

National Cultural Policy Submission

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27 July 2022

Instead of trying to argue about productivity and primary producers and culture, I'd like to make a personal statement of gratitude to the Australian government for the help it gave me, early in my writing life.

People don't talk much about the massive amount of intellectual and observational preparation that serious writers have to do before they can start writing a book.

The funding I had from the Literature Board, when I was starting out in the late 1970s and early 1980s, gave me weeks and months of unencumbered time for the wide, deep reading every writer needs to do.

It also allowed me long stretches of time to wander around looking at things and places, watching people and listening to the way they talk—just ruminating and thinking and absorbing, building up a head of steam.

To an outside observer, these activities probably don't look like much. In fact, although they're a sort of labour, they probably look more like bludging. But without them, no one can write anything that's worth reading.

Without the help I was given, my work would have been hasty and shallow, and my working life harder and more painfully fragmented.

So I'd simply like to offer my thanks to the Australian government and the tax-payers, for the priceless gift they gave me when I asked for help: they gave me their trust, and a chance to establish myself as a writer who might have something useful and interesting to say to (and for) my fellow-citizens.

I urge you with all my heart to offer more of this generous and invaluable help to the writers who need it today.

With sincere gratitude

Helen Garner