Translating literary heterolingualism: *Hijo de hombre*'s French variations

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Could the Aristotelian notion of ethos help improve our understanding of both literary heterolingualism and its afterlife in translation? This paper proposes a first investigation into this question through an analysis of the three French versions of the novel Hijo de Hombre by the Paraguayan Augusto Roa Bastos (1917-2005). The original's heterolingualism will be seen not only as a set of linguistic forms, but also as a discursive strategy. The complex stratification of source and target texts is shown to be a striking illustration of Roa Bastos's "poetics of variation". The re-enunciation by each translator's narrator negotiates the relation to alterity from a new specific viewpoint.

Keywords: Augusto Roa Bastos, multilingualism, ethos, "poética de las variaciones", re-enunciation, Postcolonial Studies

Introduction

Ethics is a longstanding issue in literary translation studies. In a lecture given in 1813, Schleiermacher opposed two kinds of translation, distinguished by their orientation: translation can either bring the target reader to the source text, or bring the source text to the target reader, by making it look familiar (Schleiermacher 1999). Nowadays, postcolonial theories of literary translation discredit domesticating ethnocentric translation and promote the kind of foreignizing translation that forces the target language to welcome the source text. Postcolonial studies have also introduced a new paradigm in translation theory for at least two reasons. First, as Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi put it in their introduction to the collective volume *Postcolonial Translation; Theory and Practice,* with the postcolonial consciousness "the close relationship between colonization and translation has come under scrutiny" (Bassnet and Trivedi 1999: 5). Second, the focus on multilingual texts, characteristic of the "postcolonial scenography" (Moura 1999: 129), has blown apart the traditional dichotomy of source text versus target text, as well as many other structural notions such as fidelity and equivalence. Samia Mehrez puts it as follows:

> The postcolonial texts, frequently referred to as "hybrid" or "métissés" because of the culturo-linguistic layering which exists within them, have

succeeded in forging a new language that defies the very notion of a "for-eign" text that can be readily translatable into another language. With this literature we can no longer merely concern ourselves with conventional notions of linguistic equivalence, or ideas of loss and gain which have long been a consideration in translation theory. For these texts written by postcolonial bilingual subjects create a language "in between" and there-fore come to occupy a space "in between". (Mehrez 1992: 121)

In other words, the time has come to elaborate new models for translation. It seems self-evident that such a new start implies a continual interplay between theoretical models and practical case studies.

Our proposal consists in using the Aristotelian notion of *ethos* in order to describe the way literary heterolingualism builds an image of the enunciator and to characterize strategies of translation. Translation is thus conceived as an act of re-enunciation within which the voice of a new enunciator as to be taken into account. This will be achieved through the empirical study of the Paraguayan novelist Augusto Roa Bastos's novel *Hijo de Hombre* and its three French translations. We shall first describe the poetics of heterolingualism (Grutman 1997) that characterizes the novel, raising specific problems for translation. We shall then present each translation strategy. Finally, we analyze the way Roa Bastos has integrated these translations into his creative project. His "poética de las variaciones" (Roa Bastos 1985) will allow us to sketch a new model of translation.

Hijo de hombre, a literary attempt to account for a diglossic situation

The plot

Hijo de hombre was first published in 1960 in Buenos Aires. It is the first part of a trilogy, later completed with *Yo, el Supremo* and *El Fiscal*. *Hijo de hombre* recreates Paraguay's history from the dictatorship of José Gaspar de Francia in the early nineteenth century through the Chaco war. The story focuses on two villages, Itape and Sapukai, and on several protagonists with extreme symbolic density. The re-reading of the Chaco war as a popular revolt involves a fragmented form that explodes the hegemonic discourse of the mainstream historiography.

