

A Database of Filmed Novels: Methodology and Didactic Use

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1. The Adaptation process: A very old practice

The adaptation of literary works on the big screen constitutes a lucrative business, which started only a few years after the birth of the cinema. According to John Izod (1992: 95),

from the period about 1906-8, by which time the standard length of a film was one reel (something in the order of twelve minutes), American film production companies began to satisfy their need for fresh story ideas by drawing upon literature – both popular and ‘classic’. Although some film-makers began by simply stealing what they needed, they quickly found that they were under a legal obligation to purchase the rights to material they wanted to use [...]

During the first decades of the twentieth century, the literary genre that was most frequently adapted was the «dime novel», a genre of ambiguous qualities based on stories that took place in the Far West. However, as Izod (1992: 96) points out,

classic literature was not being ignored by the industry. It had a double role. Firstly, it was used as a weapon to resist pressures exerted on the film business by those middle-class reformers who held the cinema to be an evil influence on society [...] Secondly [...] it was hoped that adaptations of ‘good’ literature would do more than reassure the middle classes that cinema was not a dangerous new social diseases[...]» Thus, adapting literary classics was part of the industry’s strategy to gain for itself both a clean reputation and new business.

The present status quo is as follows: if the novelist of a work that the film industry wishes to adapt has been dead for more than seventy-five years, the copyright law does not apply, therefore the novel can be used freely by the interested party. This is one of the main reasons why classical novelists, such as Jane Austen, William

Shakespeare and Charles Dickens remain a valuable inspiration source for a significant number of films. In the case of a more recent novel, the production company has to acquire an option on the novel, in order to start the process of scriptwriting and purchase the rights before the actual shooting. It should be noted that this process does not only benefit film producers, but publishers and writers as well. For example, the author of the *Harry Potter* series, J. K. Rowling, is today one of the richest women in Great Britain partly out of revenues from film rights, while Dan Brown, the author of *The Da Vinci Code*, received six million dollars for selling film rights to one of the most powerful production companies in the world.

2. Film and Literature

The close relationship between film and literature can be easily identified through the great number of films based on literary sources, the great box-office success filmic adaptations encounter (*Casablanca*, *Out of Africa*, *The English Patient*, the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, etc.), and their artistic recognition via numerous awards. Let it be noted that, from 1927 to 2004, 47 out of the 77 films that won the Oscar for Best Picture (a percentage of 61%) were based on novels, proving the indisputable relationship between the movie industry and literary production.

George Bluestone (1971: 3) notes that the evaluation of the film industry, as far as its product is concerned, shows a strong and steady preference to films that derive from novels, films that constantly appear in the lists of the most prestigious and artistically acknowledged productions. Filmmakers have detected in the novels samples of plot construction, ways to present characters and means to manipulate time and space, in other words, tools that they subsequently modified and applied to their own medium (McDougal 1985: 3).

2.1. Differences, prejudice, new approaches

To begin with, as far as production is concerned, it is claimed that a novel is mainly a personal struggle, whereas a film is the result of teamwork (Kolovos 1990, Gormlie 1992). Additionally, there are theorists and authors, such as Iakovos Kambanellis (1990) and Vassilis Vassilikos (1990) who believe that the cinema constitutes a commercial product, contrary to literature which is considered as 'high' art. In this

way, even to the present day, the film is often put down as an «industrial product» (Paul Coates ix), that exploits the public. Stam and Raengo (2005: 4-7) state that

this view derives from the a priori valorization of historical anteriority and seniority: the assumption, that is, that older arts are necessarily better arts[...] Here literature profits from a double ‘priority’: the general historical priority of literature to cinema, and the specific priority of novels to their adaptations [...] Another source of the hostility to the cinema and adaptation is a subliminal form of class prejudice [...] The cinema, perhaps unconsciously, is seen as degraded by the company it keeps – the great unwashed popular mass audience, with its lower-class origins in ‘vulgar’ spectacles like sideshows and carnivals.

