



PAUL GOODMAN



A CEREMONIAL

*STORIES 1936-1940*

VOLUME II

*of the*

COLLECTED

STORIES

*EDITED BY*

TAYLOR STOEHR

- 
- 1934 *Teat Lyric Poems*  
 1935 *72 Ethical Sonnets*  
 1936 *75 Poems with Time Expressions*  
 1937 *Homecoming & Departure*  
 1938 *Childish Jokes: Crying Socktags*  
 1939 *A Warning at My Leisure*  
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1978 *The Break Up of Our Camp. Stories 1932-1935: Volume 1 of the Collected Stories*  
1978 *A Ceremonial. Stories 1936-1940: Volume 2 of the Collected Stories*

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In March 1936 the twenty-five-year-old Paul Goodman, already the author of fifty or sixty short stories, four or five of which had been published, began a new one, with the unpromising title "Prose Composition." Its subtitle was more descriptive—"sustained—rapid—jokes—slow—forthright—and disturbed"—but scarcely adequate to the revolution it represented in his literary method. During the next four years Goodman wrote another dozen like it, most of them with the same generic title, as in "Prose Composition: The Sea! the Sea!" but some merely called "2 Pastoral Movements" or "Ravel", and all the rest of his fiction in this period shifted in style and manner more or less drastically, depending on just where in the wake of these "prose compositions" it lay. Even his most realistic stories were affected, though the method was essentially an alternative to realism.

Goodman quickly realized that it was a turning-point for him. Before long he had begun to distinguish sub-genres like the "heroic portrait" and had given his new literary manner a more prepossessing name—cubism. Four years later he was thinking of it as his "cubist period"—though he never quite said it so pompously—and was planning a collection of stories to commemorate it, including a preface in which he provided the following theory of his own practice:

"Now by literary *Cubism* let us here understand not abstraction from subject-matter, but in the presentation of subject-matter an accompanying emphasis and indepen-

dent development of the signifying means. And in effect this means, if the work hangs together, that the relations of the characters, thoughts, and acts will seem to be partly advanced by the mere literary handling, apart from their natural or imaginary relations. In a scientific work this is of course a dangerous fallacy, the 'literary fallacy'; but in literary works it gives a literary, formal quality to the subject-matter which is to my taste excellent. The classical ideal is so to merge the subject-matter and the literary means that nothing is obvious but the world presented, but this 'world,' on analysis, proves to have no properties beyond what is useful to organize the literary medium. . . .

"The handling of most of the pieces in this volume leans away from the classical in the cubist direction. Thus the minutely varying repetitions in the last part of 'Ravel' are a cubist expression of that subject-matter, the syllogisms in the 'Composition' are a cubist expression of the particular kind of resolved feeling; the reduction of Saul's chase to algebra is cubist; the nonsense-syllables in 'Orpheus' are cubist; and so forth. For the most part, unlike Miss Stein or E. E. Cummings who analyze especially the elementary parts - words, spelling, punctuation - I rely mainly on the larger means of signifying, the sorites in the 'Composition,' the dialectic in 'The Detective Story,' the eristic in 'Tiberius.' (The 6th and 4th parts of 'Tiberius' are parodies of Bradley.)

"Let me make a few remarks about the chronology of these pieces. The earliest of them is 'Phaëthon' [1933]. This is nothing but a mythological account of coming to know something, the temporal sequence of awareness is equated with the sequence of Phaëthon's ride, and apart from this initial device there is little use made of purely literary means in unifying the whole. By the time I came to write 'The Detective Story' [1934-1935] I was prepared to organize the entire structure by a formal device. The great advance, however, came with the writing of the 'Composition' [1936], for here not only the whole but also the parts underwent cubist analysis, and it was therefore possible to find a beginning, middle, and end not merely in a dialectic of objective ideas, but partly in a progress of literary



methods, as from continuous exposition to discrete fragments to jokes to syllogisms. 'Tiberius,' 'Orpheus,' 'Ravel,' and 'Saul' are simply further explorations of what I discovered in the 'Composition.' "

As Goodman makes clear, his "discovery" of literary cubism was several years in the making—the earliest hints are in his *Johnny* stories of 1932-1933. Nonetheless, it is important to know that he began self-consciously reconsidering his approach to fiction at the same time that he was preparing the most dramatic and far-reaching changes in his own way of life. In 1936 he left home for good: out from under the roof of the older sister who had cared for him since boyhood, saying goodbye to the circle of admiring friends who had gathered in his apartment every Saturday night for years, uprooting himself from his beloved Washington Heights, the neighborhood in which he had been born and raised, the landscape of his very dreams. Off he went to the midwest, where he had scarcely an acquaintance, to seek his fortune (starting at \$900 a year) as a research assistant in English literature and a graduate student in philosophy at the University of Chicago.