The sociolinguistic context

Reflection on the narrative form of *Hijo de hombre* is inextricably linked to the question of language. Paraguay is the only officially bilingual country in Latin America. Nonetheless, the two languages have a very complicated diglossic relationship. Whereas Spanish dominates most of the writing, Guaraní is commonly spoken by most of the population and is the main

language in rural areas. This situation of linguistic contact has produced a third code, "jopará" (mixing), a Guaraní with significant vocabulary borrowing from Spanish (De Canses 1987; Melia 1969). Roa Bastos has written numerous articles about the need for recognition of Guaraní as a language of culture (Roa Bastos 1967, 1978). His own fictional work attempts to integrate the Guarani "absent text" (Roa Bastos 1991) into Spanish writing. In this respect, *Hijo de Hombre* plays a major role (Courthès & Lagarde 2001), since its heterogeneity figures the complex linguistic situation of his country. In a note written in Toulouse in 1982 and appearing as an introduction to later editions of his novel, Roa Bastos explains:

> *Hijo de hombre*, la primera novela de la trilogía mencionada, me permitió precisamente profundizar esta experiencia de búsqueda en el intento de lograr la fusión o imbricación de los dos hemisferios lingüísticos de la cultura paraguaya en la expresión de la lengua literaria de sus narradores y poetas; dos universos lingüísticos de tan diferente estructura y functionalidad. (Roa Bastos 1982: 17)

Textual strategy

To give a glimpse of Roa Bastos's heterolingual poetics, we shall comment on the first paragraph of the novel. This incipit has a major pragmatic function, since it establishes the pact with the reader. As such, it is a crucial standpoint for observing the author's strategy:

> Hueso y piel, doblado hacia la tierra, solía vagar por el pueblo en el sopor de las siestas calcinadas por el viento norte. Han pasado muchos años, pero de eso me acuerdo. Brotaba en cualquier parte, de alguna esquina, de algún corredor en sombras. A veces se recostaba contra un mojinete hasta no ser sino una mancha más sobre la agrietada pared de adobe. El candelazo de la resolana lo despegaba de nuevo. Echaba a andar tantaleando el camino con su bastón de tacuara, los ojos muertos, parchados por las telitas de las cataractas, los andrajos de aó-poí sobre el ya visible esqueleto, no más alto que une chico.

> -- ¡Guá, Macario!

> Dejábamos dormir los tropos de arasá junto al hoyo y lo mirábamos pasar como si ese viejecito achicharrado, hijo de uno de los esclavos del dictador Francia, surgiera ante nosotros, cada vez, como una aparición del pasado.

> Algunos lo seguían procurando alborotarlo. Pero él avanzaba lentamente sin oírlos, moviéndose sobre aquellas delgadas patas de benteveo.

> -- ¡Guá, Macario Pitogüe!
>
> Los mellizos Goiburú corrían tras él tirándole puñados de tierra que apa-gaban un instante la diminuta figura.
>
> -- ¡Bicho feo..., feo..., feo!
>
> -- *¡Karaí tuyá colí..., güililí!...* (Roa Bastos 1960: 11).

Most of the Guaraní lexicon refers to Paraguayan realities, such as

– Flora: "tacuara" designates a kind of bamboo with a big trunk that grows in Paraguay. "Arasá" is a guava tree, named in Spanish "guay-abo".
– Fauna: "Pitogüe", the Great Kiskadee, is one of the most common birds in Paraguay. Its name is onomatopoeic of its call. The Spanish term occurs in the text the previous line: "benteveo".
– Clothes: "aó-poí " is the traditional hand-embroidered Paraguayan shirt.
– We also find two Guaraní idiophones and interjections: "Guá" ex-presses fear or surprise, "güililí" is a mockery.
– A specific lexical item appears in the last line: "Karaí" originally designated a person with magical or spiritual powers. It meant some-thing like "the biggest leader". During the colonial time, the word lost some of its signification and was used to address the Conquistadores. It became a local equivalent for the Spanish "Don" or "Señor".

In a very enlightening article, Bareiro Saguier (1994) analyzes Roa Bastos's linguistic strategy as follows:

1. First, Roa Bastos smoothes out the disruption produced by the insertion of Guaraní terms by incorporating their explanation within the text, without rupture.
2. Second, the author moulds the Spanish sentence in the syntactic frame of the Guaraní language, respecting its agglutinative and affective struc-ture and avoiding the rational links specific to the European languages
3. Finally, the use made of diminutives, interjections, puns and loan translations conveys a deep feeling of oral language.

These three strategies are perceptible in our passage. Together, they make it possible to go beyond code-switching, traditionally described as an asymmetrical relation between an "embedded language" and a "matrix language" (Myers-Scotton 1995). In addition to the syntagmatic insertion of L2 elements conforming to the traditional matrix-frame model, Roa Bastos

plays on the paradigmatic stratification to alter L1 from inside, letting L2 be heard beneath L1's surface.

