

Rene's our man in current crop of biographies

By CATHARINE JUTRAS
of The Gazette

Someone said this was the year everyone had decided to give Father — especially English-speaking, living-in-Quebec Father — a copy of René, Peter Desbarats' new biography of Quebec's enigmatic, chain-smoking premier.

Judging from a quick survey of Montreal bookstores this week, the book's going to be more than just a paternal treat this Christmas — it's selling briskly everywhere and to everyone.

Except, ironically, to Levesque's constituency. Many Francophones have complained to booksellers that this latest biography of their new leader is available in only one of Canada's official languages — you guessed it, English. Plus ca change . . .

In any event, the 223-page book, by a long-time observer of Quebec politics, is published by McClelland and Stewart and costs \$10. A thoughtful gift, perhaps, for the nervous Westmounter on your list — or maybe for yourself.

It hasn't been a bad year for politics, and history with another volume of the Diefenbaker memoirs appearing; more work in print on everyone's favorite slightly strange prime minister, MacKenzie King; volumes on Gabriel Dumont and Louis Riel; and a new Duplessis biography.

The first volume of One Canada, Diefenbaker's memoirs, may have had overtones of Genesis, but his second volume offers little revelation into one

of Canada's stormier political eras. Diefenbaker's look backward is certainly taken through a one-sided mirror, with no doubts allowed about who was the fairest in the land. Still, the book provides interesting insight into the personality of the man they still call "The Chief."

Peter Stursburg takes more careful aim in Leadership Lost, the second of his volumes on the Diefenbaker dynasty. On-target shots from a seasoned Parliamentary reporter.

From C. P. Stacey, A Very Double Life and a very interesting political story: that of MacKenzie King. A strange tale it has proven to be: This may be one of the few Canadian political biographies that summons up more old ghosts than it lays to rest.

For the official position on MacKenzie King, (University of Toronto Press, 366 pages, \$19.95) you could pick up The Prism of Unity, Blair Neatby's last of three volumes covering King's career.

And the late prime minister also figures in the events described in Donald Creighton's The Forked Road, one in a series of books McClelland and Stewart has published on Canadian history. It covers the years 1939 to 1957 in its 319 pages; cost is \$14.95.

Still in the who-says-Canadian-politicians-are-dull category, George Woodcock managed to round up a few literary awards this year with his biography of Gabriel Dumont, Louis Riel's ally.

As for Riel himself, we have a compilation of his recently translated diaries, reviewed today on page 42.

A figure who cast large — not to say dark — shadows across the past of this province, is treated biographically by Conrad Black in Duplessis, excerpted at length in The Gazette (as have been the Diefenbaker memoirs.) It's also selling well in Montreal bookstores.

But it isn't just the big names in Canadian history who have received attention this year. Just plain (or plains) folk get their due in The Pioneer Years, (Doubleday, 403 pages, \$12.50) Barry Broadfoot's oral history of how the Canadian West was opened, if not won. For those who enjoyed Ten Lost Years and Ten War Years, Broadfoot's examinations of the Depression and the Second World War — or anyone, for that matter, who enjoys the direct-transcription style made famous largely by Studs Terkel — it should be a welcome Christmas gift.

In a similar vein is The Last Best West, edited by Jean Bruce (Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 177 pages, \$15), an unusual collection of photographs with accompanying text.

Railway history gets a graphic treatment in Meet Me At the Station, (Gage, \$14.95) one of several books offering glimpses of structures from our past: Others include The Mill (McClelland and Stewart, \$29.50); Mills of Canada (McGraw-Hill Ryerson, \$27.50); Covered Bridges of Central

and Eastern Canada (McGraw-Hill Ryerson, \$10.95); and Pioneer Churches, with the photographs of John de Visser (McClelland and Stewart, \$25).

Not a historical book but one dealing, mostly through images, with a historical bond is Between Friends/Entre Amis, Canada's gift to the United States on the occasion of our neighbor's 200th anniversary. Produced by the National Film Board under Lorraine Monk's direction, it has won praise from all quarters (McClelland and Stewart, \$42.50).

Out of the mainstream of major historical works, Lifelines: The Stacey Letters can nonetheless be recommended for its intimate look at pioneer life, Quebec-style, and at the ties forged between the New World and the Old — in this case, England. Edited by Jane Vansittart (Peter Davies, 180 pages, \$11.95).

For your favorite Scottish, Portuguese or Polish Canadian, perhaps one of the first three volumes of a new McClelland and Stewart series might be just the thing. The Scottish Tradition in Canada (edited by Stanford Reid); A Member of a Distinguished Family (Henry Radecki with Benedykt Heydenkorn) on the Poles; and A Future to Inherit (Grace Anderson and David Higgs) on the Portuguese are \$12.95 hard cover, \$5.95 paper.

William Kurelek continues his prolific output this year with two works on ethnic groups. Jewish Life in Canada

is reviewed today on page 42; he also depicts native peoples in The Last of the Arctic (McGraw-Hill Ryerson, \$19.95, 96 pages).

There's lots more non-fiction Canadiana available this year, some of it, like the art books we've reviewed here and on page 36, not really complete without a coffee table resting underneath.

In fiction, we've had new work from three of our female writers that's been widely praised: Marion Engle's Bear, not quite the tale of a girl and her pet bear (McClelland and Stewart, \$9.95); Lady Oracle, Margaret Atwood's comic story of Gothic romance (M & S, \$9.95, 345 pages); and from relative new-comer Margaret Gibson Gilboord, Butterfly Ward — a book of short stories to read from a name to watch for (Oberon, \$3.95).

More short stories: Split Delaney's Island, by Jack Hodgins (Macmillan, \$9.95); Dark Glasses, by Hugh Hood (Oberon, \$4.50).

And, dependably, from Richard Rohmer we have a new book, Separation, about the spectre of The Big Split (McClelland and Stewart, \$9.95).

Two books not Canadian but selling briskly and highly praised in these pages this year: Alex Haley's Roots (Doubleday, \$14.95), about the history of one black American family, and of blacks; and Your Obedient Servant, letters to the Editor of The Times of London (Methuen, \$10).