



Citizen of the World: The Life of Pierre Elliott Trudeau, Volume One: 1919-1968

John English

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One of the most important, exciting biographies of our time: the definitive, major two-volume biography of Pierre Elliott Trudeau – written with unprecedented, complete access to Trudeau’s enormous cache of private letters and papers.

Bestselling biographer John English gets behind the public record and existing glancing portraits of Trudeau to reveal the real man and the multiple influences that shaped his life, providing the full context lacking in all previous biographies to-date.

As prime minister between 1968 and 1984, Trudeau, the brilliant, controversial figure, intrigued Canadians and attracted international attention as no other Canadian leader has ever done. Volume One takes us from his birth in 1919 to his election as leader in 1968.

Born into a wealthy family in Montreal, Trudeau excelled at the best schools, graduating as a lawyer with conservative, nationalist and traditional Catholic views. But always conscious of his French-English heritage, desperate to know the outside world, and an adventurer to boot, he embarked on a pilgrimage of discovery – first to Harvard and the Sorbonne, then to the London School of Economics and, finally, on a trip through Europe, the Middle East, India and China. He was a changed man when he returned – socialist in his politics, sympathetic to labour, a friend to activists and writers in radical causes. Suddenly and surprisingly, he went to Ottawa for two mostly unhappy years as a public servant in the Privy Council Office. He frequently shocked his colleagues when, on the brink of a Quebec election, for example, he departed for New York or Europe on an extended tour. Yet in the 1950s and 60s, he wrote the most important articles outlining his political philosophy.

And there were the remarkable relationships with friends, women and especially his mother (whom he lived with until he was middle-aged). He wrote to them always, exchanging ideas with the men, intimacies with the women, especially in these early years, and lively descriptions of his life. He even recorded his in-depth psychoanalysis in Paris. This personal side of Trudeau has never been revealed before – and it sheds light on the politician and statesman he became.

Volume One ends with his entry into politics, his appointment as Minister of Justice, his meeting Margaret and his election as leader of the Liberal Party and Prime Minister of Canada. There, his genius and charisma, his ambition and intellectual prowess, his ruthlessness and emotional character and his deliberate shaping of himself for leadership played out on the national stage and, when Lester B. Pearson announced his retirement as prime minister in 1968, there was but one obvious man for the job: Pierre Trudeau.

In 1938 Trudeau began a diary, which he continued for over two years. It is detailed, frank, and extraordinarily revealing. It is the only diary in Trudeau’s papers, apart from less personal travel diaries and an agenda for 1937 that contains some commentary. His diary expresses Trudeau’s own need to chronicle the moments of late adolescence as he tried to find his identity. It begins on New Year’s Day 1938 with the intriguing advice: “If you want to know my thoughts, read between the lines!”

–from **Citizen of the World**

Citizen of the World: The Life of Pierre Elliott Trudeau, Volume One: 1919-1968

Details

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Duncan says

Probably a 4.5 if that was possible on the star rating. Enjoyed learning about his early years of which I know little and the book was just starting to get really interesting so can't wait for the second volume. I suspect one I will read again to really take all the points in.

Margarita says

A densely researched book with seamlessly woven together information. Regardless of your party leaning, you'll enjoy this one if you are politically minded. It fundamentally concentrates on how Trudeau developed his political identity starting with his student years through to the early part of his career. Within this framework, excellent context is provided of the social/political environment of the time.

Jim Zubricky says

As an American, I am intrigued and fascinated by all things Canadian. One of the things that intrigues me is this period in history: as we were contending with President Nixon and this surge of conservatism, Canadians were enjoying a period of liberalism with Prime Minister Trudeau. I wanted to learn more about him and his times, and that's what brought me to this book.

This was a little bit more challenging to read - primarily because I didn't know who the people that the author talked about were (but with a lot of help from Wikipedia, I got that sorted out). I think that if I was more well-versed in 20th century Canadian history, it would have been much faster for me to read. That being said, the first part of the book was a little rough, and I had to put the book down for a few months and come back to it. But I'm glad I did - it was very cool to see how Pierre Trudeau came to his first term as Prime Minister from his beginnings in Montreal. I'm excited to read part two!

