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## Jeri Kroll

### *Imagination and Marketability: What Do Writers Do for a Living?*

**Introduction** "I've always wanted to meet an author. What do you do for a living?"

- Woman at party to male author from a cartoon in *The New Yorker*

Students take writing topics for a multitude of reasons, but few ask themselves that question, even those who think that they have already committed themselves to creative careers. If recent statistics are reliable, most Australian writers pursue their craft as a vocation, not as a means to a living wage. In its August 1997 Newsletter, the Australian Society of Authors announced this depressing fact: 'Recent figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics reveal that the median income for Australian authors is now \$3 400 a year' (No 16:1). These statistics might not dampen the enthusiasm of students who might be years away from facing their implications, yet virtually all teachers of creative writing who have ever freelanced or tried to supplement their incomes in a meaningful way by publishing, realise the seriousness of them. Not all, however, discuss the economics of the writer with their students.

As a teacher of writing for children, I frequently confront the issue of the professional's bottom line. Marketability has to be present in the consciousness of active writers for young people, who consider at some stage of the creative, editing and publishing sequence who will buy as well as consume their product - the parents, relatives, teachers, librarians and caregivers who possess the power. In addition, many writers who do possess that glittering prize - a backlist - not only want to pay their way with sales, but with talks and workshops. Royalties might provide the bread, but school visits supply the butter on which some authors exist.

This paper will first canvass the reasons students enrol in writing topics, then consider how realistic their aims are in light of current publishing practice and finally focus on three successful writers for young people to evaluate those aims in the light of professional experience. Students do not always understand that artistic integrity has to be tempered with market sense. Hazel Edwards has been gainfully self-employed as a writer for more than twenty years, producing non-fiction, educational and trade books as well as screenplays. Morris Gleitzman began as a TV comedy writer and then transformed himself into a novelist for the eight-to-thirteen age group. He has had a meteoric rise since 1985 and is one of Australia's best-selling authors. Glyn Parry is a new breed of young adult fiction writer who planned out his career and has steered himself to an enviable position where he can take risks and survive. With evidence gleaned from in-depth interviews with each, I examine how these diverse writers balance the need to respect their individual visions with their need for survival.

#### Of Pleasure, Purging and Profit

1. 'I write for pure pleasure. The experience of purging ideas, constructing characters and exploring situations, is cathartic.'
2. 'I will be able to write creatively, get my message through to the reader and still be uncompromisingly interesting.'
3. 'I would like to learn the difference between good literature and bad literature for children, and eventually be able to write *good* children's literature.'
4. 'I love to read, I love to write, and if I could bring some of that wonder to children then I would write forever.'

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5. 'I feel that this course could refine my skills and help me to produce publishable work.'

6. 'As I am planning to be a professional writer, especially of novels and stories for children, I believe this course would be invaluable in providing skills and information that would assist me in succeeding in this career.'

(Six student submissions explaining why they want to take a Writing for Children topic [Kroll 1994, 1995, 1997])

What do most students in undergraduate writing topics think that they are doing, however? In my experience, few enrol intending to enter contests or to earn any money at all. Some maintain that they create as a method of catharsis; others that they write as a strategy for self-development. Writing topics, thus, are a nice way to earn credit and to store up good karma. The majority like fooling around with words and would like the chance to see where this entertaining, albeit at times frustrating, endeavour will lead. A few know that they want to be writers and conceive of this vaguely as being 'true to their vision,' even if they have not defined one as yet. One or two actually believe that they can make a living as authors, although they haven't yet worked out the details. None of the above positions, it must be observed, guarantees who will be a success.

How truthful are we as teachers about whether creative writing topics can help students to achieve any of the aims listed at the beginning of this section? Does our grading scale correlate with the likelihood of publication? Do we ever reward imagination while knowing that the work we have given a distinction would never be published in a commercial environment? Further, does the way in which we teach lead students in the direction of imaginative stimulation or commercial hard-headedness? Do we as teacher-writers follow any of the strategies we espouse explicitly or implicitly in the exercises we set? Or do we write in entirely different ways?