Of course, there is also the opposite view, according to which cinema and literature constitute two separate forms of art and should be examined as such (Karapanou 1990, Valtinos 1990). From the time filmic adaptations of literary sources started, criticism posed one basic question: is the film faithful to the novel? This kind of criticism relies

on a notion of the text as having and rendering up to the (intelligent) reader a single, correct ‘meaning’ which the film-maker has either adhered to or in some sense violated or tampered with. There will often be a distinction between being faithful to the ‘letter’, an approach which the more sophisticated writer may suggest is no way to ensure a ‘successful’ adaptation, and to the ‘spirit’ or ‘essence’ of the work. The latter is of course very much more difficult to determine since it involves not merely a parallelism between novel and film but between two or more readings of a novel, since any given film version is able only to aim at reproducing the film-maker’s reading of the original and to hope that it will coincide with that of many other readers/viewers. Since such coincidence is unlikely, the fidelity approach seems a doomed enterprise and fidelity criticism unilluminating (McFarlane 8-9).

McFarlane (1996: 10) also maintains that this approach obstructs the development of more satisfactory and effective theoretical approaches, since it does not view the adaptation process as a creative process of convergence between the arts. That is why he proposes the use of tools borrowed from the science of narratology, tools that were first applied to literary texts, but can also be utilized in film analysis

and lead to substantial and insightful conclusions. However, the numerous differences between the two arts (differences in production, signs, symbols, codes and consumption), which cannot be discussed in detail here, do not reduce the importance of the great number of novels which are transformed into filmic texts and can present possibilities of didactic exploitation in the context of a distance-learning program which could include film students, as well as anyone interested in filmic and literary issues (see section 3.2).