Greg Perowne says

Trudeau is a fascinating character, and English does a good job in portraying why he was so polarizing throughout his life. I can relate to Trudeau's youth in many ways growing up in a bilingual Montreal family and with extensive international experience in my 20's, but even then I'm not sure I'd get along with him at all were I to meet him in his late 20's today. However, I respect a man who is able to reflect on his own opinions and have the strength of mind to change positions on significant issues. It is also interesting to read Trudeau's vision of Quebec and Canada's place in the world which resonates strongly with my own view, considering the influences in his youth and early adulthood were heavily religious and from the francophone sphere vs. my own coming from the opposite spectrum. Looking forward to learning in more detail how he puts it all together in practice as prime minister in Volume Two.

PastAllReason says

Comprehensive biography of Trudeau's life up until his assumption of the Liberal leadership in 1968. The biographer's access to the Trudeau family and friends, as well as Trudeau's personal papers led to a whole picture of Trudeau, both his strengths and failings. The book reveals a complicated but brilliant man who could be mercurial and whimsical, and at the same time he displayed amazing charisma also appear arrogant and aloof. I'm looking forward to reading volume 2, and in particular, the coverage of the FLQ crisis, the imposition of the War Measures Act, and "Just watch me."

Mikey B. says

This is the first volume of John English's biography of the life of Pierre Trudeau. It deals with the period up to when Trudeau was elected to lead the Liberal party in 1968 after the resignation of Prime Minister Pearson (it does not concern itself with the later Canadian election of 1968; this is in the second volume).

Somewhat like the biography of Max and Monique Nimni it paints a portrait, for Trudeau's early formative years, of a nationalistic and fervent Catholic who was right-wing, bordering on the fascist. It also gives us a view of his rich and privileged life – a perpetual and traveling student. But Trudeau was always open to the wider world even though his road to it was long, taking him over thirty years to really embrace it. Up to that time Trudeau was so conservative that he would ask Catholic priests for permission to read controversial books. He was cocooned in the insular world of Quebec and was hardly aware of the onset of World War II. He opposed conscription due mostly to the influence of Quebec Catholicism. In the U.S. he would have been considered an isolationist, except that Trudeau's isolationism lasted to the early 1950's.

It is when he attended Harvard, then schools in Paris and London that he finally came to realize the extent of his Quebec parochialism. Mr. English depicts well how Trudeau became more and more like the title of his book – "Citizen of the World".

One senses throughout – even though now and then we are aware of Trudeau's deficiencies (such as his infatuation with left-wing dictatorships – from Stalin to Castro), the esteem with which the author regards Trudeau. And one comes to admire throughout the pages of this book Trudeau's eloquence, fortitude and magnetism. This is certainly reflected throughout his many years as Prime Minister – that marked him as the most phenomenal of the modern era. In this book we are given a perspective of the individualism of Trudeau which made him such a formidable and erudite figure.

Two of my favourite Trudeau quotes (from page 471 of my volume)

- "the state has no business in the bedrooms of the nation". This was said in 1967; can one imagine a U.S. presidential contender saying such today?!
 - "what may be sin to some is not law for all".
-

Kristen says

An interesting look at both the rise to power of Pierre Elliott Trudeau and the changing political scene in Quebec from the 1920s through the 1960s. In some places, the narrative is slightly repetitive and clumsy as it jumps back and forth in time, but overall a very well-written, cogent story. English tends to "explain," rather than analyze, Trudeau, but he remains clear-eyed throughout the book.

I'm looking forward to volume II.

Daniel says

John English is a fantastic writer. He does know how to keep the eyes of the readers where they should be. This biography of the late Prime Minister of Canada is an excellent example of the trust the Estate of P.E. Trudeau put into his skills.

Periods of his life are described with the most amazing way, to keep us from putting it down, not that the days of Trudeau were that exceptional but just for the presence of facts and prose mixed together.

Eric Schultz says

For lovers of Canadian history and politics (or just biographies in general) this book is a great read. Well-paced and accessible, *Citizen of the World* takes you on a fascinating journey through the rise of one of Canada's most intriguing and influential figures in the 20th century.

Tracking Trudeau's evolution from an idealistic young man to a determined, worldly politician and all the triumphs and failures encountered in between, John English demonstrates how the experiences, cultures and people we encounter inevitably play a massive role on the individuals we become.

In covering the man who would go on to become such a polarizing figure among Canadians throughout his career the author does a careful job in neither fawning over or being unjustly critical of the future Prime Minister. Rightly calling out Trudeau on his intricacies, both good and bad, English paints a fully-formed picture of his subject during the formative years of his life and onto adulthood as he worked to find his place in the world.

