"Only Connect": 1 Irish Women's Voices, Latin America & the Irish Women's Writing Network

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Abstract: This essay offers a preliminary sketch of the recent critical attention given to Irish women and the literary interfaces between Ireland and Latin America (e.g. travel writers, immigrant or diasporic writers, and those who wrote 'travelling texts') at the turn of the twentieth century. This growing field is then situated in the broader context of new scholarship on Irish women's writing, literary and otherwise, published during this period. It also introduces the Irish Women's Writing Network, launched in 2016, and its potential benefits to scholars, and a consideration of the ways in which intersections and overlaps can be further explored and promoted, networks can be established, and conversations and cross-pollinations facilitated.

And so I lie, watching, now, the right-hand bank: which is Paraguay. It is indeed an Arcady, as my friend promised; all wild orange groves, and "bosky glens". It looks soft. You can see the mist hang on distant forests and the hills are quite medieval, in their trackless pastoral. Endless and ancient, and waiting for the story to begin.

(Enright 2002: 159)

Of all the Irish women who travelled or migrated to, explored, or wrote about the life, landscapes and peoples of Latin America during the 'long nineteenth century', Eliza Lynch's name is now the most resonant. Not a writer herself, she figured as both notorious and glorious in the contemporary legends around her life as the mistress of Francisco Solano López, son of Carlos Antonio López, president and dictator of Paraguay, whom he later succeeded. More recently, her life (1833-1886), which began in Cork and was shaped by the Irish Famine, emigration and exploitation before she became a powerful and influential, though always controversial, figurehead in Paraguay, has been

¹ The epigraph to E.M. Forster's 1910 novel *Howard's End* (London: Penguin, 1971).

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revisited and reimagined in film and print. Numerous biographies and Anne Enright's novel, *The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch* (2002), have illuminated this striking figure and, more broadly, the presence of nineteenth-century Irish women in Paraguay. This intersection between Ireland and Latin America was, of course, not the only one.

The exploration of literary connections between Ireland and Latin America during the long nineteenth century and well into the twentieth century has already been identified as crucial to understanding the diasporic culture and its identity formation, as Laura P. Z. Izarra and Patricia Novillo-Corvalán have outlined:

Another way of looking at the interface between Ireland and Latin America is through the Irish diaspora and their descendants, particularly in their contributions to literature, painting and music. [...] Indeed, the conviction that transcultural contact between different literatures, cultures and languages would give birth to, or encourage the formation of, an invigorated modern Irish culture lies at the centre of the historical exchange between Ireland and Latin America.

(Izarra and Novillo-Corvalán 2009: 134).

A glance through the contents list of this 2009 issue of *Irish Migration Studies in Latin America*, in which Izarra and Novillo-Corvalán's article appeared, gives a flavor of the enriching intersections, both past and present. For example, it lists topics such as James Joyce and Spanish literature, Joyce's *Ulysses* and Argentinian literature, and Marina Carr and her fascination with Spanish and Latin American literature.

Diverse scholarship on migration and the nineteenth-century Irish diaspora in various South American countries has drawn specific attention to the presence of Irish women in various capacities. The life of Cecilia Grierson, Argentina's first female doctor, and her professional achievements have been mapped, for example, along with numerous other Irish women who either migrated from Ireland or who were born in Latin America, first generation progeny of the diaspora (Barry 2008: 213-218).3 Ordinary women's voices and their perspectives have also been captured through their letters, a selection of which were published in Edmundo Murray's 2005 work Becoming Irlandès: Private Narratives of the Irish Emigration to Argentina (1844-1912). These letters have since become the focus of a fascinating linguistic analysis of women in the context of Irish emigration (Amador-Moreno 2016: 77-95). Rediscovery and new readings of the lives and literary output of Irish women travelling to, and writing about and from, the Americas during the long nineteenth century and beyond have been stimulated by feminist and postcolonial perspectives, as well as readings informed by diaspora and migration studies.

³ The recovery and elucidation of the lives and achievements of numerous Irish women who settled or travelled to Latin America is a significant feature of *Irish Migration Studies in Latin America*.

