

BOOKS

A declaration of faith

CANADA LOST, CANADA FOUND

By Peter Desbarats
McClelland & Stewart
128 pp, \$9.95

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Special to The Gazette

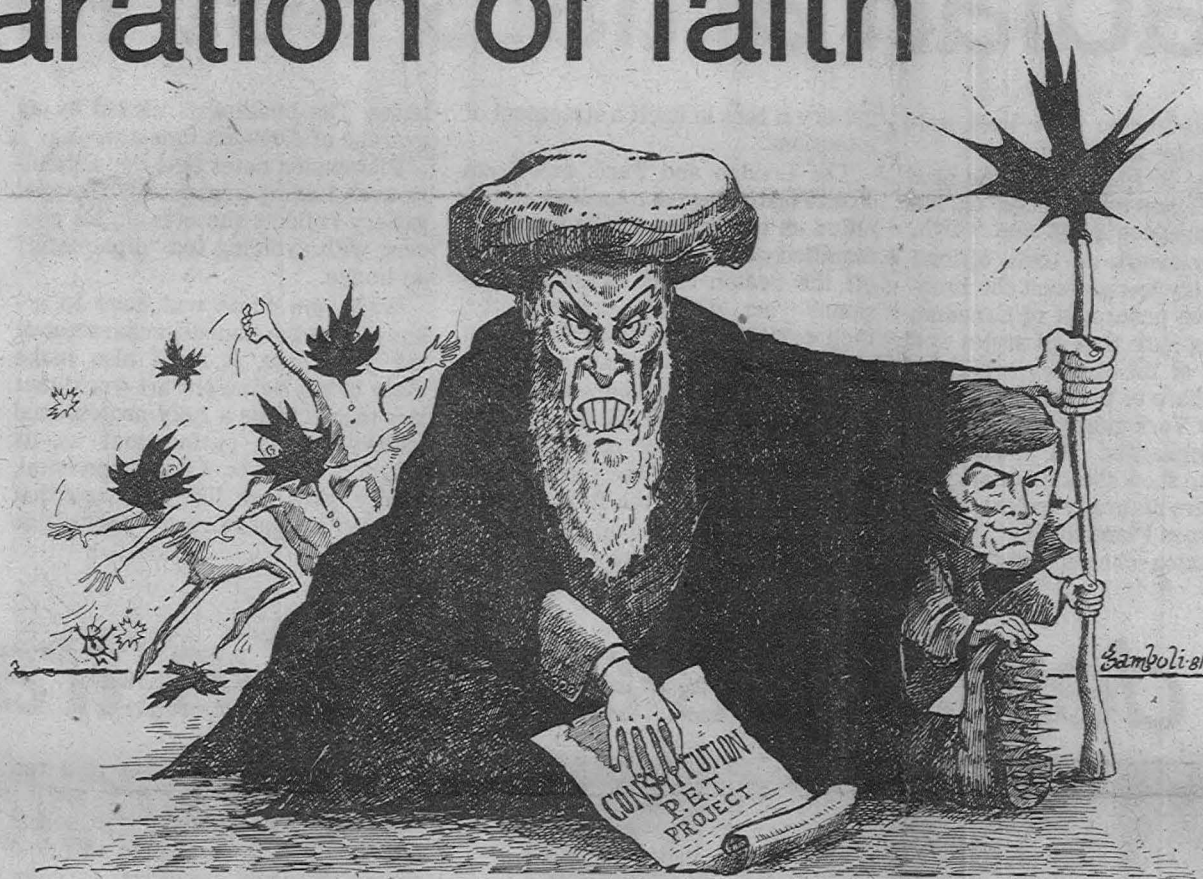
In his latest book, Peter Desbarats describes himself not as an author but as a non-partisan polemicist; the controversial argument that Desbarats delivers as author-polemicist of *Canada Lost, Canada Found* is the somewhat dubious one that Canada, today lost, will be found tomorrow, if we only shop for the right ideas in the right Canadian department store of knowledge.

For those Canadians who are not faint of heart and whose patriotism still stirs at the sight of Lily Schreyer and, yes, Margaret Trudeau, the arguments for our survival presented by Desbarats are more than controversial; they are even convincing.

