



Mis/Representations of Gendered Subalterns and Other Disenfranchised in the Canonical Narratives

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Abstract

This paper critiques the representations in the mainstream narratives, *The Tempest*, *Robinson Crusoe* and *Jane Eyre* as they give space to raise questions about the inclusive representations of the marginalized women, slaves and underclass workers. The paper argues that written from the mainstream perspective, these narratives fail to rise above the ideologies of race, gender and class that divide societies. As ideologies influence representations, critiquing them can explore the possibilities for the alternative representations. The narratives of Aime Cesaire, JM Coetzee and Jean Rhys are the instances of such representations. They may not be totally ideal of representations since they have their own limitations. However, there are significant efforts to critique misrepresentations. To examine the points of departures in the alternative narratives regarding representations, the paper has used the comparative approach as a method of study. Moreover, to critique the positions of subalterns and disenfranchised in connection to race, gender and class as projected in the canonical narratives, the study draws the ideas from Gayatri Spivak. The key finding of this paper is that the

misrepresentations of the Caribbeans, Africans and other non-Europeans in the mainstream narratives, invite contestations. For instance, Bertha of *Jane Eyre* as a mad woman, Friday of *Robinson Crusoe* as a savage, and Caliban of *The Tempest* as an ugly slave of Prospero question these representations. Therefore, the reproduced critical narratives, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, *Foe* and *A Tempest* respectively redefine the roles of the gendered subalterns and disenfranchised. These narratives envision inclusive and integrative societies where the differences get recognition and the hierarchical relations are bridged by the alternative relations.

Keywords: Gendered subalterns, alternative relations, other disenfranchised, representations

Introduction

The representations of the marginalized groups in *The Tempest*, *Robinson Crusoe* and *Jane Eyre* are contested regarding the roles of the characters that represent the European and the non-European societies. The projections of the binary relations between the mainstream-European and the marginal-non-European characters raise

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the questions about the perspectives. From whose side the narratives are constructed? The silenced peripheral figures, like Bertha of *Jane Eyre*, Friday of *Robinson Crusoe* and Ariel and Caliban of *The Tempest* symbolize the lack of agency to represent their voices. Their subordinate roles get the place of 'other' in self-other dichotomy. In this context, it is necessary to critique the misrepresentations of the marginal societies. The voices of the gendered subaltern, like Bertha, and the disenfranchised, like Caliban, remain unheard in the mainstream discourses.

To examine the differences in representations, this paper explores the alternative narratives, Aime Cesaire's *A Tempest*, JM Coetzee's *Foe* and Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*. My argument is that these narratives have better representations than the master- narratives since they change the perspectives and critique the ideologies of race, gender and class. They change the plot and modify the roles of the characters to redefine relations between the mainstream and the marginal characters. So, they try to be inclusive by articulating the voices from the side of the marginalized. The silenced voices of mainstream narratives get recovered in the alternative narratives.

Theoretically, the paper uses Gayatri Spivak's ideas of subalterns and disenfranchised as the under privileged groups, like the underclass women and the suppressed workers. Since the subaltern lack agencies to represent themselves, they are represented by others. In such case, the higher possibility of misrepresentation is difficult to deny as the reality is distorted to meet the interests of the representer. Spivak's integrated theoretical model that draws insights from feminism, Marxism, deconstruction and postcolonial theory is helpful to critique the intersected issues of race, gender, class and nationality in this paper.

This study is significant to explore the possibilities for fair representations

in the narratives so that it is possible to redefine the debatable relations across the differences. Moreover, it envisions social justice for the egalitarian relations through the constructive narratives that defy the borders of racism, class contradictions and gendered relations. To bridge the divided societies and establish the alternative relations, the problems of representations need to be addressed.

Literature Review

To uncover the space of contestation in the canonical narratives: *The Tempest*, *Robinson Crusoe* and *Jane Eyre* and examine how the alternative narratives: *A Tempest*, *Foe* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* respectively depart from them to address the social disparities, I examine some key researches on these narratives.