All these questions could lead to several papers, but they are worth collecting here because they condition how we organise topics. As I have explained in a previous paper ('A or C: Can We Assess Creative Work Fairly?' *TEXT*, 1997), teaching children's writing makes it somewhat easier to emphasise both a craft and a professional element because of the complex nature of the writer-reader relationship. It is most frequently conducted through intermediaries - the teacher, parent, caregiver or librarian. Children's writers never exist in a vacuum. I aim to develop my students' imaginations, but this does not preclude focusing on necessary and communicable information: editing skills to hone their inspirations as well as production and marketing knowledge to bring drafts to a publishable stage.

### **The Way of Idealism versus the Way of Pragmatism**

'At the risk of putting too fine a point on it, you are right - all that you have suspected over the years is true - publishers are in it for the money.'  
(Brian Cook 43)

Publishers have a particular kind of arrogance born of their intimacy with the commercial world. For some, quality equals marketability and sales figures function as a potent form of assessment. Publishers periodically try to take the pulse of the reading public and are alert to any signs of malaise. As Brian Cook of HarperCollins explains, they need to make 'a conscious decision about what profile or image the particular list will take' (Cook 44), and this means that some excellent books might not fit. From a pool of '3000 manuscripts a year of which about two-thirds are "children's books"' (Cook 44), HarperCollins has to decide what to place its money on. Individual publishers might love literature, but they need to make it pay.

What might seem, then, like a conflict of interests has given rise to a crisis situation in publishing in Australia, spearheaded by Penguin's announcement that they will curtail their list, especially poetry. Paul Brennan's depressing article, 'Has Penguin Lost Its Way' (Brennan 1997), surveys the international situation, too:

*The New York Times*, 7 July, announced: 'In a watershed year for the business of books the publishing industry is struggling with record-breaking returns of unsold copies, a steady decline in adult trade sales and a shelf-life

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for new titles that has compressed to somewhere between radicchio and active culture yogurt.' (Brennan 13).

What Brennan's piece does make clear is that the situation for children's book publishing is different. Even though he declares that 'backlists...are truly dead, because accountants can't make it work for them' (Brennan 15), many children's authors manage to maintain them. Illustrator Kerry Argent's only book where she is also responsible for the text, *One Woolly Wombat* (Omnibus, 1982, text also by Rod Trinca), still sells about 500 copies a month (remark to my Writing for Children class, 4 September, 1997). Brennan acknowledges that being set as a school text can guarantee that Penguin will keep a book in print, as any sane publisher would. And if it is true that 'in the balance the Children's Division seems to be driving the Adult Division and the Marketing and Publicity seems to be driving the Editorial...' (Brennan 16), this situation models what seems to be happening in other companies.

Rosalind Price, who founded the Little Ark imprint for Allen and Unwin in 1988, is conscious of the conflicting motives behind the decision to accept or reject a manuscript. Her classification of the publishing ethos into two primary strains is worth quoting in full:

With the first approach you find something that you think is worth publishing, you turn it into a book, and then look for people to buy it.

This might be described as the Way of Idealism, the Way of Evangelism, the Way of Optimism, the Way of the Wild Leap, the Way of Intuition, or even the Way of Arrogance - the Way of the Scattergun.

With the second approach, you find people with a need for a certain kind of book, concoct a book that fits their need, and then sell it to them.

This might be described as the Way of Pragmatism, the Way of Opportunism, the Way of Prudence, the Way of the Careful Plan, the Way of Reason - the Way of the Precision Rifle. (Price 47)

So publishers do experience conflicts and hope that one if not both strategies will balance the books. Adult non-fiction writers, of course, are familiar with these classifications, because many conduct market research, package ideas and follow 'the Way of Pragmatism.' Children's writers who work for educational series, who are circumscribed by age, vocabulary or subject restrictions, testify to this method of operation. They can also explain how inspiration has to accommodate a certain kind of perspiration; in other words, how writing for oneself can be combined with this business-oriented approach.

