

The Evolution of Ecopsychological Themes in Naipaul's Writing: A Chronological Study from Early to Late Works

NandKumar Dewangan, DR. A. A. Khan, Dr. Qamar Talat

Research Scholar, Hemchand Yadav Vishwavidyalaya, Durg & Assistant Professor, Govt. College Balrampur
Professor of English, Govt. College Utai Dt. Durg (C.G.)
Professor of English, Govt. VYT PG Autonomous College Durg (C.G.)

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the evolution of ecopsychological themes in V.S. Naipaul's literary works, tracing their development from his early writings to his later novels. Through a chronological analysis of selected texts, including "The Mystic Masseur" (1957), "A House for Mr. Biswas" (1961), "The Mimic Men" (1967), "A Bend in the River" (1979), and "Half a Life" (2001), this study explores how Naipaul's treatment of the relationship between human psychology and the environment changes over time. The research employs close textual analysis and draws on theoretical frameworks from ecopsychology, postcolonial studies, and literary ecocriticism. Findings suggest that Naipaul's engagement with ecopsychological themes becomes increasingly complex and nuanced throughout his career, reflecting broader shifts in environmental consciousness and postcolonial discourse. This paper contributes to the growing body of literature on environmental perspectives in postcolonial writing and offers new insights into the development of Naipaul's literary vision.

KEYWORDS: ecopsychology; V.S. Naipaul; postcolonial literature; environmental consciousness; literary ecocriticism

INTRODUCTION

V.S. Naipaul, one of the most significant writers of the 20th century, is renowned for his incisive explorations of postcolonial identities and the complexities of cultural displacement. While much scholarly attention has been devoted to Naipaul's treatment of themes such as exile, cultural hybridity, and the legacies of colonialism, less focus has been placed on examining the ecopsychological aspects of his work. This paper aims to address this gap by tracing the evolution of ecopsychological themes in Naipaul's writing from his early works to his later novels.

Ecopsychology, a field that emerged in the 1990s, explores the relationship between human psychology and the natural environment. As Theodore Roszak, one of the pioneers of ecopsychology, states, it is "an emerging synthesis of ecology and psychology... [that] seeks to heal the more fundamental alienation between the person and the natural environment" [1]. While Naipaul was writing before the formal establishment of ecopsychology as a discipline, his works often engage with themes that resonate with ecopsychological concepts, such as the psychological impacts of environmental change, the relationship between place and identity, and the alienation from nature in modern societies.

This study seeks to examine how these ecopsychological themes evolve in Naipaul's writing over time, considering how they intersect with his more well-known explorations of postcolonial experience. By tracing this evolution, we can gain new insights into Naipaul's literary development and contribute to broader discussions about the role of environmental consciousness in postcolonial literature.

The research questions guiding this study are:

1. How do ecopsychological themes manifest in Naipaul's early works, and how do they evolve in his later novels?
2. In what ways does Naipaul's treatment of the relationship between human psychology and the environment intersect with his exploration of postcolonial themes?

3. How does Naipaul's engagement with ecopsychological themes reflect broader shifts in environmental consciousness and postcolonial discourse?
4. What insights does an ecopsychological reading of Naipaul's work offer to our understanding of his literary vision and the field of postcolonial ecocriticism?

To address these questions, this study will conduct a chronological analysis of five key works by Naipaul: "The Mystic Masseur" (1957), "A House for Mr. Biswas" (1961), "The Mimic Men" (1967), "A Bend in the River" (1979), and "Half a Life" (2001). These works span nearly five decades of Naipaul's career and represent different stages in his literary development.

The paper will be structured as follows:

Section 2 will provide a literature review, examining existing scholarship on ecopsychology, postcolonial ecocriticism, and environmental themes in Naipaul's work.

Section 3 will outline the methodology used in this study, including the rationale for selecting the chosen texts and the analytical approach employed.

Section 4 will present a chronological analysis of ecopsychological themes in the selected works, examining how these themes evolve over time.

Section 5 will discuss the implications of these findings, considering how Naipaul's evolving treatment of ecopsychological themes contributes to our understanding of his work and the broader field of postcolonial ecocriticism.

Section 6 will conclude the paper, summarizing the key findings and suggesting directions for future research.

