

**SOCIETY  
FOR  
THE  
STUDY  
OF**



# **MIDWESTERN LITERATURE**

Newsletter  
Volume Five  
Number Two  
Summer, 1975

Society for the Study of  
Midwestern Literature

Volume V, No. 2

Newsletter

Summer, 1975

Things to Come

The Society will sponsor three programs during the Fall and early Winter of 1975: The Fifth Annual Conference, on October 4, 1975; a special Midwestern Literature seminar at the Midwest Modern Language Association in Chicago, November 6-8; and a special program at the Modern Language Association meeting in San Francisco, December 26-29, 1975. There will also be a seminar on Midwestern Literature at the MLA meeting.

The theme of the Fifth Annual Conference will be, "Midwestern Literary Innovations and the American Mainstream." The full program and details will be sent out early in September.

The program at Midwest MLA will focus upon "Chicago in Fiction." Details will appear in the MMLA program and will be made available to members of the Society in advance of the meeting.

The MLA program, the first part of a two-part bicentennial observance, "Two Hundred Years of Midwestern Literature," will focus upon the years 1776-1876. Part two, 1876-1976, will be held in New York in December, 1976. The seminar, chaired by Blair Whitney, will discuss "The Great Gatsby at Fifty: A Midwestern Novel as National Masterpiece." Details of time and place will be announced as they become available.

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Announcements

MidAmerica I and II are still available to members at \$3.50 each. Back issues of the Newsletter are available at .50 each.

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The Sherwood Anderson Centenary will be held on September 9-11, 1976. If you are interested in giving a paper or otherwise participating, write Dave Anderson by September 30, 1975.

If you are interested in joining the Sherwood Anderson Society, write Welford Taylor, University of Richmond.

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I would like very much to receive some suggestions on who is available for doing studies on contemporary "plains" poets. I am preparing an anthology of prairie poets and critics for publication by the Bookmark Press sometime next year. The anthology will include works of individual poets which will be accompanied by a scholarly-critical essay about the poet's work. The volume will also contain an essay which will deal with the poets and themes that cannot be dealt with individually. We hope that the anthology will be able to accomplish two things: first, to reunite the artists with scholars of the academic world - both of whose goals are essentially the same; second, to take another step in defining what the literature of our region is all about. I hope that we will be able to continue some of the efforts of others, including yourself, who have done studies of regional literature.

If you could perhaps give me some names of some scholars who would be interested in this project, I would appreciate it very much. We can offer little reward to the contributors other than the nature of the anthology; all we can offer in return for contributions is a copy of the book. Bookmark Press is a small press which operates solely on outside grants and profits on their chapbooks. Because of a rather substantial grant received this year, a grant received at least partially on the merits of this project, it will be able to publish this anthology. I do

hope that you will let the word out about the project so that we can make a good choice of people to do the essays.

The poets tentatively selected for the anthology are John Knoepfle, Thomas McGrath, Robert Bly, Dave Etter, James Hearst, Bruce Cutler, and Dan Jaffe. They are representative of poets writing about the plains experience. Definitions of exactly what this means are pretty vague, as I am sure you know. This sense of "place" that many have been attempting to define is rather elusive, but efforts such as this project may help in understanding these terms.

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Later this month we expect to have a book on Ole Rølvaag off the press. It is a collection of eight papers presented last fall at the Rølvaag Symposium, including Robert Scholes' "The Fictional Heart of the Country: From Rølvaag to Gass." The volume will also contain a checklist of books and articles on Rølvaag and a chronology of events in Rølvaag's life and his publications. The price has not yet been set, but it will, hopefully, be around \$2.00.

This semester I have taught a senior seminar on the literature of the Midwest. All students read The Story of a Country Town, Windy McPherson's Son, The Lost Lady, some short stories by Hamlin Garland, and either The Titan or Studs Lonigan. We had intended to read The Heart of the Heart of the Country, but the bookstore was unable to get it. We had group reports on the literature of each state and source materials for a study of that literature. Each student reported on his major project and is now in the process of completing a paper on it.