Hazel Edwards: *The Writer as a Small Business*

'...a professional writer is a small business...trading in literary ideas...' (Edwards 132)

'Some small businesses go bankrupt.' (Edwards 134)

How many successful writers in Australia can boast that they create to achieve catharsis; to facilitate personal development; to establish a reputation; to be true to their visions; to earn a living; and to prove that primary school teacher wrong who said that they were chronic complainers and would come to a bad end? The aforementioned aims would be held by some writing students in any teacher's class during a year. But having a game plan and a vision are no use if authors cannot earn enough to devote their time to writing.

Nevertheless, many Australian writers for young people manage to write 'author' on their tax returns and can muster the figures to make it a credible assertion. The three I will discuss - Hazel Edwards, Morris Gleitzman and Glyn Parry - are cases in point. Although I am not privy to their bank balances, they do not appear to be moonlighting at other high-paying jobs. Each would be aware of the specialised difficulties confronting writers

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for young people in 1990s' Australia. They grapple with how to please themselves, their target audience, their editors and their publishers as well as the guardians who control access to their books.

Energetic and prolific, Hazel Edwards markets herself with various CVs which announce that she is the author of 120 adult and children's books, many of which have been published overseas, is 'a frequent flyer, problem-writer and aqua-readaholic,' and has corporate clients such as Le Pine Funeral Services, the Metropolitan Fire Brigade and the University of Melbourne. Two of her best-known books are *There's a Hippopotamus on My Roof Eating Cake* (Hodder, 1980) and *Winning a Giraffe Called Geoffrey* (Random House, 1991).

For Edwards, being a professional means being flexible enough to take commissions and enterprising enough to market her own projects. Consequently, 'I don't distinguish between writing for children and writing for adults' (interview: Kroll 1996), she explains. 'I contemplate who the particular reader is and try to shape the material. To me that's the difference between a professional writer and an amateur.'

An example of Edwards' flexible methodology is her Frequent Flyer Twins mystery series, which comprises individual novels. Each book is prefaced by character profiles of ten-year old Asian-Australian twins Christopher and Amy Lee, the sleuths. Their parents are eco-photographers who fly around the world to shoot on location. In order to see their parents, the twins have to fly as UMs (Unaccompanied Minors) and so spend a good deal of time in airports, where they solve mysteries without ever putting themselves in danger.

Edwards conceived of this series about four years ago, intending to write novels that Ansett, for example, would include in their in-flight packages for children. She is now co-scripting thirteen episodes for TV based on her characters. If all her tie-ins come to fruition, Edwards will have produced a lucrative project. From the start, she has been aware of the restrictions her format and target audience would entail. The novels 'are based on what I call "participant-observer" techniques of research; that is, the background is accurate so that procedures for customs in airports, for example, are accurate.' Edwards investigated how Ansett and Qantas looked after unaccompanied minors, so she could 'not have the characters doing things that airlines would not allow them to do when they are escorting children.' To complicate matters, since often UMs are the product of divorces and custody is involved, 'they [the airlines] do not want to have stories that suggest these kids are running free all the time.' Edwards calls this a kind of 'commercial censorship,' because she does want to sell these books to the airlines.

*The Frequent Flyer Twins* series, however, is not just a commercial exercise for Edwards. She intended to produce quality novels that reflected her own social reality, too. She did not make the pair multicultural only to be politically correct: 'My principal reason was that the area where I live in Melbourne is predominantly Chinese, and one of the schools where I test a lot of material is Glendal Primary, which has a very strong Chinese language program. Some of the children there were saying, "Well, how come there are never any kids in stories who've got a parent who's Asian?"'

Edwards was, therefore, 'interested in the enrichment of the cultures as an asset, but as a background issue, not as foreground.' Ironically, this desire to allow children in her area to recognise themselves has raised difficulties with 'possible international [European] TV investors. They want Australian children cast in these roles, not Asian-Australian... The producer and I have discussed this and as far as I'm concerned I think Australian-born actors of Asian-Australian background would be perfectly suitable for the roles.' At this point in negotiations Edwards is resolute about what she desires from an artistic perspective. When the decision has to be made, however, will financial benefit overshadow artistic will?

Edwards is philosophical about the demands of being a professional writer. She believes that conflicts in a way are inevitable because 'writers on the whole are attracted to the eccentric; they are not attracted to what everybody else is doing.' Obviously, then, they will not want to produce just for the norm; characters might be fat or like junk food, both anathema to children's publishers, particularly of educational series, who want to model ideal, not real, behaviour.

