

let the great world spin

Let the Great World Spin: Exploring the Depths of a Literary Masterpiece

let the great world spin—these words evoke a sense of continuity, resilience, and the intricate dance of human lives woven together by fate and circumstance. More than just a phrase, "Let the Great World Spin" is also the title of Colum McCann's acclaimed novel, a work that has captured the hearts of readers worldwide with its profound storytelling and rich characters. In this article, we'll delve into the layers of this remarkable novel, explore its themes, and understand why it continues to resonate with readers today.

Understanding "Let the Great World Spin": A Literary Overview

At its core, "Let the Great World Spin" is a novel set against the backdrop of 1970s New York City, a time of social upheaval, transformation, and stark contrasts. The story unfolds around Philippe Petit's daring high-wire walk between the Twin Towers, an event that serves as a symbolic thread connecting multiple characters from different walks of life.

The Narrative Structure and Style

McCann's storytelling is notable for its interwoven narratives. The novel weaves together various perspectives—from an Irish monk grappling with faith, to a grieving mother, to a pair of junkies struggling for survival. This multi-voiced narrative style creates a mosaic of experiences, making the reader feel immersed in the bustling, chaotic life of New York City.

The prose is lyrical yet grounded, blending poetic imagery with gritty realism. This approach not only brings the city to life but also highlights the underlying humanity shared by the characters, despite their different backgrounds and struggles.

Why "Let the Great World Spin" is a Timeless Read

What makes "Let the Great World Spin" stand out is its exploration of universal themes such as loss, redemption, hope, and connection. The novel doesn't shy away from the harsh realities of life—poverty, addiction, grief—but it balances these with moments of beauty, courage, and grace.

The title itself serves as a metaphor for the resilience of life and how, despite challenges and tragedies, the world continues its relentless spin. This message strikes a chord in readers, encouraging reflection on the interconnectedness of human experience.

The Symbolism Behind "Let the Great World Spin"

Symbolism is a powerful element in McCann's novel. The high-wire walk acts as both a literal event and a metaphorical device.

The High-Wire Walk: Risk and Balance

Philippe Petit's walk between the Twin Towers symbolizes the fragile balance between risk and control, chaos and order. It represents a moment of transcendence—defying gravity and fear—that captivates the city below. For the characters in the novel, this daring act mirrors their own struggles to maintain balance in their personal lives amid turmoil.

New York City: A Character in Itself

The city's skyline, streets, and neighborhoods play a crucial role, almost as a living, breathing character. The urban landscape reflects the socioeconomic divides and cultural vibrancy of the period, emphasizing themes of isolation and community.

Major Themes Explored in "Let the Great World Spin"

The novel's rich thematic tapestry invites readers to explore several profound ideas.

Interconnectedness and Human Compassion

One of the strongest messages in "Let the Great World Spin" is how lives intersect in unexpected ways. McCann highlights moments where compassion transcends social barriers, reminding us that empathy can be a powerful force for healing.

Faith and Doubt

Through characters like the Irish monk, the novel delves into spiritual questions. It explores the tension between faith and doubt, illustrating how belief can provide solace but also be challenged by the harshness of reality.

Loss and Redemption

Many characters are haunted by personal losses. Their journeys toward redemption reveal the complexity of grief and the human capacity to find meaning and hope despite pain.

Why Readers Keep Returning to "Let the Great World Spin"

There are countless reasons why "Let the Great World Spin" remains a beloved novel among literary enthusiasts.

- **Emotional Depth:** The richly drawn characters evoke empathy, making readers reflect on their own lives and the lives of others.
- **Historical Context:** The vivid portrayal of 1970s New York offers a window into a transformative era.
- **Masterful Storytelling:** McCann's skillful narrative weaving keeps readers engaged and invested.
- **Universal Themes:** The exploration of hope, despair, love, and resilience resonates across cultures and generations.

Tips for Readers Approaching "Let the Great World Spin"

If you're planning to read or revisit this novel, here are some tips to enhance your experience:

1. **Pay Attention to Character Voices:** Each chapter is told from a different perspective. Embracing these shifts enriches understanding of the novel's depth.
2. **Reflect on the Symbolism:** Consider how events like the high-wire act connect to broader themes.
3. **Explore Historical References:** Familiarizing yourself with 1970s New York history can provide context that deepens appreciation.
4. **Engage with Discussion Groups:** Sharing insights with others can reveal new interpretations and nuances.