However accurate this linguistic description might be, it does not satisfactorily account for what is at stake in literary heterolingualism. Literary heterolingualism is not a mere set of linguistic forms but a discursive negotiation with alterity. It is the result of a process of differentiation through which both the self and its other come into being. As such, it requires not a static but a dynamic description in terms of strategy. When code-switching from Spanish to Guarani, especially the way he chooses to do so, *Hijo de Hombre's* narrator positions himself with respect to other discourses. Whereas direct speech tends to identify the foreign tongue with someone else's voice, the rest of the narration shows a close intimacy with words and syntactic patterns completely integrated within the text. On the one hand, the narrator seems to reassert the boundaries of his own discourse while on the other hand he shows great permeability to the other and the foreign tongue. This uncertainty, frequent in postcolonial writing, may be identified as Bhabha's "hybridity": that "'third space' which enables other positions to emerge" (Bhabha 1990: 211). But in this precise case the fuzziness of the discourses' boundaries is an indication of the fact that the narrator is not reliable, a foretaste of his assertion on the next page: "Mi testimonio no sirve más que a medias". Miguel Vera, the homodiegetic narrator of this first chapter, is a traitor who betrayed the very heroes whose life (and death) he is narrating, as the reader happens to discover in VI, 2. The way languages are put into contact in the text has something to say about the narrator's figure.

At this point we may borrow from Aristotle the notion of *ethos*. In Aristotle's art of persuasion, the term *ethos* designates the image of self built by the orator in order to exert an influence on the audience. As explained by Ruth Amossy:

> This is accomplished not only by what the orator says about his or her own person (it is often not good to talk about oneself) but through the way he or she says it; through the style of speaking. In other words, ethos is built on the level of enunciation process as well as on that of the utterance. (Amossy 2001: 8)

How can translation handle this tie-in between heterolingualism and the construction of *ethos*? Roa Bastos's novel, acclaimed worldwide, has been translated into several European languages. The French adventure has been particularly rich and complex.

The three French translations

2.1 Jean-François Reille, Le Feu et la Lèpre, Gallimard, Paris, 1968, p.13.

La peau et les os. Dans l'assoupissement des après-midi calcinés par le vent du nord, on le voyait, courbé vers la terre, errer à travers les rues. Bien des années ont passé, mais je me le rappelle. Parfois il se reposait contre une borne et alors, collé au mur lézardé, ce n'était plus qu'une tache parmi les autres. Le flamboiement de la canicule l'en décollait. Tâtant le sol du bout de son bâton, il se remettait en marche, avec ses yeux morts voilés par la cataracte. On distinguait déjà le squelette sous ses haillons. Il n'était pas plus grand qu'un enfant.

-- Hé! Macario!

Nous laissions s'endormir nos toupies de bois pour regarder passer ce petit vieillard rabougri qui était le fils d'un esclave du dictateur Francia, comme s'il s'agissait d'un être d'un autre âge.

Il y en avait qui le suivaient pour essayer de le mettre en colère. Mais il continuait à avancer, sans avoir l'air de les entendre et avec la même lenteur, sur ses petites pattes d'oiseau, comme le petit chanteur des bois que nous appelons *pitogüé*.

-- Hé! Macario *Pitogüé*!

Les jumeaux Goïburu lui couraient après en lui jetant des poignées de poussière derrière lesquelles s'estompait un moment la grêle silhouette.

-- Hé! Vilaine bête!

-- Vieux monsieur déplumé...mé...mé...mé!

The title of this first French translation, *Le Feu et la Lèpre* (*Fire and Leprosy*), is very far from the original (*Son of Man*). Far from being anecdotic, this first discrepancy is revealing of the entire translation strategy, characterized by complete deafness to the source text. The first sentence, divided into two, does not respect the rhythm of the original. Most of the Paraguayan realia in the source text have vanished, together with the Guarani terms that named them. "Tacuara", "arasá", "aó-poí ", "Guá", and "*güililí*" are quite simply omitted. The Guaraní terms in the dialogue are translated into French equivalents and nothing indicates the original code-switching. The only remaining Guaraní word is "*pitogüé*". The use of italics isolates the foreign word instead of integrating it into the rest of the text. The term is introduced by a relative clause in which we find a strange first-person pronoun "we": "as the little wood singer we call *pitogüe*". By employing the first-person pronoun, the translator betrays a desire to belong to the author's group, at the very moment he shows his complete misunderstanding of the culture and creative project of the author.