As well, society has been changing its cultural configurations in the second half of the twentieth century. Even literature that should not date appreciably can encounter difficulties. Edwards has had this experience with two works that originally were not particularly culture or language-specific. One of her most successful books, published seventeen years ago, *There's a Hippopotamus on My Roof Eating Cake*, has been criticised recently in the United States: 'I've been accused of being nutritionally unsound...when he eats cake on the roof. He should

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be eating apples or something appropriate. I said, they don't eat apples, they eat carrots... the food issue is one for the Americans, too. There's a gap between the practice and the profession.' Luckily, the quality of the book has overridden this kind of nutritional fascism, but new titles in educational series, as opposed to trade books, are continually subjected to this type of scrutiny.

The other surprising criticism levelled at this picture book, which has been adapted for video and as a puppet play, occurred while Edwards was in Canada at an international writers workshop: 'In a radio interview, I was asked about a particular scene in the book where the father has smacked the child. Now that was written sixteen or seventeen years ago...and the flavour of society was slightly different. Anyway, I was asked, "Do all Australian children's writers support child abuse?"... I possibly wouldn't put the smacking scene in now, but it was appropriate at the time.'

Another, more insidious example of retrospective censorship that affected Edwards concerns a frequently-anthologised short story initially called, 'My Most Embarrassing Moment.' In this instance, a recent interpretation of the girl's condition, which nonplussed Edwards, led to a minor loss of income. 'The story concerns a girl who swam out of her bathers in the pool and how she coped with the embarrassment. It's a funny story, it's well structured. It was based on an autobiographical incident with my father, who'd been very ill, lost a lot of weight, swam out of his bathers in the swimming pool... For a man of his age at that time it didn't really matter all that much. But I made it worse by making it a thirteen-year-old girl. That short story...has been published at least a dozen times in various places. Recently, I was told, "No, we can't run that. She's obviously anorexic and she has a food problem, therefore, it's not appropriate."

Only in recent years has Edwards experienced this 'editorial rejection...of a story that had been very popular... Attitudes towards subject matter changes.'

Flexibility, a tough skin, a resilient psyche and a personality willing to accept that business acumen and artistic integrity can cooperate are essential to long-term success as an author in Edwards' opinion. The rewards are multifold:

In return, my income enables me to choose the workstyle balance that I prefer, and to carry a non-commercial writing project for my 'soul', at my own expense. But I do not consider writing a novel or short story 'superior' to writing a corporate script. They are equal in crafting skills but different in their aims. (Edwards 132)

Morris Gleitzman: Can the Writer be Trusted?

'I see it sometimes flash across parents' eyes that this man, whom we don't really know, he's got some power over our children. Just who is this guy? Just what is he about? What's his agenda? Can he be trusted?' (Morris Gleitzman, Interview with Jeri Kroll, 1997)

One of Australia's best-selling writers for young people, Morris Gleitzman published his twelfth book, *Water Wings* (Pan Macmillan), in 1996 and in 1997 he has already been responsible for six novels co-authored with superstar Paul Jennings. In the space of a mere twelve years, Gleitzman has moved from being a successful comedy writer for the small screen (sole writer for the Norman Gunston Show for five years) to a person who, to some parents' perplexity, has 'become important in their kids' lives.' He realises that this power brings, along with a sense of pride and a salutary glow over his bank balance, a problematic responsibility.

Gleitzman is adamant that he wants to tackle whatever issues he feels passionate about, but he is canny enough not to lose market share or his publishers' support. Unique among Australian young people's authors, he manages to combine humour with cutting-edge moral and social issues: 'My philosophy...is not about looking at the bleak and negative aspects of life. I'm actually more interested in writing about optimism, creativity, determination and a bit of anarchy. The way in which we and young people go about solving or at least wrestling with the problems of life.' This attitude and his artistic virtuosity have allowed him to confront subjects such as the death of a sibling, euthanasia, guardian angels (without the context of any particular religion), AIDS and gay relationships, to name only a few.

