

Jacques Poulin's *Volkswagen Blues*: A Journey through American Texts

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Abstract. This article analyses the intertextuality of the novel *Volkswagen Blues* by Jacques Poulin, a French-Canadian take on the road novel. The aim of the paper is to examine not only the relationships between *Volkswagen Blues* and its culturally diverse sources, but also to show how those multicultural intertexts permeate the road novel genre. In order to achieve this purpose, the study identifies in the novel instances of intertextuality which are analyzed within Genette's framework for *transtextuality*. Considering the intertextual presence in *Volkswagen Blues*, the analysis ponders whether it is limited to this novel or is a manifestation of Americanness and, thus, a piece of evidence of multiculturalism in the hegemonic American discourse. The study shows how Poulin depicts the crucial role of non-Anglo-American identities in contemporary American culture and explains the influence of world literatures in Poulin's work.

Keywords: *Volkswagen Blues*; *On the Road*; Jacques Poulin; Quebec; Oregon Trail; Pioneers; Canadian literature; road novel; transtextuality; intertextuality.

[es] *Volkswagen Blues* de Jacques Poulin: Viaje por los textos americanos

Resumen. Este artículo analiza la intertextualidad de la novela *Volkswagen Blues* de Jacques Poulin, una aproximación francocanadiense a la *road novel*. Este examen pretende exponer no solo las relaciones entre *Volkswagen Blues* y sus fuentes culturales, de origen diverso, sino también la forma en que esos intertextos empapan el género de la *road novel* en su conjunto. Para alcanzar este propósito, el estudio escruta el libro para identificar instancias de intertextualidad y analizarlas de acuerdo con el marco teórico de la transtextualidad según Genette. El análisis considera la presencia intertextual en *Volkswagen Blues* y pondera si esta se limita a la novela o es una manifestación de americanidad y, por lo tanto, evidencia de multiculturalidad en el discurso hegemónico americano. El estudio revela cómo perfila Poulin el papel destacado de las identidades no anglosajonas en la cultura popular americana y expone la influencia de las literaturas del mundo en la obra de Poulin.

Keywords: *Volkswagen Blues*; *On the Road*; Jacques Poulin; Québec; Senda de Oregón; pioneros; literatura canadiense; *road novel*; transtextualidad; intertextualidad.

[fr] *Volkswagen Blues* de Jacques Poulin: Un voyage à travers les textes américains

Résumé. Cet article analyse l'intertextualité du roman *Volkswagen Blues* de Jacques Poulin. Le but de l'examen de cet œuvre n'est pas seulement d'exposer les relations entre le *Volkswagen Blues* et ses sources culturelles, mais aussi de comprendre comment ces intertextes multiculturels marquent le genre du roman routier dans son intégralité. L'étude examine profondément le livre pour pouvoir identifier les instances de l'intertextualité et les analyser dans le cadre de la transtextualité d'après Genette. Ce travail tient en compte la présence de l'intertexte dans le *Volkswagen Blues* et se demande si elle est limitée dans ce livre ou si c'est une manifestation de l'américanité et, en conséquence, un élément de preuve de la multiculturalité dans le discours hégémonique de l'Amérique. L'analyse, d'une part, démontre comment Poulin retrace le rôle capital des identités non anglo-saxonnes dans la culture américaine contemporaine et, d'autre part, expose l'influence du monde littéraire dans l'œuvre de cet auteur.

Mots clés: *Volkswagen Blues*; *Sur la route*; Jacques Poulin; Québec; Oregon Trail; pionniers; littérature canadienne; roman routier; transtextualité; intertextualité.

Summary: Introduction. Texts related to other texts. Intertextuality. Paratextuality. Metatextuality. Other transtextualities. Conclusion.

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Introduction²

The novel *Volkswagen Blues* by the French-Canadian writer Jacques Poulin is a new revision of the road novel. It was originally published by the Canadian publisher Québec-Amérique in 1984, and, subsequently, by Jean Picollec in Paris in 1988, and by Actes Sud in Arles ten years later. It narrates the story of a writer suffering from writer’s block, who is only known by his nom-de-plume Jack Waterman. After recovering an old postcard from his long-lost older brother Théo, Jack drives his old Volkswagen minibus accompanied by the hitchhiker Pitsémine, alias La Grande Sauterelle, to find Théo. This journey from the Baie de Gaspé to San Francisco transcends the geographical sphere to become a historical tracking after the footprints of the French in America and, ultimately, a journey of self-discovery typical of Poulin’s universe (Socken, 1993: 9).

Unlike other similar stories, Poulin inserts a Canadian prelude to the well known American route. The new literary and geographical addition leaves the old path as it used to be, despite the renewed context and background to the story. This parallelism between narration and geography can be applied to the whole course of the story to a great extent in both ways, using literature to describe the journey, or using the travelling to refer to literature. This correlation between written texts and spaces is a direct consequence of the self-consciousness of the novel.

Undoubtedly, *Volkswagen Blues* is well aware of its nature regarding genre, a consequence of the conventions established by precedent texts. The implicit references to other travellers that went on the road before the characters of the novel are constant. However, the novel does not just acknowledge the patterns established by those works to reproduce them but goes one step beyond by adding a new meta-level. Transtextuality is a very distinctive feature of the novel that lets the reader feel its presence throughout the book. Indeed, even the title of the book might be a metatextual reference itself as the Brazilian musician Gilberto Gil published a song with the title “Volks-Volkswagen Blues” in 1971.

This article aims to find those devices in the novel to reveal whether transtextuality determines the representation of literary travel in *Volkswagen Blues*, and, should this be the case, the way this determination takes place according to Genette’s theoretical framework on transtextuality.

Texts related to other texts

There is an inevitable relationship between texts defined by intertextuality (Kristeva, 1986: 34–62). Poulin embraces an intertextual conception of the literature and makes all his novels a constant play of intertextuality (Llop García, 2016: 793). In *Volkswagen Blues*, these intertextual references serve as a device for questioning the cultural biases of hegemonic epistemic narratives (Leahy, 1992: 74). Genette (1982: 7–14) finds Kristeva’s definition correct, yet too broad. Consequently, he coins the concept *transtextuality*, which comprises five possible realisations, namely, intertextuality, paratextuality, metatextuality, hypertextuality, and architextuality.

