



When Ralph Waldo Emerson Self Reliance Meets Ridley Scott in the ‘The Martian ‘

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Abstract ;(not more than 10 Lines)

By dint of the prompt advancement in the cinematographic sphere, it becomes an exigency for most of all filmmakers to create new audio-visual effects which make all their allure. The new achievements in that field were attained thanks to previous literary basics novels that were deemed as the first reportative story-telling procedure including several brilliant artistic works. Science-fiction is indeed that specific genre where all those literary or cinematographic works converged. One noteworthy sci-fi work is entitled The Martian of Ridley Scott which its basic themes are identical to Emerson’s Transcendentalism tenets and precisely that of his famous essay Self Reliance. So the main objective of this research is to determine the relationship between Ridley Scott’s film and Emerson’s ideas and to figure out how these emotional themes and thoughts are mirrored through motion pictures.

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1. Introduction:

During the 19th century, America witnessed a continuous development that changed completely the social norms and ways of thinking. The rapid industrial development, the westward expansion and the different politico-military conflicts swayed the Americans between the logical pragmatic reasoning and the spiritual intuitive culture. Philosophy as part of this emerging culture, became the fuel of this new particular society since it is, and as Alexis de Tocqueville described America, the only society that not only is influenced by different philosophies but it is the only society that applies it in its daily life.

Transcendentalism emerged as a philosophical movement in the mid-1830s in eastern Massachusetts, this movement was based on intuitive logic rather than imaginative pragmatic conviction. Transcendentalists succeeded to create an equilibrium of the American way of life by glorifying 'man', worshipping god everywhere and not between the church walls, believing in nature rather than enhancing to be slave of technology and materialistic industrial life and the most important

thing is to be non-conformist as a way of being unique. Though for only thirty years, transcendentalism, led by Ralph Waldo Emerson, made a great achievement by maintaining the echoes of its convictions and philosophical ideas until modern time.

In this work, the focus will be on the depiction of some aspects and tenets of Transcendentalism and precisely that of Ralph Waldo Emerson's *Self-Reliance* essay (1841) in contemporary cinema throughout Ridley Scott's *The Martian*, a science fiction movie that can provide a philosophical dimension more than a mere survival story. The aim is to put forward the hypothesis that though Transcendentalism is an old 19th-century philosophy, its impact remains in the American way of thinking. Throughout the research question: can we consider Ridley Scott's 'The Martian' as the motion version of Emerson's Self Reliance?

2. Transcendentalism

Transcendentalism can be simply defined as the literary movement that believes truth exists beyond Reason and experience. In other words, the transcendentalists are selected writers who rebelled against other writers of the "Age of Reason" such as Patrick Henry, Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin and others, who thought that everything must be physically evident in order to be true.

It became an American legacy and a philosophical movement that emerged in the United States of America during the 19th century. It is a mixture of new ideas in literature, culture, religion, education and society. It took place during the 1820s in the eastern United States and exactly in New England. It flourished from almost mid-1830 to the 1860s and was also viewed as a step toward the spiritual, and thus breaking the growing materialism of American society at the time. To put it differently, Transcendentalism is an academic term that denotes the idea that every man and woman should know themselves and this knowledge should not be based on logic and science, but rather on intuition and imagination. In fact, in that period, Transcendentalism was regarded as a traditional movement of Unitarianism, which was the predominant religion in Boston. In this regard, Kurtz mentioned that:

The movement was rather conservative in its metaphysics and epistemology, but it was decidedly liberal in its morals and politics. It was a fairly inchoate movement – literary, religious, political, and philosophical distinguishable more perhaps by what it opposed than by what is supported. (Kurtz, 26)

Transcendentalism is tremendously considered as an offshoot or a rebellion against Romanticism and emerged around 1800 and flourished between 1830 to 1860. Though Transcendentalism and Romanticism share several similarities such as their esteem of nature, they differ in their founding beliefs and principles. One fundamental distinction between the two was particularly viewed through their notion of God as well as God's role in people's lives. In point of fact, transcendentalists confirm that God is omnipresent, which shows that God is everywhere and in everything.