Writers selected were Willa Cather, Sherwood Anderson, Ole Rølvaag, H. B. Fuller, Sinclair Lewis, Ernest Hemingway, W. H. Gass, Hamlin Garland, Kate Chopin, and Jonathan Carver.

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# SEMINAR: SOUTHWESTERN LITERATURE

Modern Language Association Annual  
Meeting, 1975

Persons wishing to submit papers should direct them to:

Professor D. C. Grover  
Department of Literature  
and Languages  
East Texas State University  
Commerce, Texas 75428

Papers are to be ten minutes in length. Four papers will be selected with 40 minutes reserved for their presentation. The remaining time will be for discussion and questions. This procedure follows the new policy for MLA seminars. Three persons will read the papers to determine suitability. Submit return postage if you wish the paper returned. PAPER WILL BE TIMED.

Topics should pertain to writers, literature, or some aspect of the Southwest. The key areas of the Southwest are Arizona, New Mexico, Oklahoma and West Texas, but persons may apply J. Frank Dobie's boundaries of ".....anything else north, south, east, or west that anybody wants to bring in."

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The January 1977 issue of Studies in American Humor will be devoted to Mark Twain's life and work in the 1870s. This is the least studied period of his career

even though it produced four of his major books and more writing (aside from daily journalism) than any other decade. Critical and scholarly articles, preferably between 15 to 20 pages of typescript, are solicited. They should be sent to the special editor for the issue, Louis J. Budd (Department of English; Duke University; Durham, North Carolina, 27706), who would appreciate hearing soon from anyone contemplating a relevant article.

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At its April 18 meeting in Lansing, the Michigan College English Association approved the publication of a magazine to be called Ancient Cud.

Editor Bob Kraft is currently soliciting materials for the magazine, including poetry, short stories, light articles, campus news.

Would you address materials to:

Bob Kraft, Editor  
Ancient Cud  
English Department  
Eastern Michigan University  
Ypsilanti, Michigan 48197

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THE "WRITER'S BOOK" BY SHERWOOD ANDERSON  
A Critical Edition by Martha Mulroy Curry  
424 pages, 1975, \$16.00

At the time of Sherwood Anderson's sudden death in 1941, he left three unfinished projects: his Memoirs, a new volume of short stories, and a 267-page manuscript entitled "Writer's Book," which has remained in its manuscript form and thus inaccessible to readers until now.

The "Writer's Book" is an autobiographical essay on creative writing. In it Anderson reminisces about his life and work: about his mother, father, boyhood, and youth; about his business careers in Chicago and

Elyria, Ohio; and about his struggle to establish and maintain his literary reputation and, above all, his artistic integrity. The present critical edition contains the text of Anderson's "Writer's Book," an Introduction, Textual Apparatus, and a Commentary of interpretive and biographical notes.

The Introduction to this critical edition describes the editorial procedures followed, comments on the condition of the manuscript, and analyzes the "Writer's Book" in the light of Anderson's biography, his other works, and his critical theories. The Textual Apparatus gives two types of information. First, it notes every change that Anderson made in his manuscript. Second, it documents the four types of changes introduced by the editor for the sake of clarity: spelling and punctuation are standardized; missing words are supplied; inadvertent errors in handwriting, or what are called accidents of inscription, are corrected; and several emendations are made. Finally, the Commentary elucidates biographical and critical questions raised by the text of the "Writer's Book."

About the author: Sister Martha Mulroy Curry, a member of the Society of the Sacred Heart, is presently assistant professor of English at Barat College in Lake Forest, Illinois. She received her B.A. from Barat College, her M.A. from the University of Chicago, and her Ph.D. from Loyola University, Chicago. She taught for two years at Duchesne College in Omaha before joining the English faculty at Barat College.

A review of A Writer's Book will appear in the next Newsletter.

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Announcing a new journal.....

MIDWESTERN JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE AND FOLKLORE

Beginning with the Spring 1975 issue, Indiana Names will become the MIDWESTERN JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE AND FOLKLORE. The

new journal will be published twice each year, and subscriptions will be \$3.00 annually.