First, intertextuality refers to the coexistence of two or more texts, most frequently as the presence of a text within another text. This text-embedding can present different degrees of literalness and explicitness. The most traditional form is *quoting*, which is literal and explicit. Another type is *plagiarism*, which is literal but not explicit since plagiarism, by definition, implies avoiding crediting the source. A further form is *allusion*, defined as a textual formulation whose full understanding demands the recognition of the relationship between that and another text. The first and third types are crucial for this study.

Second, paratextuality is a less explicit relationship between the text and its paratext. This term comprises elements both autographic and allographic such as title, subtitle, headers, prefaces, epilogues, warnings, marginal notes, footnotes, epigraphs, or illustrations that provide a frame of reference to interpret the text. Genette regards this kind of transtextuality as a vantage point on the pragmatic level.

Third, metatextuality is the relationship between a text and another text that speaks about the former without explicitly citing it, and in some cases, without even naming it. This case is of high relevance regarding *Volkswagen Blues*, as it is used often in the story.

Fourth, hypertextuality is the relation between the hypertext and the hypotext. In other words, it is the transformative process to build a text upon a previous text. This kind of intertextuality is another feature easily identifiable in *Volkswagen Blues* concerning different hypotexts. Finally, *architextuality* refers to a silent relationship articulated by paratextual mention, such as, for instance, the title *Poems*, or the subtitle *A Novel*.

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Intertextuality

The main source of intertexts in *Volkswagen Blues* is the historiography. The novel turns to historical sources, albeit not uncritically but rather challenging them (Vautier, 1999: 23). In the first chapter, the most relevant intertext is *La Grande Aventure de Jacques Cartier*. The rather lengthy first quote is an extract from this text. It stresses the strong relationship between Canada and France and geographically marks the starting point of the journey as Jack's quest begins at the same place where Cartier set foot on New World soil. Metaphorically, Jack continues Cartier's advance to the West and the joint course of both represents the penetration of the continent of the French-Canadians as a whole, adding a counterweight to the Anglo-Saxon metanarratives about the colonisation of America, and starting a *great American novel* (Thibeault, 2012: 17) not limited to the United States but one that comprises the whole subcontinent with all its cultures and peoples.

Le XXIII^e jour dudict moys nous fismes faire vne croix de trente piedz de hault, qui fut fete deuant plusieurs d'eulx, sur la poincte de l'entrée dudit hable, soubz le croysillon de laquelle mismes vng escusson en bosse à troyes fleurs de lys, et dessus vng escripteau en boys en grant, en grosse lettre de forme où il y auoit "Vive le Roy de France"; Et icelle croix plantasmes sur ladicte poincte deuant eulx, lesquelz la regardèrent faire et planter; Et après qu'elle fut esleuée en l'air, nous mismes tous à genoulx, les mains jointes, en adorant icelle deuant eulx et leur fismes signe, regardant et leur montrant le ciel, que par icelle estoit nostre Redemption, de quoy ilz firent plusieurs admyrations, en tournant et regardant icelle croix (Qtd. in Poulin, 1988: 19).

The second historical account of importance is *La pénétration du continent américain par les Canadiens français, 1763-1846: Traitants, explorateurs, missionnaires* by Benoit Brouillette. This work is one of the most prolific sources not only regarding intertextuality but also other types of transtextuality. Here, Poulin takes full paragraphs from Brouillette in order to establish the historical background of the French-Canadian travellers and their displacements as a precedent to contextualise his characters. For instance, the following quote evokes the tenacious nature of Jack and La Grande Sauterelle, to keep advancing despite the precariousness of their means of transport.

De l'assentiment de tous, ce sont les Canadiens qui sont les mieux faits pour supporter, en leur qualité de payeurs, les rigueurs d'une expédition en canot. Il est que d'autres soient employés pour un travail aussi dur. En tant que *voyageurs*, les Canadiens méritent en effet les meilleurs éloges.

Et il lut encore :

Je les ai vus payer dans un canot vingt heures sur vingt-quatre, aller à cette vitesse durant une quinzaine de jours ou trois semaines sans un jour de repos ni ralentissement (Qtd. in Poulin, 1988: 45-46, emphasis in original).

It should be noted that the source above refers not to the penetration of Canada but the American continent. Therefore, the use of this French source reinforces the alternative metanarrative, depicting the French colonisers as playing a role equivalent to their British counterparts.

Other quotes do not address the travellers but the journey itself. For example, the fragment below offers a foretaste of the path the protagonists will follow. However, the intertext does not give a mere toponymical relation but also contextual information such as the importance of the places as trade centres.

Partout où il se fait de la traite, on trouve les traces des Canadiens français, au sang pur au début de la période, au sang mêlé plus tard. (...) Nous suivons les traitants à partir de leurs principaux centres de rayonnement, qui furent tour à tour : Detroit, Michillimakinac, Grand-Portage (plus tard Fort Williams) et Saint Louis (Qtd. in Poulin, 1988: 44).

Furthermore, the mention of the ethnic background of the French-Canadians meets its counterpart in the novel as Jack, a pure-blooded French-Canadian, is joined by the half-Native American La Grande Sauterelle, although it should be noted that she still signs *Pitsémine* in Innu (Poulin, 1988: 42). The combination of the French-Canadian explorer and the Native American prompt a reinvention of America as an intercultural territory of mixed races and cultures (Thibeault, 2012: 16), in which different and often contradictory standpoints about history collide as chapter six exemplifies through the historical *courieur de bois* Etienne Brulé.

La Grande Sauterelle provides some curious cases of second-hand intertextuality with her recounts of historical quotations. For instance, she attributes to Chief Joseph the words "mes jeunes gens ne travailleront jamais, les hommes qui travaillent ne peuvent rêver, et le sagesse nous vient des rêves" (Poulin, 1988: 88). However, these are the words the medicine man Smohalla allegedly said to Captain E.L. Huggins in 1890 (Trafzer & Beach, 1985: 320). This inconsistency does not alter the essence considering that the European intertexts refer to identities rather than individuals. They reproduce the French colonial metanarrative, not the story of an individual French man. This quotation, in turn, is a statement of the Native Americans regardless of whether Chief Joseph or Smohalla said it.

