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The Demand for Love and the Mediation of Desire in *La traición en la amistad*

MATTHEW D. STROUD

María de Zayas's *comedia*, *La traición en la amistad* [Friendship betrayed], presents us with a truly stunning demonstration of intrigue and deception in the service of love. Based on the relationships among nine people, we have women who deceive men, men who deceive women, women who betray each others' friendships, servants who are quick to comment on the absurdity of all these machinations, and a final scene in which most of the principals get married. What distinguishes this play is the presence of the ninth character, Fenisa, who acts and reacts just as the other women do before the final scene but who is excluded from the happy ending. Her situation brings up a number of questions lying just beneath the surface of the play: Why is it so hard for people to get together with the ones they love? What is the relationship between love and intrigue on the one hand and love and marriage on the other? What is, after all is said and done, the goal of love? Sex? Marriage? Ego satisfaction? The answers to these questions are intimately related to the human condition that has been so provocatively studied by Jacques Lacan. In very different ways, Zayas's play and Lacan's psychoanalytic theories both serve to illuminate the basic nature of the human subject and its demands for love.

Of primary importance in Lacanian psychoanalytic theory is the idea of the human subject at whose center is a gap, a lack, constituted during the mirror phase (six to eighteen months) in which the infant both rejoices at the realization of body unity and at the same time confronts the fact that one can never know the primordial unity with another being

that one felt in the womb with one's mother. As compensation for this lack of wholeness in the human subject, one creates for oneself a number of imaginary images of unity, strength, and independence, all of which struggle in vain to constitute a whole subject. This register, called by Lacan the imaginary because of its dependence upon fictional *imagos* as the definition of the subject, is directly related to, and even constitutive of, the ego, the *moi* (see Lacan 1975, 94–96, 121, 133, 191–94; Lacan 1977, 1–7).

In interpersonal relations, the imaginary manifests itself in posturing, manipulation, idolatry, defense mechanisms, disguise, deceit, lies, rivalries, and other forms of intrigue designed to strengthen the individual's apparent unity in his or her relation to others, and all of which are closely related to love (Lacan 1975, 130, 134, 141, 162–63, 199–200, 212, 255, 305–6). Indeed, for Lacan, all demands of the subject are for love; someone in love desperately hopes that the other person, the object of affection, will be able to fill the void, the lacuna, and validate the illusion of wholeness to the subject. Because of the inherent lack at the core of both the subject and the person serving as the love object (the other), however, no one can fulfill these demands with total satisfaction. There is always something left over, one's desire, that is insistently unfulfilled. The satisfaction of a demand does not fulfill (and therefore does not eradicate) the desire that is constitutive of the human subject.¹ At the same time, it is precisely the function of the imaginary, to create the illusion of wholeness and defend against the inevitable fragmentation of the subject. One really believes (because it pleases the ego to believe) that love restores the center to one's being, and a number of characters note such manifestations of the imaginary: Juan calls Belisa the center of his soul (602b); Liseo tells Marcia that love can enlarge the soul ("engrandecer el alma" [593a]); Marcia notes that "Naide puede sin amor/vivir" (590b). At the same time, however, there is a general understanding in other quarters that these effects are most illusory:

Fabio: ¡Bravo amor!
Antonio: ¡Brava quimera!

(596b)

[Fabio: A great love!
Antonio: A great illusion!]

The feeling one has in love that the other is capable of completing the subject is a direct indication that love is by nature intersubjective, just as

is the subject. Marcia tells Laura, “Gerardo está en mi alma” (607a) [Gerardo is in my soul], and Liseo points out very clearly his belief that he lives and dies by the other:

si no vivo, ¿cómo miento?
vivo solo donde estás,
porque donde no estás muero.

(595a)²

[if I am not alive, how can I lie?
I live only where you are
because where you are not I die.]

Of course, any mention of intersubjectivity in a Lacanian context also alludes to the Hegelian relationship between slave and master, a metaphor also found in discussing love, as when Juan tells Belisa:

Pues ya vengo a que me veas
y me mandes como a esclavo.

(618a; see also 602a; 607b)

[I have come for you to see me
and command me as a slave.].