Exploring Adaptations and Cultural Impact

Beyond the printed page, "Let the Great World Spin" has inspired various adaptations and discussions. The novel's cinematic qualities have led to stage adaptations and audiobook versions

that bring its vivid storytelling to life through performance.

Moreover, the book's themes continue to influence conversations about urban life, social justice, and the enduring human spirit. In literary circles, it is often cited as an example of contemporary fiction that combines historical events with intimate human stories in a seamless and compelling way.

The Role of Philippe Petit's Walk in Popular Culture

Philippe Petit's actual high-wire walk between the Twin Towers in 1974 is a celebrated historical event, immortalized not only in literature but also in documentaries and films. This real-life act of daring has become a symbol of creativity, courage, and the pursuit of dreams against all odds—echoing the novel's deeper messages.

Embracing the Spirit of "Let the Great World Spin" in Everyday Life

Outside the realm of literature, the phrase "let the great world spin" encourages us to embrace life's unpredictability with grace and resilience. It suggests that, no matter the obstacles, life moves forward, and we are all part of a larger story.

In moments of challenge or change, recalling this idea can inspire patience, openness, and a sense of connectedness with others. Whether it's through acts of kindness, moments of reflection, or simply appreciating the beauty around us, letting the great world spin invites us to find balance amid chaos.

Reading "Let the Great World Spin" is more than just experiencing a novel—it's embarking on a journey through the complexities of human existence, framed by a city that never sleeps and a moment that defied gravity. Its enduring appeal lies in its ability to touch the heart and mind, reminding us that while the world spins on, so do our stories, intertwined and unstoppable.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the main theme of 'Let the Great World Spin'?

The main theme of 'Let the Great World Spin' is interconnectedness and the impact of individual lives within the broader social and historical context of 1970s New York City.

Who is the author of 'Let the Great World Spin'?

The author of 'Let the Great World Spin' is Colum McCann.

What historical event is central to the novel 'Let the Great World Spin'?

The central historical event in the novel is Philippe Petit's high-wire walk between the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in 1974.

How does 'Let the Great World Spin' portray New York City?

The novel portrays New York City as a vibrant, complex, and divided metropolis, highlighting the lives of people from diverse backgrounds and social classes.

What narrative style is used in 'Let the Great World Spin'?

The novel uses multiple perspectives and interconnected stories, featuring various characters whose lives are linked by the high-wire event.

Has 'Let the Great World Spin' received any literary awards?

Yes, 'Let the Great World Spin' won the 2009 National Book Award for Fiction.

What role does the high-wire act play in the novel?

The high-wire act serves as a metaphor for human daring, connection, and the precariousness of life, linking the various characters and storylines.

Is 'Let the Great World Spin' based on a true story?

While the characters and many events are fictional, the novel is based around the true event of Philippe Petit's high-wire walk between the Twin Towers in 1974.

Additional Resources

Let the Great World Spin: A Deep Dive into Colum McCann's Masterpiece

let the great world spin is more than just a phrase—it is the title of Colum McCann's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel that intricately weaves together disparate lives in 1970s New York City. This literary work explores themes of connection, trauma, redemption, and the human spirit's resilience against the backdrop of Philippe Petit's daring tightrope walk between the Twin Towers. As a narrative, it challenges readers to consider how seemingly unrelated stories and individuals are interconnected within the vast tapestry of urban life.

Exploring the Narrative Structure and Themes

At its core, **Let the Great World Spin** employs a multifaceted narrative structure that shifts between multiple perspectives, providing a panoramic view of New York City's socio-economic

diversity during a tumultuous era. The novel's interwoven storylines traverse the lives of characters ranging from a grieving mother to a heroin-addicted artist, a Dominican prostitute, and a Vietnam War veteran. This mosaic of voices is unified by the symbolic act of Petit's tightrope walk, which serves as a metaphor for balance amidst chaos.