La Grande Sauterelle also recalls that the folk hero Daniel Boone said "Je me sens parfois comme une feuille sur un torrent. Elle peut tourner, tourbillonner et se retourner, mais elle va toujours vers l'avant" (Poulin, 1988: 289), although she cannot remember where she found it. We may conjecture that it was in a biographical account by a third

party. However, this is not a verbatim quotation of Boone, who actually claimed to be “like a leaf skimming down a pulsing creek, snagging here and there on rocks and clutter, spinning, turning, upending, but always moving on—forward” (Belue, 1988: 533). Attributing the disagreement between the two versions to the translation seems implausible as the idea of *a leaf snagging on rocks* is easily translatable to French, and it is as understandable in French as it is in English. Therefore, the sources of these quotes are either apocryphal or misquoted. Considering the accuracy of other references, we can assume that Poulin intentionally makes his Native American character unreliable. This unreliability raises the question of whether this is evidence of new epistemologies challenging the fact-based European knowledge or internalised Eurocentric disregard for non-privileged identities. There is indeed a gap between cultures, and La Grande Sauterelle serves as a bridge between them as she is excluded from both sides, but it is precisely this characteristic, which enables her as a native guide for Jack (Thibeault, 2012: 20).

However, *Volkswagen Blues* endorses neither the Native American nor any of the European-American versions (Vautier, 1999: 24), which leaves the reader with the task of juggling with a set of narratives, and none of them provides an accurate, objective version. Nevertheless, the unveiling of hidden narratives challenges the American myths and suggests new interpretations in which the voices of marginalised actors can be heard over the hegemonic discourse (Vandervoort, 2011: 314–315).

Although the historiography is the primary provider of intertext by far, the literary quotes are not scarce. Nonetheless, many of these prove to be peculiar as, rather than being direct sources, they come indirectly through reference books, for instance, in the following verses from the *Encyclopédie de la jeunesse* “Sire Galahad / Sa force valait celle de dix hommes / Parce que son cœur était pur” (Poulin, 1988: 99). Direct quotes, however, may have more emotional weight. The reference to McCullers “Sa propre vie lui apparut dérisoire, solitaire, fragile colonne dressée parmi les décombres des années perdues” (qtd. in Poulin, 1988: 195) is taken directly from the primary source as La Grande Sauterelle finds it in the short story “The Sojourner”, although it would more appropriately refer to a contingent state rather than the essence of the character.

After meeting the renowned Canadian-American writer Saul Bellow, not so much as a transtextual reference than as a reference to a real-life person, the characters read aloud an excerpt from the Nobel Prize laureate’s novel *The Adventures of Augie March* (Poulin, 1988: 108). Similarly to the Galahad description, this quote is not from the original work but is instead a reproduction embedded in a third text. In this case, the mediator is the dictionary of proper names *Le Petit Robert des Noms Propres* to reinforce their presentiments regarding the good results of their quest: “Je suis une sorte de Colomb pour tous ceux qui sont à portée de la main et je crois fermement qu’on peut les rejoindre dans cette *terra incognita* immédiate qui s’étend devant chaque regard” (qtd. in Poulin, 1988: 111).

Although the adoption of the Arthurian myths in French occurred rather early through the Chrétien de Troyes, the mediated quotation of contemporary texts raises questions about how the English American culture imposes itself on other unprivileged ones. That is, the normalisation of the American narrative has been internalised to the point of using them not as alien cultural artefacts but as natural entities. This cultural imperialism finds a reflection in the novel as both protagonists belong to cultural identities that have been under attack by English-American colonialists since 1759 (Vandervoort, 2011: 316). The rediscovering of American Frenchness is also expressed by claiming the Kerouac for the Quebecois literature, a position that has found academic support (Melehy, 2012: 592–596).

The third instance of mediated transtextuality and one of the lengthiest of the novel is the so-called “Prière sioux pour le retour des bisons” below. This time, although it most likely was not taken from a reference book, might be at least a second-hand reference, quite probably even a third. The song is related to the *Ghost Dance*, which was a religious movement that originated in the late nineteenth century that spread among several Native American tribes (see Andersson, 2008). The first four verses correspond to a song recorded by the Bureau of Ethnology between 1892 and 1893, yet it is not a Sioux song but instead of the Arapaho series (Powell, 1896: 977). However, it may well be apocryphal since the same anthology neither mentions the following lines nor leaves evidence of another song of such extension and explicitly states that there is no other with a similar pessimistic undertone.

Moreover, the lyrics in French correspond literally to a previous text registered at least as early as 1962 (Federation Française de Cine-Clubs, 1962: 81). Therefore, the text in *Volkswagen Blues* refers to a French translation of an already extended English or Arapaho version, or a French translation extended afterwards³. If the description is accurate, it should have also been adopted by the Lakota at some point, adding a new intermediary. In any case, this extended version serves Pitsémine’s purposes better, as she intends to make a stance against the hegemonic colonial metanarrative to vindicate the Native American narratives.

PRIÈRE SIOUX POUR LE RETOUR DES BISONS (1889)

Père, aie pitié de nous ;
 Nous pleurons parce que nous avons soif,
 Tout est fini.
 Nous n’avons rien à manger ;
 Père, nous sommes misérables.
 Nous sommes très malheureux.

³ Interestingly, the song of the English translation (see Poulin, 2004) is not the well-established English version but a translation from French.

Le bison n'est plus. Ils ont tous disparu.
 Aie pitié de nous, Père ;
 Nous dansons comme tu le désires
 Puisque tu nous l'as ordonné.
 Nous dansons avec peine,
 Nous dansons longtemps.
 Aie pitié, Père, aide-nous ;
 Nous sommes près de toi dans les ténèbres ;
 Entends-nous et aide-nous,
 Chasse les hommes blancs,
 Ramène le bison,
 Nous sommes pauvres et faibles,
 Nous ne pouvons rien seuls ;
 Aide-nous à être ce que nous étions
 D'heureux chasseurs de bisons (Qtd. in Poulin, 1988: 128).

This prayer presents significant issues. Firstly, the misattribution of an Arapaho piece to the Sioux reveals a notorious grade of disregard for the individual identities of both, putting them into the same basket as if their identities were interchangeable. This case, although probably well-meant when the text was published, others Arapahos and Sioux together as just *Indians*. Secondly, the additional text is under suspicion as its Arapaho authorship remains to be proven. While this would have been understandable considering the time of the publication, making proud Native Americans adopt a Eurocentric view of themselves raises questions about the identity and self-awareness of the characters.