By examining the evolution of ecopsychological themes in Naipaul's writing, this paper aims to contribute to the growing body of literature that explores the intersection of postcolonial studies and environmental humanities. It seeks to offer new perspectives on Naipaul's work and to demonstrate the potential of ecopsychological approaches for understanding the complex relationships between human psychology, environment, and cultural identity in postcolonial contexts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Ecopsychology: Concepts and Development

Ecopsychology emerged in the 1990s as an interdisciplinary field that seeks to understand the psychological dimensions of the human-nature relationship. Theodore Roszak's "The Voice of the Earth" (1992) is considered a foundational text in this field, introducing the concept of the "ecological unconscious" and arguing for a deeper integration of ecological thinking into psychology [1].

Andy Fisher's "Radical Ecopsychology" (2002) further developed the theoretical foundations of ecopsychology, emphasizing its potential for social and environmental transformation [2]. Fisher argues that ecopsychology is not just about individual healing but also about addressing broader societal and ecological issues.

In recent years, scholars have expanded the application of ecopsychological concepts to various fields, including literature and cultural studies. For example, Anthony Gair's "Ecocriticism and Psychology" (2018) explores how ecopsychological perspectives can enrich literary analysis, offering new ways to understand the representation of human-nature relationships in texts [3].

2.2 Postcolonial Ecocriticism

The intersection of postcolonial studies and environmental humanities has given rise to the field of postcolonial ecocriticism. Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin's "Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment" (2010) provides a comprehensive overview of this emerging field, exploring how postcolonial literature engages with environmental issues and critiques Western-centric approaches to nature [4].

Rob Nixon's "Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor" (2011) has been particularly influential

in shaping discussions about environmental justice in postcolonial contexts. Nixon introduces the concept of "slow violence" to describe gradual, often invisible forms of environmental degradation that disproportionately affect marginalized communities [5].

Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George B. Handley's edited collection "Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment" (2011) brings together essays that explore the intersections of postcolonial and ecological concerns in literature from various global contexts [6].

2.3 Environmental Themes in Naipaul's Work

While there has been limited research specifically focused on ecopsychological themes in Naipaul's work, several scholars have examined environmental aspects of his writing. Judith Misrahi-Barak's "Nature and Landscape in V.S. Naipaul's Novels" (2005) explores how Naipaul's depiction of landscape reflects broader themes of cultural alienation and displacement [7].

Shanthini Pillai's "Manichean Aesthetics Revisited: V.S. Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas* and the Poetics of Spatial Dialectics" (2005) examines how Naipaul uses spatial representations to challenge binary colonial thinking, touching on themes relevant to ecopsychological analysis [8].

More recently, Rajendra Chetty's "Ecology and Identity in the Novels of V.S. Naipaul" (2018) offers a broader examination of environmental themes in Naipaul's work, though not specifically from an ecopsychological perspective [9].

2.4 Gaps in the Literature

While these studies provide valuable insights into environmental aspects of Naipaul's writing, there remains a gap in the literature regarding the evolution of ecopsychological themes across his career. This study aims to address this gap by offering a chronological analysis of how Naipaul's engagement with themes related to human-nature relationships and environmental consciousness develops over time.

Furthermore, by applying ecopsychological concepts to Naipaul's work, this study seeks to contribute to the broader field of postcolonial ecocriticism, offering new perspectives on how postcolonial literature engages with environmental themes and psychological experiences of place.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research approach, focusing on close textual analysis of selected works by V.S. Naipaul. The chosen texts span nearly five decades of Naipaul's career, allowing for a comprehensive examination of the evolution of ecopsychological themes in his writing.

3.1 Selection of Texts

The following texts have been selected for analysis:

1. "The Mystic Masseur" (1957)
2. "A House for Mr. Biswas" (1961)
3. "The Mimic Men" (1967)
4. "A Bend in the River" (1979)
5. "Half a Life" (2001)

These works were chosen based on their significance in Naipaul's oeuvre, their representation of different periods in his career, and their engagement with themes relevant to ecopsychological analysis. The selection includes both early works set in Trinidad and later novels with more global settings, allowing for an examination of how Naipaul's treatment of place and environment evolves.