Desbarats marshalls his armies of thought in the tight, close-knit manner of General Montgomery. One argument leads inevitably to a second and the third is not far behind. The argument is linear, not dialectic and while Desbarats professes no ultimate solution to Canada's dilemmas he does promise Canadians lots of "blood, sweat and tears."

As Desbarats sees the country, it is fragmented beyond hope, indeed, beyond despair. Our foster child of 1949, Newfoundland, 30 years later is a greedy spoiled brat demanding our off-shore oil. Alberta, whom we all saved from the Great Depression, wants to oil-rig its destiny at the expense of our future. Quebec, which refused to fight to preserve our virtues in two world wars, daily threatens to put a Polish corridor between our Maritime and American kith and kin.

Yet in all this despair lies deliverance. "The road to accommodation with Alberta leads through Quebec," Desbarats triumphantly proclaims. (If there's one thing Desbarats understands and writes beautifully about it's Quebec and Montreal.) Montreal, he says, has now learned to live with violence and with French-English, rich-poor dichotomies. Since the Quebec Referendum, Montreal has become truly united, says Desbarats: one solitude, not two. Federalist Montreal won the rest of Quebec over to national unity, says Desbarats; and it is this tamed separatist Quebec tiger that will leap into Alberta gas



Trudeau's fanaticism about the Constitution has met Desbarat's passion

tanks and smother the flame of Western separatism.

The renaissance of Canada according to Desbarats will not be written in blood but in butter on the new parchment pages of the Canada Act, our proposed new Constitution.

'The road to accommodation with Alberta leads through Quebec'

The cook-chemist for this incredible Quebec-Alberta concoction of a new United Canada will be none other than Pierre Elliott Trudeau, or so says Desbarats. Yes, the same Pierre Elliott Trudeau Mr. Desbarats described in this hilarious soppy sentence: "I have squinted against the glare of Pierre Trudeau's dazzling blindness about Western Canada." Blind as a bat about Alberta Trudeau may be but, says Desbarats: "our future and his are now inextricably linked." Trudeau's fanaticism on the need for a new Constitution has at last met its match in Desbarats' passionate Constitution-making Ayatollahism.

Desbarats can hardly wait for the new Canada the axis powers of Quebec, Alberta and Trudeau will

bring us. Desbarats' faith in the old Canada is limited. The litany of past Canadian sins Desbarats lists is impressive; the statistics selected to punch home the message of present Canadian ineptitude are carefully chosen.

Canadians hate the poor and immigrants, says Desbarats. Our ethnic groups "have never truly belonged because there has been nothing to claim their allegiance." "Our disregard for the native peoples is an international scandal that the world has yet to appreciate." We are, says Desbarats, far more racist than the United States.

Desbarats insists we were robbed on the Auto Pact and of our potential for research and development by the Americans. We are, he says, the most overgoverned country in the world. One out of 10 Canadians works for the state. Mandarins and bureaucrats manipulate and control politicians like Flora Macdonald and even Trudeau. The Senate is nothing but a business lobby masquerading as an Upper House. Our provinces "are more powerful than most of the member states at the United Nations." Our armed forces are "the most over-officered, under-manned, ill-equipped, costly and confused military forces on either side of the Iron Curtain."

One can say all this stuff is about as original as the average doughnut or bagel. But coming from Desbarats, one can only say: "wow!" On

TV where most Canadians know him, Desbarats is so fair, so objective, so careful, so plodding, that one could sometimes swear he doesn't say anything at all, never mind repeats of old stuff. Desbarats on TV is more laid back than Dracula at dusk. Thus it is more than surprising that Desbarats in *Canada Lost, Canada Found* becomes the country's first Howard Beal.

Desbarats views himself more modestly. "Within a few years this book will be regarded simply as a statement of the obvious. I have a wonderful feeling... that I am saying nothing new."

Sometimes I have that feeling too, Peter, but I plan to suppress it. *Canada Lost, Canada Found* is a good polemic (although certainly not in the league of polemics like George Grant's *Lament for a Nation* or Vallieres' *White Niggers of America*). Desbarats has borrowed the old to create something new and for the most part he's successful.

If Mr. Cool Desbarats can blow his cool in print for God and country the least Canadians can do is, to quote Desbarats, stop studying "our navels to avoid looking into our hearts." I agree and insist that reading *Canada Lost, Canada Found* is the first necessary step for Canadians to take.

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