The very impossibility that another person will truly fill in all the gaps and cuts in the structure of the subject makes all the perceived benefits (happiness, completeness, unity, harmony, etc.) only impossible longings of the ego. This impossibility is eloquently described in this sonnet with which Marcia opens Act II:

Amar el día, aborrecer el día,
llamar la noche y despreciarla luego,
temer el fuego y acercarse el fuego,
tener a un tiempo pena y alegría.

Estar juntos valor y cobardía,
en desprecio cruel y el blando ruego,
temor valiente, entendimiento ciego,
atada la razón, libre osadía.

Buscar lugar donde aliviar los males
y no querer del mal hacer mudanza,
desear sin saber qué se desea.

Tener el gusto y el disgusto iguales
y todo el bien librado en esperanza,
si aquesto no es amor, no sé qué sea.

(599a)

To love the day, to hate the day
 to summon the night and then despise it,
 to fear fire and draw near fire,
 to feel pain and happiness at the same time.

To join valor and cowardice,
 in cruel disdain and sweet solicitation,
 valiant fear, blind understanding,
 refrained reason, unrestrained daring.

To seek a place to alleviate maladies,
 and not to want the malady to change,
 to desire without knowing what is desired.

To have pleasure and displeasure equally
 and all good joined to hope,
 if that is not love, I do not know what is.

Given the fruitlessness of the search for happiness in love, it is not surprising that Belisa talks of the cruelty and pain of love (601a, 601b), Liseo complains about its harshness and resistance to reason (610a), Lucía mentions the suffering it causes (615b), Laura angrily comments on the effects of love ("Muerte, rabia, / cuidados, ansias y tormentos, celos" [Death, fury, cares, anxieties and torments, jealousy] [609a]), and Fenisa uses metaphors of being lost at sea (590b). Closely related is the metaphor of love as death, as in Juan's words, "¿Porfías / en darme la muerte, ingrata?" [Do you persist in giving me death, ingrate?] and "Tras ti voy, fiera, / que por amarte me has muerto" [I follow you, beast, because you have killed me for loving you] (592b), and in this tercet by Gerardo:

Con su dicha se alegre el venturoso
 y con su amada el vencedor amado,
 y el que busca imposibles, cual yo, muera.
 (596b; see also 598b, 609b, 614a)

[Let the fortunate one be content with his happiness,
 and the beloved conqueror with his lady love,
 and let him who seeks the impossible, as I do, die.].

Of course, just as the pleasure is only imaginary, so too is the death. Of course, because love is so integrally related to ego illusions, there is really no difference between love and deceit, and Fenisa herself is the proof of it. As long as love remains unmediated, it can be nothing other than deception and illusion, as we see in Juan's words to Fenisa:

ya sé tus tretas, sirena,
que ya en tu engaño y mi pena
hace sus suertes amor.

(592a)

[I know your tricks, siren,
for with your deception and my pain
love plays its games.]

Fenisa deceives Juan by stringing him along when he is fed up with her fickleness (592b) and in order to prompt Juan to ask for Marcia (594a-b), but she is far from being the only character to resort to deception: Laura enters covered by a *manto* (599a) and deceives Liseo by pretending to be Marcia (611a); Marcia pretends to be a friend of Laura's whom she met in a convent (600b-601a) and feigns a decision to become a nun (601a); Liseo dishonored Laura with the promise of marriage (599-600); and Liseo decides to deceive Fenisa, all in an attempt to satisfy desire:

si yo a Fenisa galanteo,
es con engaños, burlas y mentiras,
no más de por cumplir con mi deseo.

(603b)

[if I court Fenisa,
it is with deceit, mockery and lies,
just to fulfill my desire.]

Here we might also bring in the *topos* of love as an enchantment, as with León's questions to Liseo:

di, ¿sabes encantamentos?
¿con qué hechizas esta gente?
¿traes algún grano de helecho?
Marcia, te adora y estima;
Fenisa, por ti muriendo.

(595a)

[Tell me, do you now any spells?
How do you bewitch these people?
Do you have some spores of maiden-hair fern?
Marcia loves and admires you,
Fenisa is dying for you.]

Almost anything can serve as a lure to capture the subject in the imaginary register: clothing, locks of hair, ribbons, headdresses, skirts — all of which are mentioned by León in his catalog of examples of the uncertain nature of love (616b-617a). Perhaps even more important (at least in their frequency in the *comedia*) are letters and portraits. A letter can easily become a lure, as when Liseo treats a letter he received as a religious relic (594b), and when Marcia, in the same letter, admits the effect his portrait had on her:

En tu retrato miré
las partes que te dio el cielo,
y al fin por ojos y oídos
me dio el amor su veneno.