Thematically, McCann delves into concepts such as connection across divides, the search for meaning in suffering, and the capacity for grace in moments of despair. The novel's title itself alludes to the idea that despite turmoil, the 'great world' continues its rotation, hinting at an underlying order or inevitability.

Symbolism of Philippe Petit's Tightrope Walk

Philippe Petit's real-life tightrope walk between the Twin Towers in 1974 is not merely a historical event within the novel but a central symbol. The act embodies risk, artistry, and an almost spiritual defiance of gravity and death. For the characters, the walk represents hope, courage, and the possibility of transcendence.

This event ties the disparate narratives together, functioning as a silent witness to human dramas unfolding below. The metaphor extends to the precariousness of life, the fine line between despair and hope, and the interconnectedness of human experiences.

Character Analysis and Development

McCann's characters are richly drawn, each representing different facets of New York's social landscape. Their development is nuanced, with personal histories that reveal broader societal issues such as poverty, addiction, and racial tensions.

- **Corrigan:** A Catholic priest whose compassionate outreach to the marginalized embodies themes of redemption and faith.
- **Claire:** A mother grappling with grief and loss, highlighting the personal cost of tragedy.
- **Jazzlyn:** A Dominican prostitute whose narrative brings issues of immigration, exploitation, and survival to light.
- **Jasper:** An artist struggling with addiction, representing the intersection of creativity and self-destruction.

The interplay between these characters' stories underscores the novel's exploration of community and isolation, as well as the invisible bonds that connect individuals across social and cultural divides.

Stylistic Elements and Literary Techniques

McCann's prose in **Let the Great World Spin** is often lauded for its lyrical quality and evocative imagery. The narrative employs shifts in perspective and time, creating a layered reading experience that demands active engagement. The use of multiple narrators allows for a polyphonic exploration of themes, while the vivid descriptions immerse readers in the sights, sounds, and emotional textures of 1970s New York.

The novel also utilizes contrasts—between light and darkness, despair and hope—to heighten its emotional impact. This juxtaposition is evident in scenes depicting both the grandeur of Petit's walk and the gritty realities of the city's underbelly.

Comparative Context in Contemporary Literature

In comparison to other contemporary novels that explore urban life and interconnected narratives—such as Jennifer Egan's **A Visit from the Goon Squad** or David Mitchell's **Cloud Atlas**—**Let the Great World Spin** stands out for its historical grounding and spiritual undertones. While Egan and Mitchell employ experimental structures and expansive timelines, McCann's focus remains tightly bound to a specific moment and place, offering a microcosm of human experience.

The novel's intricate linking of characters shares similarities with works in the genre of interconnected storytelling, yet its emphasis on grace and redemption gives it a distinctive voice within this literary tradition.

Reception and Critical Perspectives

Since its publication, **Let the Great World Spin** has garnered critical acclaim for its ambitious narrative and poetic prose. Winning the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 2009, the novel has been praised for its empathetic portrayal of marginalized communities and its capacity to evoke a sense of wonder amidst tragedy.

Critics have noted the balance McCann strikes between historical fact and fictional narrative, as well as the ethical considerations inherent in representing trauma and suffering. Some discussions revolve around the novel's sometimes dense and layered storytelling approach, which may challenge readers but ultimately rewards close reading.

SEO-Relevant Insights: Why **Let the Great World Spin** Remains Relevant

For readers and literary enthusiasts searching for novels that blend historical events with profound human stories, **Let the Great World Spin** continues to be a significant recommendation. Incorporating keywords such as "Colum McCann novel," "Pulitzer Prize-winning fiction," and "1970s New York literature" enhances discoverability for those researching contemporary American novels

with rich thematic content.

The novel's exploration of universal themes—grief, hope, connection—ensures its lasting appeal across diverse audiences. Furthermore, the symbolic use of the Twin Towers and the tightrope walk ties it to broader cultural and historical discourses, positioning it as an important text for academic study and book club discussions alike.

Potential Drawbacks and Reader Considerations

While the novel's complexity is often cited as a strength, it may also be a barrier for some readers. The multiple narrative voices and non-linear timeline require attentive reading. Additionally, the inclusion of heavy themes such as addiction, prostitution, and war trauma may not appeal to all audiences.