The aim of this essay is two-fold – firstly to offer a preliminary sketch of this rapidly developing field before situating it in the broader contexts of the burgeoning scholarship on Irish women's writing, literary and otherwise, during the nineteenth century and at the turn of the twentieth century. Secondly, to introduce the recently launched Irish Women's Writing Network and its potential benefits to scholars, and a consideration of the ways in which intersections and overlaps can be further explored and promoted, networks can be established, and conversations and cross-pollinations facilitated.

In recent years, Laura Izarra has identified the rich terrain of "Argentinian diaspora space" at the turn of the nineteenth century and in the first decades of the twentieth century in "Don't Cry for Me Ireland - Irish Women's Voices from Argentina" (Izarra 2010: 136). Mapping out "the various forms of literary representation produced by Irish immigrant women in Latin America", she focuses on letters, travel narratives, sketches and memoirs, "the main forms used by women migrants to portray the effects of the new geographical, historical and political landscape on their psyche and on the social roles they performed in a non-English speaking country" (Izarra 2010: 136). In "Through Other Eyes: Nineteenth-Century Irish Women in South America", she expands her reach from Marion Mulhall's travelogue Between the Amazon and Andes (1881), the memoirs of Barbara Peart in Tia Barbarita (1932), and an autobiographical novel by Kathleen Nevin, You'll Never Go Back (1946) discussed in "Don't Cry for Me Ireland", to representations of Irish women migrants in Brazil and Paraguay as well as Argentina (Izarra 2016: 59-69). Marion Mulhall (1847-1922), "a pioneer in writing about the Irish in South America", her extensive travels across the continent and considerable body of travel writing has received further attention in Mariono Galazzi's "Thousands of Miles through Untrodden Lands" (Galazzi 2015: 39). Ena Dargan, a later but similarly hitherto neglected writer, who documented her travels from Argentina to Peru, features in Deirdre Brady's essay, "The Road to Cuzco: An Irish woman writer's journey to the 'navel of the world" in this current volume (11-24), expanding the vistas on Irish women writers who recorded their travels and experiences on the South American continent during the midtwentieth century.

There were other Irish women travelers too. Protestant missionary Mary Geraldine Guinness (1865-1949; part of the evangelical wing of the Guinness family and later known as Mrs. Howard Taylor), made extended visits to missions in China and South America. She wrote several accounts of her experiences including *Peru: Its Story, People and Religion* (1909). The preface provides the specific contexts of the journey undertaken and recorded in this work:

The author of this book, Miss Guinness, a student of philosophy at

⁴ Marion Mulhall's husband, Michael Mulhall, was also a significant figure as founder and editor of *The Standard* newspaper, a publication directed towards the English-speaking population of Buenos Aires. He was also the author of several books about South America (Galazzi 2015: 42).

University College, is a young lady of a family many of whose members have done noble service in the missionary cause. She has had unusual opportunities, during her sojourn in Peru of observing the conditions of spiritual destitution and the obstacles which hinder the spread of evangelical truth here. She has here collected and set forth her notes of travel in many parts of that singularly diversified and interesting country, and they make a most striking and suggestive work. She shows herself to be a keen and sympathetic observer of people and places, and to possess the faculty of vivid description.

(Guinness 1920: Alex Macalister, introduction, viii)

In her introduction to the travelogue, Guinness describes a violent storm on Lake Titicaca and concludes that despite this and many other dangers, in answer to the question, was it worth it, that - "Yes - a thousand times - to have come to know and love the wonderful land of the Incas" (Guinness 1920: xiii). Is there a current research project exploring the life and travels of Mary Guinness or other forgotten Irish women travel writers who traversed the South American continent?⁵ What glimpsed but unexamined literary allusions, connections and networks between Ireland and Latin America at the turn of the twentieth century await further illumination?

George Egerton's (Mary Chavelita Dunne Bright, 1859-1945) residence in Chile is cited in biographies. Furthermore, in Egerton's autobiographical novel, The Wheel of God, a trip to Chile is proposed to the central figure, Mary Desmond: "we'll stop in Buenos Ayres, go on to Valparaiso" (Egerton 1898: 214). In fact, according to Iveta Jusová, Egerton's connections to South America through a rich uncle, an admiral in the British navy and based in Chile, shaped her political perspectives in a distinctive and paradoxical manner:

Egerton managed to turn the only money the family seems to have received from the rich colonial uncle toward quite anticolonial (or at least antibourgeois) ends - she developed a loathing for religion and learned the German language, which would later enable her to discover Nietzsche (the arch-critic of bourgeois morality) long before his philosophy became known to English readers.