Pitsémine's incoherence is even more startling considering her attempts to deconstruct the White historiography are recurrent throughout the novel. Whenever Jack voices the Eurocentric narrative regurgitating the *commonly accepted facts* about American history and its heroes, La Grande Sauterelle opposes the oral recounts of the defeated to the version of the victors. This dialectic tension can be observed, for example, when she delivers her moving speech about the aftermath of the Battle of Washita River (Poulin, 1988: 207).

These inaccuracies vanish when addressing transmedial transtexts of arguably less important but European origin. Particularly, songs are frequently mentioned in the novel, and several are even partially quoted. Interestingly enough, popular music, far from the respectful awe prompted by classical music, engages the listener and may be linked to progressive movements (Marc, 2019: 3–4). This feature of popular music renders the participation of the listener crucial in *Volkswagen Blues* as the characters interact with the music to find a particular mood. For instance, and again being a second-hand intertext, the song “Il n'y a pas d'amour heureux” by George Brassens, which, in turn, is a musical adaption of a poem by Louis Aragon.

Rien n'est jamais acquis à l'homme.
 Ni sa force Ni sa faiblesse ni son cœur.
 Et quand il croit Ouvrir ses bras,
 son ombre est celle d'une croix (Qtd. in Poulin, 1988: 98).

This song adds a distinctive atmosphere to the chapter, even more since the protagonists have started another quest to find *la chanson la plus triste au monde*. This setting may influence the predisposition of the reader to extend the connotations of the lyrics beyond their boundaries, which could allow them to permeate the surrounding text. However, the interpreter may also transmit certain connotations as Brassens' songs are often social critiques (Marc, 2017: 10), but he can also recall the past to evoke nostalgic feelings (Marc, 2012).

The same applies to “Le Bateau Espagnol” by Léo Ferré, although this case differs from the precedent in the originality of the reference. Ferré is the original composer, and the text was always intended to be a song from the beginning. This song adds, nonetheless, another aspect to the previous, namely the concept of America linked to a sense of hope despite Ferré being known for his tragic tone (Marc, 2017: 9). The narrator reveals something mentally stimulating about Jack with the following words.

Qu'il est long le chemin d'Amérique
 Qu'il est long le chemin de l'amour
 Le bonheur, ça vient toujours après la peine
 T'en fais pas, mon amie, je reviendrai
 Puisque les voyages forment la jeunesse
 T'en fais pas, mon amie, je vieillirai (Qtd. in Poulin, 1988: 100).

This approach is interesting as it shows the American Dream from the French point of view. Being a tune of the years following the Second World War, it may well reproduce the same despair that urged the pioneers to set sail to

the Americas. However, the French lyrics subvert the homogeneity of the construct, turning it into a pluricultural and multilingual one. That is, the Anglo-Saxon hegemony over the American Dream disappears as other identities become empowered.

However, the text is not free of the internalised hegemonic metanarrative. This bias may well be the reason to counterweight to the French songs with American country tunes as if too much non-Anglo-Saxon influence would deamericanise the text. One of those songs is “Hobo Bill’s last ride” by Jimmie Rodgers. This song qualifies as a candidate for the saddest song in the world, which, to some extent, puts the American tunes on a level with the precedent French songs.

It was early in the morning when they raised the hobo’s head
The smile still lingered on his face but Hobo Bill was dead.
There was no mother’s longing to soothe his weary soul,
For he was just a railroad bum who died out in the cold (Qtd. in Poulin, 1988: 175–76).

The next song consists of the following verses of “No Roots In Rambling!” by Jerry Jeff Walker: “I’m now alone and I know I need to rumble”, “It’s the call from deep inside”, and “The blues will haunt me until I die” (qtd. in Poulin, 1988: 231). A musical interlude is used one more time to set the connotative background of this scene. In a certain sense, the inclusion of fragments of songs is synaesthetic, as they open a gap in the negotiation of meanings that the reader unconsciously tries to fill. Even without music, the passage potentially has a musical background.

The most extensive musical quote of a popular song corresponds to several fragments of “Le Temps des cerises” in Yves Montand’s version. It is noteworthy that, in contrast to previous French artists, Montand interprets songs composed by others (Marc, 2017: 2).

Quand nous chanterons le temps des cerises
Et gais rossignols et merles moqueurs
Seront tous en f’ê-te

Les belles auront la folie en tête
Et les amoureux du soleil au cœur

Mais il est bien court, le temps des cerises...

C’est de ce temps-là que je garde au cœur
Une plaie ouverte
Etdame fortune... ne pourra jamais
Fermer ma douleur (Qtd. in Poulin, 1988: 247).

Although the previous quotes leave their imprints on *Volkswagen Blues*, another summarises both the spirit of the novel and its hypertextual relationship with *On the Road*. It is a fragment from the preface of Kerouac’s novel, which, notably enough, Jack has underlined: “La route a remplacé l’ancien «trail» des pionniers de la marche vers l’Ouest; elle est le lien mystique qui rattache l’Américain à son continent, à ses compatriotes” (qtd. in Poulin, 1988: 258).

A curious case is a reference to the epitaph (Poulin, 1988: 184) that signals the Oregon Trail stage of the journey. The text is based on a real tombstone, although it is allusion rather than a quote since neither the wording nor the information is accurate. Indeed, the real Rachel Pattison died on 19 June 1849, aged 18, while her fictive counterpart passed away on 18 June when she was 19 (Find A Grave, n.d.). Nonetheless, the resemblance adds plausibility to the relationship to the point of making this case a probable misquotation. This license does not prevent the effect of the paratext, which adds a new dramatic dimension to the already moving epitaph.

Besides the misattributions already mentioned, there is a peculiar case. A graffito found under the sun visors of the minibus says “Die Sprache ist das Haus des Seins” (qtd. in Poulin, 1988: 85) without attribution, even though this is a literal quote from Martin Heidegger’s *Brief über den „Humanismus”* (Heidegger, 2000: 5). Does this qualify as plagiarism, or is it an innocent allusion? We could naively consider that the maxim has transcended its author to become an autonomous meme (see Dawkins, 1989: 192) in the collective imaginary and, thus, the quote would not constitute a deliberated misappropriation. However, it seems more plausible that a proper credit would have required a justification of either the characters’ proficiency in German or their degree of expertise in Heideggerian philosophy to recognise his words even in a foreign language. Be that as it may, what is certain is that it describes the *Volkswagen Blues* characters’ struggle to come to terms with their own identities through—or despite—the language. For Jack and La Grande Sauterelle, it is true: “In ihrer Behausung wohnt der Mensch” (Heidegger, 2000: 5).