(595a)

[In your portrait I saw
the features that heaven gave you,
and at last, through my eyes and ears,
love gave me its poison.]

Since love is an imaginary enterprise, it is not at all surprising that almost any token of love can serve as a powerful lure for the subject who thinks that the other can fill the lack (see Lacan 1975, 141–42, 158).

Perhaps the most frequent lure found in this play is the look of the other, the gaze that opens up for the subject the realization that one is not complete.³ There are abundant examples of the role of the eyes in love (as in the expressions, “puso los ojos en mí” [he put his eyes on me] and “aquel veneno que dicen / que se bebe por la vista” [that poison that is said to be drunk with the eyes] [590a]). Marcia is in love with Liseo at the beginning because she has seen him and has his portrait (590b–591a). She even goes so far as to say, “me obliga / toda la gala que he visto” [all the finery I have seen obliges me] (590b).⁴ That the gaze is a potent lure is demonstrated in Marcia’s statement:

¿qué pierdo en ser de unos ojos
cuyas agradables niñas
tienes cautivas más almas
que tiene arenas la Libia ...?

(591a)

[What do I lose in belonging to eyes
whose pleasant pupils
have captured more souls
than Libya has sand?]

Because Fenisa also loves Liseo, or at least she says she does at the beginning (591a), she too calls his eyes “ojos de hechizos llenos” [eyes full of enchantments]. Just as in the case of the metaphorical equivalence of love and death, the look of the other can also be equated with one’s life, one’s imaginary subject, as in this sonnet pronounced by Laura at the end of Act I:

Que muera yo, Liseo, por tus ojos
y que gusten tus ojos de matarme;
que quiera con tus ojos alegrarme
y tus ojos me den cien mil enojos.

Que rinda yo a tus ojos por despojos
mis ojos, y ellos en lugar de amarme
pudiendo con sus rayos alumbrarme
las flores me convierten en abrojos.

Que me maten tus ojos con desdenes,
con rigores, con celos, con tibieza,
cuando mis ojos por tus ojos mueren,

¡Ay! dulce ingrato que en los ojos tiene
tan grande deslealtad, como belleza,
para unos ojos que a tus ojos quieren.

(598b)

[Let me die, Liseo, by your eyes,
and let your eyes enjoy killing me;
let me want to be happy in your eyes
and let your eyes give me a hundred thousand complaints.

Let me surrender my eyes to yours
as spoils, and they, instead of loving me,
being able to enlighten me with their rays,
change flowers into thistles for me.

Let your eyes kill me with disdain,
with severity, with jealousy, with indifference,
when my eyes die by your eyes.

Oh! Sweet ingrate whose eyes hold
as great a disloyalty as they do beauty
for some eyes that love your eyes.]

Even the familiar question, “¿Qué es lo que veo?” [What is this I see?] (592a), can be interpreted in light of the gaze, but in inverted form. What I see is not in the least important except in that it serves as a lure to

captivate the ego (see Lacan 1978, 93, 102–3). Of course, like all imaginary lures, the look is inevitably a source not of certainty but of *méconnaissance*: “the level of reciprocity between the gaze and the gazed at is, for the subject, more open than any other to alibi” (77).

There is a concrete link between deception and its manifestations as travesty, camouflage and masquerade, and violence — a rivalry to the death.⁵ Rivalry is, of course, one of the hallmarks of the imaginary register. One does not happen to desire the same object as another person; one desires it because the other person does. Marcia hits exactly on the nature of rivalry when she hopes that Laura does not have the same love object as she:

Laura bella, por mi vida
que no tengáis mi deseo.

(599b)

[Beautiful Laura, upon my life,
may you not have my desire.]

As usual, Fenisa is the worst offender. One of her main characteristics is her rivalry with the other women, her alleged friends, which gives rise to the charge of treason in the title. When she hears Marcia talking about her love for Liseo, she reacts by saying that she, too, loves Liseo, and that she cannot believe the coincidence (591a). At the same time, Fenisa is also immensely jealous of the women who receive the attentions of her suitors after she has tired of them.

