

Radio fifth grade is closely related to the Bruno and Boots series, but the driving force is Benjy Driver, as his name indicates. The adults in *Radio fifth grade* fall into definite stereotypes. Human foibles are "writ large" in all of Korman's books and here the pet shop owner who sponsors the fifth grade radio show is as tight-fisted as they come. In spite of his tendency to think the worst of the students, however, he, like Mr. Sturgeon in the Bruno and Boots books, has a kind wife who stands up for them. Like Mr. Sturgeon, his bark is worse than his bite. As veteran readers of Korman, we anticipate numerous difficulties for his characters as they cope with good intentions turned sour. Crises with the mascot parrot, with the questions a new teacher has assigned as homework, and with the school bully loom large. Korman does have a habit of poking fun at human inadequacies and society's sanctified and time-honoured customs. In *Macdonald Hall goes Hollywood*, the film industry receives the brunt of Korman's satiric thrusts, whereas in *Radio fifth grade*, Benjy's idol, the announcer Eldridge Kestenbaum, serves as a parody of those idols whom many professionals attempt to emulate.

It is clear that Korman's forte is situational comedy and he tends to rewrite the same plot with minor variations. The success of his books depends on a number of factors: his masterful pacing of narrative to achieve the timing so essential for comedic effect, his exploiting the naiveté of some of his characters, and his habit of relying on his reader's anticipation of his next move. It might be risky for Korman to launch into a new writing style when he so obviously has this one down pat. Formulaic as his fiction is, however, when you've read one Korman book, you haven't read them all. He keeps you reading, laughing, and coming back for more.

Barbara Carman Garner is an Associate Professor of English at Carleton University, Ottawa.

CROSS-CULTURAL FRIENDSHIPS

Copper sunrise. Bryan Buchan. Scholastic, (1972), 1991. 112 pp., \$7.95 paper. ISBN 0-590-73623-X; **Darlene's shadow.** Norma Charles. General Paperbacks, 1991. 96 pp., \$5.95 paper. ISBN 077-3672-958.

Recent multi-cultural consciousness in Canadian children's literature has produced a number of books involving cross-cultural friendships. Brian Buchan's *Copper sunrise* is an older novel, first published in 1972 and recently reissued by Scholastic in a handsome Gold Leaf edition; like Norma Charles's new novel, *Darlene's shadow*, it is about the growth of a friendship, through situations of danger and crisis, between two children who do not even understand each other's language. The two novels are, however, very different in setting and

mood. Charles's is a fairly well-told modern story, blending humour and adventure, about a school trip to a wilderness centre. Buchan's is a seriously flawed attempt to write for children about a tragedy – the extinction of the Beothuk people in early nineteenth-century Newfoundland.

A teacher herself, Norma Charles has a good sense of the attitudes and concerns of mid-elementary school children. The excitement of the class trip to a wilderness centre is convincingly evoked, although the double climax provides more drama than – fortunately – such outings usually do. The novel stays with young Darlene's perspective throughout, and her feelings and concerns ring true: for example, the mortification of having her teacher pair her for the trip with an immigrant girl is increased by noting that her own best friend is *not* disappointed at being paired with someone else.

Charles effectively shows the subtle awkwardness which may arise in interracial situations. The fact that Darlene is Chinese emerges indirectly; it is more evident that she is, and considers herself to be, a very ordinary Canadian school girl. She feels nothing in common with the Cambodian immigrant, Noy, whose dress, manner and language make her stand out painfully from the other children. The adults in the novel, however, are evidently much more conscious than Darlene or the reader that she is oriental; the teacher pairs her with Noy for the trip, other kids joke that they are "Siamese twins," and the camp leader assumes Darlene speaks Noy's language. The truthfulness of such moments is more interesting than the climaxes of rescuing someone from a cliff and scaring off a grizzly bear. Charles seems to feel that some such dramatic events are needed to break down the barriers between the two girls and cause Darlene to value and accept Noy. Given Charles's gift for realistic depiction of everyday school life, however, it would have been interesting to see how, without the aid of crumbling cliffs and grizzlies, she might have shown these two girls working their way to friendship.

Buchan's *Copper sunrise* is a grim novel about man's inhumanity to man – and to women, children, and animals as well. Set in a Newfoundland outport, it describes the massacre by white settlers of a group of Beothuk natives. The voice telling this chilling story is that of Jamie, a young boy who has immigrated with his parents and two brothers from Scotland. Ignoring the other villagers' anxieties about murderous savages in the woods, he secretly becomes friends with Tathani, a native boy; they exchange gifts and learn each other's languages. When the settlers' paranoia erupts in a plan to hunt down and exterminate the natives, Jamie is unable to argue with his elders and is forced to participate in the hunt, eventually becoming an appalled witness of the massacre, first of Tathani's family, then of 80 other members of the tribe, and finally of Tathani himself.

Buchan's theme of the callous brutality of the white settlers in their wanton destruction of animal and human life in the New World is very topical, and the reissue of this book taps into the feelings aroused by films like *Dances with*

wolves. In its close focus on Jamie's direct experience, the novel seeks, and to some extent achieves, a tragic dimension. As an historical novel, however, *Copper sunrise* presents a questionable version of the Beothuk story, at least as it is now understood by most scholars. There is no Afterword or supplementary comment in Buchan's book indicating when and where, let alone why and how, the terrible events he describes took place. Popular history at the time of Buchan's writing, in 1972, did present the Beothuk as having been deliberately exterminated, in large scale massacres such as the one described in *Copper sunrise* (see, for example, the *Maclean's* article by Harold Horwood, "The people who were murdered for fun," 10 Oct. 1959). Recent historians of the Beothuk extermination, however, find no real evidence for the reputed massacres; rather, they attribute it to the more mundane combination of disease and a failing food supply – both exacerbated by white settlement, but not the result of the spectacular acts of malevolence described in Buchan's novel and elsewhere. (See Ralph T. Pastore, "Native history in the Atlantic region during the Colonial period," *Acadiensis*, XX, I [Autumn 1990], 200-225, Leslie Upton's "The extermination of the Beothuks of Newfoundland," *Canadian Historical Review*, LVIII, 2 [June 1977], 133-153 and Ralph Pastore "The collapse of the Beothuk world," *Acadiensis* 4, XIX, I [Fall 1989], 52-71).

While the details given by Buchan about the Beothuk way of life are soundly based on available evidence, we are mostly told about them, rather than having them brought to life for us. In other respects Buchan's story has an air of unreality: Mr. Craven, who incites the settlers to massacre, is a stock villain – "heavy, balding," "dressed in fancy town clothes," who "puffed heavily, his red nose and cheeks glowing as if they were sunburned. His tiny eyes glanced suspiciously around..." (78-9). It is hard to see why his wheezy rhetoric would move ordinary Scots family men to acts of atrocity. The friendship of the boys seems too effortless, in contrast to the wariness and inexplicable barbarity of the other characters. Dialogue is stilted, and although the story is told by Jamie, his words rarely sound like those of a young boy – even two centuries ago.

On the other hand, Buchan effectively uses images – of the copper sunrise and the sound of Tethani's flute, and they, more effectively than the action or dialogue, convey the elegiac mood sought by the novel. In this new edition, *Copper sunrise* is handsomely presented, with a cover painting by James Hill.

Gwyneth Evans, a frequent contributor to CCL, has taught *Children's Literature* at several Canadian universities; she is a member of the *English and Education faculties* at Malaspina College, on Vancouver Island.