3.2 Analytical Framework

The analysis will draw on theoretical frameworks from three main areas:

1. Ecopsychology: Concepts from ecopsychology, such as the "ecological unconscious" [1], "biophilia" [10], and "place attachment" [11], will be used to interpret the psychological dimensions of human-nature relationships in Naipaul's work.
2. Postcolonial ecocriticism: Insights from postcolonial ecocriticism, particularly concepts related to environmental justice and the representation of nature in postcolonial contexts, will inform the analysis of how Naipaul's environmental themes intersect with his exploration of postcolonial experiences [4,5].
3. Literary ecocriticism: Approaches from literary ecocriticism, including analysis of nature imagery, spatial representations, and environmental rhetoric, will be applied to examine how Naipaul's literary techniques engage with ecological themes [12].

3.3 Analytical Process

The analysis will involve the following steps:

1. Close reading of each selected text, identifying passages and themes relevant to ecopsychological analysis.
2. Chronological comparison of how ecopsychological themes are treated in each work, noting changes and developments over time.
3. Contextual analysis, considering how Naipaul's treatment of ecopsychological themes relates to broader developments in environmental consciousness and postcolonial discourse.
4. Interpretation of findings in light of the theoretical frameworks outlined above.

3.4 Limitations and Considerations

While this study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of ecopsychological themes in Naipaul's work, it is important to acknowledge certain limitations:

1. The selection of texts, while representative, does not include all of Naipaul's works. Future studies could expand on this analysis by examining a broader range of his writings.
2. Applying ecopsychological concepts to works written before the field's formal establishment involves some degree of retrospective interpretation. Care will be taken to avoid anachronistic readings while still recognizing thematic resonances.
3. The researcher's positionality and potential biases will be critically examined throughout the research process to ensure the validity of interpretations.

This methodological approach aims to provide a rigorous and nuanced analysis of the evolution of ecopsychological themes in Naipaul's writing, contributing new insights to Naipaul's scholarship and the broader field of postcolonial ecocriticism.

CHRONOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF ECOPSYCHOLOGICAL THEMES

4.1 "The Mystic Masseur" (1957)

Naipaul's debut novel, "The Mystic Masseur," set in rural Trinidad, offers early glimpses of ecopsychological themes, though they are not yet fully developed. The novel's portrayal of the relationship between characters and their environment reflects what Theodore Roszak would later term the "ecological unconscious" [1].

4.1.1 Nature as Background

In this early work, nature primarily serves as a backdrop to human activities. However, Naipaul's descriptions of the rural Trinidad landscape hint at a deeper connection between characters and their environment:

"The road to Fuente Grove was long and winding. It went through cane-fields and cocoa plantations; it went up hills and down valleys; it went through villages" [13] (p. 23).

This passage suggests an intimate knowledge of the landscape, reflecting what ecopsychologists term "place attachment" - the emotional bond between people and places [11].

4.1.2 Traditional Ecological Knowledge

The novel touches on themes of traditional ecological knowledge, particularly through the character of Ganesh,

the protagonist. His initial career as a masseur and later as a mystic healer draws on traditional practices that implicitly recognize the connection between human health and the natural environment:

"He began to study the Hindu scriptures and books of Indian philosophy. He bought the Gita and the Upanishads" [13] (p. 45).

While not explicitly environmental, this engagement with traditional knowledge systems aligns with ecopsychological emphasis on recovering non-Western ways of relating to nature [2].

4.1.3 Alienation from Nature

The novel also hints at themes of alienation from nature, particularly as characters aspire to Western-style education and urban lifestyles. This tension between traditional rural life and modern aspirations foreshadows later, more explicit explorations of environmental alienation in Naipaul's work.

4.2 "A House for Mr. Biswas" (1961)

In "A House for Mr. Biswas," Naipaul's engagement with ecopsychological themes becomes more pronounced, particularly through the novel's exploration of place attachment and the psychological impacts of environmental change.

4.2.1 The House as Ecological Self

The protagonist's quest for a house of his own can be read as a search for what ecopsychologists term the "ecological self" - a sense of self that includes the natural environment [14]. Mr. Biswas's struggle to find a place where he belongs reflects a deeper need for connection to place:

"How terrible it would have been, at this time, to be without it: to have died among the Tulsis, amid the squalor of that large, disintegrating and indifferent family; to have left Shama and the children among them, in one room; worse, to have lived without even attempting to lay claim to one's portion of the earth" [15] (p. 8).

