

Helen Garner

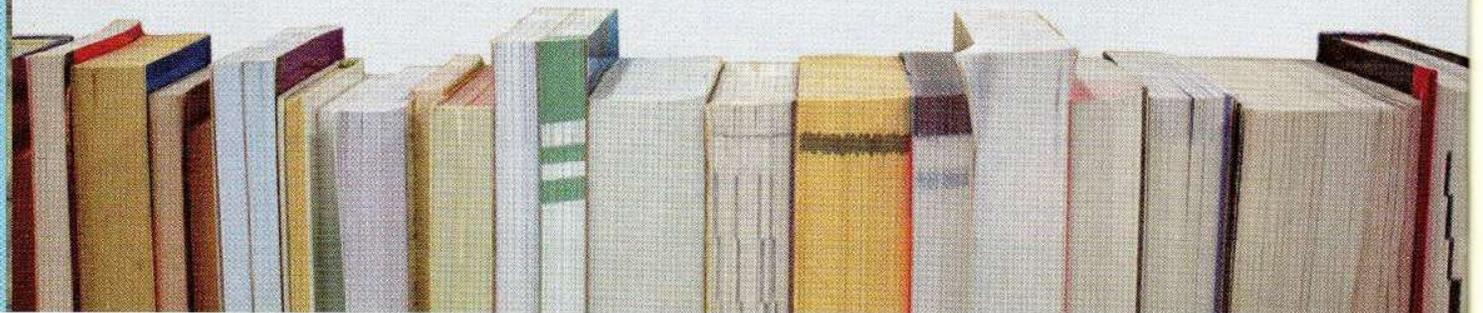
on writing

Helen Garner is an award-winning Australian novelist and short-story writer.

At the time I was writing *The Children's Bach*, my sentences were short and stumpy, but lately I've been trying to lengthen them, to make them more ... capacious and sinuous. Flexible. I spend many wonderful hours shifting clauses around and taking out adjectives and putting more in. Somebody once said to me that adjectives were the small change of language. At the time, I thought, Oooh! Well, I won't use any then. But now I use thousands of them. I love them.

Whenever I read Christina Stead, I get an electric thrill from the way she breaks all the rules. She can string seven adjectives together in a row—in *Letty Fox: Her Luck* I practically pass out with envy and admiration. She holds the noun up to the light, and uses the adjectives to make it shine *this way* and *that way*, shifting and shifting. Of course you never get the sense, with Stead, that she's even given a moment's thought to any of this. It's beneath her. Did she ever rewrite? I envy that naturalness—as if she sat down and out it poured.

As I get older, my vocabulary seems to be shrinking. It's alarming. Where there used to be a word there's now a blank. So when I'm reading, especially eighteenth- or nineteenth-century things, I always keep a bit of paper handy and write down any interesting or strong words that strike me. I tack them up near my desk so that if I'm writing wimpily, I think: I wonder if I've got a word on this list that I could use to replace the flat, weak one I've written. It's like a personal file. Words like taxing. Afflicted. Costly. Trifling. It's like having a collection of pebbles or marbles in my pocket. I can get them out every now and then and examine them. Often there's one I can use. It's always a word that I already know—I don't mean impossible or new or obscure ones—but a word that didn't spontaneously appear in my writing. I find it extremely useful to keep jolting myself like that.



20. Why did Helen Garner decide at one point to stop using adjectives in her writing?
- (A) She believed the viewpoint that they were inferior word choices.
 - (B) She accepted criticism that she had overused them in her writing.
 - (C) She considered them inappropriate for her style of writing.
 - (D) She thought that the range of adjectives she knew was too small.
21. The expression 'the small change' means that something is
- (A) incoherent.
 - (B) inconvenient.
 - (C) incongruent.
 - (D) inconsequential.
22. Helen Garner's opening comments reveal that
- (A) she is able to withstand criticism of her writing.
 - (B) she is prepared to experiment with her writing style.
 - (C) she finds it difficult to edit her writing.
 - (D) she has to adapt her writing style to suit the occasion.
23. The phrase 'pass out' is used as
- (A) a cliché that indicates resentment.
 - (B) an expression that conveys shock.
 - (C) an idiom that demonstrates bewilderment.
 - (D) a hyperbole that expresses depth of feeling.
24. Why does Helen Garner compare her collection of words to 'pebbles or marbles in my pocket'?
- (A) She can keep these treasures hidden from other people.
 - (B) They are small and easily disposable keepsakes.
 - (C) They are personal examples that keep her writing realistic.
 - (D) She can retrieve them whenever she needs inspiration.
25. In the last paragraph, the dashes are used to enclose words that
- (A) contain a warning.
 - (B) indicate a shift in tone.
 - (C) clarify a preceding idea.
 - (D) identify a previous point.
26. Helen Garner would agree that when choosing the right words to use, the best word
- (A) is one that takes time to select.
 - (B) has to be one that she has used before.
 - (C) is one from the eighteenth or nineteenth century.
 - (D) has to be one that readers are familiar with.

