



PHOTO: DOUGLAS CURRAN

Cowboys Don't Cry, but they do need a reassuring hug from Mom sometimes

Anne Wheeler's Cowboys Don't Cry

When the old man tells his grandson that he is going to bury the boy's mother in a beautiful place, he speaks the truth. This is 'big sky' country, the Alberta foothills:

cowboy country whose landscape, if nothing else, Anne Wheeler captures so well in her new feature, *Cowboys Don't Cry*.

The 'cowboys' the title refers to are Josh Morgan and his 15-year-old son Shane (perhaps harking back to the classic Stevens western of the same name with its own version of the father-son conflict). Lucy (mom), played with a gentle sweetness by Rebecca Jenkins, is the rancher's daughter who married her cowboy hero and ran away to join the rodeo.

Ten years down the road she is raising her 10-year-old son in a camper trailer, still following the rodeo circuit with her world champion, bull-riding husband. Dad and the ranch are taboo subjects. When Shane wants to know why he can't see grandpa, we understand that there are certain things a man - Canadian cowboy style - can't do, such as confront the man whose daughter he stole.

As long as Lucy is in the picture we see Josh through her stary eyes. He seems kind of cute: singing along with the corny country songs as they drive to yet another rodeo while mom home-schools young Shane in the back of the camper.

Lucy is dispatched early in the film, a victim

of Josh's drunken driving leaving Josh a drifter, a drinker and a gambler; Shane to pick up his mom's longing for a homestead; and Wheeler with the classic ingredients for an archetypal western which, unfortunately, she fails to capitalize on.

The relationship between father and son disappears in a fog of sentimentality only rescued by an odd moment of dignified restraint. Lucy's burial is a difficult scene, well done. The mourners stand awkwardly around the hole in the ground unable to connect to the reality of her death. Josh is a solitary figure hiding his physical and emotional injuries behind heavy black sunglasses. He seems immobilized; the tears of grief locked away.

Lucy's father (the grandfather Shane has never seen) shows up at her graveside in a pick-up and work clothes, ready to haul his daughter's coffin back to the prairie where she was born. Josh is too numb to argue. Shane and the old man connect and for a moment we are touched as they cling to each other to weather their mutual loss.

Grandpa asks Shane if he wants to come back to the ranch. But Dad still needs his son, and the grandfather leaves, never to see the boy again.

Five years later, Josh and Shane are, in Shane's words, "just a couple of bums." The sleek camper-trailer is gone, replaced by a wheezing van, a slum on wheels that literally can't make the grade. And they're still on the rodeo circuit.

Josh is on the skids. He gets drunk in a bar and tries to sneak out because he's too broke to pay the tab. He can't make money because he's too drunk to ride the bulls. Meanwhile Shane is outside in the parking lot, stealing the parts he needs to fix the van, probably wondering, along with the audience, why he didn't get out with grandpa while the going was good. Josh, at least, knows

why he's with Shane; his son is good for a couple of bucks when he signs him up, against his wishes, for the steer ride.

Thank God for grandpa who, at an opportune moment, drops dead leaving the ranch to Shane. For Shane it's heaven on earth. He's sick to death of the rodeo and he misses his mother. This is her home where she was born and raised, where her gymkhana trophies gather dust, and where she's now buried.

For Josh it's different. This is what he spent his life avoiding. He'd have to get a job and stay put. But Josh can't deny his son's puppy-faced eagerness. Shane settles in to get his education at the local high school where his natural brilliance allows him in short order to catch up with the rest of the class while Dad proceeds to mess up.

Whatever momentum the film had on the road is gone. What follows is a series of loosely connected melodramas that mark time until the inevitable confrontation between Shane and Josh. In the climactic scene, the men fight it out. Shane, weeping, lays the guilt for his mother's death on Josh; Josh, the archetypal male, walks out.

It's not clear why Shane eventually goes looking for Josh. But he does. And thank God he finds him, because that's the signal for the end. And thank God, too, for rich neighbours, mother and daughter, who genteelly lust after these real cowboys, who can bail out the ranch while father and son sort out their confused relationship.