Not too far removed from rivalry is revenge. Marcia wants to take her revenge for Fenisa’s betrayal (600b). Belisa wants revenge on Juan because he tricked her (601a). Laura wishes Liseo dead because of his alleged love for Fenisa (611a). Juan even wanted to kill Fenisa (608a), but rather than kill her (because people would accuse Belisa), he decided to shame her, saying,

así se castigan
a las mujeres que intentan
desatinos semejantes
y que a los hombres enredan.

(608a)

thus are punished
women who undertake
similar foolishness
and who ensnare men.

Fenisa, for her part, threatens to punish Juan for his deceptions (592b), says that many lovers fit in her soul (605a), and vows to take revenge on men's deceptions by toying with them. Later (614a), she says she wants revenge on everyone, at one point even threatening death (618b).

Up to this point, all the characters seem to engage in the same kinds of intrigue, deception, rivalry, and revenge. Where Fenisa differs from the others is primarily in her wish to keep all the men as her love objects without settling on any one of them. She is almost like Diana in Lope's *El perro del hortelano*; she will not commit to any one man, but she will not willingly allow the other women their commitment. As can frequently happen, the ego will not permit another's ego to treat it the way it treats others. Despite her endless intrigues that involve the other characters, Fenisa cannot stand that the men might be toying with her. One gets the distinct impression that with Fenisa, the goal is not sexual, at least in some sense; as soon as a man gives up his interest in another woman and begins to pay attention to her, she abandons him. Rather, her behavior is much more characteristic of repetition, grounded, as Lacan notes, "first of all in the very split that occurs in the subject in relation to the encounter" (Lacan 1978, 69). She functions exclusively at the level of the imaginary, which is why she is able to say that she really does love all the men:

y aunque a mi don Juan adoro
 quiero también a Liseo
 porque en mi alma hay lugar
 para amar a cuantos veo.
 Perdona, amistad, que amor
 tiene mi gusto sujeto,
 sin que pueda la razón,
 ni mande el entendimiento;
 tantos quiero cuantos miro,
 y aunque a ninguno aborrezco
 este que miro me mata.

(594b; see also 605b, 614a)

[and although I adore my Don Juan,
 I also love Liseo
 because in my soul there is room
 to love as many as I see.
 Forgive me, friendship, for love
 has subjected my pleasure,

without empowering reason
 nor giving the rule to understanding
 I love everyone I see,
 and although I hate no one,
 this one I see kills me.]

At the same time, she appears to realize that her quest is ultimately doomed to fail when she says “por los demás me pierdo” [I am lost for the rest] (614b), adding that if any one of them left her she would be empty. Lucía echoes her feeling that this cannot last:

pues no es mucho que penes,
 que dar gusto a tantos hombres
 imposible me parece.

(615b)

[since it is not much for you to suffer,
 because to please so many men
 seems impossible to me.]

Fenisa is in some important ways a female Don Juan: she wants the ego satisfaction of the hunt and conquest without the long-term commitment of marriage.

Marriage allows one to escape from the endless illusions of the ego in the imaginary register. As such, it is the most significant representation of the symbolic register in the *comedia*. The speaking subject, because of its acceptance of the symbolic order, is able to mediate its desires through language and the other constructs that the community (society, civilization) provide as a promise of completeness. The “Name of the Father” (also in French the “no” of the father, *nom-non*) mitigates without eliminating the posturing, defensiveness, and rivalry of the ego in the imaginary. One accepts the limitations of the law (in a symbolic castration) — that is, one gives up some of one’s imaginary fantasies for the promise of peace and order in a symbolic structure. But in order to find one’s place in the symbolic order, one must also give up a great deal of one’s illusory, imaginary happiness. The subject fades as it “loses itself” in the constructs of the symbolic, a notion quite different from the metaphorical use of “perderse” in the imaginary that was mentioned earlier. When Fenisa says early on that she is “lost” on account of Liso (591a), she is alluding to her status as lost on the one hand because the illusion of wholeness is shattered (her love for him has allowed chinks to

appear in the armor of her ego defenses), while on the other hand she is lost in the image itself and needs the mediation of the symbolic. Actually, one loses either way, as Fenisa herself admits when she says, "yo me tengo de perder" (615b). Every time a person makes a choice between two possibilities, there is a loss. In an absolute sense, there is no such thing as a truly happy ending.