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Fortunately, Gleitzman finds the climate for children's books in Australia more tolerant than elsewhere. At least he knows that he can still write what he desires and achieve first publication at home: 'I sell several times more books here than I do overseas. My books in the UK probably average around twenty thousand, whereas my books here average around a hundred thousand.' Not a negligible amount on which to plan one's household budget. Poets would be contemplating immortality with those figures. Gleitzman is reminded of the restrictive atmosphere that can prevail whenever his agent faces selling his titles abroad. In fact, his latest releases, *Belly Flop* (Pan Macmillan, 1996) and *Water Wings* (Pan Macmillan, 1996), which contain crossover characters (those who appear in both books), are yet to be published in America: 'I feel that they are risky books in the states,' he observes.

*Water Wings* is a novel designed for eight-to-thirteen-year-olds, but with its complexity, audacity and offbeat humour, it compares admirably with Gleitzman's greatest critical success, *Two Weeks With the Queen* (Blackie and Son, 1989 [UK]; Pan Macmillan Australia, 1990). As with the earlier novel, a plot outline could so oversimplify the action that it would terrify certain parents and teachers. As he himself says, it's 'a book about a girl who helps her dying grandmother to die. And I'd be happy to sit down with any parent in Australia and justify both that book and what the kid does, but it could be totally abhorrent in terms of that family's beliefs and attitudes about death and dying.' In fact, the two central characters, Pearl and Mitch, do not actually kill grandma, but help, as she puts it, 'with the travel arrangements' (*Water Wings* 137). As in other Gleitzman novels, it is always the relationships that enable the child to cope amidst emotional and physical traumas:

We have great resources as individuals. Our human life force which gives us optimism and humour and creativity... I like to write about characters who are battling with sometimes overwhelming odds trying to solve problems that just aren't going to be solvable. I'm really interested in looking at how we as humans come to terms with there not being a simple sort of win or lose situation... And I think that there are big victories to be won in terms of the internal life of people and of my characters.

These are demanding concepts to be dramatising in novels for younger readers.

Gleitzman's most pressing challenge arose when he tackled the conclusion of *Water Wings*, which he did not specifically write 'as part of the euthanasia debate.' He took the decision to have grandma refuse the drink concocted by Pearl and Mitch, a drink designed to end her suffering: 'I didn't think, "Oh, this is going to be heavy. This book will be banned all over the place if I have the kids actually kill her." That outcome "wasn't really the story I wanted to tell. So I decided not to tell it.'" In order to do the characters justice, he was faced with 'a set of creative decisions... I wouldn't say that it was self-censorship because at no stage did I in any way compromise the story I wanted to tell. In some people's eyes I have softened it...' So while *Water Wings* seems a ground-breaking novel in some readers' opinions, it backs away from the hard truths in others. Gleitzman maintains he wrote the book he wanted to write, and he will see how it fares in the marketplace as a result.

Gleitzman deplores any type of censorship, but completely understands, as a parent and a citizen, the impetus. If publishers fear that schools, for example, will not buy a work, or it will not sell overseas, pressure can be brought to bear on authors. In our predominantly multinational publishing environment, what Gleitzman calls 'some sort of censorship assessment' frequently goes on at the submission stage: '...publishers are nowadays primarily economic rationalists... I also know publishers have to think of things like their reputation. If they are seen as being sort of sleaze merchants then it really undermines the effectiveness with which they can publish and market other books.'

Nevertheless, he strongly rejects having his creations tampered with. A case in point occurred in a state that sponsored distance education programs. A substantial number of copies of *Misery Guts* (Pan Macmillan, 1991) had been purchased as texts: 'It is certainly a book that I didn't think ever would be sensitive in any way...it was felt by this particular group of people in this particular department that the use of the term Pom was akin to sort of wog...they had gone through quite some large number of copies of *Misery Guts* and had liquid papered out all mention of Pom... Now I was pretty outraged when I heard this.'