Another brief yet unmistakable allusion is the physical description of a girl at the information desk of Scott’s Bluff by comparing her looks with those of Pippi Longstocking (Poulin 1988: 197). Whether it refers to Astrid Lindgren’s literary character, the book illustrations by Ingrid Vang Nyman, or its adaptation as a television series remains a mystery. Nonetheless, the reference to commonplaces of popular culture is evident.

The protagonist's pseudonym turns out to be a major instance of allusion. Jack is the name his brother used to call him in their childhood. This name, however, far from being an innocent choice, alludes to two characters from other texts, after whom the protagonist of this novel is shaped. On the one hand, it is a reference to the French explorer Jacques Cartier who inspires the Canadian stages of the journey. On the other hand, it refers to Jack Kerouac, who is not only the author of *On the Road* but also the alter-ego of Sal Paradise, its protagonist, even though neither Poulin is Kerouac nor Waterman is Paradise eventually (Ménard, 2017: 100). Additionally, Jack London is Jack's favourite author (Poulin, 1988: 234). This coincidence of the names has profound implications for the construction of Jack. Furthermore, it should be noted that *Waterman* is also a brand of fountain pens, which seem certainly appropriate for a writer.

Finally, regarding allusion, the case of names mentioned remains open. Let us consider an example of the book: "Maurice Richard, Ernest Hemingway, Jim Clark, Louis Riel, Burt Lancaster, Kit Carson, Le Vérendrye, Vincent Van Gogh, Davy Crockett..." (Poulin, 1988: 217). On the one hand, the mention of Ernest Hemingway is inseparable from his work, Burt Lancaster evokes sequences of the Golden Age of Hollywood, and Van Gogh brings impressionist images with yellow tones. On the other hand, Kit Carson, La Vérendrye, Vincent Van Gogh, Davy Crockett, Maurice Richard, Jim Clark, and Louis Riel are historical and sports figures. The implication is, thus, that those names do not stand for their texts but rather as cultural icons.

Paratextuality

Paratextuality makes its entrance at the very beginning, even before opening the book. Indeed, the front cover shows a plethora of signs aimed at the prospective reader. These signs can be divided into two different communicative levels. On the one hand, there is a linguistic level which, as in most covers, includes the title and the author's name. On the other hand, there is a more subtle non-linguistic level, which comprises signs such as the composition, illustrations, and colours.

The title already reveals one of the essential elements of the story both with the Volkswagen camper that transports the protagonists and the term blues evokes the landscapes of the electric blues that gained popularity in cities such as St Louis, Chicago, and Detroit in the 1950s (DiMartino, 2016: 75). Furthermore, if considered independently as an autonomous text, it can be viewed as an allusion to the song already mentioned in the introduction. The cover picture of the Québec/Amérique first edition shows the Chimney Rock, a geological formation located on the Rocky Mountain Foothills in Nebraska, and its reflection on still water. This landmark marks a stage of the Oregon Trail as the pioneers used it as a visual reference that is of importance later in the story. The Picollec edition introduces a crucial element into the ensemble, namely, the road. It shows a blue-tinted picture of a straight road disappearing into the background, where the Rocky Mountains protrude breaking the horizon. The Actes Sud edition provides more hints as it shows a bright blue sky contrasting with the blurred orange of a wagon in the bottom third speeding up through the level crossing. The three pictures share a common trait as all evoke the idea of travel to the West through the American landscapes. The landmarks signalling their way to the pioneers, the straightness of the American roads, and the freight wagon of the hobo incarnate the American longing for the West.

The novel includes several illustrations that provide context to the story even before this starts. Together with the cover, there is a map of the United States and Canada (Poulin, 1988: 7) already on the page following the copyright notice. The path the characters follow is drawn on this map with the names and locations of relevant points. The next illustration appears in the body in the shape of a postcard (Poulin, 1988: 12). On the right side, there is a stamp, as well as Jack's address. On the left side, there is a text in old-fashioned calligraphy. Again, if the illustration is considered an autonomous text, a new transtextuality within the transtextuality appears, as the writing is an intertext from *La Grande Aventure de Jacques Cartier* by Joseph-Camille Pouliot, which is fully referenced in the caption. Once again, it is an indirect reference as the book shows a copy of the original manuscript (see Pouliot, 1934: 4). This image offers context on multiple levels. First, it shows the element that triggers Jack's lust for travelling. Second, it lets the reader know the aspect of the text that will be referenced in the following pages quite often. Nonetheless, it is the stamp that conveys the most valuable information. Canada Post issued this kind of stamp between the years 1962 and 1964 (see Colnect, n.d.). Therefore, a temporal frame can be safely established around this postcard. Moreover, this picture marks the start of the first stage of the journey in francophone Canada.

The next illustration portrays the Far West outlaw Jesse James (Poulin, 1988: 144), and, as seems to be the norm in *Volkswagen Blues*, is the reproduction of an indirect source. The novel does not reproduce the original picture, but the copy of *Histoire du Far-West* by Rieuepeyrou. Once again, the caption includes the full reference to the source, which is, to be precise, the book that Le Grande Sauterelle is reading at that very moment. Furthermore, it is opened on the page relating the story of Jesse James and his brother Frank, presumably the same page from which this transtext was borrowed. The passage is laden with symbolism as this is the first time that a book borrowed by Pitsémine suffers damage, representing a turning point in the middle of the story that marks the moment in which Jack overcomes his deep-sea diver's complex.

Consequently, the inclusion of this picture stresses not only the importance of Jesse James or his image but of *Histoire du Far-West*. The significance of the book does not only emanate from being this particular book but from being

a book, a borrowed book. As previously mentioned, no book before had been mistreated under Pitsémine's care whatsoever. Nonetheless, it is of great significance that it happens with a book about the Far West. This particularity, thus, also signals a geographical turning point as the characters are not in the East anymore. As on many occasions in this novel, plot and location are closely akin.