3. A database of filmed novels

In an effort to explore further the relationship between film and literature, an extended corpus composed of 2,800 filmic adaptations was produced by Despoina Kaklamanidou in 1999, which covers the years 1914-1996. Next, a database was set up, aiming at filing, processing, analysis and presentation of the information that refer to the films and the novels in question. The methodology and the process of the database's construction are explained in the next section

The database presented in this paper (<http://ariadne.frl.auth.gr/FilmedNovels>) includes 2,792 filmic adaptations that cover the years 1914-1996. We narrowed our search to US and British productions for two reasons. Firstly, film production started in Europe. Hollywood followed shortly afterwards and established its domination in the global film market during World War II. James Monaco (1981: 211-6) states that

in 1946, box office grosses amounted to \$1,7 billion. In a sense, World War II [...] limited effectively competition from European countries [...] Great Britain [...] produced 225 films in 1936, the second highest output in the world [...] By 1980, the American companies had regained effective control of the world's screen.

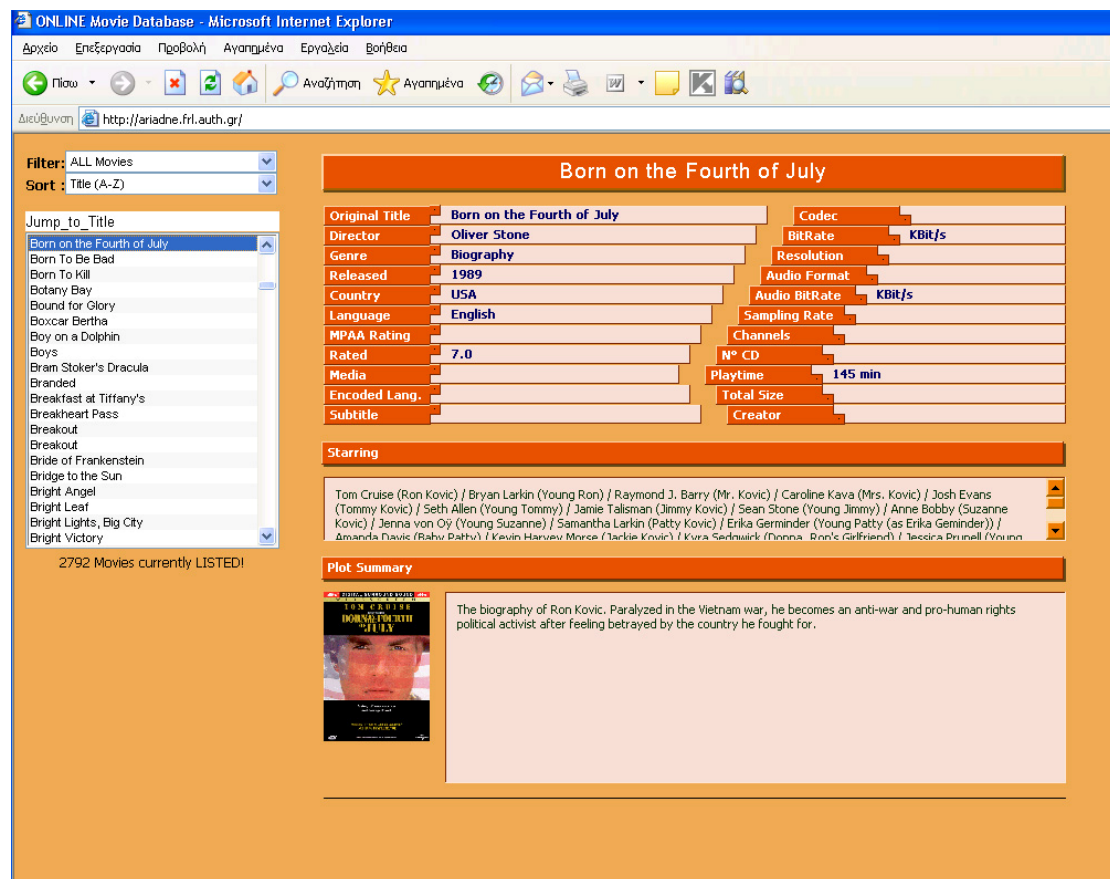
The most important aspect of the corpus' process was the retrieval of the films' details and their storage in a suitably designed Multimedia Database (S. Subrahmanian 1998). The Multimedia Database is the core of a web portal delivery system that stores and manages multimedia information (texts, sounds, graphics, still images, etc.), plus all metadata information for each film. Various types of software were used, software that 'pump' information from the large cinematic databases, as