Pierre Elliott Trudeau was a one of a kind individual and John English certainly does him justice in Volume One of this biography.

Emily says

I received both volume's of John English's Trudeau biography for Christmas a number of years ago. As is often the case, it sat on the shelf until I felt like I it was the right time to read. I picked up this first volume hoping it might provide some insight into our current election. Volume 1 starts with PET's childhood and ends at the 1968 leadership conference in which he wins the Liberal leadership and becomes Prime Minister.

In many ways, the political environment of the 1960s was much more difficult than today. The federal government and the provinces were in a full-on fight about federal and provincial rights (which wasn't solved until the repatriation of the constitution in 1982). Trudeau and others were fighting for a Bill of Rights for Canadians to ensure individual human rights. And of course the Quiet Revolution was underway, though it seems to me, not so quietly. Already in the 1960s there had been home grown terrorist attacks in favour of an independent French state in North America. All this well Pearson was trying to build a social welfare state in Canada (RIP).

What does this tell about the 2015 election? In the 1960s they were grappling with issues that would define us as a nation, with politicians whose skill (on all sides) remains unparalleled in Canadian politics. It makes this election look lacklustre at best and the candidates juveniles at worst.

From his childhood, PET was interested in a life of public service, as a politician. How do we groom such people? Those who have an authentic interest in public life?

I'll end with something PET told Peter Newman then of the Toronto Star when he was reforming the Criminal Code: "Justice, should be regarded more and more as a department planning for the society of tomorrow, not merely the government's legal advisor... Society is throwing up problems all the time - divorce, abortions, family planning, pollution, etc. - and it's no longer enough to review your statutes every 20 years."

Paul Nelson says

The first volume of John English's biography of Pierre Trudeau covers Trudeau's life from birth until Trudeau became Prime Minister of Canada in 1968. The amount of research and analysis is astounding; English gained access to more of Trudeau's private papers than any previous biographer.

The coverage of Trudeau as a budding left-wing intellectual is remarkable, although scant coverage is offered to Trudeau's years as a backbencher in the House of Commons and Trudeau's rise as Lester Pearson's Minister of Justice. This is lamentable because Trudeau made fundamental changes in the lives of Canadians as Justice Minister.

Moreover, Trudeau's personal life does not receive the promised coverage in the second half of the book. Trudeau's fabled relationships with women, for example, are covered more in depth early but less so in the second half of the book, where the volume seems to bog down in professional detail.

John English had an impossible task: trying to clarify Trudeau the man vs. Trudeau the legend. English did this about as well as anyone could, and did so with a fairly remarkable and readable first volume. However, the most enigmatic figure in Canadian history remains just that.

Shawn Mooney says

Hating Pierre Trudeau was par for the course in Saskatchewan when I was a kid: that hatred got inside me by osmosis. I purged most of it once I entered university and he retired. And now I'm a middle aged homo, more than a little obsessed with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, not only politically. Never mind how much I adore Margaret Trudeau. If mother or son walked into the room right now, I'd squeal like a girl.

All of which is to say, this is not going to be an unbiased review.

This is a terrible biography, but I've only ever read one biography in my life that wasn't. Biographies suck. Biographers try to interpret every god-darned thing about their subject, a process that is especially painful to endure while reading the childhood and early adulthood chapters. Thus, I read biographies anarchically: while I don't skip over the interpretive inanities, I most definitely do disregard them. My biography-reading manifesto and practice is, "Just shut the hell up and tell me the stories!"

So yes, 'Citizen of the World' was dreadful; the author somehow managed to write boring chapter-after-chapter about the most fascinating Canadian in public life. No small feat. I really wasn't sure I'd finish: the first sections were that bad.

But Johnson eventually won out over his mediocre Boswell: by the time English was narrating Trudeau's crazy round-the-world trip when he was in his late-20s, I had tuned the writer out and Trudeau in. In spite of John English, I thoroughly enjoyed the rest of the book, which covered Trudeau's life up to the moment he wins the leadership of the federal Liberal party which would lead to his being sworn in as the Prime Minister of Canada a day or so later.

I knew next to nothing about his parents and siblings. I knew only a little more than that about the evolution of Trudeau's Quebecois, Canadian and international political views. English does quite a good job of tracing and explaining all that, particularly against the backdrop of World War II and the crazy politics of Quebec.