A few pages later, a photography of a picturesque geological formation accompanies the text (Poulin, 1988: 188). It is the same Chimney Rock that features on the cover in the original edition. The picture has no caption and, hence, it may well be an original work for the novel or a non-credited borrow. The function of the paratext resembles that of the picture of Jesse James, establishing a landmark in the narration. If the picture of the book marks a point in the psychological progress of the character, the Chimney does likewise with the geographical route. In other words, this picture indicates the start of the Rockies, the last obstacle before reaching the West. The following picture (Poulin 1988: 199) also relates to the outskirts of the Rockies as it represents a diagram of a *prairie schooner*, the traditional wagon of the pioneers. The caption attributes it to O'Neill, who is the first author of several volumes of the collection *Le Far West*. Nonetheless, *The Pioneers* is by Huston and the Editors of Time-Life Books. To add more confusion as to the origin of this image, its caption refers the reader to the library of the Université Laval.

The final image is a photograph by Diana Church of a group of people (Poulin, 1988: 265). They are sitting around a table at the Café Trieste in San Francisco in 1977, which was published in the anthology *Beat Angels* by Arthur and Kit Knight. The picture is remarkable, as the guests depicted are members of the Beat Generation such as Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Minette and Peter LeBlanc, Allen Ginsberg, Harold Norse, Jack Hirschmann, and Bob Kaufman. The transtextual relation of this photo with the texts is set through the use of the picture as a plot device. An unidentified man in the picture is allegedly Théo. The figure of Théo, however, makes possible the alienation of the discourse from the French-Canadian narrative creating an oblique memory (Thibeault, 2012: 18).

The reader can see the realistic representation of non-fictional characters, one of whom is employed to embody one of the fictional characters. The intermingling of reality and fiction establishes a believable bond between Théo and the Beat Generation since the anonymous person, even if he is not Théo, could have been the character. In this case, the paratext not only contextualises the text but also dilutes the borders between reality and fiction.

The chapter titles are probably the most apparent paratext both due to the difficulty of overlooking them and their descriptive essence of the following pages. Even if they are not as prolix as the lengthy paragraphs employed to reveal any relevant detail of the story, they usually provide enough context to prepare the reader's expectations. Consequently, the first chapter title is "Jacques Cartier", so the reader knows that the following text will revolve around this explorer. However, not every title is like in the first chapter. There may be falsely explicit paratexts that may intentionally mislead the reader, and there may be others that are initially vague but become unambiguous if contextualised by the reader's prior experiences.

Nonetheless, the text may not meet the expectations created, as in the second chapter, "The legend of Eldorado". The topic of Eldorado is indeed prominent in this chapter, yet probably not in the way the readers would anticipate according to their horizon of expectations (see Jauß, 1970: 173–77). The chapter addresses the legend of Eldorado only marginally, just to the extent that the real topic permits. The latent topic is *The Golden Dream: Seekers of El Dorado* by Walter Chapman, an alias the Science Fiction writer Robert Silverberg used for some non-fiction works. An example of the opposite occurs in chapter 29, "Les fantômes de San Francisco". In this case, the combination of previous readings and the current story so far leaves a little margin to the reader to avoid predicting that the chapter will address the traces of Kerouac that haunt the city, as his legacy does in the Quebecoise literature (Adams, 2010: 176).

Metatextuality

Metatextuality probably is the most widespread form of transtextuality in *Volkswagen Blues*. It ranges from simple mentions to rather insightful comments about the contents of a particular work. Regarding the first type, the text mentions explicitly *La Grande Aventure de Jacques Cartier* (Poulin, 1988: 22), *La pénétration du continent américain par les Canadiens français* (43), *The Golden Dream: Seekers of El Dorado* (14, 30), *Histoire du Far West* (144), *Encyclopédie de la jeunesse* (99), and *Le Petit Robert des noms propres* (110, 214, 215). Other works referenced are *Hotel New Hampshire* by John Irving, (Poulin, 1988: 41), *The Fragile Lights of Earth* by Gabrielle Roy (44), *Toronto During the French Regime: A History of the Toronto Region from Brule to Simcoe, 1615-1793* by Percy J. Robinson (70), *The Indians of Canada* by Diamond Jenness (84), *On the Road* by Jack Kerouac (74), *The Adventures of Augie March* and *Humboldt's Gift* by Saul Bellow (108), *Explorers of the Mississippi* by Timothy Severin (123), *The Valley of the Moon* by Jack London (234), *A Moveable Feast* by Ernest Hemingway (264), *Treasure Island* by Robert Louis Stevenson (268), and *The Electric Kool-Aid Test* by Tom Wolfe (269). To these extensive works, two short stories should be added, "The Sojourner" by Carson McCullers (195) and "Big Two-Hearted River" by Ernest Hemingway (211), and poetic anthologies such as *Howl and Other Poems* by Allen Ginsberg (269) and *Clean Asshole Poems* by Peter Orlovsky (269). Other paper media are also present as, for instance, the *Plan de Westport* drawn by Nicolas Point (139), or periodic publications such as *Superman* (17), *The Examiner* (128, 139) or *The Bay Guardian* (262).

Metatextuality is not limited to explicit mentions. It can also take place without naming the text. This modality can be found regarding Jack's favourite authors (Poulin, 1988: 42). This list comprises American writers, such as Ernest Hemingway, J.D. Salinger, or Richard Brautigan, as well as French-Canadian ones like Gabrielle Roy and Rejéan Ducharme, and even the French Boris Vian. These mentions are not a mere exercise of name-dropping since the readers fill the gaps as they actualise the meanings through two metonymical levels. First, there is a substitution of the author's work for the author himself. The second level is a synecdoche hidden under the first layer where the author's places the part for the whole. Consequently, this short yet pregnant passage is indeed a case of metatextuality. However, more specific instances are planted throughout the book.

Contrariwise, the mention of Faulkner and Twain (Poulin, 1988: 118) has fundamental differences as the reference is to the authors themselves, not as a relay to address their work. In the previous case, Jack has a weakness for those writers due to their writing. In this case, the Mississippi does not embrace the writers for their work, but it is instead the authors who choose the river to set their stories along its banks, be it in the fictive Yoknapatawpha County or St Petersburg, Missouri. Therefore, the classification of this reference as transtextual is, at least, dubious.

The third case concerning authors is even more peculiar. It refers to the author by himself but, at the same time, to his work. After travelling for a while with the vagabond, Jack sums up some recounts of the bum. He claims he has lived in Paris on rue du Cardinal-Lemoine, talks about Cuba and Key West with familiarity, and even says he has had a house in Ketchum, Idaho. Jack concludes that the man is delusional and that he believes himself to be Hemingway (Poulin, 1988: 237). Nonetheless, all this information comes from a literary source, namely a biographical account of Hemingway's life, most probably the aforementioned autobiography *A Moveable Feast*, which is also the inspiration for the characters in *Volkswagen Blues* to rename City Lights to Shakespeare and Company.