(Jusová 2005: 51)

South America features in other fiction by Irish women writers publishing during this period - The Gadfly (1897) by E. L. Voynich (1864-1960) and much more briefly in Hannah Lynch's (1859-1904) enigmatic novel, An Odd Experiment, via the portrait of Miss Baruna, "a shallow, good-hearted type of girl of South American extraction" (Lynch 1897: 177). In The Gadfly, a political and geographical map of several Latin American countries is outlined through the adventure tales of the eponymous hero, following his flight and sojourn there:

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See Russell (2017) for further biographical details, although there is no reference to her journey to South America here.

He rattled on, telling anecdote after anecdote; now of the Argentine war, now of the Brazilian expedition, now of hunting feats and adventures with savages or wild beasts. [...]

"It must have been a glorious life!" sighed Galli with naïve envy. "I wonder you ever made up your mind to leave Brazil. Other countries must seem so flat after it!"

"I think I was happiest in Peru and Ecuador", said the Gadfly. "That really is a magnificent tract of country. Of course it is very hot, especially the coast district of Ecuador, and one has to rough it a bit; but the scenery is superb beyond imagination".

(Voynich 1900: 182)

Are there other allusions, abbreviated or more extended, to specific countries or the continent more generally in the work of contemporaries of Egerton, Voynich and Lynch?⁶ Are there patterns or specific resonances to be traced? Are there other women's voices, contributions from Ireland or from within Latin America more broadly during the long nineteenth century to be recovered, or are scholars already excavating further?

A reference to Alice Milligan's article "The Emigration Question and Employment for Women", published on 28 August 1903 in *The Southern Cross* newspaper (cited in Izarra 2010: 134), and a footnote in Catherine Morris's article on Milligan, give a tantalizing taste of other possible avenues for exploration which may well already be under way:

'Hero Lays' was the first collection of Milligan's poetry from newspapers. It was a project initiated and funded by Irish republican sympathizers in Argentina led by William Bulfin (1862-1910). Milligan remained in close contact with Bulfin ('Che Bueno') who actively supported the *Shan Van Vocht* from its inception in 1896. As editor and proprietor of the nationalist paper *The Southern Cross*, Bulfin was a central figure in the Irish republican movement abroad and remained an active supporter of Milligan's work until his death.

(Morris 2003: fn. 28, 96)

Was Alice Milligan the only Irish woman writer whose work featured in *The Southern Cross*? Or did some of her contemporaries, who were also engaged in various ways in promoting the Celtic Renaissance and nationalist discourses feature? Laura Izarra's discussion of literary narratives and Irish travelling texts published in nineteenth-century newspapers, including *The Southern Cross* and *Fianna* in Argentina or *The Anglo-Brazilian Times* in Brazil, provides a definite answer and a glimpse of further research possibilities (Izarra 2015: 65). In the

⁶ All three of these writers are striking for their unconventional lives, international travels and fiction. See O'Toole (2014) on Egerton's migrations and transnational connections, and Binckes and Laing (2010) on Lynch's "vagabondage" across Europe and travel writing. Of the three, Voynich (Ethel Lilian née Boole) remains the most neglected now in the context of scholarship on Irish women's writing at the fin de siècle.

short-lived journal, Fianna (1910-1912), which aimed "to construct a collective narrative that kept the diasporic subject tied to their birthplace", the inclusion of poetry by Nora Hopper (1871-1906) and Ethna Carbery (Anna Johnston McManus, 1866-1902) is intriguing (Izarra 2015: 67). What further treasures await discovery? How accessible are these newspapers, are they being digitised and in which archives might they be found? Were there other women poets or writers, other examples of women's writing as 'travelling texts' in these publications?⁷ And what about contributions to other papers that flourished during this period: The Standard, for example, with its distinctively different political and religious allegiances and with which Marion Mulhall was particularly associated. Sinead Wall's analysis of William Bulfin's travel sketches develops our understanding of the history of Irish newspapers in Latin America. Specifically, Wall explores "the material effect of migration in the form of print culture and The Southern Cross newspaper" (Wall 2015: 28); in this essay, she offers a model or departure point for the analysis of Irish women writers who were published in newspapers and journals in Latin America during this period. From a different perspective, Giulia Bruna's "The Irish Revival en Route: The Travel Writing of William Bulfin and Robert Lynd" argues that their travel writing "complicate[s] the geographies of activism of the Revival" (Bruna 2016: 162), provoking questions about how an engagement with Irish women's voices of this period might further complicate these geographies.