1.1 Major Tenets of Transcendentalism

Among the tenets of Transcendentalism there are:

Nature = God: man must live close to nature, since it is the first and greatest teacher. Nature is emblematic, and understanding its "language" and "lessons" can bring man closer to God .in fact according

to the transcendentalists, God is everywhere and it is impossible to worship him only within the four walls of a church. God creates nature so god is nature

God is omnipresent: God is everywhere and in everything, so there is no need for specific religions or churches. The Transcendentalists did not believe in organized religion because they wanted that direct relationship with God, not one through a pastor or a priest. They thought organized religions (Christianity, Judaism, Islam, etc.) were all just made up by people anyway.

Man is divine: Since Nature is divine, and we are literally creatures of Nature, we are also divine. Therefore, we have a direct relationship with God. In a sense, we are God or particles of God.

Intuition: Since God is within us, every person has "intuition"; an essential understanding of right and wrong (morality). We do not need to learn morality from the so-called holy books, laws, or society.

Non-conformity, individuality and Self-Reliance

Conformity means respect and obeying the social norms, rules and traditions that have been established to prevent anarchy. Transcendentalists view conformity as imitation and the mind's jail "There is a time in every man's education when he arrives at the conviction that envy is ignorance; that imitation is suicide..." Emerson

Society is the source of corruption

Man is born pure or 'tabula rasa', his social environment is the source of corruption. Each society has its principles that sometimes go beyond man's values, history is full of such examples as the domination of wrong religion on people that of the middle ages and many other examples.

Idealism: Human beings are naturally good at their core. Again, it is the society that corrupts us. Human beings left to their own devices are good.

Materialism is bad

Striving for material goods is worthless and an unhealthy pursuit. It is totally superficial. Money is evil because it causes to place artificial and false values on the humanistic values of people.

Technology is bad: Advances in technology only caused more problems for society. For example, we built the railroad that caused the Indian massacre in America

‘If a man walks in the woods for love of them half of each day, he is in danger of being regarded as a loafer. But if he spends his days as a speculator, shearing off those woods and making the earth bald before her time, he is deemed an industrious and enterprising citizen (Thoreau, 48)

Emphasis on the here and now: The past is unimportant. Knowledge comes from experience. It is not derived from studying the past. We cannot learn anything truly valuable from the past or from the people who lived before us. Their knowledge was based on their experience, and ours should be too. We should not worship anybody or anything that has come before us.

1.2 Transcendentalism in Modern Times

Thanks to the Transcendentalists’ wise notions and inspiring morals, it is undeniable that each decade witnessed a special touch of transcendentalism. Starting from the mid 19th century in which they defended the abolition of slavery until the 1960s, which was seen as a decade of rebellion and change. It was at that time that people began to react against materialism, conformity and even traditional marriage. America in the ’60s was known as “the land of the free and the home of the brave” since the new generation of that time began to react and rebel against the family’s conservatism and demanded to be free and independent. In this period, many adjustments, new ideas and beliefs appeared and even knew a rebellion against society’s norms.

In addition to that, the 1960’s sexual revolution occurred to defend sexual freedom and drug legacy without being ashamed. In this regard, Stone said that:

What led to this sexual revolution in the ’60s? How did we get from ‘No sex before marriage’ to ‘If it feels good do it? The answer is simple. Hippies. The Hippie Movement had a profound influence on sexual freedom in the U.S. and elsewhere. (...) It was a release from all social inhibitions that characterized hippies. (Stone, 15)

Moreover, this decade knew also the objection of ancient social norms especially the unjust discriminable treatment of African Americans and that rejection helped them to face and transcend racial obstacles and issues. Furthermore, Transcendental rebellion involves also the support of journalists and even musicians who attempt to convey the message of freedom, equality and peace through their writings and music and revolt against discrimination and injustice such as The Beat Generation which encompasses writers, artists and even intellectuals. They revolted against conformity, materialism and towards the sake of enlightenment. Even though they were criticized and seen as antagonists in society, but their works inspired many people as well as it was taken as a model for American writers. The Beats and Transcendentalists share several points in common such as the human’s soul which was regarded as a significant factor that enables them to transmit their beliefs. Another similarity incarnates in the fact that both groups are insurrect against society. The only difference between the two movements is the century they lived in. In actual fact, the ’60s was a specific period in which for the first time Americans’ thoughts were talked about and verbalized and even human rights began to take place. This change does not come easily but through several social conflicts and turmoil with the American leading government of that time.