Using Lawrence Venuti's terminology, we can say that this translation is both "transparent" and "domesticating". It is transparent because it gives

the reader the feeling of reading a text directly written in the target culture. It is domesticating because the reader confronts a text where cultural and linguistic particularities have been systematically erased.

2.2.. Iris Gimenez, Fils d'Homme, Belfond, Paris, 1982, p.25.

> La peau et les os, arqué vers la terre, il errait d'ordinaire à travers le village dans la torpeur des siestes calcinées par le vent du nord. Bien des années ont passé, mais de cela je me souviens. Il jaillissait à tout bout de champ, d'un coin de rue, d'une galerie noyée d'ombres. Parfois il s'adossait à un enclos à n'en devenir qu'une tache de plus sur le torchis du mur lézardé. L'embrasement de la canicule l'en détachait à nouveau. Il repartait, tâtonnant sur le chemin de son bâton de bambou, les yeux morts, scellés par le voile des cataractes, les haillons d'*ao-poi* posés sur le squelette déjà apparent, pas plus grand qu'un enfant.

> -- Hou, Macario!

> Nous laissions tourner les toupies de goyavier près du trou et nous le regardions passer comme si, chaque fois, ce petit vieux racorni, fils de l'un des esclaves du dictateur Francia, eût surgi devant nous comme une apparition du passé.

> Quelques uns le suivaient, s'efforçant de l'agacer. Mais lui avançait lentement sans les entendre, se déplaçant sur ces pattes grêles d'oiseau pitoguë!

> -- Hou, Macario Pitoguë!

> Les jumeaux Goiburu lui couraient après en lui jetant des poignées de terre qui estompaient un instant la silhouette minuscule.

> -- Pitoguë, pistolet... laid...laid!

> -- Emplumé...déplumé!

This time the French title is a literal translation of the Spanish one. The first sentence of the text finds its own rhythm again. The Guarani *realia* are also back, albeit through a French translation of the Guaraní terms. "Ao-poi" is marked by italics and loses its diacritical marks to integrate the French system of accents. "Pitogüe", introduced by the single tag "bird", appears three times. The repetition is an equivalent for the variation in the original. The dialogue is all translated into French and the equivalents found by the translator succeed in conveying at least the mockery.

Iris Gimenez's translation is a good example of a compromise strategy that tries to bring the source text and the target reader together, negotiating

between respect for the letter and the limits of the French public's linguistic repertoire.

2.3.. François Maspéro, Fils d'Homme, Seuil, 1995, p.17.

> La peau sur les os, courbé vers la terre, il errait à travers le bourg dans la torpeur des midis calcinés par le vent du nord. Bien des années ont passé, mais je ne peux l'oublier. Il surgissait de n'importe où, d'un coin de rue, d'une galerie obscure. Parfois il allait se tapir contre un muret pour n'être plus qu'une tache parmi d'autres sur le torchis lézardé. La brûlure du soleil l'obligeait bientôt à se relever. Alors il repartait en explorant le chemin de son bâton en bambou, les yeux morts recouverts par les taies de la cataracte, les haillons d'aó-poí[1] collant au squelette déjà visible, pas plus grand qu'un enfant.

> -- Ouh! Macario!

> Chaque fois, nous laissions tourner les toupies de goyavier près du trou pour regarder passer ce petit vieux parcheminé, fils d'un esclave du dictateur Francia, qui surgissait devant nous comme une apparition du passé.

> Certains le suivaient pour essayer de le provoquer. Mais lui marchait lentement sans les entendre, en déplaçant ses échasses grêles de pique-bœuf.

> -- Ouh! Macario Pitogüe[2]!

> Les jumeaux Goiburú couraient derrière, en lui lançant de la terre qui noircissait un instant sa silhouette minuscule.

> -- Sale bête... sale bête...

> -- *Karaí tuyá colí..., güililí!...* Homme emplumé sans plumes!

> [1] Toile blanche. [2] *Pitoguë*, en guarani, est le nom de l'oiseau dit pique-bœuf.