Although the opportunity came unexpectedly, this uprooting of his ties with the past was thoroughly willed, an invitation to upheavals of character as well as prospects. No wonder his fiction also reflected the change. The reverberations continued until 1940, when Goodman returned from what he now called his "exile" in Chicago, never again to leave New York City for more than a few months. As if to seal the epoch, he seems to have decided that the possibilities of literary cubism were exhausted for him, and he immediately entered on new experiments in manner.

Of course he was coming back to a world very different from the one he had left, and was himself a different person: he brought with him a wife and baby, a Ph.D. (not quite in hand), and a new sense of himself as a professional. As he abandoned literary cubism, it was not to return to some earlier manner, but to move on to forms and methods that would build from what he had accomplished in the interim. Even before he got back it had become apparent that he would soon break into print with some of the more

prestigious avant-garde publishers; New Directions had accepted "A Ceremonial" and "A Cross-Country Runner at Sixty-Five" for the 1940 *Annual*, while the *Partisan Review* had taken a batch of stories and poems, and was soon running his film criticism regularly. It was not far-fetched to think that he might now publish a book of his stories. This was a time for taking stock.

When the collection of stories failed to materialize, the impulse toward self-assessment was channeled into other works—more prefaces that went unpublished, and two important essays, on "Literary Abstraction and Cubism" and on "Literary Method and Author-Attitude." Goodman's theory of literary method or manner was really a theory of art and alienation. The various manners—realism, naturalism, symbolism, cubism, and so forth—were analyzed according to their formal characteristics, and these in turn were correlated with "author-attitude," the social and psychological interaction of a writer with his world. *Realism* was accepted as a sort of norm of fiction, representing the "harmony between the author's sense of what is meaningful and at least the potentiality of the scene accurately described." There is no alienation here, and whatever "problems" come into focus—for instance, as in Jane Austen—are seen against a background of tolerable institutions and reasonable conventions. *Naturalism* however begins to express "latent alienation by a malicious or indignant selection of the pointless or unsavory, the usually relieved by youthful compassion." Goodman's own early work fell in this category, the tradition of Dreiser and Ring Lardner. The formula of *Symbolism* goes a step further: "it is intolerable that the scene should be merely what it seems, it must contain also some other meaning." This was what he discovered in his novel of 1935, *The Break Up of Our Camp*, when he first came to revise it in the early Forties: his uneasiness with the naturalistic presentation led him to explore beneath the surface—not so much to causes as to "contexts of causes," the hidden psychic contents looming larger than mere chains of events or even the motives and dispositions of his characters. Finally, the *Cubism* to which he had arrived in 1936-1940

represents a further retreat from conventional subject matter, to "inventive play in the literary medium itself, more or less abstracted from the represented scene. . . . One can easily see genetically how the passage from method to method described above would lead to abstraction, if [a] the art seemed more and more worth the trouble and [b] the scene seemed less and less worth the trouble."

Such theorizing can help a reader understand what Goodman was up to in his "prose compositions," but of course the analysis was very much after-the-fact, and certainly too schematic to do justice to his own case. It would be a mistake, for instance, to think of Goodman as distant, embittered, or out-of-touch during his Chicago years, or of his cubist stories as harping on the usual complaints or slipping into the usual rhetoric of the alienated (that, in fact, is what we have learned to expect from naturalism, not cubism). Indeed, the story from this period that made the biggest stir among critics, "A Ceremonial," was lauded for qualities that were just the opposite. Klaus Mann (the novelist's son no less) singled it out from all the stories in *New Directions 5*: "The tone of this young American voice reminds me, admitting the infinite differences in style and scope, of certain venerable accents long-known and ever-loved—the accents of Goethe's mellow wisdom and fatherly confidence." Hardly a description of alienation. Was it pure spite when Goodman replied that Mann had missed the point, that imaginary celebrations are "the cruellest form of satire"?