Ricardo Castells interprets *The Tempest* as a resistance to Prospero's colonization over Caliban's island. Symbolically, it represents that the natives protest the imperial invader (43). The natives, Like Caliban, disenfranchised or marginalized, must bear the burden of imperialism as they lose sovereignty and self-representation. The projection of Caliban as beastly, unlike Prospero, the European master, reveals the imperial psychology.

In the context of *Robinson Crusoe*, Jason S. Farr examines the role of gestures in communication. Gestures have political implications, like of language. Gestures of Crusoe are authoritative that subject Friday as a colonized figure in master-slave relation (555). The silence of subaltern Friday enforced by physical gestures of Crusoe signals the control over Friday. The representation of Friday as other of Crusoe is problematic.

Lewis MacLeod, in the context of *Foe* argues, "To narrate "the world" is to gain power and authority, to be subject to outside pulses is to lose them" (3). In the narrative, Friday, as a silent character, does not hold the agency to represent himself.

So, Susan tries to represent him. However, her representation of Friday cannot truly empower the subaltern, like him. The gap exists between his condition of lacking agency and Susan's better position in society. So, it becomes her voice rather than Friday's. Therefore, there is a possibility of misrepresentation of Friday.

Jane Eyre remains no exception from other narratives regarding the position of the marginalized. Bertha Mason as a gendered subaltern is silenced in the name of madness. Karen Beth Strovas examines, "the relationship between vice and madness had so thoroughly pervaded British mainstream culture that Bronte chose to join rather than subvert its discourse. . ." (386). Bronte normalizes the image of madness and takes for granted rather than questioning it. My argument is that representation of Bertha as a mad woman is a gender issue along with the problem of national ideology. As a Jamaican, she loses her voice in the English society of Rochester. So, a gendered subaltern does not have an agency to speak for herself and explain that madness is imposed on her to exclude and marginalize.

Despite the efforts of these critics to address the problematic mainstream-margin relations, they fail to uncover the underlying cause of such relations. Thus, this paper aims to bridge the lack with the proposition that ideologies of race, gender, class and nationality play the key roles in the selected narratives to cause the social exclusion and marginalization. Since the ideologies help maintain the unequal relations, critiquing such ideologies can address the disparities related to gendered subalterns and other disenfranchised.

The Concept of Subalternity: An Approach

This study uses the concept of subalternity developed by Gayatri Spivak. According to her, subalterns are the marginal groups who do not have agencies

to represent themselves. The socio-political structures remain hostile for the articulation of their voices. In the text "A critique of Postcolonial Reason," Spivak asks, "How can we touch the consciousness of people, even as we investigate their politics? With what voice – consciousness can the subaltern speak? (2202). Even if they speak, they are not heard. She implies that it is difficult for them to speak since they are not in positions to be heard. Spivak argues that if others represent the subalterns, there is the possibility of misrepresentation. If so, what are the alternatives for them to rise? Spivak envisions that through socio-political restructuring the subalterns get opportunities for self-representation. With their self-representation, social transformation is possible.

In the context of the primary texts of this paper, the concept of subalternity applies to the suppressed, gendered subalterns, racially marginalized and underclass workers who lack agencies for self-representation. In the mainstream narratives, the issues of misrepresentations invite the critical views for alternative representations that are closer to the reality and on behalf of marginalized. Therefore, this study examines the alternative representations also to observe the points of departures from the mainstream representations.

The Mainstream Narratives: Critical Analysis

The ideological and institutional affiliations of the authors influence the works of representation. In case of gendered subalterns and other disenfranchised, representations are more questionable as others try to represent them since they cannot represent themselves. For Spivak, those who claim to represent the subalterns fail to do so as they cannot bridge the gap between themselves and the represented. The gap exists because their social positions intervene in the act of representation. In the context of my study, some characters live

in subaltern condition. Bertha Mason of *Jane Eyre*, Christophine and other black servants of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Friday of both *Robinson Crusoe* and *Foe*, Caliban and Ariel of both *The Tempest* and *A Tempest* represent the subaltern or underprivileged group. These characters do not have access to the mainstream discourses. So, they have to serve the interests of the dominant group. As their voices are silenced by the socio-political structure, they lose the agency of representation. Among the marginal, women characters, like Bertha, are the gendered subaltern due to the additional problem of gender. Other male characters, Friday and Caliban, are the victims of the ideologies of class and race. Therefore, the issues of marginalization are crucial to address. This paper argues that the hegemonic ideologies play the key roles to cause the social disparity. Thus, without contesting such ideologies the social division cannot be bridged.