To complicate matters, Gleitzman heard about this literary vandalism in the course of a video interview that was being conducted for that very distance education program and was taken aback. Apparently the fact came out 'in the spirit of well, we've bought three hundred copies of your book, so you should be really pleased about that. It would be churlish to complain . . . whereas my view would be, I would much prefer that you didn't ever buy any more of my books and in fact I'll buy those three hundred copies back from you immediately, rather than have you doing that. Anybody has a right to choose not to use a book either in a professional or family context, but

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nobody has the right to alter what I've written and has been published.' Gleitzman believes that what amounts to a defacing of his novels is: 'an infringement of my rights as an author and an infringement of those kids' rights as readers.'

Fortunately, Gleitzman is successful enough that his difficulties with would-be moral custodians of young people have not hindered him unduly. He is still prepared to take risks (he is contemplating a book about birth control). Yet as a children's author he also knows that he bears a responsibility for what and how he chooses to write: 'There's an intimacy between the reader and a printed page that is probably more intimate than any other form and I think parents get nervous seeing their kids intimate with anybody else outside the family, even in a metaphorical sense.' Gleitzman also perceives that as a society 'we equate the intensity with which young people connect with their stories and with their other cultural experiences...with the degree to which they are liable to be influenced.'

Since the beginning of his career, Gleitzman has possessed this complex perception of a creator's relationship with audience. He now acknowledges, however, that he has reached a stage where potential bookbuyers have options; librarians and parents can select a less contentious title, or wait for the next Gleitzman. His fame works positively and negatively: 'It's probably relevant that I'm now a much better known author than I was in 1990. I wonder which way that cuts... There's much less chance that one of my books is not going to sell enough to justify its continuation and that it will be remaindered and disappear... On the other hand, any book I write is immediately more high profile than someone else's.' Nevertheless, Gleitzman will not stop 'pushing the limits' if that means creating the type of fictions he wants to explore.

Glyn Parry: Establish the Name

'My game plan was very simply to have six teenage novels in print before my fortieth birthday. *LA Postcards* was my grand entrance.'  
(Glyn Parry, Interview with Jeri Kroll, 1995)

A former high school teacher, Glyn Parry is now a popular author and a sought-after visitor to schools around the country. Wearing his trademark board shorts and using a trendy vocabulary, Parry has workshopped himself into a position that allows him time to write as well as to support his family. His first novel, *LA Postcards*, (Random House, 1992) guaranteed him teen and teacher recognition and so when *Monster Man* (Random House, 1994), a thriller about abduction, followed, he could still be invited to schools, as long as he did not speak about the controversial book.

Parry is nothing if not forthright about his prospects. His methodical approach to writing sits side by side with his passion for his craft. He has had a game plan since he completed a BA in English, majoring in creative writing, at Curtin University of Technology in Perth: 'I walked in off the street with a portfolio of stories, and they took me in. I had no educational qualifications whatsoever. I hadn't even done year 12. But Curtin Uni saw the talent and someone threw me a lifeline. Good days.'

Parry could not begin to fulfil his plan to be a full-time writer when he finished university because his wife was pregnant: 'So I made a pact to say in teaching for ten years [He had a Dip. Ed by then] and in the meantime I moonshined writing at 5 am and 10 pm, doing the job of writing. I knew that my first novel would be like the debut, but after that I would go for broke... Because ten years in the classroom was enough!' Calculated to move his career into high gear from the start, *LA Postcards* made Parry feel 'safe...because I knew, first novel, what are your chances, eight hundred to one. I had to give them something that would be a good seller and I knew it would sell. See? Very Napoleon.' By the time the novel was accepted his collection of stories, *Radical Take-offs* (Little Ark, 1994), was already being considered.

Parry was prepared to take risks with his next project. He realised that he might unsettle adults but also that adolescents would respond; and he already had a reputation: 'Rule number one: establish the name.' Parry knew that he did not want to write another *LA Postcards*, no matter how successful that novel had been: 'I got paranoid about this idea of, I'll be Paul Zindel forever and a day.' Discussing his prospects with Mark Macleod, his publisher at Random House, he came to the conclusion that 'there were two very strongly emerging genres.