We must take Goodman's word for it, that alienation was what he saw when he confronted the work of his late twenties, but surely Mann was not *that* far off when he heard serenity in Goodman's voice. The objective facts of his life also indicate a happier relation to the world, and every photograph that survives from this period shows an irrepressibly beaming face. Perhaps being alienated *suited* him? It is an important ambiguity in a man who twenty years later suddenly gave up writing fiction in order to devote himself to social criticism, appointing himself society's scourge and healer simultaneously. Was *Growing Up Absurd* the work of an alienated artist?

In the first place, we must recognize that Goodman's feeling of alienation, at least in the Thirties, was primarily a negative matter. Although he later specified what he was alienated from—"the political economy, the sexual mores, and the religion of the society"—this identification was entirely post hoc, only in 1947 approaching militant antagonism. Before that, he stood aloof. If he paid a price for his non-conformity, it was not by colliding with society but by missing out, a sense of ostracism, exile. This was especially true during his years at Chicago. The academic climate, for instance, was chillier than the wind blowing off Lake Michigan, and gave occasion for poems such as this:

#### A University City

To travelers I am not far from home,  
but I who rode my bicycle and bent  
my wheel back on the neighborhood content  
—how did I come so far as I have come?  
I used to cultivate the children from  
the corner school and read the day's events  
chalked on a house. . . .  
I might as well invent  
or use a foreign language for this poem,  
made so far from the usual deeds that give  
words sense; for who knows how they live  
hereabouts? what use the gestures of  
desire? what are the rules no one breaks?  
Dear God, perhaps there is no careless love  
among folks merely studying the Greeks!

This poem forced itself upon him only a few weeks after "A Ceremonial." And a few days later he wrote a friend back home, "Friday was Lincoln's birthday: I took a long walk along the lake; till suddenly it struck me that I was doing so because it was a holiday. I who always had holidays. Well, I shall fail to attend most of my classes during the next weeks, lest I form regular habits (which are of course desirable). Yet by God, I have no street life in Chicago—& know only people at school or home."

All this edgy self-consciousness, it should be pointed out, transpired after Goodman had been in Chicago only a semester, before he had made any close friends or met his wife. "A Ceremonial" must be seen in this light; it was written out of longing for—not so much a better world, "after the establishment among us of reasonable institutions," but for—Washington Heights! He was homesick. This same month he wrote his most famous poem, "The Lordly Hudson," addressed to the bus driver who brings him back to Manhattan at the semester break: "be quiet, heart! Home! home!"

So one meaning of alienation was simply exile—from home, family, friends, the scenes and habits of his lifetime. Some of these deprivations were only temporary, for soon he had made new friends, had found a street life, had fallen in love. And then what was lacking? The relative poverty of his youth had long since been embraced as "voluntary poverty," so that could not be counted as loss, though it was certainly a case of being alienated from the popular conception of a proper standard of living. Similarly his sexual predilection for young boys as well as lively young women—and especially his openness about it—kept him out of polite society, and ultimately got him fired. But one could not say that he was therefore unhappy, any more than he was discreet. On the contrary, his economic and sexual life in Chicago was if anything an embarrassment of riches. His \$900 a year became \$1100, then \$1500—affluence for the young man who had never made more than a few dollars reviewing a book—and his love affair with Virginia was celebrated in so many poems and stories, one cannot doubt its satisfactions.

Now we begin to touch the quick of his alienation, for when he came to *confront* his happiness, to write not the imaginary but the real celebration, a strange uneasiness welled up. His first attempt, "Virginia," written in the early days of their romance, ought to have been a simple outburst of joy, yet he was already wondering how long it would last, and asking himself why he was wondering. In "Honey-Moon and Archaic Longings" he found himself unable to write the "Olympian marriage-festivities" he had planned;

instead, "I see that I am writing the same unquiet strain as of old!" In "The Minutes Are Flying By Like a Snowstorm" he makes an explicit connection between "having sunk into a habit of joy" and a "rage of aggression against my dear self," the desire to be "brought to a pause . . . in the jaws of death." These cubist stories held their subjects at arm's length, as he later theorized, but not so distant that we cannot make out the deeper sources of alienation that disturbed him. It was not society he shrank from, but his own happiness.