Marion Mulhall's travel writing and literary representations of South America, and the 'travelling texts' and Irish Nationalism of Nora Hopper, Alice Milligan, Ethna Carberry in *The Southern Cross* newspaper and *Fianna* journal, could have featured among the many writers under discussion at the Occluded Narratives: Researching Irish Women's Writing (1880-1910) Symposium (Mary Immaculate College, Limerick, 2016). This event was twinned with the launch of the Irish Women's Writing Network. Jane Barlow, Katherine Cecil Thurston, Ethel Colburn Mayne, L.A.M. Priestly, Alice Stopford Green and Hannah Lynch were just some of the writers whose works were considered in a variety of broader contexts – newspaper and periodical publication, women's suffrage, trans-European cultural networks, travel writing, archives and the 'digital turn', Land War fiction and more.

So, who are these and numerous other women writers not listed who were published at the intersections of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries? What did they write, why did they write, in what political, social and cultural contexts, and where did they publish? Where can one find their works? How does one teach them if texts are out of print? What does the retrieval of the stories of their lives and analysis of their *neuvre* tell us about this period in literary history,

⁷ The concept of 'travelling texts' or 'textual travels' in this context has been defined as "those texts published in newspapers read by the community, such as *The Southern Cross* and *Fianna*, [which] shaped the diasporic identity of the Irish in Argentina" (Wall and Izarra (2015: 7).

8 https://irishwomenswritingnetwork.com.

The plenitude of women writers and the diversity of their writing has been made evident through the *Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, volumes 4 and 5, and in numerous studies of the Victorian period and early twentieth century, including James Murphy (2013), J.W. Foster (2008) and Rolf Loeber and Magda Stouthamer-Loeber (2006).

as well as print cultures and publishing histories? Travel writers, historians, botanists, novelists, short story writers and journalists, sometimes all and more, these women wrote from divergent political and religious perspectives, their subjects and settings were multiple. Crossing generic boundaries – Land War fiction, 'New Woman' fiction, travel writing, children's literature, Nationalist poetry (to name a few), multi-topic contributions to newspapers and periodicals - the focus of their writing was not only on Ireland but it was international too. Europe, the United States and Canada, the South Seas, South America and Australia also featured in their fiction, journalism and travel pieces.

Theorising and practising acts of retrieval are not new. In "Writing Irish Women's Literary History" published in 2001, Margaret Kelleher noted how: "The recovery of previously neglected writing by women from the eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries has been one of the richest activities in Irish feminist literary studies", and how new research had broadened the focus beyond poetry, fiction and drama to other genres (Kelleher, 2001: 5). After the publication of the Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing, volumes 4 and 5, in 2002 and more recently Mary Pierse's five volume Irish Feminisms 1810-1930 (2012), after the proliferation of scholarship in the wake of these groundbreaking volumes and the rapidly growing availability of databases that provide access to digitised resources, Margaret Kelleher's observations remain pertinent almost twenty years on.