Transtextuality, even if not omnipresent as the form above, is also productive in *Volkswagen Blues*, which often portrays musical or visual works. It covers a broad spectrum from brief mentions such as the song "Kentucky Waltz" by Billy Munroe (Poulin, 1988: 279) or the painting *The Last Supper* by Leonardo da Vinci (Poulin, 1988: 267) to extensive descriptions. Some of those instances are predicted by the paratext, as seen above. The title of the third chapter is entirely accurate as "A phone call from Sam Peckinpah" describes precisely what Jack awaits in the text. As it could not be otherwise, the chapter addresses the Seventh Art, particularly explaining Jack's predilection for the director. The narrator discusses it in the following terms.

Pour les films d'action, Sam Peckinpah était le cinéaste qu'il préférait. Il avait beaucoup aimé *Straw Dogs*. Dès les premières images, il avait été captivé, l'action était devenue de plus en plus rapide et il avait été emporté par le rythme du film jusqu'au moment où le mot FIN était apparu en grosses lettres sur l'écran. Il était sorti du cinéma, essoufflé et fatigué comme s'il avait couru le mille en moins de quatre minutes. Depuis ce jour, il entretenait l'espoir insensé que le vieux Peckinpah allait l'appeler pour lui dire qu'il avait lu son dernier roman et qu'il voulait en faire un film (Poulin, 1988: 38).

The same occurs in the tenth chapter, entitled "Al Capone, Auguste Renoir, The Nobel Prize". The gangster is synecdochical, while the Nobel Prize is metonymical and refers to the laureate Saul Bellow. Renoir is also metonymical, but more conventionally, as it uses the author to name the work. First, Jack recalls that Théo "il a parlé d'une peinture de Renoir [...] une femme avec un chapeau rouge et beaucoup de fleurs" (Poulin, 1988: 104). When Jack eventually sees the picture with his own eyes, the narrator describes with great detail what Jack sees.

C'était une jeune femme assise à une terrasse en compagnie d'une petite fille. Le tableau était intitulé *On the Terrace*, 1881. Derrière la femme, il y avait une balustrade de fer envahie par des arbustes fleuris et puis une rangée d'arbres à travers laquelle on apercevait une rivière, des gens en barque et, plus loin, des maisons et des collines. La petite fille portait une robe blanche et un chapeau à fleurs, et ses mains étaient posées sur le rebord d'un panier de fruits qui était placé sur la table. La femme semblait très jeune; elle avait une robe noire et un chapeau d'un rouge incroyablement vif; l'expression de son visage avait une douceur infinie et cette douceur se confondait avec la lumière qui imprégnait l'ensemble du tableau (Poulin, 1988: 105-6).

The description of the Detroit Industry Murals by Diego Rivera is even more profuse as the medium requires additional linguistic translation. Indeed, if Renoir's *Two Sisters* is an oil-on-canvas limited by its frame, Rivera's mural has no boundaries. Therefore, the task requires some degree of spatial location, which is achieved by adapting the narration to the physical demands of the source.

La salle mesurait près de dix mètres de hauteur et elle était éclairée par la lumière naturelle qui venait du plafond en verre. L'œuvre de Rivera couvrait les quatre murs de la pièce. Elle représentait, en des tons où dominaient le vert pâle, le jaune pâle et surtout le gris, de gigantesques machines industrielles autour desquelles s'affairaient des ouvriers aux visages sans expression.

Les machines [...] étaient celles de l'industrie de l'automobile. Sur le mur du côté nord, des ouvriers fabriquaient des moteurs: ils préparaient la fonte, moulaient des blocs-cylindres et actionnaient deux énormes appareils servant à percer des ouvertures pour les pistons et les valves. Sur le mur du sud, les ouvriers travaillaient à une chaîne d'assemblage, à gauche de laquelle se trouvait un convoyeur et, à droite, une presse géante qui moulait des pièces de carrosserie.

Tous les visages étaient immuablement sérieux, presque solennels, et cette gravité ajoutait à l'impression d'austérité qui se dégageait des couleurs ternes. L'ensemble était lourd, triste et accablant.

[...] en plein milieu de la murale, sur le mur du côté sud, une petite tache rouge vif [...] une automobile sortant la chaîne d'assemblage (Poulin, 1988: 93).

The detail of this fragment is remarkable, considering that it turns around the cultural premises of *On the Road*. While Kerouac's novel stresses the otherness of the Mexicans, *Volkswagen Blues* appeals to the common grounds. Poulin turns the work of Diego Rivera, a Mexican artist, into the symbol of Detroit. Not only that, but he also depicts the mural as the incarnation of the automotive industry, almost the very soul and heart of America. In this sense, *Volkswagen Blues* negates the modern concept of cultural appropriation based on the Self/Other dichotomy and instead suggests the possibility of cohabitation of cultures and identities, even though not always exempt from tensions (Vautier, 1999: 25).

This necessity of adapting the text to convey the properties of a source of very different nature may be more clearly observed in the case of the music. For instance, the quote of "Hobo Bill's Last Ride" is wrapped between a summary of the lyrics—which would not differ from what has already been said about the metatextuality of other literary works—and a brief comment on the musical features of the song: "Avec les sifflements nostalgiques de la locomotive et la voix nasillarde de Jimmie Rodgers, la chanson était digne de figurer au *Concours de la chanson la plus triste au monde*" (Poulin, 1988: 176).

The more influential metatexts of *Volkswagen Blues*, however, are Kerouac's *On the Road* and *The Oregon Trail Revisited* by Gregory Franzwa. These two works permeate the story even more since the protagonists discover that a copy of each of the volumes was found among Théo's belonging when he was arrested in Toronto.

Other transtextualities

On the Road is the main hypotext that underlies *Volkswagen Blues* following the guidelines shaped by Kerouac's preface quoted by Poulin. Both novels have writers as protagonists, and both go on the road under the pressure of writer's block. However, the parallelisms grasp beyond the thematic frontiers to reach the characters. Furthermore, the connection between the characters of both texts surpasses the external features to show that the figures of *Volkswagen Blues* resemble those of *On the Road*. Jack is the not-quite-cool traveller with fantasies of idealised cowboys (Skinazi, 2010: 44), just as Sal Paradise indulges himself in "reading books about the pioneers and savouring names like Platte and Cimarron" (Kerouac, 1976: 10). Nonetheless, Jack expands Sal's pantheon of heroes with French Canadian figures, whose virtues Théo embodies for Jack.