His poems show the same ambivalence. They seem to feed on it. On one occasion he writes,

I've given up punishing myself  
by lonely walks in the park o' nights,  
looking for love where it can't be found,  
where well I know it can't be found.

One effect of the "habit of joy" he had fallen into was that he stayed home nights; but back in New York for a few weeks' vacation, he found himself once again prowling the streets and the parks:

After those of lust, the pleasures of the chase,  
and by the time I've caught 'em, lust again!  
making daylight a delightful race  
for a week or two at Christmas. It is then

I learn the idiom of careless love  
needed in poems, and my private parts  
are touched with memory to make him move  
in the dead of winter till the First of March!

"The idiom of careless love"—that was one side of it. "Looking for love where it can't be found"—that was the other side. Together they were the alienation that kept Goodman's art taut between desire and satisfaction. The deepest uneasiness he felt in the very center of joy, when his happiness seemed most likely to persist. If no other circumstances offered obstacles, the uneasiness itself would

have to serve as the counterbalance necessary for his art. And so his honeymoon stories turned out anxious plumbings of the unconscious, archaic longings, uncanny dreams.

Perhaps it is misleading to speak of these matters as "alienation." Goodman does not speak of them at all when he analyzes his cubist manner; the political economy, sexual mores, and spiritual death of society were more than enough to account for it. But it is not to be ignored that he never published any of these stories of his fatal encounter with happiness. Instead he printed the more anonymous treatments of his disaffection. "Tiberius," "Saul," and "Orpheus" all have the same theme—the insupportability of happiness, the impossibility of attaining the heart's desire—but the expression is impersonal, muted, "alienated" if you will. Similarly, among his more realistic stories, "The Mean, the Maximum, and the Minimum" spelled out the same message in terms of political economy and the standard of living, while "A Goat for Azazel" explained how the very attempt to take such ultimate desires seriously would turn all against him—a taboed hero of the libido. Realist or cubist, these too were analogues of his uneasy dreams of perfect satisfaction, the terrifying Golden Age of infant bliss.

Of course he had suppressed just those stories that no one would have printed anyway; no publisher was likely to touch these literal renderings of forbidden subjects—love-making during menstruation, with newboys, or collie dogs! Goodman knew well enough that he could not publish such outrages on the proprieties. One is tempted to suppose that he wrote them in part for that very reason, to protect his alienation, just as he cruised the parks partly in order to be alone, and to fuel the imagination with fruitless longing. In an early version of "Literary Method and Author-Attitude" he toyed with, but then also suppressed, this conjecture: that "there might be an original relationship between the later alienation and my becoming an author at all."

Indeed there might. It is most clearly envisioned in his story of the archetypal poet Orpheus, who learns at the end

that he cannot both possess his heart's desire *and* make his music. Back from Hades, shaken but also somehow relieved, he retunes his lyre and sings a song of mourning for Eurydice, whose loss is now accepted: "Blessed art thou, angel of death, author of every new song."

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T. S.



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**A CEREMONIAL**

*VOLUME*

*2*



## A Cross-Country Runner at Sixty-Five

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The list for the X-country run was tacked up in front of the Post Office; the small boys crowded round, looking for only one name, and there it was:

NO. 6—PERRY WESTOVER

"He's going to run again!"

"Look, is the old man going to run again?"

"Let me see."

"They say he has run a thousand times."

They crowded up close to the bulletin board, staring at the one name.

"How could he run a thousand times when the race is only a hundred years old?"

"I saw him run last year and before that. I saw him run twenty times!"

"What! you little liar, you're only eight years old."

"He used to run, my mother told me so."

"Why does he run, he's too old to win."

"How do you know he can't win? He takes it easy, he's just kidding around. He could win any time he wants."

"I saw him running once in the woods when nobody was watching, and he went like a streak, you couldn't see him—"

"How did you know it was him?"

"If he once put on the steam! They say he has so many silver cups that the whole cellar is full, and there's no place to put the coal. Isn't that so, Danny?"