well as websites with databases of information about classic movies, actors, actresses, and directors. These were: Classic Movies–Databases (<http://www.classicmovies.org>), The Internet Movie Database - IMDb (<http://www.imdb.org>), and others.

In accordance with the user’s needs, a conceptual model for the web delivery system has been developed. The feeding of our web pages is dynamic and comes on the fly on the database¹. The database consists of a set of tables for storing information for the films, a data security layer for the protection of the stored content, and a data management layer (R. Elmasri and S. Navathe 1994).

The dynamic web user interface provides access to films and delivery of their metadata information. Users are provided with a user-friendly interface to find out specific details (see picture 1).

PICTURE 1



Using pre-defined templates, users can access a great deal of detailed information about each film they seek. For the implementation of the portal delivery system, it was decided that standard solutions should be used wherever possible to ensure maximum compatibility with the clients’ side. On the server side, an SQL

¹ Due to copyright issues, the portal only provides information about the movies; it does not provide a link to any type of media files for the films listed.

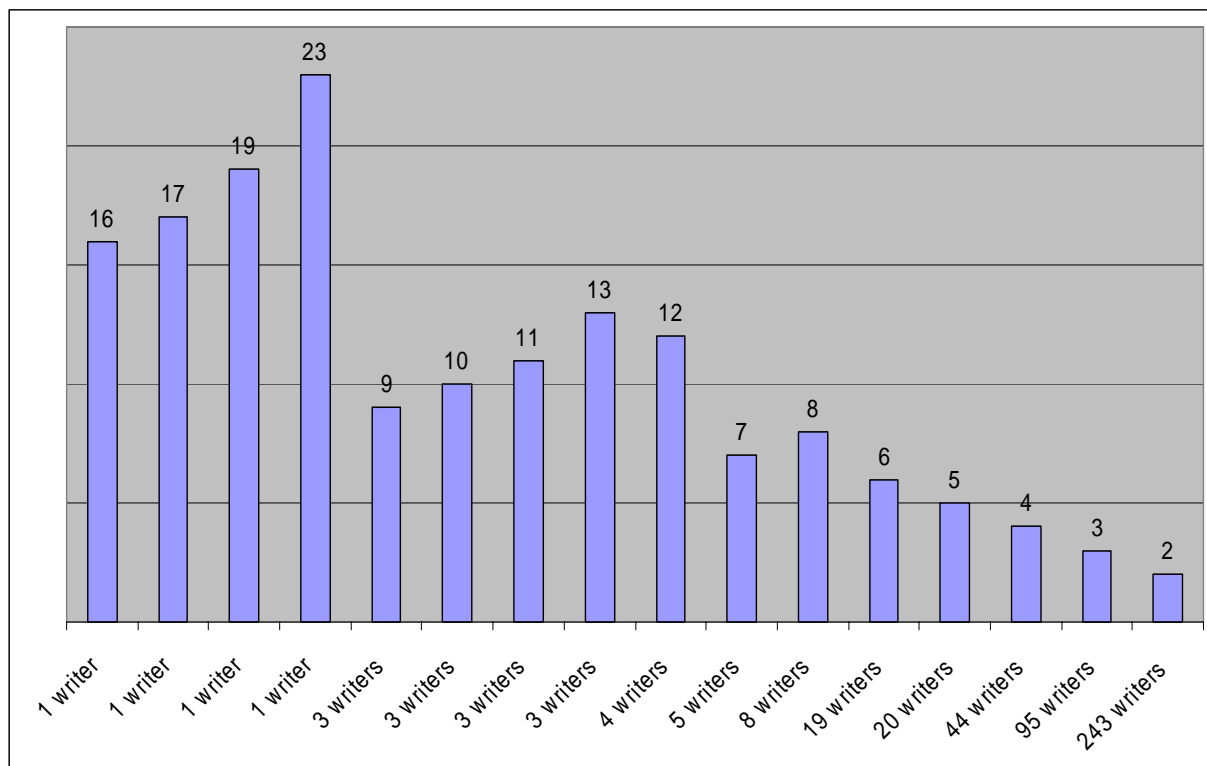
Server was chosen as the main database system and a Microsoft Internet Information Server as the HTTP server that generates html documents from the multimedia data stored in the database.

3.1. Observations based on the corpus

The first conclusion that arises upon completion of the corpus is that the 2,792 films are based on the novels of 1,732 authors, from which 1,282 had one and only novel adapted on the big screen. The rest (1,512 films) are based on a limited number of authors (454). A second observation is based on the criterion of the writers' «popularity», which was estimated according to the number of films that were based on the novels of each writer, whether these films derive from different works or from the same one. This observation led to the first general classification of the corpus.

Bar chart I shows the 454 writers whose work has been adapted twice or more. From a total number of 1732 authors, only 243 (14%), saw their novels adapted twice. Respectively, 95 writers (5,5%) have inspired three films, 44 four, etc.

BAR CHART I. Distribution of 454 authors according to the number of their novels which were the source for 1,512 films



Bar chart I exhibits the authors' popularity. A second criterion was the inspection of the novels' popularity. The results are quite interesting. It is evident that only 99 novels (7%) have been filmed twice, 25 have been filmed three times (1,8%), 8 novels (0,5%) have been filmed four times and 3 novels (0,2%) five times (Table I).

Finally, only two novels have been filmed six times: *A Christmas Carol* (1843) [1935, 1938, 1951, 1970, 1988, 1992] by Charles Dickens, and *Huckleberry Finn* (1844) [1931, 1939, 1960, 1974, 1985, 1993] by Mark Twain. Two novels have been filmed seven times (*The Three Musketeers* (1844) [1935, 1939, 1948, 1974, 1975, 1989, 1993] by Alexander Dumas, and *Frankenstein* (1818) [1931, 1935, 1948, 1957, 1974, 1985, 1994] by Mary Shelley, whereas the novel which has been filmed eight times is *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) [1929, 1932, 1941, 1957, 1960, 1972, 1972, 1995] by Robert Louis Stevenson.