1.3 Ralph Waldo Emerson’s Self-Reliance

Self-Reliance is an 1841 essay written by American transcendentalist philosopher and also essayist “Ralph Waldo Emerson” in which he tackles several virtuous aspects such as non-conformity, freedom of thoughts and even choices. He concentrates on the importance of Individualism which

leads to personal life's satisfaction by celebrating the self as it is clearly stated: Believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men. (Emerson, 26)

Furthermore, Emerson shed the light on the aspect that "Imitation is suicide" and each individual relies on his observation and creativity for seeking happiness. Great figures followed their path towards success by accepting themselves and then they trusted in their abilities, capacities and strength. One fundamental point that Emerson focuses on is called "nonconformity" and in this regard, he added: Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind. (Emerson,4)

Although nonconformity opens the doors for creativity and imagination that can erase social norms and laws, it angers many of conformity's supporters who believe that conformism is the shield that protects society from any disastrous anarchy and chaos. Emerson asserts that "To be yourself in a world that is constantly trying to make you something else is the greatest accomplishment". (Emerson,25)

Basing his ideas on 'man' as the centre of society, Emerson believed that any social change cannot stand without the creativity and the willingness of man. institutions and laws are founded in order to accompany man's will and not the opposite. Emerson will is to change people's way of thinking due to the great changes that America and the whole world are facing by maintaining the same old archaic cap which is not representative of the 19th-century development. In fact, the rapid development of technology and industry in addition to the wave of western expansion gave a prelude vision about the future which would be completely different from the present past as it is manifested in the problem of slavery in the United States of America but the politico-social institutions maintained their traditional beliefs in the old northern free states and southern slave ones convinced by the protection of the institutions means the protection of the nation. Being non-conformist on that stage is to be for the emancipation of all slaves, on the whole, the American territory; and that is what Abraham Lincoln did later on after his presidential election. Speak your latent conviction, and it shall be the universal sense; for the inmost in due time becomes the outmost and our first thought is rendered back to us by the trumpets of the Last Judgment. (Emerson, 26)

In a nutshell, Self-Reliance was seen as a major interesting theme that highlights intuition and natural senses conduct the right way without the interference of the social system. Emerson's essay was considered as a starting point in shaping Americans' way of thinking through guiding them to believe in their own feelings and spiritual intuition and do not care about persons' judgments. Therefore, for the self-reliant individual, the eyes of the crowd are of no significance. The virtuous benefits of Self-Reliance are obvious for the whole world and are numerous, but one remarkable thing is that it pushes the individual to develop self-acceptance and promote self-confidence as well.

One important thing is that Emerson's ideas grew out of a specific time and place which spawned a great philosophical movement called "Transcendentalism". Self- Reliance asserts a central belief in that philosophy which is exemplified through the fact that truth lays in spontaneous, involuntary intuitions. It does not need to explain Transcendentalism fully here, but it can sketch some of its fundamental convictions, a bit of its historical context and also the way "Self-Reliance" relates to it.

Transcendentalism is regarded as one of America's most fundamental movements that alternate Americans' way of thinking, norms and attitudes. Ralph Waldo Emerson who had extremely impacted Americans' lives, became the leader of the movement with other transcendentalists such as

Henry David Thoreau and Margaret Fuller with another virtuous movement that broke the limits between God and the individual and gave rise to freedom of choice and personal liberty.

2. Ridley Scott's *The Martian*

Considered as the best science fiction 2015 movie, Ridley Scott maintain his domination on Hollywood by realizing and producing masterpieces in cinema. The casting reflects his genius by selecting Matt Damon, Jessica Chastain, Kristen Wiig, Jeff Daniels and others that added a real personal artistic touch. Based on a novel written by Andy Weir, the movie gathers all the ingredients to become a blockbuster of the year.

2.1. Synopsis

The Martian movie begins right in the middle of the action with a mission in progress on Mars. Mark Watney and the rest of the team, face a storm shows up, and suddenly an antenna hit Mark Watney. Believing he's dead, the rest of the team must abort the mission and leave Mark behind. This is where the team back on Earth realize that Mark Watney is actually still alive, and because of the distance and how complicated the mission would be, they wouldn't be able to get back to Mars for at least a year.

