 12, no. 26 (1997): 257–63, doi.org/10.1080/08164649.1997.9994865.

contempt for the two young women who pursued charges against him was tantamount to treachery. *Monkey Grip*'s cherished status as a feminist book was sometimes evoked in these condemnations, as this quotation from Katherine in an article marking the 10th anniversary of *The First Stone*'s publication illustrates. It also captures well the attachment a later group of feminists had to *Monkey Grip*:

I remember the outrage and the feeling of betrayal. We were, after all, huge fans of Helen Garner—I was proud to live round the corner from the house featured in the *Last Days of Chez Nous* and my flatmate Katie even went and bought King Gee overalls to wear in order to emulate *Monkey Grip*'s heroine. It was absolutely shocking that someone we so admired could get it so wrong.<sup>72</sup>

Clearly then, *The First Stone* controversy is one of the feminist contexts in which *Monkey Grip* has been read (or reread) and I conclude with it here for that reason. However, the primary focus in this chapter has been on the earlier feminist contexts—such as the emergence of feminist publishing and the creation of feminist readers—that informed both the novel's creation and reception, including among other feminists, in the late 1970s. As Garner herself would acknowledge many times over the next 40 years, it was the advent of women's liberation that gave her the confidence to start writing in the first place. Sometimes this recognition comes with a caveat—'I don't write as a feminist: I think that's a killer' or 'I had never thought of myself as being a political person'<sup>73</sup>—but these are not contradictory claims, but rather consistent with the themes and feelings first captured in *Monkey Grip*. Lastly, her qualifications are also reflective of the wider everyday implications of the 1970s feminist mantra 'the personal is political', a notion that was enlarged by women writers of this period, perhaps none more so than Helen Garner.

72 Zora Simic, 'On Reading the First Stone Ten Years Later', *Lilith* 15 (2006): 18.

73 Sonya Voumard and Helen Garner, 'The Interviewer and the Subject', *Meanjin Papers*, June 2012, 3.

This text is taken from *Everyday Revolutions: Remaking Gender, Sexuality and Culture in 1970s Australia*, edited by Michelle Arrow and Angela Woollacott, published 2019 by ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.

[doi.org/10.22459/ER.2019.08](https://doi.org/10.22459/ER.2019.08)