Marginal Solidarity against the Incursion

The Tempest reflects the social division. The colonial politics is explicit in the roles of the characters. Caliban and Ariel are the product of imperialism because the island of Caliban and his role are devised to justify the role for incursion. In the narrative, Ariel and Caliban are the subaltern characters since they live in slavery under Prospero and they fail to recover the sovereignty. Though finally Prospero leaves the island, it is not for the sake of these characters rather for his own dignity in Europe. As he mends the tie with his brother and regains the lost position in Milan, he voluntarily leaves the island. He adopts the policy of use and throw with regard to Caliban and Ariel. He employs Ariel to take revenge against his brother, Antonio and his colleagues. Similarly, he uses Caliban for his own survival. So, these slaves have to compromise with their freedom not for the sake of their social benefit rather to fulfil the interests of the imperialist. Thus,

the exploitation of Caliban and Ariel by Prospero makes them subaltern characters. Ambitious Prospero betrays Caliban's trust and compassion. This expression reveals his oppression against Caliban:

If thou neglect'st, or dost unwillingly What I command, I'll rack thee with old cramps, Fill all thy bones with aches, make thee roar, That beasts shall tremble at thy din. (120)
Did Caliban offer the hospitality to the tyrant for this abuse?

The positive aspect of Caliban is that even in the dismal situation, he does not give up his mission for freedom. He continues his struggle. It is like, Spivak underscores the necessity of waiting patiently for the rise of subaltern since it takes time to change the sociopolitical structure that creates the subaltern condition.

Cesaire critiques the representation presented in *The Tempest*. Specially, he focuses on the impact of imperialism on the peripheral society of Caribbean. Therefore, Caliban is the representative of the colonized society who has paid the price of imperial politics. From the characterization of Caliban, it seems that Cesaire identifies himself in the image of Caliban in terms of Racial oppression. As a black author, he does not approve the colonial politics. So, written from the perspective of the underclass slave, Caliban, *A Tempest* is an attempt to represent the voices of the margin as Cesaire underscores the necessity of solidarity among the marginal, like Africans (Hiddleston 88-95). Cesaire gives Caliban an indigenous identity. With some change in his characterization from Shakespeare's play, Caliban gets the focus in the narrative. Cesaire highlights the impact of the colonial subjugation on the peripherals through Caliban. To signal the unity among the colonized subalterns, Cesaire associates Ariel with Caliban. Both intend to battle the common enemy, Prospero. Ariel assures solidarity with Caliban, "but after all we are brothers, brothers in suffering and slavery,

but brothers in hope as well. We both want our freedom" (2). To approve Ariel's statement, Caliban declares, "Better death than humiliation and injustice" (23). This preparedness of these slaves for liberation illustrates how Césaire constructs the discourse to represent the marginal voices.

Robinson Crusoe is another example of literary discourse that deals with center-margin relation. To justify the role of center from where Crusoe comes, Defoe constructs the role for the margin that needs support of the center. So, in the literary representation, some authors try to represent the social reality as it appears to them. They represent as realist, like Charles Dickens who exposes the social inequality of the 19th century in England in *Hard Times*. Others, like Defoe, construct the social disparity in art with the intention of searching the superior role of the self in connection with the racial and national identity, as in case of *Robinson Crusoe*. The role of the subaltern character, Friday, is the outcome of the politics of representation that defines the privileged in relation to the subaltern. However, to examine the condition of Friday in the way he is represented, he is a slave from the savage society, who lives under the duress of the European master. Unlike Crusoe, he does not define himself. Neither he boasts about his nationality nor glorifies his religion and culture. But Friday listens to what Crusoe fabricates to raise his own self-esteem. In this communication, Friday has no voice to interrogate or disapprove the claims of Crusoe. Defoe has constructed Friday to listen, not to speak because Crusoe has a say. Therefore, in his subaltern position, somebody, like Crusoe, makes claim of working on behalf Friday. However, Friday becomes the means for Crusoe to search his own identity. For instance, Crusoe narrates, "for never man had a more faithful, loving, sincere servant than Friday was to me . . . like those of a child to a father; and I dare say, he would have sacrificed his life for the saving mine . . ." (165). Crusoe perceives