Roberta King •

COWBOYS DON'T CRY *d. /sc.* Anne Wheeler *exec p.* Peter Sussman *p.* Janice L. Platt *line p.* Arvi Liimatainen *assoc. p.* Anne Wheeler *d. o. p.* Brian R. R. Hebb, CSC *p. des.* John Blackie *ed.* Peter Svab *mus.* Louis Natale *p. man.* Tom Dent-Cox *lst a. d.* "E" Scherberger *loc. man.* Murray Ord *p. coord.* Merri Toth *art d.* Ted Kuchera *costume des.* Jill Concannon *ward.* Carla Hetland *hair.* Jon C. White *1st ass. cam.* Peter Wunstorff *stills photog.* Douglas Curran *hd. carp.* Marty Shostak *sd. fx. ed.* Arnie Stewart *diul. ed.* Sharon Lackie, Penny Hozy *ADR ed.* Dale Shelldrake *p. prod.* Susan Gerofsky, John Harcourt *publ.* Jeremy Katz *l. p.* Ron White, Zachary Ansley, Janet-Laine Green, Val Pearson, Candace Ratcliffe, Thomas Hauff, Rebecca Jenkins, Joshua Ansley, Michael Hogan, Janet Wright, Barney O'Sullivan, Wendell Smith, Graham McPherson, Thomas Peacock, Jason Wolff, George Collins, William Korbutt, Ruby Swekla *bullfighters* Ryan Byrne, John Dodds *bullriders* Jim Finkbeiner, Brian Aebly, Dave Malek, Darrell Cholach *stunts* Jason Kiley, Greg Schlosser, Kevin West, Bill Ferguson *rodeo clown* Ernie Marshall *rodeo announcers* Bill Kehler, Ivan Daines. Based on the novel by Marilyn Halvorson. *prod.* Atlantis Films in association with CBC, the Beacon Group; with participation of Telefilm and OFDC, collaboration with Allarcom, 2 & 7 Television, Calgary and TVO.

Ric Beairsto and Harry Crossland's Close to Home

A few years ago I had the curious experience of sharing a West End Vancouver street corner with the young men and women, children some of them, who were available there. I was renting a studio apartment, they

were renting themselves. We developed nodding acquaintanceships during the daylight hours but I never understood much about their world - except that it was awfully damn noisy outside my windows in the middle of a hot summer weekend night.

Some of the same faces I watched get into cars driven by men old enough to be their fathers appear in Hy Perspectives Media Group's production of *Close to Home*. It's a home movie from the sort of homes you'd much rather avoid.

Ric Beairsto (writer/director) and Harvey Crossland (writer/producer/editor) finished the docu-drama about two years ago. Unable to find a Canadian broadcaster they sat back and watched as just about every TV network in North America devoted hours of prime-time to



Jillian Fargey as Michelle, a juvenile street hooker

juvenile street prostitution. CBC-TV vice-president Ivan Fecan saw the video and, in a move that should be typical at the CBC, decided to put it on the air as soon as possible (June 18th, 8 p. m.).

With that in mind please bear with the first half-hour or so of *Close to Home*. It's chock-a-block full of the now stereotypical scenes of drugged-out kids peddling their wares while exhausted street workers fight an uncaring system. The footage was hot when shot, now it's unnecessarily long. You might want to take time out to hug your child during an interminable shoplifting scene but be sure to come back; that's where the film begins to work.

The last 90 minutes provide a revealing look at the adults who, after all, keep the hookers, hustlers and pimps in drug money. In what is perhaps the strongest single scene in the entire film, a jaded young man called Flynn (Daniel Allman) is stabbed by an infuriated, impotent trick. It follows some revealing statistics on juveniles for sale in Victorian London (up to

40,000 at a time!) and is shot in blue-grey mists that would do credit to any Jack the Ripper mystery.

Actually, what's most noteworthy about this film is the style rather than the content. Most docu-dramas, particularly those made on a relatively low-budget, tend to be strong on docu- and a little limp in -drama. *Close to Home* is the opposite.

