

book reviews

A martyr of the media in loud and lusty revolt

CONSPIRATORS IN SILENCE, by Patrick Watson, McClelland & Stewart Ltd., Toronto

Patrick Watson preaches what he practises.

The flaming martyr of the media who co-produced the controversial "This Hour Has Seven Days" public affairs show for CBC from 1964 to 1966, has collected into a book his thoughts on the quality of life in Canada.

His thesis: "There is a conspiracy to turn us off, us people, to make of us well-programmed, responsive robots. It is a conspiracy that works particularly well because the conspirators do not know there is a conspiracy and believe their actions to be good. Therefore they make no slips, no furtive looks nor guilty gestures. Our schools, our mass media and our politics co-operate to silence the human voice. But so successfully do they sham the opposite role that they convince themselves."

Coming from a man who is a journalist, a television producer, and today an educator and student of political science, that is an intriguing thesis. His book is ironic in another sense, as well; it is not a defense of his thesis, but a loud and lusty revolt against it.

We have to articulate ourselves to discover who we are, says Prof. Watson. And the fabric of our society, from the close social institution of the family to the broad fencing of our governments, is warped and woofed in a finely woven conspiracy to defraud the individual Canadian of the chance to find himself.

"If we can't say who we are," says Watson, "it is because we have been taught we must not say so. Overcoming such teaching is a task that challenges all the resources of the person as actor—that is, as one who acts as opposed to being acted upon.

"It is not simply a question of knowing or not knowing, and consequently, saying or not being able to say. The only way we can move towards self-knowledge is by continually seeking to express ourselves. That sounds circular, and it is: a matter of process, not product; journey, not arrival."

Sounds a little like another man from Toronto who likes to talk about media and messages and the minds of people, doesn't it?

Watson, after articulating a protest against the repressive socialization of Canadian politeness and restraint—what Whitman might have called a barbaric yawp—proceeds to give the inside story on why the CBC tubed the uncomfortably vital Seven Days show, withheld the documentary "Warrendale" (which since won international film awards and become a classic study for students of abnormal psychology) and killed other creative, questioning efforts at social comment which threatened

to disturb the equanimity of the Canadian viewing masses. Watson's view is necessarily prejudiced by his own role in the story, but it is an intriguing view nonetheless.

What he has to say about Canadian journalism is true, and like a gadfly sting to anyone connected with a newsroom: "Like the school board members, they (mass media) have a profound commitment to the status quo, and to the uncritical attitude of those who serve them and are served by them. The continuation of their extraordinary capacity to turn cost-free pastimes and questionable information into money depends upon the maximum predictability of their audience."

Schools get a good knock for repressing individual creativity. The government, and every Canadian politician except our beloved P.E.T., gets slammed for being afraid to do anything meaningful for people.

People is the key word in this book, which, if it does nothing else, proclaims that Patrick Watson is alive and hollering at the University of Waterloo. It walks a thin line between social criticism and paranoia, between anarchism and patriotism. It is not academically profound; it is just plain fascinating. And—may Manitou forgive me—every Canadian ought to read it.

—Elaine Verbicky

Buckskin curtain is drawn and God—what a mess!?

THE UNJUST SOCIETY by Harold Cardinal, M. G. Hurtig Ltd.

The "Unjust Society" is a seething, throbbing, angry book. About what? Let Cardinal speak for himself.

"The history of Canada's Indians is a shameful chronicle of the white man's disinterest, his deliberate trampling of Indian rights and his repeated betrayal of our trust. Generations of Indians have grown up behind a buckskin curtain of indifference, ignorance and, all too often, plain bigotry. Now, at a time when our fellow Canadians consider the promise of the Just Society, once more the Indians of Canada are betrayed by a program which offers nothing better than cultural genocide."

Harold Cardinal is an Indian, an Indian of a kind who has refused to lie down any longer before his 'masters' in Ottawa. He has refused to lie down before a society which, apart from mouthing pious platitudes about the need to 'better' the Indian, has done nothing for the Indian except to destroy him physically by denying him his essentials to sustain a decent life; has unmercifully exploited him by taking advantage of his ignorance and economic helplessness; has mutilated him psychically by denying him his personhood and culture as an Indian.

The bureaucrats in Ottawa, Cardinal maintains, are responsible to a large extent for the Indian problem:

"These are the people who make the decisions, the policies, the plans and programs by which we live, decisions made in almost total isolation from the people whose lives and destinies they so routinely control perpetuates the stereotype image they have developed of the native people . . . they have fostered an image of Indians as a helpless people, an incompetent people, and an apathetic people in order to increase their own importance and to stress the need for their own continued presence."