Danny was the runner's grandson. "My grandpa has lots of cups and medals," he said.

"He must be a hundred years old!"

"My grandpa is sixty-five," said Danny.

The Winchester Borough X-Country was one of the oldest races in the State; it was forty-five years old. Runners from all the neighboring boroughs and even from neighboring counties came to run in the event. Perry Westover, however, had run all forty-five times, ever since the inception of the race; he had not missed one year. In his prime, he had once won three times in a row, and twice besides that. Even now he always came home among the first third, probably because of his experience of the course. Other entrants came back eight or nine times; but this was his forty-sixth! A X-country runner at sixty-five!

Mrs. Perry Westover disapproved of her husband's racing.

"I hear that you have again handed in your entry," she said sharply.

"Yes," answered the old athlete.

"Why do you do it, running with a lot of boys! You act like an old fool. Don't you see that you are an old man?"

"I used to run to win; now I run just for the race."

"Running under the broiling sun—you don't know how it aggravates me or you wouldn't do it, to see you come home worn-out and panting. How long do you think your heart can last? One day they'll bring you home on a stretcher. What a shame it is that *my* husband is the one all the neighbors laugh at!"

"Naturally! living close to us and having known us for so many years, they regard us in every respect in the same class as themselves, so I seem eccentric and even comic," said Perry Westover. "But to people farther off, perhaps, there's nothing ridiculous in my devoting myself to a race, again and again, perhaps it's even admirable."

"Do you suppose I care what people say, Perry?" said the white-haired woman. "I am thinking only of yourself. What a pity it is that a person of your intelligence should waste his life away in preparing to run across the fields. Almost every morning you are out before breakfast. The closet is

crammed with discarded hobnailed shoes and dirty running-pants hung up forever. And half a dozen tarnished silver cups. Are those proper relics of a life's work?"

"Do you think you could name me a career that is obviously preferable, that everybody would rather choose?" said Perry excitedly, for it was a point much thought of by him. "Don't you believe it! In the long run, the X-country runner is as wise as the banker or doctor—seeing the countryside in rain and shine. One life is as good as another, mine is no worse. Anyway, haven't we done well enough and brought up three children?"

Perry had evolved this doctrine of the indifference among careers partly by a long reading of the book of Ecclesiastes. He kept this book by him so often that it began to infect his speech, and he sometimes bewildered a person talking to him by saying, suddenly, out of nowhere, like the memory of a dream: "Time and Chance happeneth to them all," or "Ere ever the silver cord is snapped asunder, and the golden bowl is shattered, and the pitcher is broken at the fountain . . ."

The Westovers were well fixed, for the village of Winchester, almost rich; this despite the fact that, all his life, Perry had never chosen a career, unless to be a X-country runner for silver cups be regarded as a career. He was "lucky," always falling into money-making ideas, "bunches," "windfalls." One time he saved the State a quarter of a million dollars by demonstrating that a new bridge ought not to be built where they intended building it, at the road, but farther upstream, since the road would have to be made over anyway within a year or two. For this he was paid \$10,000 as a "consultant-engineer." Again, he set up his eldest son in a prosperous hardware business by inventing a patent can-opener, sold by mail-order. The secret, of course, was that he alone was not tied down to anything, but could look about him disinterestedly; in a freely competitive society (such as this rural country used to be in his youth) a person like that could always make money.

"I used to run to win," said Perry; "now I run to see the countryside!"

At this moment, Cummings, the eldest son, entered the

house—an alert, well-groomed, rather portly gentleman of forty. Like his mother, he disapproved of Perry's running in the race. So did his brothers, and so, aping their parents, did all the grandchildren excepting little Danny. No one could see any sense in it, in being a X-country runner at sixty-five! Perhaps they would have felt less ill at ease if he were guilty of some criminal mania, kleptomania or a lust for little girls; then at least one could condemn him. Now, what could one say to him?

"To see the countryside!" cried Cummings. "If you want to see the countryside, papa, I can drive you high and low in a yellow Stutz, and from here to Denver!"

"One need not go so far, a little territory thoroughly explored is sufficient."

"By God, you've had time enough to do that."