A glance at publications over the past decade gives an insight into the continuing diversity and innovation in this field of feminist recovery. New biographies and fresh angles on the lives of writers prominent during this period include, for example: Anne Jamison's E. Œ. Somerville and Martin Ross: female authorship and literary collaboration (2016); Sonja Tiernan's biography, Eva Gore-Booth: An Image of Such Politics (2012) and her edited collection of The Political Writings of Eva Gore-Booth (2015); Heidi Hansson's Emily Lawless 1845-1913: Writing the Interspace (2007); and Catherine Morris's Alice Milligan and the Irish Cultural Revival (2012). In The Irish New Woman (2013) Tina O'Toole draws attention to the defining role Irish women writers played at the fin de siècle experimenting in fiction with new identities and roles for women. Stories for girls and specifically the 'New Girl' fiction, a subgenre also dominated by Irish women writers of this period such as L.T. Meade, has also been foregrounded (see Susan Cahill (2014) and Beth Rogers (2014), for example). The shaping of girls' education and thus the lives of Irish women during the nineteenth century is illuminated from another angle by historian Ciaran O'Neill in Catholics of Consequence: Transnational Education, Social Mobility and the Irish Catholic Elite, 1850-1900 (2014). Women as historians in Ireland is a new area recently attended to in Nadia Clare Smith's 'A Manly Study?': Irish Women Historians 1868-1949 (2006). In addition, Irish Land War fiction, a subgenre dominated by women writers of varying political affiliations has been given extensive coverage in a collection edited by Heidi Hansson and James Murphy, Fictions of

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¹⁰ References to the colonial contexts and international nature of the pupils attending several of the Irish schools under discussion, including in Mexico and the South American sugar colony of Demerara, suggest further areas for research.

the Irish Land War and in several chapters in Women Writing War: Ireland 1889-1922 edited by Tina O'Toole, Gillian McIntosh and Muireann O'Cinnéide (2017). In their edited collection, Irish Women's Writing 1878-1922 (2016), Whitney Standlee and Anna Pilz introduce another array of writers, new angles on more familiar writers, including Katharine Tynan and Charlotte Riddell, while several lesser known writers are also featured (e.g. Ella Young and F. E. Crichton). George Egerton and Katherine Cecil Thurston have been considered in several contexts, including proto-modernist fiction, and the recent turn to rethinking the boundaries between Victorian and Modernist literature creates new spaces in which some of these turn-of-the-twentieth century Irish writers might be considered.

More recently, Matthew Reznicek explores The European Metropolis: Paris and Nineteenth-Century Irish Women Novelists (2017), expanding insights into the transnational and transcultural contexts in which many writers of this period wrote and flourished. However, Paris was not the only city where Irish women writers were able to carve out niches for their work. Already, the centrality of London to the shaping and publishing of writers such as Katharine Tynan and Charlotte Riddell has been explored by scholars, including Margaret Kelleher and Whitney Standlee, while Irish women's travel and diasporic narratives from within and beyond Europe's borders have formed the focus of multiple research projects and publications. The figure of the Irish female tourist and travel writer features in Raphaël Ingelbein's Irish Cultures of Travel: Writing on the Continent, 1819-1914 (2016) and most recently in Traveling Irishness in the Long Nineteenth Century (2017) edited by Marguérite Corporaal and Christina Morin, while specific attention has been drawn to the extensive travel writing of women who traversed Europe or ventured much further afield. Beatrice Grimshaw's oeuvre is indicative. Exotic tales of adventure derived from her extensive world travels, including to New Zealand, Australia and the South Seas, and published in various formats have been considered most recently by Eve Patten and Jane Mahony (2017). As already noted, the records of Irish women travellers, Marion Mulhall for example, who explored and documented their experiences in South America have received specific attention in the contexts of the Irish diaspora in the work of Laura P. Z. Izarra and Mariano Galazzi. Poetry by Women in Ireland: A Critical Anthology 1870-1970 (2012), edited by Lucy Collins, challenges and extends on earlier anthologies of women's poetry, including *The Field Day Anthology* (volumes 4 and 5) and Anne Colman's Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Irish Women Poets (1996). Female dramatists of this period have also received renewed attention, most recently at the 2017 conference entitled "Irish Women Playwrights and Theatre Makers". 11 Despite this abundance of scholarship, areas for potential further or new research are plentiful, as James H. Murphy highlighted in his extensive survey, "How Feminist was Irish Victorian Women's Fiction" (2016), including women, art and artists, and the field of suffrage writing. Equally up to date, Julie Anne Stevens's Two Irish Girls in Bohemia (2017) offers the most recent investigation of intersections between Irish women's writing and the visual at the fin de siècle.