This third version proposes several interesting solutions. First, the italics, in conformity with the original, mark none of the Guaraní terms. Secondly, the dialogue is bilingual: the French reader discovers first the Guarani exclamation, then its French equivalent. The way François Maspéro includes implicit adjunctions shows his deep understanding of the original's strategy. But the most striking aspect of this version is the presence of footnotes. Footnotes have the merit of providing necessary information to the reader and underlining the translation as a translation. The major inconvenience with footnotes is that they tend to turn the fictional text into an ethnographic document (Malingret 2002: 100). In this precise case, the footnotes present

another problem, since the information given is erroneous. "Aó-poí" is not a mere "white cloth" as is said in the first note, and the Paraguayan "pitogüe" has nothing in common with the African "ox-pecker" of the second note. The interchangeability of Latin American and African realities betrays a risk of facile exotism.

Towards a new model for translation?

"La poética de las variaciones"

The real originality of this translating adventure lies in the fact that Roa Bastos has integrated the French versions of his novel into the creative process. Roa Bastos has deplored the first translation, which, in his terms, spoilt the novel. At the same time, he acknowledges that this translation, as bad as it is, made him conscious of the deficiencies of his own linguistic strategy:

> Pourtant, comme c'est le cas pour *Fils d'Homme*, une traduction malheu-reuse peut parfois rendre d'excellents et imprévisibles services. En pre-mier lieu à l'auteur lui-même. Les erreurs et limitations de la première traduction française m'ont révélé mes propres limitations et erreurs d'auteur.
>
> J'avais, moi aussi, mal "traduit" le monde secret de la réalité qui s'exprime en guarani : ce "texte" premier de l'oralité qui est le fondement de l'espagnol paraguayen comme langue parlée et comme langue litté-raire. (Roa Bastos 1982:15)

In 1982, Roa Bastos, considered *persona non grata* in Paraguay, settled in Toulouse, France, where he decided to release a new translation that would actually be a new version of *Hijo de Hombre*, albeit in French. The French version by Iris Gimenez is in fact a new text: a chapter is added, many others are rearranged, and the paratext has expanded (Ezquerro 1993; Moreno 1994). According to Roa Bastos himself, this second version of the novel is meant to replace the original text:

> Ainsi le roman *Fils d'Homme* est dans la présente traduction une œuvre totalement nouvelle non seulement en elle-même -- comme traduction --, mais aussi en relation à l'original espagnol-paraguayen. Dorénavant, ce roman devrait varier ou se réécrire -- c'est-à-dire se lire -- à partir de cette traduction française, unique original originaire autorisé par l'auteur. (Roa Bastos 1982:17)

Three years later, in 1985, Roa Bastos published the Spanish translation of the French text. The chronology of the text is as follows:

- 1960. *Hijo de Hombre* (1), Buenos Aires: Losada.
- 1968. *Le Feu et la Lèpre* (translated by Jean-François Reille). Paris: Gallimard.
- 1982. *Fils d'homme* (translated by Iris Gimenez) = *Hijo de Hombre* (2). Paris: Belfond.
- 1985. *Hijo de Hombre* (2). Madrid: Alfaguara.
- 1995. *Fils d'homme* (translated by François Maspéro). Paris: Seuil.

This complex genesis is a striking illustration of Roa Bastos's poetics of variation. This poetics, theorized in numerous articles and prefaces, is at once a creative principle and an ethics of creation. Its fundamental assertion is that the text is a living being that changes when read or translated:

> Un texto, si es vivo, vive y se modifica. Lo varía y reinventa el lector en cada lectura. Si hay creación, ésta es su ética. También el autor -- como lector -- puede variar el texto indefinidamente sin hacerle perder su naturaleza originaria sino, por el contrario, enriqueciéndola con sutiles modificaciones. Si hay una imaginación verdaderamente libre y creativa, ésta es la poética de las variaciones. [...] Esta poética de las variaciones que subvierte y anima los "textos establecidos", forma los palimpsestos que desesperan a los críticos sesudos, pero que encantan a los lectores ingenuos. (Roa Bastos 1985: 16)

The "poética de las variaciones" considers the text as a palimpsest, that is, a sedimentation of layers in constant modification. How can the reader be responsible for these modifications? Roa Bastos's conception of the living text is a theory of literary communication: he considers the text as the product of a situation of enunciation. The variations result of shifts from one situation to another: like Pierre Menard (Borges 1962), the reader produces an entirely original text because each reading constitutes a specific contextualization.