Friday as a naive childlike who takes his master, like a father, and can sacrifice his life for the sake of master. Who knows whether Friday respects him, like a father, or intends to get rid of Crusoe's suppression, like the son in Freud's theory of Oedipal relation. In Oedipal relation, the son tries to murder the father to be with mother. Since the author gives the narrative voice to Crusoe, he holds the agency to define the relation as he likes. Further, to interpret this relation, Crusoe's claim of guardianship takes Friday as dependent on him. It also illustrates vulnerability of Friday who is helpless without the father-figure. This way, the roles are created in representation as per the interest of the author.

Misrepresentations of Disenfranchised

As the disenfranchised cannot represent themselves, it gives space to somebody to do politics in their name. For example, Crusoe narrates how he could be useful to Friday, "I was greatly delighted with him, and made it my business to teach him everything that was proper to make him useful, handy and helpful; specially to makes him speak, and understand me when I spoke . . ." (166). In this statement, Crusoe makes his judgment on Friday as an ignorant who needs a master, like Crusoe, to educate so that he can improve his lifestyle. So, Spivak believes that such self-claimed benevolence to subalterns fails to translate into reality because they are not sincere and fail to hold ethical responsibility. They prove to be the empty words of promise made for politics which do not bring the substantial improvement in the living condition of the subalterns, like Friday. So, Friday remains in the subaltern position no matter how graceful Crusoe pretends to be.

Authors roles cannot be ignored for what they represent in their narratives since it is difficult to maintain neutrality in representation as they are under the influence of ideologies that serve the interests of specific groups or societies.

In case of Defoe's role for the narrative of *Robinson Crusoe*, he positions himself in close association with Crusoe in terms of British national identity, religion of Christianity and white racial background. The key element of the narrative, the point of view, is offered to Crusoe through which the author expresses his world view. For instance, Crusoe expresses a sense of duty to Friday because he is inferior to him. It reflects how Defoe perceives another part of the world that needs help from Europe. Similarly, Crusoe imagines what would be the condition of Friday without his teaching. He is also concerned about the future of Friday. Crusoe imagines what may happen if Friday comes in contact with his people and the primitive instinct overpowers his rationality developed by Crusoe. Crusoe questions Friday, "What would you do there, would you turn wild again, eat men's flesh again, and be a savage as you were before?" (177). What about Friday, did he not live meaningful life before he met Crusoe? Does he need to civilize under Crusoe? Why does Crusoe as a white man take this burden? What makes Defoe imagine that cannibals, like Friday, exist beyond Europe? These questions uncover the link between Defoe and *Robinson Crusoe*.

In master-slave relation, Friday does not hold an agency that supports for self-representation. Similarly, the master cannot represent Friday because he cannot forget that he is a master to Friday. As Spivak underscores the importance of learning from below for better representation, Does Crusoe try to learn from Friday? He does not do so. Rather, Crusoe attempts to represent Friday as per his interests. Consequently, it becomes misrepresentation. To create the conducive environment for Friday's self-representation, the master-servant relation between Crusoe and Friday must change. The subjected position of Friday does not allow for his self-representation. Since Crusoe holds power and resources, his voice remains dominant. In front of his gun,

Friday has to surrender. So, if the authors represent by learning from below, they are less under the influence of their ideologies as they try to see from the perspective of the represented rather than imposing from their sides.