Manuscripts, following the MLA Style Sheet, are invited on studies in the fields of language and folklore, not limited to the Midwest. Notes and reviews also will be considered. Publishers and individuals may submit books and records for review.

Address all correspondence and subscriptions to:

Dr. Ronald L. Baker, Editor  
MIDWESTERN JOURNAL OF  
LANGUAGE AND FOLKLORE  
Parsons Hall 231  
Indiana State University  
Terre Haute, Indiana 47809

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#### Clemens Letters

The University of California, which has published the Mark Twain Papers, is about to publish a chronological collection of the author's letters and would appreciate any information (however slight) about Samuel L. Clemens' letters in either private or institutional collections. Please send information to:

Frederick Anderson, Editor  
Mark Twain Papers  
480 Bancroft Library  
University of California  
Berkeley, California 94720

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#### Walden Pond Restoration

The Friends of Walden Pond, Inc. is a citizens group founded in 1974 to assure excellence in the restoration of Walden Pond and its surrounding woodland. The Friends have obtained professionally prepared long-range plans which will be the

basis for all future restoration work; they will also publish a newsletter and bulletins. Membership dues, which start at \$2.00 per year, may be sent to the Friends of Walden Pond, Inc., 156 Belknap St., Concord, Mass. 01742.

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#### The London Library

The London Library contains nearly one million books on all subjects and in many languages, arranged on open shelves by subject. Up to ten volumes at a time may be borrowed. The reading room has 7,000 reference books on its shelves and the current issues of over 400 periodicals. There are bound volumes of The Times dating back to 1810 (earlier numbers on microfilm), a complete set of Hansard, xerox facilities, and an extensively cross-references subject index. Both subject index and author catalog are in published form up to 1950, and so can be consulted in other libraries. The address of the London Library is 14 St. James's Square, London SW1Y 4LG (telephone 01-930 7705/6). For those residing in Britain, the annual subscription is £25 (approximately \$60). Temporary membership with full borrowing rights is available for visitors at £12.50 for four months.

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Study of Midwestern Literature

# From a Midwest Notebook: The Years of The Reo

I reached that time of life when one begins to soak up knowledge like a sponge and to look at the world in terms of mechanics some while after the heroic age of motoring ended. I got no firsthand experience of a time when automobiles had to be stopped on the road so that frightened horses could be led past them or when a driver's costume of duster and goggles was deemed a necessity. Even so, there were stories yet current of motoring hazards: repeated occasions that required patching a tire tube on the road and the strenuous effort of pumping it up with a hand pump; engine failure; the sudden breakdown of a vital part of the mechanism, which resulted in having to get the car towed with horses to a farmer's barnyard, where it stayed weeks or months awaiting a replacement part from the factory.

I heard about steam cars, but nobody I knew had one; my automotive education was altogether in the field of internal-combustion engines. And if in my time the major hazards were diminished, some lesser ones remained. You still had to expect the unexpected--that is, every now and then to have to change a tire on the road (demountable rims were a revolutionary improvement); to stop somewhere and let an overheated engine cool down; to know that a steady loud rattle from the engine meant a burned-out crankshaft bearing. Possibilities of trouble had to be foreseen, and if you were experienced and wise you took along overalls to pull on over good clothing. To start on a trip of any considerable distance (that is, a couple of hundred miles) was an undertaking that involved the kind of detailed planning required to mount a polar expedition. You wanted to take along at least two spare tires on their rims, as well as extra inner tubes, valve cores, patches for small leaks,

and boots for tire casings in event of a blowout. You wanted a can to hold a couple of gallons of extra gasoline, and another for the same quantity of water to put into the radiator if the engine got hot and boiled some away. Of course you carried a jack and a tire pump and a general assortment of wrenches, pliers, screwdrivers, and tire irons; and it was wise to have some spark plugs and of course a fan belt. If you were pessimistic enough to admit the most dire eventuality, you had a tow chain. The spare tires were strapped to a frame on the back of the car; the tools went under the back-seat cushion; the gasoline and water cans were in a rack attached to the running board, the suitcases in the same position opposite. Back-seat riders got in and out as best they could; often it wasn't possible to open the rear doors.

