

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-fixated, 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 Gérard died of rheumatic fever, slowly and at home, so that "Ti-Jean" watched his life ebbing away like the colour on his face. (Later his mother would say to him, "You should have died, not Gérard.")

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 writer/poets/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. Interwoven 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 contemplations of youth and of life as read (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 for a moment compare with the flow and the power of a Kerouac, even a translated Kerouac.

As for the use of acted recreations of the writer's life-events, they do lift from the page those things which give themselves easily to the necessary visual appendage 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-shot 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 humanity 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 an 'I-am-a-camera' 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 one last time. When paired on audio 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, bloated, 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 teletype 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 gut, yet still coherent and surprisingly concise; flowing with its own energy through the grace of its primal truths.

The body of his work forms a huge and inter-resonating Kerouacian drama of incredible scope, something like William Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha saga, yet kinder, fairer, less violent, ever searching for meaning in this convoluted world.

Sadly, it is precisely this most important of all aspects of Kerouac that is missing the most from this film.

André Guy Arseneault •

LE GRAND JACK d/sc. Herménégilde Chiasson p. Eric Michel cam. Jean-Pierre Lachapelle ed. France Pilon sd. Richard Besse, Yvon Benoit, Michel Charron sd. ed. Alain Belhumeur, Louis Dupire mus. Robert M. Lepage sd. rec. Louis Hone mix. Jean-Pierre Joutel prod. mun. Michel Dandavino p. asst. Claudette Babineau coord. Monique Lavoie admin. Joanne Gallant rsrch. France Pilon, Herménégilde Chiasson, Hélène Harbec l. p. Guy Nadon, Albert Belzile, Mance Emond, Carl Helmy, Freddy Helmy, Bertholet Charron, Clarence Poirier. Colour 16 mm or video running time 54 minutes, National Film Board of Canada.

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

The road motif, used as a dynamic vehicle (no pun intended) by the 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-geophysiological soul in the documentary, *Le Voyage au bout de la route ou La ballade du 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 Parti Québécois' election victory, the referendum, etc. - events that Douai did not experience firsthand.



Part-tourist, part-troubadour, Douai is a perplexing 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

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The *Liaison of Independent Filmmakers of Toronto (LIFT)* is a nonprofit film co-op which supports and encourages independent filmmaking through the exchange of information and access to facilities. Under its auspices, three filmmakers presented their latest offerings at the Art Gallery of Ontario in April.

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 sprees. 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 accosted 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 stances 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 conflicting, 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



Catherine Barry as Our Heroine and Jo Ann Peritz as The Bride in Janis Lundman's *Close your eyes and think of England*

Freud, Zsa Zsa Gabor, Rebecca West, Judy LaMarsh and Nellie McClung, to name but a few.

p. Janis Lundman, Michelle Sirois. d. Janis Lundman. writers: Janis Lundman, Ann Marie MacDonald, Banuta Rubes, Maureen White. cam. Adrienne Mitchell. ed. Keith Hlady. Mus. John Lang. 16mm. ¾" & ½" tape. 24 mins. With assistance from the Canada Council, Ontario Arts Council, NFB Ontario Region and LIFT.

INSIDE/OUT

Joanna finds it difficult to cope with the outside everyday world - the streets, the crowds, the noise - so she decides to stay inside. And it's not too difficult to organize - groceries ordered by a telephone also hooked up to an answering machine; a computer to record thoughts and impressions; a video camera in the window to rove, at a distance, over the streetscene and its people. Joanna is not a complete hermit, she does talk to friends on the telephone and becomes interested in Mrs. Ambrose, her across-the-street neighbour whose wheelchair is always in the bay window. Mrs. Ambrose gives a friendly smile and wave, but Johanna retreats from the video camera into the shadows of her apartment.

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 a matter of life and death.

An engaging first film, assured in treatment and style, and cleverly interlaced with the video material 'shot' by Joanna from her window (somewhat reminiscent of *I've Heard the Mermaids Singing*). Emma Richler 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 delineated by that ever-helpful trouper, Jackie Burroughs.

d. /sc. /ed. Lori Spring. cam. Steven Deme. sd. Chris Leach. mus. John Tucker. 27 mins. 16mm. ¾" & ½" tape. l. p. Emma Richler, Jackie Burroughs.

THE MYSTERIOUS MOON MEN OF CANADA

Brownie McFadden, an industrial filmmaker, is very, very excited! He's found a letter from Jean-Pierre to Wesley,

his companion on an unpublicized trip to the moon from Canada in 1959.

Given money and a credit card to document the cross-country journey of a blind cyclist, Brownie (dubbing himself "rebel filmmaker") interrupts this saga to search for the elusive Jean-Pierre. The Portuguese landlady at the address on the letter luckily has a computer in her kitchen, and prints out a list of her past tenants. Brownie muses about a Portuguese connection, major cover-ups and international intrigue! The outlaw filmmaker tools down the highway on his way to Québec to find Jean-Pierre and, following a lead, on to Nova Scotia after one Travis Pupkin (don't ask about plot points!). Astonishingly, he encounters the blind cyclist peddling madly with, as Brownie says humbly, no support team, no credit cards, but an amazing sense of smell...