"Listen, Cummings," said Perry Westover, "to know one typical thing, it is necessary to return to it again and again, so that each time you change your mind, you also see the countryside afresh. You would not trust to your childhood reading of a poem, would you? Most often, when asked for a judgment about anything, we have no clear present idea of it, but judge it with the same words we once used, although they have lost their meaning; and this is why we so often contradict ourselves, trying to harmonize past words and present knowledge. But luckily we suffer that vague uneasiness of conscience which tells us (though nobody else knows) when our words are opinion and when they are knowledge. By running across the country again and again, I hope to keep my judgments up to date," said the old man smiling.

"What!" cried Mrs. Westover, "is all this philosophy behind a X-country race? I should never have thought it."

"You intrigue me, papa," said Cummings. "What is there to see in the environs of Winchester? Perhaps I have been missing something all my life!"

"Not very much."

"For instance?"

"There seem to be at least five temporal layers of the countryside. When you first pass by, different patches of land seem to have completely different dates—a spot beside

Beaver Brook has not changed since the time of the Cayuga Indians, whereas the macadam highway, Route 4W, seems exclusively of 1930. But the more you look at each, the more you see all the others emerging from it."

"What are the five?"

"In tabular form:

"1. The rough brook purling among the green rocks, and under the high pines roundabout, the quiet carpet of brown needles: this is a hunting ground for the ghosts of Indians (since they believed in ghosts).

"2. A stony field basking in the sun, a few cattle penned in with a wall of stones and a wooden fence, the land cleared but full of stumps, planted with wild grass for grazing and four trees where the cows can lie down.

"3. A cultivated field with tomato vines, a sow lying in the mud nuzzled at by seven sucklings, a barn with a nag, a well with a windlass. (You see how crowded the scene now becomes.) A wire chickenhouse strewn with corn grains, and loud with the four sounds of clucking, cackling, crying, and crowing, and a post-box of the RFD.

"4. Next is the tarred road, the tar spattered on the brittle leaves of the huckleberry bushes, and the reek of gasoline, a road turning and bumpy—the wreck of an old Packard with the door in the back; telegraph poles leaning in different directions; a red gasoline filling-pump (painted over for the third time) outside a hut of corrugated iron. (This Age of Iron is the most crowded of all.) The billboard CASTORIA, 'children cry for it.'

"5. And most recent is the concrete speedway, Route 4W, bright buff broad way across the State, crossing valleys and hills with hardly a rise or fall, the road signs are made of little mirrors that catch the headlights or the sun and burst into brilliance; the bridges are of gray steel. Lying on the road, like a metal jewel, is a smashed radio-tube, the plate, grid, and filament all entangled."

"Bravo, Perry!" cried Mrs. Westover.

"Look, Cummings," said the old runner, "when you skim by in your yellow motor-car, you see all these in a flickering succession, as in a moving-picture: woodland, steel bridge, farm, woodland, pasture, rapidly coming into being and vanishing. But when I break my way through the woods and emerge suddenly on the concrete speedway, a viaduct arching over my head, I am cast bodily into a different time. That is, I am compelled to look. Indeed, sometimes, at the end of a long, hot run, fagged, a little sun-struck, it seems as hard for me to drag my way from a hunting to a pastoral economy as it was for our famous ancestors; I break forth from the forest like a tired replica of the Race of Man!"

"Is it true, what they say, grandpa," said little Daniel, "that you sometimes run so fast among the trees that a person can't see you?"

"Who said that?"

"Alec van Emden."

"Watch out, Perry!" cried Mrs. Westover, "you are becoming a ghost in your own lifetime, and after death you'll haunt the country like the Legend of Sleepy Hollow!"

"What else do they say, Danny?"

"They say you must be one hundred years old."

"What else?"

"They say that the cellar is so full of silver loving-cups that we have no place to keep the coal."

An automobile drove up to the porch. Cummings looked out the window to see who it was.

"It's Roy Wiener of the *County Recorder*."

The reporter came in without knocking, explaining that he was after an interview with the famous X-country runner.

"Is it true, Mr. Westover, that this is to be your forty-sixth annual race?"

"Just so."

"Do you mind if I take a picture?" he said, setting up his apparatus.

Perry likewise gave him a photograph of himself snapped over forty years before, when he was twenty-two or



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