The Martian screenplay uses the politics, optics, and technical complications of a rescue mission to act as logical obstacles. We also get to watch as Mark uses his knowledge to prepare a trip across Mars in an effort to meet with NASA when they come back to Mars. Mark grows potatoes and then goes after the Pathfinder shuttle to try and make contact with NASA. The NASA resupply launch fails. Mark's chances for survival go from bad to worse.

The Martian screenplay breaks into Act Three with Mark removing parts of the MAV so that he is light enough to make the trip out to the shuttle, but this will require him to ditch the front of the MAV. He launches, but there are complications like his trajectory and speed. The crew must now figure out a creative way to fix the problem.

The Martian screenplay ends with Mark back on Earth. He's now an instructor for the new recruits at the Academy. One of the last scenes is mark saying hello to a young plant growing among stones.

2.2. *The Martian* Critics

The Martian receives much positive critics especially for its music, high visual effects, screenplay and scientific authenticity. Moreover, it won several universal awards such as the Golden Globe Award for Best Motion Picture – Musical or Comedy, Hugo Award for Best Dramatic Presentation. All that huge success was attained by Matt Damon's enthralling performance who won the Golden Globe Award for Best Actor – Motion Picture Musical or Comedy. "The Martian," Ridley Scott's film about an astronaut surviving on a desolate planet, is at heart a shipwreck story, one that just happens to take the form of a science fiction adventure. But, although the outline offers no surprises, the details and the tone feel new. (Matt Zoller Seitz, TV critic, October 01, 2015) .Throughout this long but never dull film, Mark makes for an affable and centred lead character and sees each new crisis as a problem-solving exercise, provided he can get his fear and despair under control long enough to think straight, which of course he does. (Seitz) .The most fascinating thing about the film is how it leans into predictability rather than make a show of fighting it. (Seitz)

Mark Kermode, the Observer film critic, asserted in *The Guardian* 4 Oct 2015 that:

“Director Ridley Scott makes the most of an excellent script and a first-rate star for a scintillating

sci-fi trip to the red planet”(Kermode, The Guardian,2015)

“Scott may not have the best eye for a decent script, but when the right words are on the page he can visualize them like no other.”(Kermode)

The Martian gathers between the ochre sands of Jordan’s Wadi Rum and Budapest soundstage to create a lurid adequate backdrop for performing space convenient actions. In addition to that, due to all its smart design and technical deliverance, the scenes convince the viewer enough to be credible and intriguing. It may be appreciated more by those who are interested in chemistry, astronomy and even biology but even persons who are not specialized in those somehow complicated fields find *The Martian* funny and advantageous.

Actually, some of Mark’s performances may seem funny or even not interesting to be added into a Sci-Fi film such as when he ran out of ketchup but the significance is deeper than food. This latest scene hides many themes in itself such as readiness for unexpected events and also the courage to do without accustomed stuff and surpass difficult obstacles in life. *The Martian* is sci-fi in a very different register. This is utopian storytelling. The pleasure lies in Scott's celebration of the resourcefulness of its protagonists in the most daunting circumstances. (Geoffrey Macnab, *The Independent* Friday 02 October 2015)

The Martian is almost certainly, the most optimistic film Scott has made. We are so used to sci-fi movies in which the heroes shoot Martians with ray guns that Scott's botanical approach can't help but seem offbeat and refreshing. Watney's tools are maths and science. (Macnab)

Scott throws in enough eye-popping 3D spectacle and debunking humour to stop it from seeming too sanctimonious. (Macnab)

Scott has collected a formidable crew of very talented actors such as Jessica Chastain in Commander Melissa Lewis who is the one in command of the *Hermes* aircraft. She is one of the strong female characters found in *The Martian*. Though she is supposed to make tough decisions and solve serious issues, that movie demonstrates widely her affection, kindness and sympathy.

There are also other significant performers like Jeff Daniels whose career contains a myriad of magnificent works from vital roles in film, music to stage production. So there is no need to mention that stunning successful unlimited list of countless brilliant works since its high achievements and his great remarkable position in American Cinema is sufficient

enough to give an overview about Jeff Daniels’ greatest fulfillments. Other impressive scenes of that film were done thanks to other masterful actors like Kate Aksel Hennie, Sebastian Stan Mara, Kristen Wiig and Donald Glover.

