

low tenants of Frank's rooming house.

It is too bad, then, that the book should fall short in its representation of the intergenerational relationship at its core. Quite simply, the friendship between Frank and Mrs. Kazinsky is not introduced in an entirely believable manner. When we first meet Mrs. Kazinsky, she is an old lady who sits in the attic "all day long and every day" and who smells of "lavender sachets and old books." Nothing wrong with that, other than it is an impersonal introduction to a person who is named three pages later as Frank's best friend. Further, even though we are told that Frank and Mrs. Kazinski spend time looking through the old woman's photo album and going to the movies together, we don't really get a sense of their enjoyment of each other. The relationship seems forced and unnatural when it should be mutually beneficial and, perhaps most important of all, fun.

Works Cited

- Moody, Harry R., and Robert Disch. "Intergenerational Programming in Public Policy." *Intergenerational Programs: Imperatives, Strategies, Impacts, Trends*. Ed. Sally Newman and W. Brummel. New York: Haworth, 1989. 101-10.
- Rosenthal, Carolyn J., and James Gladstone. "Grandparenthood in Canada." 2000. Contemporary Family Trends (Occasional papers series). Vanier Institute of the Family. 2 Oct. 2001 <<http://www.vifamily.ca/cft/grandpt/Table.htm>>.
- Shipman, Mel. "A Society for All Ages." *Transition Magazine* 28.4 (1998). 2 Oct. 2001 <<http://www.vifamily.ca/tm/284/4/htm>>.
- Statistics Canada. *A Portrait of Seniors in Canada*. 3rd ed. Ottawa: Minister of Industry, 1999.

Nadine d'Entremont, a librarian in southern Ontario, has learned much from her grandparents in Nova Scotia.

Ice and Water

The Stars from Mars. Slapshots 1. Gordon Korman. Scholastic, 1999. 143 pp. \$5.99 paper. ISBN 0-590-70619-5. *Shipwreck. Island* 1. Gordon Korman. Scholastic, 2001. 129 pp. \$5.50 paper. ISBN 0-439-16456-7.

When I was twelve, I couldn't get enough of Gordon Korman's "Bruno and Boots" books. *Go Jump in the Pool!* (1979), *Beware the Fish!* (1980), *The War with Mr. Wizzle* (1983) — the adventures of a pair of troublemakers and their pals at boarding school made for endless rereadings throughout adolescence. Besides the comedy and the fast-paced plots, what I and countless readers have found irresistible about these books are the young characters themselves. Bruno and Boots weren't rebels; their relationship with Headmaster Sturgeon — better known as "The Fish" — was based less on disruption of authority than on negotiation and compromise. These books have proven enormously popular with middle-school readers for the past 25 years, especially the very first book, *This Can't Be Happening at Macdonald Hall!* (1978), which Korman wrote at the tender age of 12.

But the Bruno and Boots books are only a small part of an ever-expanding

library of titles that bears witness to a level of productivity that shows no indication of slowing down. In addition to six sequels to *This Can't Be Happening at Macdonald Hall!*, Korman penned several similar titles in the early 1980s, including *Who is Bugs Potter?* (1980), *I Want to Go Home!* (1981), *Our Man Weston* (1982), and *No Coins Please* (1984). Beginning in 1985, Korman branched out with several successful titles for young adults: *Don't Care High* (1985), *Son of Interflux* (1986), *A Semester in the Life of a Garbage Bag* (1987), and *Losing Joe's Place* (1990). But it is the middle-reader demographic with which he has been the most successful, and the 1990s saw a steady stream of new titles for that age group: *The D- Poems of Jeremy Bloom* (1992), *The Twinkie Squad* (1992), *The Toilet Paper Tigers* (1993), *The Chicken Doesn't Skate* (1996), *Liar, Liar, Pants on Fire* (1997), *The Sixth Grade Nickname Game* (1998), and *No More Dead Dogs* (2000). For Disney Press, Korman also wrote the six-book umbrella series *Monday Night Football Club* (1997-1998) as well as *Nose Pickers from Outer Space* and three sequels (1999-2001).