However, for those willing to engage deeply, *Let the Great World Spin* offers a richly rewarding experience that challenges and expands perspectives on humanity's capacity for resilience and connection.

The ongoing relevance of *Let the Great World Spin* lies in its ability to illuminate the human condition through the lens of a singular moment in history, reminding us that even amid chaos, life continues to turn, and the great world spins on.

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McCann's powerful allegory comes alive in the unforgettable voices of the city's people, unexpectedly drawn together by hope, beauty, and the "artistic crime of the century." A sweeping and radical social novel, *Let the Great World Spin* captures the spirit of America in a time of transition, extraordinary promise, and, in hindsight, heartbreaking innocence. Hailed as a "fiercely original talent" (San Francisco Chronicle), award-winning novelist McCann has delivered a triumphantly American masterpiece that awakens in us a sense of what the novel can achieve, confront, and even heal. **BONUS:** This edition includes an excerpt from Colum McCann's *TransAtlantic*. "This is a gorgeous book, multilayered and deeply felt, and it's a damned lot of fun to read, too. Leave it to an Irishman to write one of the greatest-ever novels about New York. There's so much passion and humor and pure lifeforce on every page of *Let the Great World Spin* that you'll find yourself giddy, dizzy, overwhelmed."—Dave Eggers "Stunning . . . [an] elegiac glimpse of hope . . . It's a novel rooted firmly in time and place. It vividly captures New York at its worst and best. But it transcends all that. In the end, it's a novel about families—the ones we're born into and the ones we make for ourselves."—USA Today

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let the great world spin: *Let the Great World Spin* Colum McCann, 2010-01-18 One August morning in 1974, a tightrope walker makes his way between the World Trade Center towers, stunning thousands of watchers below. Using the true story of Philippe Petit as a pull-through metaphor, McCann crafts a portrait of a city and a people. Corrigan, a radical, young Irish monk, struggles with his demons as he lives among the prostitutes in the burning Bronx. A group of mothers gathers in a Park Avenue apartment to mourn their sons who have died in Vietnam, only to discover how much divides them even in their grief. Farther uptown, Tillie, a 38-year-old grandmother, turns tricks alongside her teenaged daughter, determined not only to take care of her babies but also to prove her own worth. Elegantly weaving together these, and other, seemingly disparate lives, McCann's powerful allegory of 9/11 comes alive in the unforgettable voices of the city's people, drawn together by hope, beauty and the tightrope walker's artistic crime of the century. *Let the Great World Spin* is McCann's most ambitious work to date and has been hailed as an American masterpiece.

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let the great world spin: Forgiveness: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue , 2020-05-06

let the great world spin: *Tennyson* Sir Alfred C. Lyall, 1914

let the great world spin: Understanding Colum McCann John Cusatis, 2012-08-24 The first critical approach to the literary career of the 2009 National Book Award winner *Understanding Colum McCann* chronicles the Irish-born writer's journey to literary celebrity from his days as a teenage sportswriter for the Irish Press in the 1970s, through the publication of his award-winning first story, *Tresses*, in 1990, to his winning the 2009 National Book Award in fiction for the international bestseller *Let the Great World Spin*. In this first critical study of McCann's body of work, John Cusatis provides an introduction to McCann's life and career; an overview of his major themes, style, and influences; and close readings of his two short story collections and five novels. Cusatis traces McCann's redefinition of the Irish novel, exploring the author's propensity for transcending aesthetic, cultural, ethnic, geographical, and social boundaries in his ascent from the status of Irish novelist to international novelist. In the process, this study illuminates the various incarnations of McCann's perennial subject: exile, both geographical and emotional. Cusatis also delineates how the influences of McCann's Irish upbringing, penchant for international travel, and exhaustive and eclectic reading of literature manifest themselves in his fiction. Close attention is given to McCann's stylistic trademarks, such as his poetic voice, use of Christian symbolism, Irish and classical mythology, intertextuality, multiple viewpoints, nonlinear plot structure, and the merger of what McCann deems factual truth and textual truth. *Understanding Colum McCann* makes use of the existing body of published interviews, profiles, and critical articles, as well as a decade of correspondence between Cusatis and McCann. With international interest in McCann on the rise, this first full-length study of his career to date serves as an ideal point of entrance for students, scholars, and serious readers, and offers the biographical and critical foundation necessary for a deeper understanding of McCann's fiction.