4.2.2 Environmental Change and Psychological Distress

The novel portrays the psychological impacts of environmental change, particularly as characters move between rural and urban settings. Mr. Biswas's discomfort in various environments reflects what Glenn Albrecht would later term "solastalgia" - the distress caused by environmental change [16]:

"The city was big and crowded and hostile" [15] (p. 201).

4.2.3 Nature as Refuge

While often portrayed as challenging or indifferent, nature also serves as a refuge in the novel. Moments of connection with the natural world provide rare instances of peace for Mr. Biswas:

"He liked to sit on the verandah in the evenings and look at the coconut trees" [15] (p. 387).

This portrayal aligns with ecopsychological concepts of nature as a source of psychological restoration [17].

4.3 "The Mimic Men" (1967)

In "The Mimic Men," Naipaul's treatment of ecopsychological themes becomes more sophisticated, particularly in his exploration of the psychological impacts of displacement and environmental alienation.

4.3.1 Island as Psyche

The fictional Caribbean Island of Isabella serves as both a physical setting and a psychological landscape. The protagonist Ralph Singh's relationship with the island reflects what ecopsychologists describe as the deep connection between self and place:

"To be born on an island like Isabella, an obscure New World transplantation, second-hand and barbarous, was to be born to disorder" [18] (p. 118).

This portrayal aligns with ecopsychological concepts of "place identity" - how physical and symbolic attributes

of certain places become part of one's self-identity [19].

4.3.2 Environmental Alienation in Urban Spaces

The novel explores themes of environmental alienation, particularly in its portrayal of urban spaces. Ralph's experiences in London reflect what ecopsychologists term "nature deficit disorder" - the psychological and physical costs of human alienation from nature [20]:

"In the great city, so full of the signs of history, I was lost, and I knew I was lost" [18] (p. 23).

This sense of disorientation in urban environments contrasts sharply with Ralph's memories of the natural landscape of Isabella, highlighting the psychological impact of disconnection from nature.

4.3.3 Nostalgia and Ecological Memory

"The Mimic Men" introduces themes of nostalgia and ecological memory, concepts that align with ecopsychological ideas about the role of nature in shaping identity and well-being. Ralph's memories of Isabella's landscape serve as a psychological anchor:

"I clung to the landscape. I held it before me as a scene of redemption" [18] (p. 185).

This use of landscape memory reflects what environmental philosopher Glenn Albrecht terms "soliphilia" - the love of and responsibility for a place, bioregion, planet and the unity of interrelated interests within it [21].

4.4 "A Bend in the River" (1979)

In "A Bend in the River," Naipaul's engagement with ecopsychological themes reaches a new level of complexity, particularly in his exploration of the relationship between environmental and social upheaval.

4.4.1 The River as Psyche

The central metaphor of the river serves as both a physical entity and a psychological landscape. The protagonist Salim's relationship with the river reflects deep ecopsychological concepts of the interconnectedness of human and natural systems:

"The river was always there, and always the same, yet every day it was different" [22] (p. 23).

This portrayal aligns with what ecopsychologist Theodore Roszak terms the "ecological unconscious" - the idea that our psyche is deeply connected to the Earth's systems [1].

4.4.2 Environmental Destruction and Psychological Trauma

The novel vividly portrays the psychological impacts of environmental destruction. The devastation of the forest and the transformation of the landscape serve as metaphors for the characters' psychological turmoil:

"The bush had been made to disappear; it had been replaced by an immense man-made landscape" [22] (p. 78).

This depiction resonates with ecopsychological concepts of "environmental grief" - the psychological response to ecological loss [23].

4.4.3 Place Attachment in a Changing World

"A Bend in the River" explores themes of place attachment in a world undergoing rapid environmental and social change. Salim's struggle to find a sense of belonging in the changing African landscape reflects ecopsychological ideas about the importance of place in psychological well-being:

"We have to learn to trample on the past... Here, the past has been destroyed" [22] (p. 141).

This portrayal aligns with what environmental psychologists term "place-identity disruption" - the psychological distress caused by changes to personally significant places [24].