Korman's books are successful because they rely on stock characters, recurring plot motifs, exaggeration, funny one-liners, and hyperreality. As with most books for middle readers, the story arcs of Korman's novels are fairly safe and predictable, with all major and minor conflicts neatly resolved. What keeps his readers going, however, is the originality of the conflicts and the absurdity of the characters' motivations, which often push the boundaries surrounding "realistic" fiction. *The Stars from Mars*, the first in the four-volume limited series *Slapshots*, relies on such strategies that have already proven successful with this age-group: a clear goal to be accomplished, a cast of irreverent younger characters, clear antagonism among protagonists to be resolved, sympathetic but ultimately loony adults, and, of course, humour. In a plot device very similar to that in Korman's fifth Bruno and Boots book, *The Zucchini Warriors* (1988), and very reminiscent of the *Mighty Ducks* film series (1992-1996), a group of sixth-grade misfits from Waterloo Elementary School decide to form a hockey team, even though, quite predictably, they stink. One of the most aggressive players in this otherwise all-male league is Alexia Colwin, who is so keen to win that she willingly stops a puck with her visor. Part of her aggression stems from a desire to challenge the boys-only rule, although no one actually tries to stop her from playing; if there is such a rule, it is never enforced.

The recycled premise aside, the characters are engaging enough to sustain a limited series. Told from the point of view of Clarence "Chipmunk" Adelman, the eleven-year-old star reporter for the *Waterloo Gazette*, the story succeeds because it handles well the lessons about overcoming conflicts and disagreements in the interest of teamwork and cooperation. Among the book's less appealing running gags is the limited vocabulary of their coach, Boom Boom Bolitsky, who refers to all objects — including helmets and jerseys — as doohickeys, whatchamacallits, and a host of additional archaic euphemisms. This takes quite a bit of getting used to, both for readers and for the young hockey players, as they discover during their first practice with him, when they are "scrambling around, sweating and struggling to understand Boom Boom's bellowed instructions":

"Put your whatsit on the whosis!" *Keep your stick on the ice.*

"Play the heejazz, not the dingus!" *Check the skater, not the puck.*

"The thing! Get the thing!" *The rebound! Cover the rebound!* (16)

Still, the depiction of Boom Boom Bolitsky is much less of a problem than that of

Mrs. Bolitsky, who is described as “the most beautiful, gorgeous, stunning, and totally awesome lady in the world. Compared to her, supermodels look like grizzly bears” (20). This is a rather unfortunate stereotyping, given the very limited number of female roles within this mostly all-male cast, a stereotyping that is never challenged or problematized anywhere in the text. Mrs. Bolitsky is constantly referred to as an object to be looked at: as Chipmunk relates during their first game, “I thought the bleachers were going to tip over when every dad on both sides leaned left to get a look at our spectacular assistant coach” (31). Calling out “Yoo-hoo” and clad in high heels in a hockey arena, Mrs. Bolitsky proves so alluring that she later mesmerizes the Zamboni driver into accidentally wrecking the community centre, providing the book’s final plot twist and giving the Stars from Mars an unexpected advantage in their goal to win enough games to avoid being disqualified by the league. Needless to say, such sexist stereotyping risks becoming internalized by both male and female younger readers, who will learn to expect such objects of allurements to be “part of the game,” and is thus a major blot in this otherwise worthwhile book.

The *Island* miniseries is more of a departure for Korman and, perhaps for that reason, is also the less successful of the two. Its six younger protagonists have all been forced into a program called “Charting a New Course” because of varied behavioural problems: Luke was caught with a gun in his locker, which he claims was planted; siblings Will and Lyssa let their sibling rivalry reach the point of violence; J.J., son of a famous actor, pulled one too many stunts as a Hollywood brat; Ian’s excessive television-watching habits led him to become extremely anti-social; and Charla had a stress-related nervous breakdown after too many years of pressure to push herself as an athlete, particularly by her father. As part of this program, the kids will be given responsibilities on a boat in order to learn to work together and be part of a team. Korman includes several familiar tropes in the book, including a captain who invariably calls all children Archie or Veronica, according to sex, but the comedy doesn’t mesh well with the pervading tone of the book. With no single protagonist with which to identify, it becomes difficult to keep track of six different points of view, motivations, and background stories, all of which are given equal space. It is also unfortunate that the only black character also happens to be the only one of the group who is economically disadvantaged, given that Charla is the exception to an otherwise all-white cast and one of the first characters of colour to appear in Korman’s body of work.