It would seem surprising at first glance that this mediation of desire, this denial of the illusory satisfaction of the invincible ego, is what most of the characters in this play accept. Yet, by the final curtain, Liseo and Laura, Marcia and Gerardo, Belisa and Juan, and Lucía and León are all engaged to be married (619a-b). Even more, whereas the men in the play seem to view marriage as the next step in the satisfaction of their demands for love,⁶ the women in the play, except for Fenisa, are actively seeking the symbolic. They want to get married, to trade their individual fantasies for the collective security of society. Marcia describes the mitigation of desire by the symbolic in terms of its benefit as an escape from the imaginary traps:

promete ser su esposo
y amansarás su rostro desdeñoso,
en un papel firmado
en que diga: prometo yo, Liseo,
por dejar confirmado
con mi amor y firmeza mi deseo
ser, señora, tu esposo.

(611b)

[promise to be her husband
and you will tame her disdainful countenance
with a signed paper
in which you say: I, Liseo, promise,
in order to confirm my love
with love and steadfastness,
to be, Lady, your husband.]

Of course, there really is no alternative except to continue to be driven by one's ego fantasies, amass an extraordinary amount of personal power, and create almost impenetrable defenses against attack (or liaison) with others, but the price is being forever alone. Since no one can really fill the void, can really "make one happy," one inevitably ends up with no one, which is precisely the situation of Fenisa, whose goal, rather

than marriage, was to be the “extremo de las mujeres” [most extreme woman] (606b). In her seeming unwillingness to allow her desires to be mitigated by the symbolic, Fenisa is consumed by the always frustrated attempt to please her ego in love. Still, she is distraught at being left alone at the end of the play. Her ego satisfaction came from having the gaze of many men without returning any of them. As long as everyone operated only in the imaginary, she could get away with the deceptions, but once the symbolic mediation began (the bridling of passion, the coupling for matrimony), her deceptions, her ego, her resistance to the symbolic, became her downfall.

For the other women, Fenisa’s exclusion for the symbolic apotheosis is a punishment for her having betrayed them in their friendship:

Fenisa, tus maldiciones
que no alcancen no creas,
pues de tu mal nadie tiene
la culpa, sino tú misma.
Las amigas desleales
y que hacen estas tretas,
pocos son estos castigos;
consuélate y ten paciencia.

(619b-620a)

[Fenisa, do not believe that
your curses have no effect,
since no one is to blame for your
unhappiness except yourself.
For disloyal girlfriends
who engage in these schemes,
these punishments are few indeed:
console yourself and be patient.]

In fact, the alleged treason of the title is really only meaningful once the other characters have entered into the symbolic. When everyone was consumed by their imaginary intrigues, all was fair in love. Rivalry is to be expected in the imaginary; indeed, even those who later blamed Fenisa for her “treason” were guilty of it themselves, as Fenisa correctly noted when she accused them earlier of “traición en tanta amistad” (606b). But in the symbolic, treason is a violation of the law, an exit from the comfortable world of desire, mediated by language, to the hopeless realm of irremediable lack, the ultimate impossibility of completeness.

Although this conflict is depicted in the play as one between love and friendship (591b, 594b), the difference really lies in the ongoing and ever-present tension between the symbolic and the imaginary. Both friendship and love are demands that point to the structuring desire at the center of the human subject. They have both imaginary (see Belisa's words on 599b: "cautiváis mi voluntad" [you capture my will]) and symbolic elements. In both, one can abide by the rules and submit one's desires to the symbolic, or suffer the illusions, the rivalries, the revenge, and the appearance of independence of the imaginary. Fenisa, like everyone else, wants it all. Unfortunately, she never learns that the promise of happiness in the symbolic is the best she can do, and that the endless search for ego satisfaction can never fill the void at the center of her being.