In fact, Scott did a wonderful realization when he plays to cross-cut between Martian actions and NASA scientists on earth. He could gather and mix those magnificent performances without letting the opportunity the viewer to notice the shifts between scenes. *The Martian* is a tale of two planets with initially competing narratives, one involving Watney’s efforts simply to stay alive and the second centred on NASA’s post-disaster strategizing. (Manohla Dargis, *The New York Times*, Oct 1, 2015)

Here in that film, Matt Damon reminds us of Robinson Crusoe who learns to survive on

his own island of despair. The movie gently thumps several issues: It's unambiguously on the side of science and rationalism with glints of manifest destiny, American can-do-ism and a little flag-waving folded in. (Dargis)

The film realizes a great success since it was directed by one spectacular leader who selected performers who have dynamic presences in order to fit him to stand up to his lush visual style, complex sets and natural vistas. In fact, Scott is a real artist and a visual stylist who has at times obscured that his great, persistent theme is what it means to be human.

Moreover, the cinematography, 3D and special effects are laudable to create those Martian mountains that look absolutely stunning. In addition to that, Scott succeeded in making a delightful balance between entertainment and scientific factors.

In a nutshell, *The Martian* is seen as an extraordinary tale that is conveyed through Watney's remarkable optimism, perseverance, self-confidence and most notably ingenuity. Therefore, Scott's great work inspires the person to go through different situations and solve problems rather than despairing or giving up. Watney's extreme

determination, courage and self-confidence can simply be considered as hints and allusions to Ralph Waldo Emerson's Self-Reliance and even Transcendentalism's tenets. So, what are those principles? And how are they reflected through *The Martian*'s story?

3. *Self-Reliance Portrayed in The Martian*

Watney's unflinching determination and persistence to survive is a story you don't want to miss. Actually, it is seen as a story of struggles and conflicts undertaken by Watney for the sake of survival and rescue. Though there exist multiple examples of movies that their major theme is perseverance and determination, *The Martian* is obviously one of the remarkable examples. Since it did not come for the reason of delivering some scientific experiments and mathematic calculations, but rather the intent is more noble and precious. In truth, it clarifies many scientific factors and beneficial knowledge especially for persons who are not too much interested in physics, biology and even astronomy. In other words, *The Martian* contains many hard truths that can be advantageous for the audience. It shows the viewer how water can be created by mixing hydrogen atoms with oxygen ones.

In addition to that, *The Martian* highlights more about botany, since it demonstrates how agriculture can succeed on Martian soil. Moreover, Gravity was also another natural phenomenon that presented a plus to the film. Through *The Martian*'s actors show that they are flying in the air and cannot touch the soil due to Martian gravity. In addition to that, climbing the ladders in the initial scenes are also other images about gravity that can make the viewer believe whatever he sees in that movie far from thinking that these are science fictional elements.

As we all know that Ralph Waldo Emerson came with many valuable notions that were delivered through several speeches like Self-Reliance, Nature and Circles. Thanks to his words, he established many new liberties and rights. In addition to that, it was in Emerson's time that self-confidence, non-conformity and other concepts emerged. *The Martian* is one of the best examples that highlighted all of those previously stated notions. After being abandoned and stuck alone on Mars, Watney must find a way to survive and for the sake of rescue. Mark did everything he could in order to survive, he made it from the impossible

possible since he grows his own food and utilizes those limited resources to create solutions and hang on for dear life. This shows Self-Reliance and reflects the values of Transcendentalism.

3.1. Nature = God

Nature is omnipresent in this movie and though the script is far from expressing the relationship between God and nature, it is manifested in the screen throughout natural portraits of Mars and some technical effects to show Marks in front of the greatness of the environment in addition to some situations where Mark was subject of death but miraculously he is alive Series of dramatic situations like that of Hydrazine Scene when everything blow but Mark survived.