Although Brownie McFadden doesn't really resolve his quixotic quest, as he re-reads Jean-Pierre's letter, his imagination supplies the home movies of him with Wesley on the moon's surface, cavorting and beaming in front of a makeshift rocketship (shades of Georges Méliès!).

A delightfully eccentric film, filled with quirky, tongue-in-cheek humour. The interesting script is firmly and funnily interpreted by Gerry Quigley as Brownie (he was the inept pickpocket in Steve DiMarco's short film *Thieves Like Us - Cinema Canada #141*), who has the great advantage of an off-beat, easily-recalled face.

p. /d. Colin Brunton. assoc. p. /ed. Bruce McDonald. cam. Gerald Packer. sc. Colin Brunton, John Pearson. l. p. Gerry Quigley as Brownie McFadden. 27 mins. 16mm. ¾" & ½" tape. With assistance from Ontario Arts Council, National Film Board, The Canada Council.

(As to availability of all these films, contact LIFT, 345 Adelaide St. W., #505, Toronto M5V 1R5 (416) 596-8233).

Montagnais Indians. To bridge the enormous gap between his archaic preconceptions and today's realities might have been Lafond's purpose, but whether he succeeds or not is lost in this octopus of a several-directions-at-once with bits-of-this-and-bits-of-that cinema.

Along the way, we get a few interesting insights into events that marked today's Quebec, such as Quebec chansonnier Claude Léveillé describing how he 'burned-out' three Volkswagens in three years going from small theatres to church halls from Moncton, N. B. to the small French-speaking centers of Ontario and points west. We get the feeling that it is through the songs that the French-speaking North-American found his voice after centuries of silence under the shadow of English Kings (or Queens) and Yankee neighbours. Indeed, Quebec's leading poet-chansonnier, Félix Leclerc, has probably meant more to his people's society and culture than Victor Hugo did in his

time for France. We also get a feel of how the natives of this province struggle to adjust between the old culture and language that is dying with its old people and the modern pressures of economics, education and the exploitation of the land. In Sept-Iles, when the Montagnais watch whole trainloads of mineral ore being loaded on ships for export, they say, "The Americans are leaving with our mountains," and in a sense it is much more than the mountains that are slipping away.

Yet just as these veins of filmic exploration are becoming interesting, but before they have a chance to settle into some kind of coherent picture, Lafond has Douai on the road again, driving up the old route 138 through Quebec City to the upper reaches of the north shore: Baie-Comeau, Sept-Iles and beyond Havre-St-Pierre to the end of a desolate, scrubby dirt road where, it is implied, Man will find Liberty. Symbolically, the trip is meant to represent a

kind of stripping away of modern influences, of returning to one's roots, of the nobility of the soul in tandem with the richness of nature's bounty. On his way to that point, Douai meets various individuals and they speak together on a variety of subjects, in no particular order, in no particular systematic exposition and, sadly, of no particular interest. What is worse, in the film version (as opposed to video) that I saw, no one was ever identified. Without a point of reference about who is speaking, the voices and what they have to say become confused, mere disembodied statements.

Cameraman Martin Leclerc shows imaginative ways of making a plain shot into an interesting one: the reflection of a chansonnier on a smoky cabaret window implies place, mood and subject better than any straight forward head-and-shoulder shots. His roving eye, ever-searching for new ways of seeing, sets a visual tone that raises the level of what could have been a much

plainer visual experience. Also, some interesting use of sound editing (by Alain Sauvé) helps relieve the tedium of the people-speaking-between-themselves orientation of this documentary. It is perhaps too bad that we did not have a narrator's voice to connect the various pieces into a well-thought-out discourse. Without it, we have a film whose pacing is jagged and whose reasoning is often incoherent, leaving an audience wondering just what the director was trying to say.

André Guy Arseneault ●

LE VOYAGE AU BOUT DE LA ROUTE (OU LA BALLADE DU PAYS QUI ATTEND)

d./sc. /rsrch. Jean-Daniel Lafond cam. Martin Leclerc ed. Babalou Hamelin sd. ed. Alain Sauvé mus. arr. & perf. Richard Lalonde, Mary Cowan mus. rec. Louis Hone mix. Jean-Pierre Joutel p. Eric Michel exec. prod. Eric Michel, Jacques Vallée Resrch. Babalou Hamelin, Kater Lescop (Sept-Iles) l. p. J. Douai, P. Jobin, J. Gagné, C. Léveillé, R. Jomphe. Colour 16 mm or video. running time 72 min. dist. National Film Board of Canada.