Tobias Schliessler is not a TV news cameraman and, since the purple thread holding the docu- and the -drama together is the research of a television journalist (Anne Petrie), this is a slight shame. However, whatever is lacking in the "journalism" segments is more than compensated for by fictional vignettes like the one mentioned above.

Likewise the pseudo-real dialogue (several scenes involve streetworkers, lawyers and so on playing themselves) is informative but a little short of gripping. Beirsto and Crossland's scripted scenes are consistently good and often brilliant. They're not afraid of minimal writing, best in a scene between Flynn and his mother (Micki Maunsell). She can barely talk while trying to stuff \$200 in the boy's pocket; he responds with a highly articulate tearing-up of the cash.

As a study of a contemporary social problem *Close to Home* is a worthwhile film which, unbeknownst to anyone but the filmmakers, broke some ground two or three years ago. Watch it for that reason alone or, rather, with your kids.

As contribution to the CBC's prime-time schedule it's a major achievement. One suspects there are dozens of good films lying around the country which were too fictional for the network's Current Affairs department and too factual for Drama. If Fecan's decision to broadcast *Close to Home* is a sign of things to come, then filmmakers such as Ric Beirsto and Harvey Crossland will have a market for more innovative projects.

Mark O'Neill •

CLOSE TO HOME d. Ric Beirsto p. led. Harvey Crossland assoc. p. Jon Stoddart sc. Ric Beirsto, Harvey Crossland cam. Tobias Schliessler art. dir. Annie O'Donoghue Assoc. ed. Jill Haras orig. score Ken Hemmerick, Richard Baker research Ann Petrie l. p. Daniel Allman, Micki Maunsell. Produced by Hy Perspectives Media Group with the financial assistance of Telefilm Canada. running time 57 min.

Randy Bradshaw's

Ramona

Two recent Canadian-made series for children recently debuted. One shows the problems facing Kidvid, and one shows its potential. *Captain Power* has proven controversial, because of its tie-in with Mattel Toys, who made the "interactive"

devices that are used with the program, and for the violent nature of its *Star Wars*-inspired scenario. Atlantis Films' *Ramona*, on the other hand, will likely be held up as a positive example of

what programming for children can achieve.

Beverly Cleary was for many years reluctant to allow her stories about eight-year-old Ramona Quimby and her family to be adapted, in spite of

the popularity of her books. She was perhaps concerned that her tales of the mischievous third-grader would be turned into a sort of distaff *Leave it To Beaver*, or would be otherwise slicked

16 of this year's Academy Awards were won on pictures filmed with ARRI cameras.

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up with sitcom formulae. It was no doubt the track record of Atlantis Films, which shows its commitment to making children's programs that respects the child's viewpoint and the audience,

that convinced her they would be true to the spirit of her books.

Producer Kim Todd and story editor Ellis Weiner have achieved this goal by filming only 10

episodes. This has enabled them to choose from the five books that Cleary wrote about Ramona. They have also kept the most important aspect of successful children's programming in mind - cla-

rity and directness. The absence of punchlines and laugh tracks is a welcome relief.

Randy Bradshaw directs the programs in keeping with the low-key nature of the stories. Ramona Quimby lives an ordinary life, but the genius of Beverly Cleary lies in the way in which she makes these ordinary events of a child resonate. Whether it is dealing with the problems of being a grade-school student, getting along with her sister, or trying to figure out her parents, Ramona is always believable.

The key to this believability lies in the casting of Sarah Polley in the title role. Kim Todd deliberately set out to find a girl who was not the model-pretty type so common among child actresses. Sarah Polley, with her high energy level, fits this role perfectly. Like Megan Follows, she has a family background in the business - her brother Mark will be remembered from *A Gift To Last* - and she may indeed have the same bright future.

Supporting roles in *Ramona* are also well done. Lori Chodos handles herself well as Ramona's put-upon older sister Beatrice, who is always called Beezus. Lynda Mason Green and Barry Flatman are Dory and Bob Quimby, and if the parental roles tend to be more stereotyped, they are well played and never become the caricatures that sitcom parents often are. Jayne Eastwood makes occasional appearances as Ramona's teacher.