Emerson declared in his essay Nature that:

The happiest man is he who learns from nature the lesson of worship. (Emerson,2)

In the tranquil landscape, and especially in the distant line of the horizon, man beholds somewhat as beautiful as his own nature. (Emerson,1)

3.2. Man is Divine:

Ridley Scott put forward this divinity in the whole movie but it is highlighted in one scene when Mark said :

“It's a strange feeling. Everywhere I go, I'm the first. Step outside the rover? First guy ever to be there! Climb a hill? The first guy to climb that hill! Kick a rock? That rock hadn't moved in a million years! I'm the first guy to drive long-distance on Mars. The first guy to spend more than thirty-one sols on Mars. The first guy to grow crops on Mars. First, first, first!”(Godard Drew, 85)

In the essay Self-Reliance, Emerson advocated that when he said :

“No law can be sacred to me but that of my own nature. Good and bad are but names very readily transferable to that or this; the only right is what is after my constitution; the only wrong what is against it...” (Emerson, 15)

3.3. Non-conformity and self-reliance

The first non-conformity marker is undoubtedly Mark Watney's determinism to survive, what seemed to be clear at the beginning of the movie is that all conditions were to oblige him to accept his fate to die but Mark rejected this idea by being creative in order to live, hence, at this level living becomes a choice and not an obligation.

oh-six-fifty-three on Sol 19. And... I'm still alive.(thinks)

Obviously. But I'm guessing this is going to be a surprise to my crewmates.And NASA. And... the world. So...surprise.(then) I didn't die on Sol 18 (Godard Drew.15)

In the next scene and after checking all surviving materials he said :

MARK (CONT'D)

Our surface mission here was supposed to take thirty-one days. For redundancy,they sent enough food to last for sixtyeight days. For six people. So for justme, it'll last three-hundred days. And Ifigure I can stretch that to four hundred if I ration. So... I've still gotta figure out how to grow three years worth of food. Here. On a planet where nothing grows. Luckily, I'm the botanist.

Mark holds up one of his mission briefs. Points to the word

“Botanist” under “Watney.” Looks at us like, impressed?

MARK (CONT'D) Mars will come to fear my botany powers. (Godard Drew ,17)

covers non-conformity since it is demonstrated through the screenplay that he is stubborn, headstrong and determined to do what he believes is right no matter if it causes any harm.

“In the face of overwhelming odds, I'm left with only one option, I'm gonna have to science the shit out of this.” (Godard Drew, 25)

Mark's acceptance of the situation and his reaction vis à vis the deadly conditions that he was facing became less pessimistic than they must be and that is what Emerson uttered in his essay when he said :

“There is a time in every man's education when he arrives at the conviction that envy is ignorance; that imitation is suicide...” op cit

These words are clearly mirrored in what Mark said :

“At some point, everything's gonna go south on you... everything's going to go south and you're going to say, this is it. This is how I end. Now you can either accept that, or you can get to work. That's all it is. You just begin. You do the math. You solve one problem... and you solve the next one... and then the next. And If you solve enough problems, you get to come home. All right, questions?” (Godard Drew,52)

Even though sometimes NASA advises him to avoid some dangerous and risky processes, but he is not afraid of futuristic consequences. Mark Watney represented that kind of person who loves challenges, new adventures and being detached from its society does not stand as an obstacle for him but rather pushes him to create resolutions on his own and this is what is known as non-conformity.

Mark: “This is obviously a clog. How about I take it apart and check the internal tubing?”

NASA: “No. You'll mess it up and die.” “So I took it apart.”(Godard Drew,153)

Emerson in an equal way of thinking said

‘All life is an experiment. The more experiments you make the better.’

It is so bad, then, to be misunderstood? Pythagoras was misunderstood and Socrates, and Jesus, and Luther...every pure and wise spirit that ever took flesh. (Emerson,28)

Conclusion:

The Martian came to demonstrate how transcendental noble tenets and thoughts are conveyed through films and not any genre but Sci-Fi ones. It is so difficult to think how it could be done, but with Ridley Scott, it is attainable. Both Ralph Waldo Emerson and Scott hold big pure messages of independence, freedom and self- trust. Both of them carried noble morals that influenced humans and realized big success, the only difference is that one defended his thoughts on papers and utterances while the other portrays them through big screens. The Martian is not a Self Reliance replica but a lesson of life; that nothing is impossible but a matter of choice. the protagonist had the choice whether to stand waiting for death or trust in himself to survive (or to live) by changing his environment and that is what had been clearly uttered in Emerson's Self Reliance.

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