Nevertheless, the risks of long-distance travel were calculated and taken. My aunt and uncle who lived in Chicago drove to the farm to see us in the summer, and sometimes my mother and I came with them, having gone there on the train. Roads weren't numbered; one got onto the Lincoln Highway and followed it, by markings on telephone poles, or the Pikes Peak-Ocean-to-Ocean Trail. Though numbers and maps were to come in a few years, with concrete and asphalt-surfaced roads, as yet the most adequate guides were booklets distributed by the tire manufacturers, which gave directions like "take the left fork at the town pump" or "two blocks past the Courthouse, turn right." Gasoline was got from a handcranked pump in front of a garage or a hardware store, and you lifted the front-seat cushion to unscrew the tank cap and measure its depth with a stick. Such refinements as "restrooms" weren't imaginable; in a town one sought out the Courthouse or the Town-hall convenience, in the country a schoolhouse. On a trip back from Chicago we made a stop at the Riley school; the stone over the door lintel read A.D. RILEY 1901. "Ad Riley!" I shouted, with the glee of a youngster habitually responding to an opportunity to make a play on words,

and for many years thereafter "Ad Riley" was a common noun and a euphemism among my aunts and uncles and cousins.

The Jeffersons came from Pittsburgh to see us, usually with a different car every year, for they advanced their practice as motor cars became more refined, luxurious, and dependable. That, to be sure, was counter to the practice of my parents and other relatives generally, who used things up and wore them out, and saw no reason why an automobile should be looked at in another light. But it was hard to show how Cornelius Jefferson was in the wrong, for he had done better, lived better, and had more than any of my father's cousins who'd stayed home and farmed. Rebelling against drudgery as a youth in Iowa, Cornelius had become a bookkeeper, and then an office manager, and a business executive. He'd used his salary to buy common stocks when his relatives called that gambling. So now he lived in a fine big house in Aspinwall, his daughters went to famous schools, and he had a new motor car every year or two.

Sleeping the four Jeffersons entailed my giving up my room, but I didn't mind, for at age ten I was deeply in love with my twenty-one-year-old second cousin Christine and was disconsolate for days after their leavetaking. She and her younger sister Mildred wanted to go all about the farm with my father and me, as did Cornelius; whereas I would have been pleased to go through the fields and to the woods in a car, either ours or theirs, they were elated to go in the buggy, and of course it was the buggy we went in.

Cars were touring cars (with front and back seats) or roadsters (with one seat only). Both had fabric tops that could be folded back and sidecurtains with isinglass insets for use in the winter. A roadster, however, was a young man's car; nobody with sense could deny the logic that found it foolish to run a vehicle with room for only two persons

when you could just as cheaply run one that would carry five. They were either black or Brewster green; like white sheets on a bed, any other color was unthinkable. As engineering improved, they were made more dependable, their appurtenances were refined, and you could buy an Overland painted dark blue. (The color faded quickly.) The car became a status symbol (though nobody thought of using such a term). If you drove a Maxwell or an Overland, you were out of the Ford class, but better still was an Oakland, and to own a Buick was to let the world know you were of some importance in it. August Ritter, the last man on earth to give a hoot about status, persistently held onto a 1912 Chandler; it was high (like the 1910 Oldsmobile, though without such big wheels), and had an aluminum body that, where later cars were curved, had angles; the steering wheel was on the right side. Sometimes I was privileged to ride in it, with Ralph driving. Benny Benz and Tad Hartman each had a succession of cars, but the satisfaction ownership gave them was very different from that afforded by status alone.

Meanwhile, the Fords (though you still had to crank the engine to start it) went sturdily along, in ruts too deep for Oaklands, through mud that Oldsmobiles and Buicks got stuck in. Addison Stone was adamant to all pleas of his family to trade in his 1914 Model T; he kept it washed and painted and its brass radiator shell polished so that it sparkled like gold in the sunlight. Eventually Maggie Stone almost never went anywhere because she was ashamed to be seen in so old-fashioned a conveyance when her friends and acquaintances were riding in classy-looking Chevrolets. I was away, and didn't know when Addison was at last prevailed on to let it go.