With its international financing - Canadian, French, West German and American - the series is nationally neutral, but only Americans will likely quibble about the lack of patriotic paraphernalia in the school, for example. As with *The Kids of DeGrassi Street*, there may also be some comment about the politeness of the children in the cast, quite distinct from the noisy brats of American television. That is probably a change that will bring sighs of relief from many critics of the state of Kidvid.

J. Paul Costabile •

And this was the 5th year in a row that the Cinematography Award went to a cameraman shooting with an ARRI 35BL.

EQUIPMENT
IN DEPTH

CLAIRMONT CAMERA

RAMONA p. Kim Todd exec. p. Michael Macmillan, Seaton McLean (Atlantis Films), Hugh Martin, Cecily Truett (Lancit) d. Randy Bradshaw created for TV Hugh Martin, Cecily Truett sc./story ed. Ellis Weiner, based on the novels by Beverly Cleary cont. Madeleine Duff asst. d. Erika Zborowsky (1st), Frank Siracusa (2nd), Jill Compton (trainee) d. o. p. Douglas Kiefer, C. S. C. focus puller Cathy Robertson clapper/loader Joel Guthro, Cudah Anarawewa ed. Sally Patterson, Lara Mazur asst. Dawn Higgins, Gloria Thorsteinson, Brett Sullivan (2nd) m. Fred Mollin loc. sd. John J. Thomson boom Martin Lacroix asst. sd. ed. Michael Cook sd. fx. ed. Arnie Stewart dialogue eds. Mata Steinberg, Dale Sheldrake apprentice ed. Thor Henrikson re-rec Wally Weaver, Daniel Pellerin Foley Andy Malcolm art d. Peter Grundy asst. Angus McCallum set dec. Robert Bartman set dresser Lloyd Brown props Jeffrey A. Melvin asst. Mia Sturup hair Jocelyne MacDonald make-up Barbara Szabolowki gaffer Gary Phipps gen. op. Roger Bowden elec. Ton Durman best boy Harold D. Stroud key grip Mark Silver best boy grip Ian Henderson head carp. David Hamayda set construction Edge and Bratton scenic artists Nick Kosonic, Martin Morris art dept. trainee Ray Lorenz stills Mani Grossman craft service Amerind Day prod. co-ord Gillian Hershfield series consult Bill Seigler prod. consult Gillian Spencer unit man. John Calvert post-prod. co-ord Daphne Ballon post-prod. assi. John Harcourt, Roberta Ripp office prod. assts. Anthony Kadak, Lori Ishbaum transport co-ord G. Kris Hawthorne acc. Joan M. Scarrow asst. Solange Marciano dialogue coach Beatrice

Green tutor Laurel Bresnahan animal handler Laura Fisher casting Arlene Berman, Rose Lewis (extras), Darlene Kaplan (consultant) catering Blue Heron Catering labl mixing PFA Film and Video neg cutter May Bischof opticals Film Opticals titles Meta Media prod. company Atlantis Films, Lancit Media Productions, Revcom Television in association with Bayerischer Rundfunk (Munich), CHCH Television (Hamilton) Corporation for Public Broadcasting running time 10x 30 minutes distribution Atlantis Films International, Lorimar (Videocassette) l. p. Sarah Polley, Barry Flatman, Lynda Mason Green, Lori Chodos, Jayne Eastwood, Nerene Virgin, Bobby Brecken, Marlow Ortela, Kerry Segal, Nicole Lynn, Alexandra Barrett.

Jacques Santi's Flag

In *Flag*, a Franco-Canadian co-production directed by Jacques Santi, we follow the lachrymose Inspector Simon (Richard Bohringer) through the familiar *mise-en-scène* of a typical French *policier*. The drizzling Parisian streets. The unmade beds and sad saxophones. The tough-guy *tripots*, filled with cigarette smoke and flurries of epithets like *mec*, *flic*, *salope*, *flambeur*, and the ever-popular *con*!