let the great world spin: *Children of the Raven and the Whale* Caroline Chamberlin Hellman, 2019-11-20 Taking its cue from Perry Miller's 1956 classic of American literary criticism, *The Raven and the Whale: The War of Words and Wits in the Era of Poe and Melville*, Caroline Chamberlin Hellman's new book examines ways in which contemporary multi-ethnic writers of the United States have responded to nineteenth- and early twentieth century texts historically central to the American literary canon. Each chapter of *Children of the Raven and the Whale* looks down the roads American literature ultimately traveled, examining pairs and constellations of texts in conversation. In their rewritings and layerings of new stories over older ones, contemporary writers forge ahead in their interrogations of a spectrum of American experience, whether they or their characters are native to

the United States, first- or second-generation immigrants, or transnational. Revealing the traces of texts by writers such as Walt Whitman, Herman Melville, Nathaniel Hawthorne, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, Richard Wright, and James Baldwin lying beneath contemporary American literature by Chang-rae Lee, Jonathan Lethem, Jhumpa Lahiri, Junot Díaz, Joseph O'Neill, Colum McCann, and Ta-Nehisi Coates, Hellman posits the existence of a twenty-first-century American renaissance.

let the great world spin: 9/11 in European Literature Svenja Frank, 2017-11-28 This volume looks at the representation of 9/11 and the resulting wars in European literature. In the face of inner-European divisions the texts under consideration take the terror attacks as a starting point to negotiate European as well as national identity. While the volume shows that these identity formations are frequently based on the construction of two Others—the US nation and a cultural-ethnic idea of Muslim communities—it also analyses examples which undermine such constructions. This much more self-critical strand in European literature unveils the Eurocentrism of a supposedly general humanistic value system through the use of complex aesthetic strategies. These strategies are in itself characteristic of the European reception as the Anglo-Irish, British, Dutch, Flemish, French, German, Italian, and Polish perspectives collected in this volume perceive of the terror attacks through the lens of continental media and semiotic theory.

let the great world spin: Trauma and Recovery in the Twenty-First-Century Irish Novel Kathleen Costello-Sullivan, 2018-05-07 The desire to engage and confront traumatic subjects was a facet of Irish literature for much of the twentieth century. Yet, just as Irish society has adopted a more direct and open approach to the past, so too have Irish authors evolved in their response to, and literary uses of, trauma. In *Trauma and Recovery in the Twenty-First-Century Irish Novel*, Costello-Sullivan considers the ways in which the Irish canon not only represents an ongoing awareness of trauma as a literary and cultural force, but also how this representation has shifted since the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first century. While earlier trauma narratives center predominantly on the role of silence and the individual and/or societal suffering that traumas induce, twenty-first-century Irish narratives increasingly turn from just the recognition of traumatic experiences toward exploring and representing the process of healing and recovery both structurally and narratively. Through a series of keenly observed close readings, Costello-Sullivan explores the work of Colm Tóibín, John Banville, Anne Enright, Emma Donohue, Colum McCann, and Sebastian Barry. In highlighting the power of narrative to amend and address memory and trauma, Costello-Sullivan argues that these works reflect a movement beyond merely representing trauma toward also representing the possibility of recovery from it.

let the great world spin: Conversations with Colum McCann Earl G. Ingersoll, Mary C. Ingersoll, 2017-07-13 *Conversations with Colum McCann* brings together eighteen interviews with a world-renowned fiction writer. Ranging from his 1994 literary debut, *Fishing the Sloe-Black River*, to a previously unpublished interview conducted in 2016, these interviews represent the development as well as the continuation of McCann's interests. The number and length of the later conversations attest to his star-power. *Let the Great World Spin* earned him the National Book Award and promises to become a major motion picture. His most recent novel, *TransAtlantic*, has awed readers with its dynamic yoking of the 1845-46 visit of Frederick Douglass to Ireland, the 1919 first nonstop transatlantic flight of Alcock and Brown, and Senator George Mitchell's 1998 efforts to achieve a peace accord in Northern Ireland. An extensive interview by scholar Cécile Maudet is included here, as is an interview by John Cusatis, who wrote *Understanding Colum McCann*, the first extensive critical analysis of McCann's work. An author who actually enjoys talking about his work, McCann (b. 1965) offers insights into his method of writing, what he hopes to achieve, as well as the challenge of writing each novel to go beyond his accomplishments in the novel before. Readers will note how many of his responses include stories in which he himself is the object of the humor and how often his remarks reveal insights into his character as a man who sees the grittiness of the urban landscape but never loses faith in the strength of ordinary people and their capacity to prevail.