Notes

1. Lacan takes great pains to delineate needs, demands, and desires. Needs are biological (sleep, food, sex) and, therefore, exist in every organism. Demands are always for love and are thus symptomatic of a basic intersubjectivity. They are also enormously misleading, because what one demands is never what one wants (Schneiderman 1983, 113). In a sense, desire lies between need and demand; there is something in the subject (its passage through what Lacan calls the "defiles" of the signifier — castration, the law, language, the signifying chain — that forbids the direct satisfaction of needs in a closed system, such as one finds among animals [Lacan 1977, 264]). At the same time, desire arises from the gap or lack at the core of the subject that precludes the satisfaction of demands. Desire, by definition, can never be satisfied. The best it can achieve is mediation through language as the buffer between individuals (see MacCannell 1986, 80; Lacan 1975, 193). One of the most famous Lacanian pronouncements about desire is the fundamental Hegelian theme that one's desire is the desire of the other (Lacan 1975, 169); that is, one cannot create a desire (and certainly one cannot fulfill a desire) outside of the inherent intersubjectivity of the subject in its relation both to the other (other people and their promise of delivery of the sought-for object) and to the Other (the symbolic, inhabited by something of the Real, and its mediating function). While the characters themselves seem to be unaware of these differences by their indiscriminate use of "deseo," one might also note that the context in which they are used is illustrative of desire as purely imaginary before the symbolic mediation of desire through language (Lacan 1975, 193), as in Fenisa's use of "deseo" when she is referring to demand:

yo te diré el deseo
que me mueve, y es Liseo
el nombre.

(592a)

[I shall tell you the desire
that moves me, and its name
is Liseo.]

2. There are numerous textual references to concepts of love involving something of the other: that love is a god (590a) or Cupido (613b); that it is an independent force in the universe (607a); and that it is subject to fortune, also beyond the control of the subject (609b, 610a, 611b). All of these typical characterizations of love imply an otherness that is ultimately unassimilable by the person in love.

3. Lacan's discussions of the gaze are quite involved and cannot be adequately dealt with here. In short, one can note that the gaze has effects both in the imaginary (as is mentioned here) and in the real (the register of the impossible and unanalyzable gap or lack at the center of the speaking subject). It can function as a lure in the imaginary or as a disorienting intrusion of the Other in the imaginary and symbolic structures that desperately try to cover over the lack. There might be some relationship between the look of the other as representative of the real gaze that disorients and causes the subject to vanish in a point (see Lacan 1978, 83) and the imaginary capture of the gaze that prompts so much ego activity. The ego tries to protect itself against the reality that its strength and integrity are only imaginary. What makes a subject a subject is the desire and the split that causes it, that is awakened by the gaze (see Lacan 1978, 84–85). In the realm of the visible, the gaze is the *objet a*, and it is part of the scopic drive, which is related to the desire of the Other. Of great importance is the fact that it is not merely a matter of the subject's seeing the other, or the subject's being seen by the other, but rather that one sees oneself being seen by the other. In a real sense, one is defined by the gaze of others, of the Other (see Lacan 1975, 243–49; Lacan 1978, 73, 83, 88–89, 105–6). Lacan also presents a rather lengthy discussion of the optics of the gaze, including the necessary difference between appearance and being, noting that the scopic drive is the most susceptible to error (XI 77, 83), thus leading us back into the area of the imaginary constructs created by these people who fall in love through the eyes.

4. Other examples of eyes and their amorous effects can be found in the speeches of Marcia (590a, 591a, 591b, 599b, 610a, 618b), Juan (591b, 592b, 602a, 602b, 607a, 618b), Fenisa (594b, 606a, 619a), Liseo (595a, 596a, 603b, 604b), Gerardo (596b, 609b), Laura (598b, 599a–b, 600a), Belisa (599b, 603a, 609b, 618a, 618b), León (604b, 612a, 618b), and Lucía (605b).

5. Lacan (1978, 99–100) goes into some depth regarding the nature of rivalry and Caillois's definitions of mimicry, noting in particular the direct

connection between deception and "a certain sexual finality" (100). For more on rivalry and its connection to the desire of the subject for the object, see Lacan 1975, 169, 193, 199–200.

6. Characters in general, both here and in other *comedias*, believe they are marrying as a logical extension of their imaginary attraction, or love. Liseo decides that he will marry Marcia, noting her enchantments: her "hacienda" [estate], her nobility, her beauty, and her unusual understanding ("entendimiento") (603a); Juan proposes marriage to Belisa because he believes she is the center of his life (602b), and Belisa is really happy once talk of marriage comes up because "don Juan fue siempre de mi gusto" [Don Juan was always to my liking] (607a).

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