The key epithet in *Flag* (*argot* for catching a criminal in *flagrante delicto*, with his or her pants down) is not *flag*; it's *con* (literally vagina; figuratively dumb jerk). The *c*-word appears so often in the picture, every second line of dialogue seems to cling to it. "Petit con!" Inspector Simon snaps at some *mec*. "Grand con," another *mec* snaps at him. "Quel métier du con," Simon says ruefully about police work. "Arrête la connerie!" says everybody at one time or another. Eventually, you want to make your way through those drizzling Parisian streets and find the *con* who wrote the script.

There's not much in that script, or the film made from it, to sustain the interest of even the dullest *mec* in the audience. As *Flag* opens, we discover that for some vague reason, Simon has a deep need to bust the Dijan Brothers, a gang of North African thieves with connections in the contentedly corrupt police department and in the government. Because of those connections, Simon's slick, sleazy superior (Pierre Arditi) orders the inspector to dump the case and take a vacation. The rest of *Flag* could be called *Inspector Simon's Holiday*.

We watch the inspector hanging around African dance clubs, Tunisian cafés, and all manner of illicit Parisian gambling joints. Simon shoots craps, plays cards, and checks out a weird game that is a hybrid of roulette and billiards. When he's not getting deeper and deeper into gambling, our hero bickers with his girlfriend, and, in one exciting scene, he separates an egg!

The gambling milieu of *Flag* is populated by suitably shady, *louche* types – the kind of nervous, hawk-beaked, amusingly eccentric hoods who are the *policier's* gift to the world. Julien Guimar (the chef in Jean Beaudin's *Le*



The gang that couldn't shoot straight make a movie. Jacques Santi's aim is off in *Flag*, with Pierre Arditi (above, center)

Matou) almost brings the film to life as one of the head hoods, a tortoise-faced, weak-willed gangster who makes threats with his face stuck in an inhaler. When Inspector Simon is asked why he is hanging around one of Guimar's joints, Simon answers, Bogart-like, "The odor – it pleases me." It pleases me too, but unfortunately, the odor in *Flag* is really just a whiff of the kind of pungent, underworld poetry that Jean-Pierre Melville got on the screen in films like *Bob, le flambeur* and *Le Doulos*. And as Simon wanders into African nightclubs, we get an equally faint taste of the atmosphere and the Hi-Life music that could have charged up the film.

When *Flag* is not offering a pale reflection of the world according to Jean-Pierre Melville, it serves up a little evil according to Claude Chabrol. All the main *crapules*, or villains, are seen amidst the details of their banal domestic lives: bourgeois apartments; dining room tables strewn with the remnants of dinner; proper mothers, wives, and daughters. Even the nasty Dijan Brothers appear *en famille* in a crowded, tastelessly decorated little parlor. A TV blares away, *sexy poules* sprawl on the boys' knees, big guns appear suddenly, and in the foreground, the family matriarch sits at a table calmly peeling vegetables. The scene, like a few others in the film, has a certain wit, although you might wonder uneasily whether it is supposed to play to the kind of anti-immigrant racism that surfaced during the last French election.

Probably not. *Flag* is the most lackadaisical of *policiers*, unmarked by the kind of icypick-in-your-ear viciousness sometimes characteristic of the genre. The Dijan Brothers don't get around to doing anything significantly nasty until near the end of the film; the car chases are remarkably relaxed; Inspector Simon *flags* the bad guys without beating anyone up or firing a single shot. In fact, he doesn't even change his sweater

until the picture is almost over.

The laid-back atmosphere of the film has a lot to do with Richard Bohringer's performance as Simon. Famous for his roles in Jean-Jacques Beineix's *Diva*, (as the cool guardian angel who wears a diving mask while buttering *baguettes*), and in Jean-Loup Hubert's hit, *Le Grand chemin*, Bohringer is rapidly becoming an institution. In *Flag*, he pushes his patented style of zen detachment to new extremes, meandering through the movie, his big sleepy face seemingly indifferent to everything around him. When his old girlfriend decides to move to Montreal (possibly because she wants to escape a damp autumn in Paris for an early blizzard in Canada), Bohringer barely flickers one of his considerably over-made-up eyebrows. When the Inspector spends the night with his new girlfriend, a *minette* called Josie (Anne Létourneau), he looks as if he would rather be buttering a baguette.