Somehow our 1915 Reo seemed in a class by itself, but that doesn't mean it outranked the rest. Rather, it seemed to be--like a blue-serge suit or vanilla icecream--the car one had if he were altogether without taste or imagination.

My father bought it when it was a year old and had been driven three thousand miles. Its contours and bulk were not imposing; they were unesthetically bulky. Black outside and in, it was somewhat as if wheels were put under the Majestic range. The steering wheel was so high and the seat so deep that anybody driving had to stretch to see the road ahead of the windshield, a feat most difficult for a twelve-year-old to accomplish. I learned nevertheless to drive it, and was permitted to do that, on the roads near home and about the farm (we drove it into the fields whenever need arose). My mother drove it oftener than my father, and despite an encounter with a fence that was more embarrassing than serious, resolved not to be psychologically defeated; she drove it purposely past the scene as soon as possible after the right front fender was repaired.

I remember the Reo especially well not only because it was the first automobile in my life but also because it was always giving trouble of one sort or another (engine or battery failure or repeatedly a flat tire) and because it brought onto me unexpected indignities. It revealed, time after time, characteristics you couldn't have suspected, diabolic traits that thwarted the best intentions a mere human could possess. Such a trait evidenced itself the day after my father instructed me, when we had come back from a trip to town in the evening, to lock the car.

Now to explain how what happened did happen requires careful and detailed exposition. First, it must be explained that the lock--rather, provision for locking--was on the starter. This may be a difficult concept for very young people (those under forty) to assimilate. There was no such thing as a switch key; there was an ignition switch, and you turned it to "On." Turned it, that is, after having properly set the throttle and spark levers on the steering wheel. Then you stepped, with

hard and steady pressure, on the starter, a post by the gearshift lever, with your right heel. The Reo starter had to be depressed about half an inch before it engaged the starting motor; in that position a slot in the post and a corresponding slot in its housing were aligned; into that slot was inserted the hasp of a padlock. When the lock was secured, you couldn't start the engine or put it in gear; the whole life of the car's mechanism was suspended.

The new padlock my father had got allowed its key to be inserted in its side--that is, one side. It snapped shut, locking itself. Now, Reader, are you prepared to learn what took place? I looped the hasp of the padlock through the starter post with the key side down, and the lock could not be lifted high enough off the car floor to permit insertion of the key. This was the state of affairs that confronted my father in his hurry to take the milk to the creamery in the morning. No amount of hammering had any effect on that solid and excellently constructed padlock, and for once my father was sorry he'd got what he paid for at the hardware store. Some time in the afternoon he fortunately received advice from Harry Hartman, who was more mechanically minded than himself. Harry's proposal was to chisel off the head of the key, leaving its functional end and a stub long enough to be manipulated with a pair of longnosed pliers. That was done, and the unlocking was accomplished.

I never forgave the Reo for that trick it played on me. It had others, such as releasing the clamp on its brake pedal and starting away by itself--but I, and my parents as well, learned that one and devised means to deal with it before inordinate damage was done. At the same time custom staled its variety, it took on the character of ugly duckling. I believe that, in spite of myself, I shared with my parents a fondness for it. When--the year I graduated from high school--the dealer who delivered a Nash drove the Reo away, I didn't know whether I was glad or sorry to see it go.

## The Pittsburg Series in Bibliography

When Matthew Bruccoli's F. Scott Fitzgerald: A Descriptive Bibliography appeared in 1972, it received superlative reviews, including my own in the Newsletter, and the praise for the volume continues, not only in reviews, but among those who use it and those who appreciate fine books, not mutually exclusive groups by any means. It was the first of a series under Professor Bruccoli's general editorship, and it has been followed by four other volumes devoted to descriptive bibliographies of works by and about Hart Crane (by Joseph Schwartz and Robert C. Schweik), Wallace Stevens (by J. M. Edelstein), Eugene O'Neill (by Jennifer McCabe Atkinson), and John Berryman (by Ernest C. Stefanik, Jr.).