let the great world spin: In Harm's Way Javier Auyero, María Fernanda Berti, 2016-08-02 A harrowing look at violence among Argentina's urban poor Arquitecto Tucci, a neighborhood in Buenos Aires, is a place where crushing poverty and violent crime are everyday realities. Homicides—often involving young people—continue to skyrocket, and in the emergency room there, victims of shootings or knifings are an all-too-common sight. In *Harm's Way* takes a harrowing look at daily life in Arquitecto Tucci, examining the sources, uses, and forms of interpersonal violence among the urban poor at the very margins of Argentine society. Drawing on more than two years of immersive fieldwork, sociologist Javier Auyero and María Berti, an elementary school teacher in the neighborhood, provide a powerful and disarmingly intimate account of what it is like to live under the constant threat of violence. They argue that being physically aggressive becomes a habitual way of acting in poor and marginalized communities, and that violence is routine and carries across various domains of public and private life. Auyero and Berti trace how different types of violence—be it criminal, drug related, sexual, or domestic—overlap, intersect, and blur together. They show how the state is complicit in the production of harm, and describe the routines and relationships that residents, particularly children, establish to cope with and respond to the constant risk that besieges them and their loved ones. Provocative, eye-opening, and extraordinarily moving, *In Harm's Way* is destined to become a classic work on violence at the urban margins.

let the great world spin: Spider Web, Labyrinth, Tigh trope Walk Regina Schober, 2023-08-07 *Spider Web, Labyrinth, Tigh trope Walk* explores the shifting functions of the network as a metaphor, model, and as an epistemological framework in US American literature and culture from the 19th century until today. The book critically inquires into the literary, cultural, philosophical, and scientific rhetoric, values, and ideological underpinnings that have given rise to the network concept. Literature and culture play a major role in the ways in which networks have been imagined and how they have evolved as conceptual models. This study regards networks as historically emergent and culturally constructed formations closely tied with the development of knowledge technologies in the process of modernization as well as with an increasingly critical awareness of network technologies and infrastructures. While the rise of the network in scientific, philosophical, political and sociological discourses has received wide attention, this book contributes an important cultural and historical perspective to network theory by demonstrating how US American literature and culture have been key sites for thinking in and about networks in the past two centuries.

let the great world spin: Radical Planes? 9/11 and Patterns of Continuity , 2016-09-07 *Radical Planes? 9/11 and Patterns of Continuity*, edited by Dunja M. Mohr and Birgit Däwes, explores the intersections between narrative disruption and continuity in post-9/11 narratives from an interdisciplinary transnational perspective, foregrounding the transatlantic cultural memory of 9/11. Contesting the earlier notion of a cataclysm that has changed 'everything,' and critically reflecting on American exceptionalism, the collection offers an inquiry into what has gone unchanged in terms of pre-9/11, post-9/11, and post-post-9/11 issues and what silences persist. How do literature and performative and visual arts negotiate this precarious balance of a pervasive discourse of change and emerging patterns of political, ideological, and cultural continuity?

let the great world spin: 09/11 Catherine Morley, 2016-08-25 The terrorist attacks on the twin towers of the World Trade Center on September 11th, 2001 have had a profound impact on contemporary American literature and culture. With chapters written by leading scholars, *9/11: Topics in Contemporary North American Literature* is a wide-ranging guide to literary responses to the attacks and its aftermath. The book covers the most widely studied texts, from Don DeLillo's *Falling Man*, Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* and Jonathan Franzen's *Freedom* to responses in contemporary American poetry and graphic narratives such as Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers*. Including annotated guides to further reading, this is an essential guide for students and readers of contemporary American literature.

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