Cardinal's book also reflects, very understandably, the bitterness and mistrust of a people that were sold down the river; but, after all, the Indians did not know the nature of the white man that had invaded their land and dispossessed them:

"They had fought battles, known victory and defeat, but treachery was new to them. They were accustomed to trusting another man's word, even an enemy's."

Cardinal relentlessly moves through the inept bungling by the federal government with regards to education:

" . . . we ask, how could even the most stupid Indian create a worse mess than has been handed him by the missionaries and bureaucrats?"

One can almost feel the petty bureaucrats wincing under Cardinal's indignant indictment:

"As long as the government persists in using education for its own designs, education will continue to be an unpleasant, frightening and painful experience for Indian children who have little reason to like or to be interested in school anyhow." And more: ". . . the approach of the federal government to the problems faced by our people suggests a bewildered horse doctor. Because he doesn't know what he is doing, and because the last thing he will admit is that he doesn't know what he is doing, scurries about surveying and resurveying the symptoms and prescribing piecemeal remedies. He never gets around to examining the causes of the ailment; consequently, he never has the right remedy."

Finally, Cardinal levels his guns at the new Indian Policy:

"The supposed new policy is no different than the arbitrary dictations from Ottawa to the Indians that have been repeated down through our history. Superficially, the government white paper is wrapped in nice middle-class platitudes that reveal, upon examination, no content, no meaning. In spite of all government attempts to convince Indians to accept the white paper, their efforts will fail, because Indians understand that the path outlined by the Department of Indian Affairs through its mouthpiece, the Honorable Mr. Chretien, leads directly to cultural genocide. We will not walk this path."

I would urge everyone to read this book. It fills a desperate need for an articulate Indian viewpoint about the problems of the Indian in Canada. It is not an objective book; it is, however, accurate in describing the plight of the Indian in Canada, quite untouched by academic obfuscation.

—Dennis Zomerschoe

Tragic opera features impressive cast

The Edmonton Opera Association will present Puccini's opera *La Boheme* in two performances, Jan. 30 and 31 at 8:30 p.m. in the Jubilee Auditorium.

Samuel Krachmalnick of the New York City Opera Company, who conducted last year's production *The Consul*, will return to conduct *La Boheme*. The opera, set in the Latin Quarter of Paris, is the tragic story of an impoverished quartet of artists. The action centres around the tragic love of Rudolpho, a poet, for Mimi, a maker of embroidery.

The production's impressive cast stars John Alexander, lyric tenor of the Metropolitan Opera, as Rudolpho, opposite Covent Garden's Irene Salemka as Mimi. The opera opens in the garret where the four friends, Rudolpho, Marcello, Colline, and Schaunard live. Marcello, the painter (to be played by Bernard Turgeon who presently resides in Edmonton), is working on "The Passage of the Red Sea," which provides the theme for the

first duet "Quest mar rosso." After Colline, the philosopher, returns discouraged by his efforts to raise money, Schaunard, the musician of the quartet, enters with money and fuel. It is Christmas Eve, and the group decides to go out to dine. Rudolpho stays behind to finish an article he is writing, and it is when Mimi knocks on his door for a light that the love story begins.

Rudolpho's attraction to Mimi's beauty and frailty is the origin of the love duet used by the composer several times in the course of the opera, "O soave faciuilla."

Act II is a gay scene on the streets of Paris. Marcello is reunited with his love, Musetta, who will be played by San Francisco soprano Sheila Marks, in a ridiculous spoof at the expense of Musetta's wealthy old patron.

When the curtain goes up again, it is February and Mimi's physical condition has deteriorated significantly. Rudolpho has become so jealous of "his muse incarnate" that Mimi tells Marcello that she

fears they must part. A contrast to the haunting sweetness of Mimi is provided by the aggressive temperament of Musetta, as she and Marcello argue violently.

As Mimi and Rudolpho sadly agree to part, they sing "Ah, that our winter night might last forever."

The ultimate tragedy of the final act is intensified by the recurring love themes of the first act. Mimi is brought at her request to Rudolpho's attic, to die where she was happiest. The opera ends with Rudolpho sobbing on Mimi's lifeless form and the orchestra playing "Mi chiamano Mimi."

The chorus for *La Boheme* is comprised entirely of local singers, trained under chorusmaster Sandra Munn. The children's chorus of St. Mark's School will be featured courtesy of Paul Bourret. Tickets are available at The Bay, and any seats remaining on the night of the performance will be sold to students at half price at the auditorium.



METROPOLITAN'S JOHN ALEXANDER