

**YOU'VE
GOT MALE**
WITH
RORY
GIBSON

I am, as I'm sure you are, constantly amused by the way men will change the way they speak or act when women enter their orbit.

Well, except members of the Canterbury Bulldogs rugby league club I suppose. And Alan Jones. But most men will temper their behaviour when women are around. One instance of this I recall fondly was at a State of Origin match. The place was packed, of course, but there were about 20 seats empty nearby. I assumed they were the consequence of a bunch of people lingering at a corporate function still making their way into the stands. There was a squad of cheerleaders dressed in not much doing a dance routine as pre-match entertainment. The commentary from around me while they were performing was along the lines of, "Phwoar! Look at the hush puppies* on that", "I'll show you my dance routine, love" etc, shouted out by blokes who then discussed loudly which of the girls they would like to, ah, get to know in the biblical sense.

This kept up until the girls, now dressed in civvies, filed into the empty seats. I waited for the men who had been so vocal in their admiration minutes before to make good on their declarations of lust. But they must have swapped seats with different men because, suddenly, not one ribald peep. I witnessed a variation of this phenomenon the other day in a bar. There was some fishing talk. A young woman from America was part of the group and she asked a crusty old tradie, "What's a squid jig?" Delighted to be asked, he explained patiently and with humour how a squid jig was a specially designed lure with an array of backward-facing spikes that hook into a squid's tentacles when it attacks what it thinks is a fish. It was a captivating exchange, and the pair giggled and laughed all the way through it. But if it had been me asking, not her, the conversation would have gone thus: "Mate, what's a squid jig?" "It's a lure for catching squid."

* *Hush puppies: breasts so magnificent they render men speechless.*

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Writing next bestseller is child's play



**SALLY
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A heads-up for those budding novelists out there. Next month is Nanowrimo – National Novel Writing Month. That's when you, and a bunch of wannabe Tolstoys around the world, try to write 50,000 words in a month.

That averages about 1666 words a day. Hmmm, spooky.

Or, as usually happens in my case, 49,000 words on the last day.

But what is the great novel these days? Forget Dostoevsky, Flaubert or even short 'n' sweet Hemingway. Young Adult fiction is all the rage.

That's fine if you have pimples and a training bra. But not only teenagers are reading it – everyone is.

Clearly, if I want to write the next great novel, it's going to have to be about some sort of crossbow-wielding vampire who goes to magic school.

If I want to write the great novel of my generation, I'll have to write it about the "next" generation.

At the recent Brisbane Writers Festival, talks on YA fiction were some of the most popular – with more people trying to get in than at a school dance where Robert Pattinson has shown up. Obviously it wasn't all young people, because young people generally spend their time avoiding lectures.

Now, I'm all for encouraging teenagers to read – but what's the appeal for the old folks? I don't think teenage books are meant for grown-ups.

The grown-ups were clearly so craving the rude bits *Twilight* skipped over, that somebody wrote them into a new novel, *Fifty Shades of Grey*.

So, what is going on? Are we getting dumber? A few generations ago, kids were learning Latin in school at 13.

Authors raised on a diet of great literature, produced more great literature – think Dickens, Fitzgerald, Woolf.

In the olden days, the words glistened and sparkled on the page. Now all that's glistening are the vampires.

In my day (yegads, I've reached the age where I can say "in my day"), we graduated straight from *Lord of the Flies* to *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*.

Our teachers were preparing us for life because clearly the future was going to be all about being stuck on an island trying to eliminate each other or being holed up in an enclosed space with a bunch of crazy people (reality TV, anyone?)

And you thought *The Hunger Games* was cutting-edge.

Of course, while we handed in our essays on Piggy and Chief, many of us were devouring *Sweet Valley High* books on the side. But no one admitted to it. And

certainly no adult would be caught dead reading a teenager's book.

Anyway, I'm going to stay ahead of the pack and make a prediction. Shorter attention spans, internet generation, more interest in visuals . . . in the future, it's going to be all about kids' books.

Bernie the Bear who gets his kite stuck up in a tree and Little Birdie has to help him get it down and they become friends.

See, it's easy, I've already written one.

Or how about Bernie the Bear finds a crossbow and takes aim at Little Birdie, but she talks him out of it and they become friends. See? Crossover novel.

J.K. Rowling is behind the times. She has

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just written her first book for adults. That is so 1870s. She should be aiming younger, not older. Attention spans are getting shorter, after all. When my friend is reading *The Three Little Pigs* to his son, they usually don't make it past the second pig.

OK, I confess, writing a good kids' book that doesn't send the grown-ups off to sleep before the little ones is a skill.

And the best ones stand the test of time. As another friend wrote to me, the best kids' books can be consumed by adults.

The House at Pooh Corner is a fantastic read because you catch all the wit and the wordplay that you absorbed on some strange molecular level as a kid."

And if you're going to start them on their literary path, it may as well be a strong one.

So you know where the future is. It's kids' books. Time to get cracking for Nakibowrimo – National Kids Book Writing Month (I just started it). You have to write 25 words a day. Hop to it.

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Frances Whiting is on leave.