TABLE I. Novels that have been filmed 3, 4 and 5 times

	NOVEL TITLE	AUTHOR NAME	YEARS OF FILMS' RELEASE
1.	<i>Jane Eyre</i> (1847)	Charlotte Bronte	1934, 1944, 1996
2.	<i>The 39 steps</i> (1915)	John Buchan	1935, 1959, 1978
3.	<i>The Asphalt Jungle</i> (1949)	W.R. Burnett	1950, 1958, 1963
4.	<i>Farewell my lovely</i> (1940)	Raymond Chandler	1942, 1944, 1975
5.	<i>Ten Little Niggers</i> (1939)	Agatha Christie	1966, 1975, 1989
6.	<i>A Tale of Two Cities</i> (1859)	Charles Dickens	1917, 1935, 1958
7.	<i>So Big</i> (1920+)	Edna Ferber	1925, 1932, 1953
8.	<i>She</i> (1886)	Rider Haggard H.	1935, 1965, 1968
9.	<i>The Maltese Falcon</i> (1930)	Dashiell Hammet	1931, 1936, 1941
10.	<i>Back Street</i> (1931)	Fannie Hurst	1932, 1941, 1961
11.	<i>Sister Act</i>	Fannie Hurst	1938, 1939, 1941
12.	<i>The Body Snatchers</i> (1954)	Jack Finney	1956, 1978, 1994
13.	<i>Smoky, the Cowhorse</i>	Will James	1933, 1944, 1964
14.	<i>La Mort d'Arthur</i> (1469-70)	Thomas Malory	1953, 1963, 1981
15.	<i>Donovan's Brain</i> (1942)	Curt Siodmark	1944, 1953, 1962
16.	<i>The Blue Lagoon</i>	Henry De Vere Stacpoole	1949, 1980, 1981
17.	<i>Kidnapped</i> (1887)	Robert Louis Stevenson	1938, 1948, 1960
18.	<i>State Fair</i> (1930+)	Phil Stong	1933, 1945, 1962
19.	<i>Gulliver's Travels</i> (1726)	Jonathan Swift	1939, 1960, 1977
20.	<i>Kid Galahad</i>	Francis Wallace	1937, 1941, 1962
21.	<i>The Invisible Man</i> (1897)	H.G. Wells	1933, 1951, 1994

22	<i>Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm</i> (1903)	Kate Douglas Wiggin	1917, 1932, 1938
23	<i>The Midwich Cuckoos</i> (1957)	John Wyndham	1960, 1964, 1995
24.	<i>Bulldog Drummond</i> (1915+)	H.C. MacNeile	1934, 1937, 1939
25.	<i>Ivanhoe</i>	Sir Walter Scott	1922, 1938, 1952
26.	<i>Little Women</i> (1868-69)	Louisa May Alcott	1933, 1940, 1949, 1994
27.	<i>Alice in Wonderland</i> (1965)	Lewis Carroll	1933, 1950, 1951, 1972
28.	<i>The Last of the Mohicans</i> (1826)	James F. Cooper	1920, 1936, 1957, 1992
29.	<i>Oliver Twist</i> (1938)	Charles Dickens	1922, 1933, 1948, 1968
30.	<i>The Scarlet Letter</i> (1850)	Nathaniel Hawthorne	1926, 1934, 1973, 1995
31.	<i>Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch</i> (1901)	Alice Hegan Rice	1914, 1919, 1934, 1942
32.	<i>Treasure Island</i> (1883)	Robert Louis Stevenson	1934, 1950, 1972, 1996
33.	<i>Dracula</i> (1897)	Bram Stoker	1931, 1979, 1992, 1995
34.	<i>The Phantom of the Opera</i>	Gaston LeRoux	1925, 1931, 1943, 1962, 1989
35.	<i>Tom Sawyer</i>	Mark Twain	1930, 1938, 1938, 1973, 1995
36.	<i>The Prisoner of Zenda</i>	Anthony Hope	1913, 1922, 1937, 1952, 1979

The next step was the retrieval of writers' biographical data (date of birth or/and death), the title of the literary source and the year of the novel's publication. This research was quite demanding, as for a number of authors, mostly recent ones, we were unable to find the necessary data. From the data which was gathered, it was noted that the great majority (87.6%), that is 554 from a total of 632 authors for whom biographical information was available, are 20th century novelists (see Table II).