And then there are the love letters between Pierre and his many, many women, pre-Margaret. And a surprising and fascinating amount of detail of his sessions with a psychoanalyst in Paris. His first meeting with Margaret Sinclair, when she stood him up in favor of the hunky lifeguard working at the resort they were both staying at. The quite moving fact that, moments after winning the Liberal leadership a year or so later, the first person Trudeau spoke to was Margaret, his future wife, this being their second conversation, ever.

I learned a lot, and admire Trudeau even more, now. By the end, I'd even developed a begrudging degree of respect for the biographer, for at least getting out of the way enough to let Pierre Trudeau live and breathe and wink mysteriously on the page.

Dubi Kanengisser says

This is, I think, the first actual biography I ever read, so this is one of those cases where I feel weird writing a review because I'm not familiar with a genre. So take this with a grain of salt.

Trudeau is an incredibly interesting character. His life story has so many twists and turns and often doesn't seem to make sense. The access John English had here to Trudeau's own private and meticulous archive of letters, drafts and clippings adds much welcome insight into the psyche of this remarkable man, especially during his early years. Supplementing his extensive public writing with the even more extensive correspondence he had had throughout his life with a number of women adds a new perspective to this oft-told story, and English does this with flourish. He weaves the historical story of this exciting period in Quebec and Canada as a whole into the personal story in a way that pulls it away from the pages of the history books and brings it to life.

One issue that bothered me is the treatment of women in this book. There are many female protagonists, and English clearly tries to give them their fair place, but I couldn't help but notice that EACH AND EVERY

WOMAN in this book is either "beautiful" or "stunning". Each and every one. Even just the random women who try to get close to Trudeau or other charismatic people. Were all these women "beautiful"? Was this characterization really necessary? It's a small thing, but in an otherwise sensitive depiction of the inner worlds of the characters in the book, this really stuck out like a sore thumb.

The story of Trudeau is fascinating for me because of the parallels I could draw from it to my own personal obsession - Israel's relations with its Arab minority. I found the emphasis here on the development of Trudeau's thinking about democratic values and the relationship between Canada and Quebec was truly enlightening when considering where Israel and Canada diverged in their treatment of their respective national-religious-linguistic minorities. This is something I hope to give more thought to in the future, but this book certainly provided a good starting point for this thinking for me.

Czarny Pies says

Ca vaut vraiment la peine de lire cette biographie superbe même si vous êtes un de ces nombreux québécois qui n'aiment pas Pierre Trudeau et qui ont horreur du culte que nous autres anglophones vouent au père du premier ministre actuel.

D'abord English explique très bien l'évolution intellectuelle de Trudeau et identifie les écrivains qui ont eu une influence déterminant sur la pensée de Trudeau. Je crois bien que la plupart des Québécois qui ont moins que quarante ans ne connaissent pas Paul Claudel, Emmanuel Mounier et Teilhard de Chardin qu'English identifie comme ayant été des sources d'inspiration importante pour Trudeau et les personnes dans son milieu. English incontestablement donne un portrait admirable d'un aspect important de l'histoire intellectuelle de la société québécoise qui est de nos jours peu connus.

English brille aussi dans son traitement des amours de Pierre Trudeau qui paraît-il avait l'âme plus torturée que Swann. English montre clairement qu'il possède les talents nécessaires pour écrire une excellent biographie d'une étoile d'Hollywood ou d'un membre de la famille royale britannique. Si les récits des moments intimes des amoureux sont un de vos plaisirs coupables, ce livre vous plaira énormément

A?win Mannepalli says

Seeing a man come together is an incredible sight. Very few of us actually manage to become our best selves. Not to mention the heroic aspects of throwing oneself against the world to reach at some accommodation with the fraudulent sham that surrounds us.

Such a process is all the more worthy if the man changes through this journey. How does a religious Québécois separatist kid become THE Pierre Trudeau? John English solves this puzzle by digging deep into heretofore sealed private papers and shows us why the young Trudeau was so remarkable.

Namely, two factors are at play here: 1) young Pierre went around the world and studied in large parts of it and 2) he had an ability to reject idiotic arguments. I believe this largely gave him eyes clear enough to see the Quebec separatist movement for the lie it was and why the federal solution was best to unite such a diverse country.

If you believe, as I do, that our upbringing manifests itself loudly in our day-to-day, his argument is clear and

convincing. The author never drifts into hagiography nor does he vilify needlessly. English's dual track training as a historian and a politician makes this one of the best political biographies ever written. And in an era where academics have lost their way in absurd trivialities, this is a welcome effort.