There is no necessity to embark on a session of speculative psychoanalysis as it could easily lead to the most peculiar conclusions. For example, we could entertain the thought that the autobiographical nature of the novel reveals the author's incapacity to assimilate the American Dream due to his French-Canadian origins playing a major role both in his problems and his character's (Miraglia, 1993: 149–50). Speculations aside, there is enough textual evidence to establish parallels without esoteric exegeses of authorial intentions.

Théo and Moriarty/Cassady also have a certain parallelism, although Théo, rather than the reinterpretation of a character of *On the Road*, is the inexistent character of Kerouac's novel that could have been. Théo was member of the inner circle of the Beat Generation at some point in his life. The picture mentioned in the account of relevant paratexts shows him among prominent members of the group, and, consequently, according to the internal logic of the story, he could have been a real person in Kerouac's life who, for some reason, he forgot to mention. However, this same logic prevents a shared diegetic space between *On the Road* and *Volkswagen Blues*, as the stamp of the postcard establishes an insurmountable temporal gap between both stories.

Kerouac's presence in *Volkswagen Blues* becomes even more explicit after the arrival in San Francisco. There, the presence of the Beat author is still noticeable. He is *the ghost of San Francisco* mentioned above, where "le nom de North Beach évoquait pour lui des souvenirs liés aux beatniks et à Jack Kerouac" (Poulin, 1988: 258) and, at the sight of the park called Washington Square, somebody should remark that "Kerouac venait souvent par ici" (Poulin, 1988: 259). North Beach is where they find the City Lights Bookstore, owned by the Beat poet Ferlinghetti that serves as a link between the protagonists and Théo, but also between them and Kerouac. Indeed, this book shop soon became a meeting point not only for regular readers and students but also for hipsters and bohemians of the Beat Generation, who could socialise there until the early hours (Ménard, 2017: 103).

The second most obvious influence is *The Oregon Trail Revisited* by Gregory M. Franzwa, a historical travel guide resembling *The Oregon Trail* by the journalist and pioneer Francis Parkman published in 1847. Franzwa's book becomes the guide of Jack and Pitsémine from Kansas City onwards. Concretely, chapter 19, "Mourir avec ses rêves" is nothing else but the reading of the book, and the insertion of his words, to let the reader know about the travel of the pioneers of the nineteenth century who went to the Wild West (Miraglia, 1993: 56).

From this point until the end of the Oregon Trail, the travel guide defines the spatial frame upon which *Volkswagen Blues* constructs the story. Beyond the almost one-to-one correspondence between both routes, *The Oregon Trail Revisited* shows its profound influence on the plot as the stress on particular locations in the guide determines the

course of the events in *Volkswagen Blues* to a great extent. Indeed, the characters observe the guide not as an inspiration but as a prescriptive code, which they are compelled to follow (Hyman, 1999: 16).

Finally, architextuality appears in *Volkswagen Blues* on its very cover, which claims the book to be a novel (*roman*), and the content does not disprove this statement. Frye (1971: 247), for instance, claims that genre comes from the relationship between the author and the reader, suggesting that it is determined by how this relationship is ideally presented. Poulin's book is indeed a long narrative text of fiction that conforms to the expectations of the reader. However, this fulfilment of the expectations raises the question of the extent to which the reader will credit the sources as real, which may affect the reception.

Conclusion

The use of transtextuality determines the representation of the literary journey in *Volkswagen Blues*. By using this device, the novel achieves diverse effects on the story and its impact on the reader. The reference to other texts serves to contextualise the story, offering a historical background of the characters. The result exposes that they are crossing America with a defined French-Canadian identity. America, in turn, corresponds by showing them and the reader its French ancestry. The journey, therefore, is not a single journey in isolation, but it can be framed within a tradition that goes back to the arrival of Jacques Cartier to the New World shores.

However, this transtextuality qualifies the historical narratives, which are predominantly Eurocentric. The deconstruction of the accounts by presenting the point of view of the Other through Pitsémine challenges the hegemonic metanarrative; it establishes a new frame to understand, first, the position of the protagonists as members of the French-Canadian community, and, eventually, the very meaning of their *américanité*. While this calls into question the Anglo-Saxon narrative, it does it nonetheless within a Eurocentric framework, othering less privileged identities often while attempting to make them visible. Pitsémine impersonates the intersection of discriminated identities and challenges the hegemonic metanarratives, particularly their expression as a patronising French-Canadian view of the First Nations.

The transtexts are also employed as a textual marker, either to separate different segments of the story summarising the subsequent developments. This marking is done canonically, with chapters and titles but also, in a more unconventional manner, with illustrations. The latter, in turn, are usually intertextual references. These pictures typically serve as milestones both of the protagonists' psychological development and the geographical progress of the journey. This framing function can even surpass the diegesis to mark a point in the past as, for instance, the stamp considered above does. The markers, however, are predominantly taken from the hegemonic metanarrative of the privileged groups in the United States. The French-Canadian story is constructed based on the Anglo-Saxon American history.

Transtextuality also provides a hypotextual structure to support the hypertext. This underpinning is precisely the role that *On the Road* and *The Oregon Trail Revisited* play in *Volkswagen Blues* as the formers are the mould in which the latter is cast. Kerouac's novel, on the one hand, offers the model for the genre and the characters. On the other hand, Franzwa's guide draws the path that Poulin's characters follow, determines the setting, and, to the extent that it also facilitates a historical background of the places, inspires many of the topics addressed. The treatment given to both sources is, nonetheless, disparate. While Poulin subverts Kerouac's novel, deconstructing its discourse to claim the French-Canadian heritage, his approach to other texts such as travel guides, is undoubtedly naiver. *Volkswagen Blues* shows its internalisation of the world-hegemonic American metanarrative accepting those *factual* readings at their face value.

In summary, *Volkswagen Blues* intentionally exploits intertexts as a means to construct an overarching inclusive American metanarrative while, at the same time, is itself exploited by narratives internalised by the author to permeate the novel through intertexts. The final result, like the history of America, is an organic collage of manifold pieces both consciously lied and surreptitiously infiltrated.

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