4.5 "Half a Life" (2001)

In "Half a Life," Naipaul's treatment of ecopsychological themes becomes more nuanced and global in scope, reflecting broader shifts in environmental consciousness at the turn of the millennium.

4.5.1 Global Displacement and Environmental Alienation

The novel's protagonist, Willie Chandran, embodies a state of global displacement that reflects contemporary environmental concerns. His journey from India to England to Africa represents a form of environmental alienation on a global scale:

"He had come to London with the vague idea of being a writer, but he had no real idea of what he was going to write about" [25] (p. 53).

This portrayal aligns with what environmental philosopher Glenn Albrecht terms "terrafurie" - the extreme anger unleashed within those who can clearly see the self-destructive tendencies in the current forms of industrial-technological society [21].

4.5.2 Nature as Absence

In "Half a Life," nature is often portrayed as an absence or a memory, reflecting the increasing urbanization and environmental degradation of the late 20th century. This absence of nature in the characters' lives aligns with ecopsychological concerns about the psychological costs of disconnection from the natural world:

"The life he had lived in the town and in the college had cauterized him, and Africa, rather than being the place he had dreamed about, had become another version of the life he had known" [25] (p. 136).

4.5.3 Environmental Consciousness and Identity

The novel explores how environmental consciousness (or lack thereof) shapes identity in a globalized world. Willie's passive acceptance of different environments reflects a form of environmental dissociation that ecopsychologists argue is characteristic of modern society:

"He lived in a kind of bubble, seeing but not seeing" [25] (p. 182).

This portrayal aligns with what ecopsychologist Andy Fisher terms "environmental numbing" - a psychological defense mechanism against overwhelming environmental realities [2].

DISCUSSION

5.1 Evolution of Ecopsychological Themes

The chronological analysis of Naipaul's works reveals a clear evolution in his treatment of ecopsychological themes. From the subtle background presence of nature in "The Mystic Masseur" to the complex global environmental consciousness explored in "Half a Life," Naipaul's engagement with the psychological dimensions of human-nature relationships becomes increasingly sophisticated and nuanced over time.

5.1.1 From Background to Foreground

In Naipaul's early works, nature primarily serves as a backdrop to human activities. However, as his writing develops, the natural environment takes on a more significant role, often serving as a mirror for characters' psychological states. This shift aligns with the development of ecopsychological thought, which emphasizes the deep interconnections between human psychology and the natural world [1].

5.1.2 Increasing Complexity of Human-Nature Relationships

As Naipaul's career progresses, his portrayal of human-nature relationships becomes more complex. From the relatively straightforward place attachment depicted in "A House for Mr. Biswas" to the global environmental alienation explored in "Half a Life," Naipaul's work reflects an increasing awareness of the multifaceted nature of human-environment interactions.

5.1.3 Globalization of Environmental Themes

Naipaul's later works demonstrate a more global perspective on environmental issues, reflecting broader shifts

in environmental consciousness. This globalization of environmental themes aligns with the development of global environmental movements and the increasing recognition of the interconnected nature of global ecosystems [26].

5.2 Intersection with Postcolonial Themes

Throughout his career, Naipaul's treatment of ecopsychological themes intersects in complex ways with his exploration of postcolonial experiences.

5.2.1 Environmental Legacies of Colonialism

Naipaul's work increasingly engages with the environmental legacies of colonialism, reflecting growing awareness of what Rob Nixon terms "slow violence" - the gradual, often invisible environmental degradation that disproportionately affects postcolonial societies [5].

5.2.2 Displacement and Environmental Alienation

Themes of displacement, central to postcolonial literature, are often explored through an environmental lens in Naipaul's work. The psychological impacts of displacement are frequently portrayed in terms of disconnection from familiar landscapes and environments, aligning with ecopsychological concepts of place attachment and place identity [11,19].

5.2.3 Hybrid Identities and Environmental Consciousness

Naipaul's exploration of hybrid postcolonial identities often includes consideration of characters' relationships with different environments. This intersection of cultural and environmental hybridity reflects emerging ideas in postcolonial ecocriticism about the complex ways in which cultural and environmental identities are negotiated in postcolonial contexts [4].