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The first genre was the Gary Paulsen road, the adventure book for boys...' But then Parry realised that 'suburbia is where I'm at. The other genre, of course, was the Point Thrillers... I thought I should give them [teenagers] something with a bit more substance than that junk stuff, however.' When in doubt, go to the consumer: 'So then I was asking kids, "What do you think I should do? I want to write a scary book." They all came back with the same answer. "Oh, why don't you write about those two girls who have been kidnapped, sir?" Abduction was in the news.'

*Monster Man* was the result, a disquieting story about a teenager who is abducted by a methodical man who also abducts a little girl at the same time. Even though the subject matter was sensitive, Parry never intended to 'get into the sexual stuff. Plus no one would have published it if I had.' Explicit material would have gone against his purpose as well because he refused to make his protagonist a victim. Parry credits Mark Macleod for improving the novel by suggesting a more hopeful ending. (In the original draft, the abductor Levine escapes): 'That was more like the hope I wanted, to show readers that Melanie could empower herself after such a horrible experience.'

Neither author nor publisher tried to deceive the public about the novel's controversial nature. *Monster Man* carried a warning on its back cover that obviously pushed panic buttons in certain adults. It said: 'Some readers may find the subject matter of this book disturbing.' This statement might have lost the novel readers and gained it others. In fact, some adults refused to read it, rejecting it as smartly as if they had been asked to shake hands with an HIV-positive person. They would have missed the story's prime focus, as Parry explains: 'The hidden story in *Monster Man* is not the abduction, it's the empowerment of a girl who has suffered years of abuse in the home.' *Monster Man* has evoked very positive responses from adolescents, and after slow reviews it was made a Children's Book Council of Australia Notable Book in 1995. It has now been sold to the United States, and will be clearly 'aimed at older teenagers. The Americans are being brave for once.'

Parry's newest book has him moving in yet another direction, but one he has foretold will keep his career percolating: 'I'm writing a new novel for teenagers called *Sad Boys*...about three boys who go to Rottnest Island for a week in search of sun, surf and sex... I mean political correctness doesn't exist on Rottnest island.' He anticipates that his honesty might again raise some eyebrows: 'What bugs me is the fact that if I retain the integrity of the character and the plot, I do put certain adults offside, because some see it as their duty to protect kids from the sort of stuff I'm writing.'

Philosophical about negative reactions, Parry is convinced that his books will still sell by word of mouth. In any event, he can always continue to make a living by visiting schools. He is an adept performer and has created a school persona: 'I'm really a larger-than-life character now to kids...it's a marketing thing to wear these zany clothes.' He calculates the impression he makes so that 'when I walk into an audience of kids I want those kids to go, "Cool! Who's this?"' Humour and just enough risky patter keep his street cred with students without offending their teachers. Parry guards his reputation, therefore, by carefully orchestrating his presentations.

Despite occasional criticism, what allows Parry to maintain his enthusiasm is his commitment to himself as a professional: 'It's ten percent talent, I tell people. It's ninety percent grunge. I'm still here.' Aside from his royalty statements, the greatest rewards come from his audience: 'I've had that many kids come up to me and say, "Oh, I was only going to read a chapter but I read the whole thing last night, because I just couldn't stop. I didn't do my homework because of it." That's the greatest compliment.'

#### To Please or to Appease - the Question for Writers

Although students enrol in creative writing topics for a variety of reasons, those who intend to become authors, to pursue writing as more than a hobby, should understand the economics of the profession. Since writers for young people have to be sensitive to the needs of their audience in order to survive, any topic that purports to teach their craft should canvass the difficulties of considering not only that audience, but those who read over young people's shoulders: teachers, librarians, parents, relatives and care-givers.

Hazel Edwards, Morris Gleitzman and Glyn Parry, all successful writers for young people who survive by their craft, testify to the balancing act necessary to keep artistic integrity intact, publishers content and the bank balance sufficient to fund the next project. Each time they embark upon a new work, these writers consciously

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or subliminally face the issue of suitability. Eventually, their publishers and editors help them to thrash out what is best for the manuscript and what is acceptable to the public. These writers feel that the two have coincided often enough. They do not believe that they have sacrificed imagination to material concerns. In any event, continuing popularity helps to protect creative freedom. As Glyn Parry counsels: 'Rule number one: establish the name.'

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