Anne Létourneau, who engraved herself on our memories as Rita Toulouse, the sweet tease in the *Plouffe* films, appears currently in Quebec's daily TV soap, *La Maison Deschênes*, and will be seen in the upcoming *Les Tisserands du pouvoir*, is one of the Canadian contributions to *Flag*. There's not much for this very talented actress to do in it – and even less for Donald Pilon, who knocks off about six lines in a completely expendable role. Quebecer François Protat's cinematography is decently professional.

Flag is not really an offensive movie. Like many other pictures, it is simply unnecessary. The only mystery the film generates is why did anyone – the young French director Jacques Santi (sadly, he died recently), or the French and Canadian co-producers – want to have anything to do with the project? And why would Telefilm invest in it?

It is extraordinary that more than a quarter of a century after Jean-Luc Godard took the *policier*,

turned it inside out, upside-down, and then sent it into a spin, the French are still making films like *Flag*, and, in this case, Canadian money helped make it possible.

Maurice Alioff •

FLAG d. Jacques Santi sc. Jacques Santi, Simon Michel, Tansou cam. François Protat sd. Bernard Aubouy ed. Françoise Javet sets Dominique André stunts. Roland Neunreuther, Alain Guerillot mus. Jean-Pierre Mas l. p. Richard Bohringer, Pierre Arditi, Philippe Leroy Beaulieu, Anne Létourneau, Julien Guimar, Philippe Pouchain, Smain, Donald Pilon, Philippe Besson, Philippe Sfez, Charlie Chemouny, Laurent Gendron, Smail Mekki, Patrick Poivey, Michel Melki, Jean-Luc Porraz, Jean-Paul Muel, Jenny Astruc, Simon Michael, Philippe Alexandre. prod. Les Films Ariane, Cinévidéo, FR3 Films Production, Soprofilms. France-Canada co-prod. running time. 104 min. dist. Gaumont.

Herménégilde Chiasson's Le Grand Jack

Acadian director Herménégilde Chiasson has made, in his *Le Grand Jack*, an incisive and multi-angled rendition of the rather complex Jack ("Ti-Jean") Kerouac: an American son of Québécois expatriates who grew up to become an internationally known writer and the Beat Generation's most eloquent voice as author of *On the Road*.

This biographical documentary, out of the "Américanité" series by the National Film Board, utilises several cinematic 'tools' in painting its picture of Kerouac, trying to separate the man from the myth, the profoundly gifted artist from the self-destructive, raging drunk.

At the same time, Chiasson explores Kerouac's cultural background as an influence, quoting his "Everything I know I owe to my French-Canadian background." The term "un grand Jack" is a popular expression among French Canadians meaning anyone of particular great height, but its use in this title denotes a different kind of stature: part of the pleased astonishment most Québécois must have felt in the early 1960s when they heard him interviewed in French, *their* particular breed of French, as a best-selling American writer, the man who coined the term 'Beat' adopted by the Beat Generation, Beat Poets, Beatniks, and even a British musical group called The Beatles.

Born in Lowell, Mass. in 1922 to Léo and Gabrielle Kerouac, who had moved to Lowell as part of the mass emigration to the American textile mills at the turn of the century, he was raised in the totally French-speaking atmosphere of the French 'ghettos' and as a youth spoke no English whatsoever – the language which, like Joseph Conrad before him, he would eventually write in.

His formative years are documented abundantly, especially through his writing but

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-geophysionomic 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 forté seems to be his profound ignorance of Quebec society, dwelling with Lafond's help on lumberjacks and

PRAXIS FILM DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOP

is designed to enable Canadian directors and screenwriters to develop their dramatic feature films with the assistance of internationally recognized professionals. Our commitment is to innovative, indigenous low - budget feature films. Projects may enter comprehensive workshops in fall or spring sessions, or may apply at any time for specific types of pre - production support -- story editing, workshop facilities, consultation with creative advisors and production planning. We charge no fees and provide no direct production funding.

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For further information call
Cath Moody at PRAXIS,
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PRAXIS
350 Robson Street
Second Floor
Vancouver, B.C.
V6B 2B2

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