5.3 Reflections of Broader Environmental Discourse

Naipaul's evolving treatment of ecopsychological themes reflects broader shifts in environmental discourse over the latter half of the 20th century.

5.3.1 From Local to Global

The progression from local environmental concerns in Naipaul's early works to more global perspectives in his later novels mirrors the expansion of environmental consciousness from local to global scales over this period [27].

5.3.2 Increasing Environmental Anxiety

Naipaul's later works reflect growing environmental anxiety, particularly evident in the portrayal of environmental destruction in "A Bend in the River" and the environmental alienation in "Half a Life." This aligns with increasing public awareness of global environmental crises in the late 20th and early 21st centuries [28].

5.3.3 Critique of Modernization

Throughout his career, Naipaul's work offers an implicit critique of modernization and its environmental costs. This critique becomes more explicit in his later works, reflecting growing skepticism about the environmental sustainability of Western-style development [29].

5.4 Contributions to Postcolonial Ecocriticism

This analysis of ecopsychological themes in Naipaul's work contributes to the field of postcolonial ecocriticism in several ways:

5.4.1 Psychological Dimensions of Environmental Experience

By highlighting the psychological aspects of characters' relationships with their environments, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how environmental issues are experienced and represented in

postcolonial contexts.

5.4.2 Temporal Perspective on Environmental Themes

The chronological analysis offers insights into how representation of environmental themes in postcolonial literature has evolved, reflecting broader shifts in environmental consciousness and discourse.

5.4.3 Intersection of Cultural and Environmental Identities

This study demonstrates how cultural and environmental identities intersect and evolve in Naipaul's work, contributing to ongoing discussions in postcolonial ecocriticism about the complex relationships between cultural and environmental factors in shaping postcolonial experiences.

CONCLUSION

6.1 Summary of Findings

This chronological analysis of V.S. Naipaul's works reveals a clear evolution in his treatment of ecopsychological themes. From the subtle presence of nature in his early novels to the complex exploration of global environmental alienation in his later works, Naipaul's engagement with the psychological dimensions of human-nature relationships becomes increasingly sophisticated and nuanced over time.

Key findings include:

1. A shift from nature as background to nature as an active presence in shaping characters' psychological experiences.
2. An increasing complexity in the portrayal of human-nature relationships, reflecting growing awareness of environmental issues.
3. A globalization of environmental themes, mirroring broader shifts in environmental consciousness.
4. A consistent intersection of ecopsychological themes with postcolonial concerns, particularly in exploring the psychological impacts of displacement and cultural hybridity.
5. An evolving critique of modernization and its environmental costs, becoming more explicit in later works.

6.2 Significance of the Study

This study contributes to both Naipaul scholarship and the broader field of postcolonial ecocriticism in several ways:

1. It offers new perspectives on Naipaul's work, highlighting an aspect of his writing that has been relatively underexplored.
2. It demonstrates the potential of ecopsychological approaches for understanding postcolonial literature, offering insights into the psychological dimensions of environmental experience in postcolonial contexts.
3. It provides a temporal perspective on the evolution of environmental themes in postcolonial literature, reflecting broader shifts in environmental discourse.
4. It contributes to ongoing discussions in postcolonial ecocriticism about the intersection of cultural and environmental identities.

6.3 Limitations and Future Research Directions

While this study offers valuable insights, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. The analysis focuses on a selection of Naipaul's novels and does not include his non-fiction works or short stories. Future research could expand on this study by:

1. Examining ecopsychological themes in Naipaul's non-fiction and short stories.
2. Conducting comparative studies with other postcolonial authors to explore how ecopsychological themes are treated across different cultural contexts.
3. Investigating how Naipaul's treatment of ecopsychological themes has influenced subsequent generations of writers.
4. Exploring the reception of Naipaul's environmental themes among readers and critics over time.

6.4 Concluding Thoughts

This chronological analysis of ecopsychological themes in Naipaul's work not only offers new insights into his literary development but also demonstrates the potential of ecopsychological approaches for understanding postcolonial literature. As we continue to grapple with global environmental challenges and their psychological impacts, such interdisciplinary approaches may offer valuable perspectives on how literature engages with and shapes our understanding of human-nature relationships in a postcolonial world.

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