also through the use of interviews with people personally familiar with either Lowell or Kerouac of that era. We get a hint of just what kind of peculiar events marked Kerouac and why he became the extremely complex, somewhat disturbed, mother-hated, compulsive, brilliant individual who would ascend the pedestal, in spite of himself, as counter-culture's great mythical hero/victim and, according to poet Allan Ginsberg, its "saint." (In his "Is There Any End to Kerouac Highway?", writer Ken (One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest) Kesey agreed, writing, "I have to go along with Ginsberg; sweet sad Jack has every right to be, in the most traditional Catholic sense, considered a candidate for canonization. He not only manifested Grace, and Mercy, and Glory, he also in some beautiful way died for our scenes.")

As a child he witnessed an accident where a man died, and when he was five, his older brother Gerard died of tuberculosis, slowly and at home, so that 'Ti-Jean' watched his life ebbing away like the color on his face. (Later his mother would say to him, "You should have died, not Gerard.")

He went to Columbia University on a football scholarship, but left to join the navy. After two months in the service, he was given a psychiatric discharge, and he gravitated to New York City where he met Allan Ginsberg and other young, penniless writers/intellectuals searching for new truths in the post-war era. He also met Neil Cassidy, the man who would help inspire On the Road, and together they explored America in all its richness: the wide-open spaces, the smoky jazz bars, the Mexican brothels, throwing down the foundations to what would be the new consciousness of the 1960s and beyond.

The film reveals these life-events by a methodical layering of several different resources: archives, eyewitness accounts, old footage of an interview Kerouac did in French, but especially Kerouac's own writing on the subject, coupled with directed recreations of these events using actors in period dress and backgrounds. Interviewees between all of these we hear Chiasson's voice narrating bits of a prose-poem, a kind of ode to Jack, that recurs from time to time to offer both a contrast to and a welcome respite from the delivery of information, nuts-and-bolts style of documentary.

The one method that works best throughout is, of course, Jack's own high-powered writing, bits of his uncontrollable youth and of life as road (very well) by actor Guy Nadon. The use of two narrator voices, however, tends to be somewhat confusing: is Chiasson reciting his prose-poem here, or is it Nadon speaking 'as Kerouac'? The rule of thumb seems to be simply to look through to the quality of writing, for though Chiasson is a very competent writer, he cannot here moment compare with the flow and the power of a Kerouac, even a translated Kerouac.

As for the use of actual recreations of the writer's life-events, they do lift from the page and make things which give themselves easily to the necessary visual appearance of film, but we are left with the impression that on the page they were better. For the most part, the work of the actors is competent, but pale in comparison to the imagery evoked when reading Kerouac.

Visually, I was struck by how archival photographs were handled, i.e., an old group photo of 'transplanted to the U.S.' French-Canadians where the camera slowly pans a close-up of their eyes, evoking the new rootlessness, the inner strength, the diversity, the human unity of kindred souls stuck on foreign soil.

The musical soundtrack, by Robert M. Lepage, also works well, giving us a languid, jazzy sound reminiscent of period and place.

In some of these recreations, Chiasson uses a '1st-person' technique in trying to dive into his subject's psyche and, literally, his point of view: hands underneath and seemingly part of the camera, which turns as a head would turn to see his old father dying slowly while sitting in a chair, pausing only long enough to curse his son last time. When paired on radio with Kerouac's own recollections of what he was thinking at the time, the method works — when used in moderation, and it is.

However, Chiasson's decision to concentrate so much on the man and his life is a detriment to Kerouac's true and enduring quality: his work. Only On the Road is ever mentioned, and this in passing, despite the fact that he wrote a prodigious 20 or so novels between 1957 and his death, brooding, destitute and alcoholic, at his mother's home in 1969.

Literary legend tells us that Kerouac knocked off the 175,000 words of On the Road in 20 days, feeding a 120-foot roll of typewriter paper into his typewriter so that he could write continuously without stopping to even change the page. He could type 100 words a minute, in the age before the word processor, and he developed a personal style reminiscent of how jazz is played — free form, yet following rigid parameters; straight from the bat, yet still coherent and surprisingly concise; flowing with its own energy through the grace of its primal truths.

Part-tourist, part-troubadour, Douai is a peripatetic choice: a little-known chansonnier (especially here in Quebec) who after 30 years, is still singing the same minor 'hits'. He is never sharply defined and remains a kind of vague personage wandering around the province talking to people. His main forte seems to be his profound ignorance of Quebec society, dwelling with Lafond's help on lumberjacks and

Jean-Daniel Lafond's
Le voyage au bout de la route

The road motif, used as a dynamic vehicle (no pun intended) by various explorers of national-cultural/social/self-discovery landscapes in the post-Kerouac era, is the method-of-choice orchestrated by director Jean-Daniel Lafond to explore Quebec's social-cultural-historical-geographic-economic soul in the documentary, Le Voyage au bout de la route ou Le baladaud pays qui attend, the fourth film in the 'Américanité' series by the National Film Board.

In it, Lafond and his crew follow aging French chansonnier Jacques Douai as he returns to the province after a 30-year absence, allowing the camera to see through his stranger's eyes the many changes that have happened to this province and its people during that period: the Quiet Revolution, a growing sense of nationalism and pride, the Fari Québécos' election victory, the referendums, etc. — events that Douai did not experience firsthand.

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Prair is in a program of the Centre for the Arts at Simon Fraser University.
CLOSE YOUR EYES AND THINK OF ENGLAND

"Feminists do have a sense of humour."

(Janis Lundman, filmmaker)

She's won a lottery and the prize is BIG! Our heroine just has to answer one tiny skill-testing question before she can pick up the money and run - all over the world; to buy a car, a house, a boat, and to pursue endless other grand prizes. So - the question is: "If you had one piece of advice to give to a woman for her to be perfect - what would it be?"

Our heroine covers the city streets in her search for the right answer. Men and women of all ages and races are asked for their opinions - AIDS, independence, taking control over your own destiny, finding a direct sense of yourself - are only a few topics that crop up in conversations. Our heroine is perplexed; many stories, taken and words spoken are variations of ideas and themes expressed over the years.

Janis Lundman has woven together a great deal of research, real people interviews, and dramatized incidents with historical overtones (imagine chatting up Queen Elizabeth I in a washroom), to make an entertaining and witty comment on attitudes of and about women which remain confusing, confusing, and even downright ridiculous.

The film is crisply professional with a good central performance by Catherine Barry as Our Heroine and, best of all, is filled with a number of great quotes from such diverse people as: "It's not too difficult to organize - groceries ordered by telephone also helped to an answering machine; a computer to record thoughts and impressions; a video camera in the window to record a distance, at a distance, over the street, and its people. Joanna is not a complete hermit, she talks to friends on the telephone and becomes interested in Mrs. Ambrose, across the street, the wheelchair is always in the bay window.

At a small dinner party given for a few friends, Joanna is upset by criticism of her withdrawn life from an out-of-town visitor. A little while later, faced with a significant moral decision, she is forced to weigh her solitude against the matter of life and death.

An engaging first film, assured in treatment and style, and cleverly interacted with the video material 'shot' by Joanna from her window (something reminiscent of 'I've heard the Mermaids Singing'). Emma Riche as Joanna does not always fit in with the intent of the script, but her performance is generally acceptable.

The non-speaking role of Mrs. Ambrose is delivered by that ever helpful trouper, Jackie Burroughs.

JUN.

P.A.T.

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