Translation as re-enunciation

Borges's short story was not written for the benefit of translators, nor was Roa Bastos's "poética de las variaciones". Yet the consequences for the translating process are obvious. Translating does not merely consist in transposing one language into another: it implies a total recasting of the original, the modification of each parameter of the original enunciation. As Rachel May puts it, "what a translation *does* is to reconstruct the work at all levels, from bottom to top and from top to bottom" (May 1994: 1). Identifying translation as an act of re-enunciation might seem obvious but it is not seriously attempted, probably because the text is seldom seen as an

utterance. Brian Mossop has sketched the following schema to represent translation as re-enunciation (Mossop 1983: 246).

1.3 Here is a diagrammatic representation of my proposed alternative:
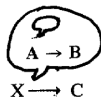
I will call this *Model 2*, and it may be read as follows: X reports in writing to C what A has written to B. (The texts ''x'' and ''y'' of Model 1 are now represented through the convention of the cartoonist's bubble—the inner and outer bubbles respectively.)

The logical consequence of this perspective is that the translator, being an enunciator, leaves some marks of his presence within the new text (Folkart 1991: 17). Some of these marks can only be detected by comparison with the source text while others are discernible in themselves (Hermans 1996). In our case study, those marks are for example: the mention of the translator's name, the addition of paratext especially in the visible form of footnotes in François Maspéro's translation, the strange occurrence of the first-person pronoun "we" in Jean-François Reille's version, etc. However, translations tend not to manifest the fact that they are re-enunciations so as to better "pass" as the original (Folkart 1991: 217). Erasing their own marks is the surer way for the translator to perform invisibility. What if these marks or traces were precisely the basis for a different model of translation?

From ethics to ethos

The notion of *ethos* is seldom applied to translations and when it is, it is in the sociological sense (Flynn 2007). We suggest that the articulation of both perspectives, the language-related and the institutional one, could benefit the theory as well as the practice of translation. Whereas ethics tends to focus exclusively on the text, neglecting the translator as person (Pym 1997: 19), *ethos* could account for both the text and its enunciator. While the ethics of translation (Venuti 1998) relies on a polemic moral axiology (Carbonell i Cortés 2004), the notion of *ethos* permits the characterization of translation as discursive strategies. Just as narrators construct images of themselves by putting the languages in contact, so do translators position their own *personae* when re-enunciating the text. This of course implies admitting the existence of a "*translator*'s narrator" (Schiavi 1996: 9) sketching the translator's own "self" as distinct form the original's narrator. In Clem Robyns's terms:

> in order to study the role that translation plays in the dynamics of self-definition, the focus of attention has to be shifted from individual texts or linguistic features in translation (however "contextualized" the analysis

may be) to interference between discourses and discursive structures and strategies. (Robyns 1994: 406)

There is no such a thing as a simple dichotomy between domesticating and foreignizing translations. Clem Robyns distinguishes four prototypical stances: *imperialist, defensive, trans-discursive* and *defective*. In each case, the conception of identity underlying the discursive strategy is ideological. In Roa Bastos's example, we can argue that none of the three translations has a similar *ethos* to the source text: while the original narrator performs a *trans-discursive* strategy, that "neither radically opposes itself to other discourses nor refuses their intrusion", Jean-François Reille opts for an *imperialist* attitude ("otherness is denied and transformed"), Iris Gimenez for a *defensive* one ("otherness is acknowledged but still transformed") and François Maspéro adopts an ethnological *defective* strategy ("stimulates the intrusion of alien elements that are explicitly acknowledged as such", here with an explicit pedagogical aim).

Conclusion

The notion of *ethos*, especially if we accept to consider both the pragmatic-intradiscursive *ethos* and the sociological-institutional *ethos* as complementary, could open new perspectives for the study of heterolingualism and its afterlife in translation. A further examination should show how literary multilingualism deconstructs the "serious, stable, 'central' self" (Baumlin 1994: xix), thus updating the rhetorical notion. If the relation to otherness turns into an internal alterity, then *ethos* can account for constitutive heterogeneity.

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