¹¹ https://irishwomenplaywrightsandtheatremakers.wordpress.com

Literary, historical, media studies, periodical studies and book history, travel writing, biography and life-writing, transnationalism, cosmopolitism, Irish writing and the diaspora, queer theory and kinship theory – such breadth, diversity and necessary multidisciplinary critical perspectives are the consequences in part of the 'permeable boundaries' of women writing at this juncture to which Heidi Hansson draws attention (2016). Generic boundary crossings were a particular feature of the publishing possibilities created by periodical culture, provoking a range of questions as to how their writing is read in periodical contexts. The digitisation of many, although not all, nineteenth- and early twentieth-century periodicals, has the potential to change scholarship, Hansson goes on to argue, but the limitations – availability, incompleteness, legibility – need to be comprehended too.

This 'digital turn' has revolutionised research possibilities, especially for scholars working on the most marginal and forgotten writers of the long nineteenth century. Out-of-print novels are now available on the Internet Archive website, 12 or through the HaithiTrust Digital Library. 13 The Irish Newspaper Archives¹⁴ and The British Newspaper Archive¹⁵ offer a treasure trove of hitherto lost material, while other databases such as '19th Century UK Periodicals' or 'British Periodicals' provide scholars with the tools to search and retrieve hitherto inaccessible articles, short stories, images, cartoons and more. The study of Irish Women's Writing at the turn of the twentieth century is one of these beneficiaries and the subject of Gerardine Meaney's "Digital Methodologies and Irish Women's Writing: Researching Katherine Cecil Thurston" (2016). Discussing the "dramatic increase in research and teaching opportunities in this period", she, in turn, identifies various limitations of digital resources. Anne Jamison also alerts readers to these potentials and restrictions in an essay that foregrounds another groundbreaking digital project on the digitization of the Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing that will be significant for scholars (Jamison 2017: 751-765).

The launch of the Irish Women's Writing Network is timely then. It benefits from an abundance of riches, both in terms of the range and diversity of writers of the period, many of whom remain under-researched, and in relation to the pioneering scholarship that has stimulated new and exciting research in the field from a variety of perspectives. As Margaret Kelleher highlighted in her talk at the network's first symposium, recent publications and the success of anthologies of Irish women's writing (e.g. Gleeson 2015, 2016) suggest "we are in a better place as critics and teachers" and reveal a "palpable energy" in Irish writing, publishing and indeed criticism (Kelleher 2016).¹⁷

¹² https://archive.org/.

¹³ www.hathitrust.org/.

¹⁴ www.irishnewsarchive.com/.

¹⁵ www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk.

http://gale.cengage.co.uk/product-highlights/history/19th-century-uk-periodicals-parts-1-and-2.aspx and http://proquest.libguides.com/britishperiodicals respectively. Not all institutions subscribe to these databases.

¹⁷ Gleeson's *The Long Gaze Back* was awarded the Best Irish Published Book of the Year at the Irish Book Awards in 2015.

The aims of the network then are to attract interested readers and scholars (established, early-career and postgraduate) working across disciplines on Irish women's writing (in its broadest terms), and between nations and continents. It also aims to extend existing dialogues between scholars and continue conversations that began at the 2016 symposium, to harness this momentum and connect scholars and the plethora of new research that is interdisciplinary and international. Still in the early stages of development, the network offers a repository for information, links and latent conversations. It is a digital forum, a virtual space (i.e. the network's website with its regularly updated blog page, its Facebook page and Twitter account), facilitating material and knowledge exchange and where newly recovered material and new approaches can be shared. Researchers frequently accrue photocopied or scanned articles, images or snippets of interesting information that are curiosities but not necessities to their own projects, but that might provide crucial links for other researchers' work. Through the Irish Women's Writing Network, further networks and research projects can be initiated that are international and multidisciplinary via conference panels and at conferences, co-researched and co-written projects and publications.

The network encourages and invites ideas for new types of research and collaborations, contributions to its blog page highlighting relevant research, recently launched research projects, conferences, etc. Interested parties can join the network through its membership link¹⁸ and can include details on their current research, publications as well as contact details for networking. An archive page is under development where useful archival sources and digital links will be listed and regularly updated. The network encourages researchers to contribute to this in addition to informing it of relevant forthcoming publications, conferences and other events – "only connect".

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