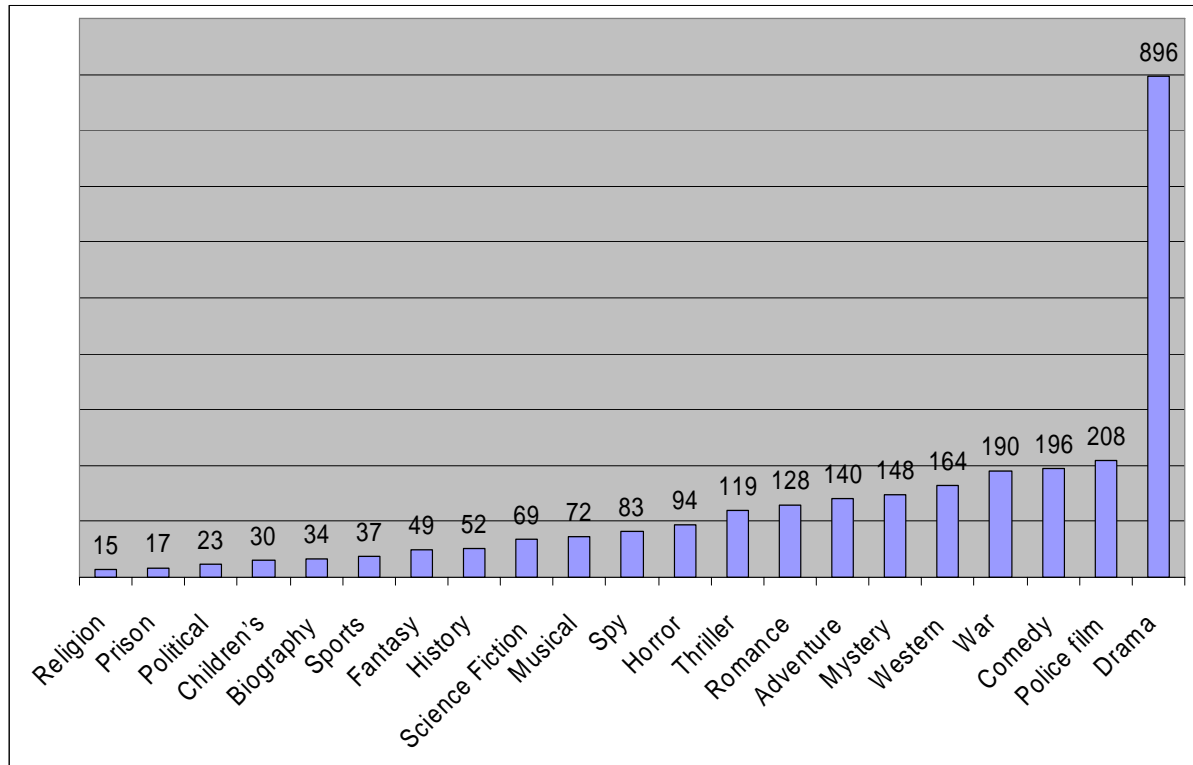
TABLE II. Distribution of authors by

Number of authors	Name of author	Century	Percentage
1	Li Yu (1368-1444)	14 th	0,15%
1	Thomas Malory (1416-1471)	15 th	0,15%
1	Cervantes (1547-1616)	16 th	0,15%
1	Charles Perrault (1628-1703)	17 th	0,15%
5	Daniel Defoe (1660-1731) Jonathan Swift (1667-1745) Henry Fielding (1700-1754) Pierre Choderlos de Laclos (1741-1803) Leprince Beaumont (1711-1780)	18 th	0,8%
69	See Table V (Index I)	19 th	11%
554	See Table VI (Index II)	20 th	87,6%
632 authors			100%

The last categorization of the corpus concerns the filmic genre. The majority (898 films, a 32% percentage) belongs to the category of drama, whereas the genres

of police films, comedies and westerns follow at much lower percentages (see Bar chart II).

BAR CHART II. Distribution of Corpus based on film genre



3.2. Possibilities of use in literature and film courses

The database we constructed will not only be of great service to the fans of the world's film production. It can be used in literary courses that analyze and deal with specific literary and/or filmic texts. Obviously, it would be interesting for professors as well as their students to compare literary works with their respective film versions, in order to check the narrative elements that can easily be transported from literature to film and those narrative aspects of a novel that cannot be transported on the silver screen, without being significantly altered. Let us not forget that the relationship between the novel and film is studied in almost every film department around the world. Therefore, if the database is used in this context, it could certainly provide a vivid space for fruitful research in the field of film adaptations as well as comparative literature.

Finally and especially for the new literary courses which are currently being offered through the Internet, our database could constitute a significant source of information retrieval. What is more, the base offers the possibility of metadata addition, which means that it could be enriched with important literary or filmic analysis, comments and / or observations, so that it could be converted into a node for literature and its representation in film.

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