Of the four later volumes I have had the opportunity to examine two, J. M. Edelstein's Wallace Stevens (1973; \$24.00), and Ernest C. Stefanik Jr.'s John Berryman (1974; \$22.00), and it is evident that they have both met the high standards set initially by Professor Bruccoli. These three volumes vary in content and approach--Bruccoli's Fitzgerald focuses on works by Fitzgerald, as does Stefanik's Berryman, while Edelstein's Stevens contains works about Stevens as well as his own works--largely because they reflect the diversity necessarily inherent in compiling bibliographies of writers whose works were as varied, as remote or recent, and as widely or little known as these three.

Nevertheless, just as Bruccoli's Fitzgerald not only presents a first-rate bibliography, but its photos and descriptions teach us as much about the history of bookmaking in our time, Edelstein and Stefanik teach us much about the role of the poet in our time: the obscurity of many journals in which a poet may publish, the disappearance of others, the rise of the recording as an important poetic medium; the nature and growth of poetic recognition; about

the problems inherent in reconciling variant and mistaken readings.

Particularly impressive in all the books is the meticulous use of terminology involved in bookmaking that is often confused or ignored: edition (all copies printed from a single type setting; printing (all copies of an edition printed at the same time); state (variants created within a printing), and others, all of which should not only receive a good deal more attention in this age of scholarly editions, but would bear an occasional review by some booksellers.

The series is first-rate, and if this sampling marks the standards set for those I have not seen and those scheduled for future publication, the series will certainly be the standard American literary bibliography for a long time to come.

David D. Anderson

## Another Story of Chicago

Kenny J. Williams, In the City of Men. Nashville, Tennessee, Townsend Press, 1974. 483 pp., bibliography, index, illustrations, \$12.50.

This remarkable book, all too modestly subtitled "another story of Chicago," is further eloquent testimony to the central place held by that city in the thinking of those who pursued power and money in the nineteenth century as well as those of us who attempt to define the meaning of the American experience in the twentieth. In the book, Professor Williams, of Northeastern Illinois and the Society, comes close to defining the role of the city in the thinking of both groups.

In so doing, Professor Williams focuses upon a peculiarly vital period of the Chicago past, that of Henry Blake Fuller, "who saw what the city was," and Louis Sullivan, who "saw what it could be." In the story of those two men--their lives, their work, their hopes and visions--Ms. Williams constructs, in microcosm,

the history of the city and of the civilization that created it through the architecture and literature that gave it its peculiar physical and aesthetic character. Professor Williams writes that "It is the partial story of the writers and architects who--conditioned by the business culture of Chicago--attempted to create an art for those destined to remain in the city."

Like Carl Sandburg and the group of lesser poets who sought, with no less determination, to recreate the ambiguous character of this ambiguous city, Professor Williams focuses upon an age, that, in both the city and the nation, has been called a gilded age and a golden age, an age that in spite of countless personal tragedies sought a new, incurably optimistic urban, material future for America, an age admirably expressed in Chicago, its people, its architecture, its literature, and its spirit. Not only was it an age determined to construct the city beautiful, but it was an age that could not or would not admit that, in the words of one fictional journalist, it had constructed a city whose lakefront resembled "the lace trim on a pair of dirty drawers," an analogy that Chicago's artists had always intuitively understood.

Professor Williams recreates the ambiguity and the vision, and she makes clear, too, the transience of both as the buildings that gave substance to the vision were destroyed in the name of progress and the writers went into exile in the East and abroad. She concludes, with eloquent regret that

.....the city which had inspired Fuller and Sullivan had become a memory. In its place there seems to be the spiritual wasteland which has served as a source of inspiration for writers such as Motley and Algren. In its place there has arisen a steel and glass city which seems to symbolize the dehumanization of the American city and the insignificance of the individual.....

Some of Professor Williams' interpretations and conclusions are open to debate, as indeed are those in any interpretive cultural history, but the book is, nevertheless, a valuable addition to the growing body of literature about a city whose significance, like the prairies and the lakes out of which it came, continues to seem inexhaustible.

David D. Anderson

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