The plot of this miniseries is also very familiar, reminiscent of the films *Lord of the Flies* (1990), directed by Harry Hook and adapted from William Golding’s novel, and *Exile* (1990), about 15 teens on a study program abroad who crash on an uncharted Malaysian island. This old trope may have been given new life thanks to the recent success of the reality television series *Survivor*, but the appearance and structure of the trilogy do nothing to cover the predictability of the entire series. Because of the title *Shipwreck*, it is difficult to feel any tension throughout this first book because there can be very little else to expect; the titles of the subsequent books in the trilogy, *Survival* and *Rescue*, also do nothing to withhold the plot of the rest of the miniseries. Moreover, the back cover of all three books shows six clean children in spotless clothing posing on a beach, even though only four have made it alive — and barely — by the end of the first book.

Despite these drawbacks, the *Island* trilogy has proven so successful with middle readers that Korman has since completed two similar trilogies for the same age

group, *Everest* (2002) and *Dive* (scheduled for release in summer 2003). And, even though a positive end to the trilogy was rather unavoidable, I was curious enough about how the rest of the story unraveled to run out and buy the last two volumes. Perhaps these two miniseries mark a transition period in the career of the prolific Korman, whose recent offerings also include the young adult novel *Son of the Mob* (2002) and the middle-reader novel *Maxx Comedy: The Funniest Kid in America* (2003), both of which are a return to more familiar territory. Also in 2003, Scholastic will reissue the classic Bruno and Boots series — with slightly updated texts and some changed titles — as the Macdonald Hall series, just in time for the 25th anniversary of *This Can't Be Happening at Macdonald Hall!* But, despite these updates and changes, and despite Korman's experiment with new modes of fiction, ultimately he will remain best known for his first books, written during his own adolescence, about a pair of rapscaillon schoolboys named Bruno and Boots.

Benjamin Lefebvre is a Ph.D. candidate in English at McMaster University and assistant editor of this journal. His most recent academic contributions have appeared or are forthcoming in Essays on Canadian Writing, University of Toronto Quarterly, The Lion and the Unicorn, and Making Avonlea: L.M. Montgomery and Popular Culture (University of Toronto Press, 2002).

Power-Packed Picture Books

Eh? to Zed: A Canadian ABeCedarium. Kevin Major. Illus. Alan Daniel. Red Deer, 2000. 32 pp. \$18.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88995-222-1. *Imagine That!* Janet Wilson. Illus. Janet Wilson. Stoddart Kids, 2000. 32 pp. \$19.95 cloth. ISBN 0-7737-3221-7. *A Time for Golden Dragons.* Song Nan Zhang and Hao Yu Zhang. Illus. Song Nan Zhang. Tundra, 2000. 24 pp. \$19.99 cloth. ISBN 0-88776-506-8.

The contents of this trio of information-packed "picture books" argue that the old saw about never judging a book by its cover should perhaps be amended to add the corollary "or by its length." Too often, the 24-to-32-page picture book simply gets dismissed as being fare for just the pre-reader and the early reader, but the audiences for the following titles are much broader. Public libraries should seriously consider purchasing two copies of each book, with one housed in the juvenile collection and the second in the adult area.

While alphabet books are usually associated with pre-reading activities, such as identifying the letters of the alphabet in their upper- and lowercase forms or associating letters with their "sounds," Major's thematic alphabet book would almost be more at home in a high school or university class on Canadian studies than in a reading class. Major's witty title choice, *Eh? to Zed*, reflects an alphabetical alpha and omega of the stereotypical Canadian, an image reinforced by Daniel's cover illustration of a maple leaf-waving Mountie. (By placing the Mountie astride a weathervane horse, is Daniel satirically suggesting that Canadians are directionless, just going where the shifting winds point them?) It is perhaps fitting that Newfoundlander Major, who was born in the year that the "Rock" became the nation's tenth province, should author such a Canadian book. His rhythmic text con-