Bridging the Disparities by Alternative Representations

Foe is an attempt to address the problem of representation projected in *Robinson Crusoe*. To highlight the issues related to subaltern, he modifies the role of Friday and characterizes him differently. For example, unlike Friday of *Robinson Crusoe*, this Friday is mute who fails to express through verbal language. So, he holds no agency for self-representation. Both his physical disability and the condition of slavery are hostile for self-representation. His muteness is connected to slavery because it is believed that the slave owner chopped his tongue. So, it is the socio-political structure that is responsible for his condition as the legalized slavery and colonialism produce a slave, like Friday. Symbolically, Friday's silence as the product of suppression cannot be broken without dismantling the socio-political structure that supports the social disparity. The long-term slavery has made Friday so insensitive that he cannot respond against harsh condition. In this context, Susan asks, "What had held Friday back all these years from beating in his master's head with a stone while he slept, so bringing slavehood to an end and inaugurating a reign of idleness?" (36). Such resistance that Susan imagines, demands courage and awareness. Friday lacks both. He even cannot express what he feels. This dumbness holds the secret of Friday. So, Susan views that "the only tongue that can tell Friday's secret is the tongue he has lost!" (67). Without Friday's self-expression, somebody misrepresents him.

Foe deals with the problem of gender. Though Susan suffers from gender politics, she is not a subaltern character. Unlike Friday, due to her middle-class background

and identity consciousness, Susan is in a more powerful position. She can analyze the situation in which she and Friday live. Susan has the agency for self-representation. She can raise the voice not only for her own identity but also for Friday's freedom. For example, she expresses her concern about Friday, "inasmuch as Friday is a slave and a child, it is our duty to care for him in all things, and not abandon him to a solitude worse than death" (39). In her own case, she questions the authority of Foe who attempts to appropriate her story. Her claim for authorship evidences that she intends to construct a discourse to search her identity and question the gendered position given to her in the narrative. Susan argues that men's ways of writing story differ from the ways women write as the men create the gendered role for the women. To illustrate, Foe expresses his surprise as Susan suggests her role as a castaway woman who struggles on the island for survival. Traditionally, this adventurous role is given to men, like Crusoe. So, Coetzee attempts to break the tradition by positioning a woman in place of a man. As *Robinson Crusoe* narrates the story of men, *Foe* is the story of a woman also. Through Susan, Coetzee underscores the necessity of raising woman's voice to address the gendered relation. For this, the narrative role is given to Susan. The narrative role holds power as Lewis MacLeod views, "To narrate 'the world' is to gain power and authority, to be subject to outside pulses is to lose them" (3). So, in case of Susan, she holds such power to some extent. But, to compare her with Friday in terms of subjugation, Patriarchy subjects her and colonialism does so to Friday. In colonialism, the ideologies of race and class are against him. However, both Susan and Friday are colonized in one way or other. Therefore, they need to decolonize themselves. Comparatively, it seems easier for Susan but for Friday, the challenges are tougher as he is doubly suppressed. However, if he waits patiently

and continues his aspiration, the hostile situation may improve and he will recover his voice to fight for justice, like Susan.

Charlotte Bronte, as a woman author, fails to meet the expectations of the marginal societies as they raise the questions about women's inclusiveness in her work, *Jane Eyre*. Her character, Bertha Mason, a gendered subaltern does not get justice in her narrative. Bronte's depiction of Bertha shows that she complies with the ideologies of empire and patriarchy. For example, Bertha remains suppressed for years in the secretive attic under the instruction of Rochester. The society beyond Thornfield does not know what goes with Bertha inside. A person who runs an inn near Thornfield discloses the secret about Bertha with Jane, "She was kept in very close confinement, ma'am; people even for some years was not absolutely certain of her existence" (377). Rochester admits that he isolated her, "She was only mad, and shut up in a lunatic asylum" (270). These instances support that the author treats Bertha differently for the lowly role she assigns to her. It is clear that Bertha's background makes difference for author's choice. Otherwise, why does she give the narrative perspective to Jane? If a woman-author creates a gendered subaltern character, who can speak for such character? Probably, another author attempts to do so. For instance, Jean Rhys tries to give voice to Bertha, the silenced figure of Bronte's narrative. How far she is successful to speak for the marginal, is a matter of evaluation.

Wide Sargasso Sea is an attempt of Rhys to address the problem of representation of *Jane Eyre*. As representations are connected to ideologies, Rhys critiques the ideologies of patriarchy, race and others by revising the narrative of *Jane Eyre*. However, Rhys's representation in *Wide Sargasso Sea* also invites debates as she fails to meet the expectations of the peripheral to some extent. Despite this, her efforts deserve recognition because some representations are better than others.

Rhys's attempt does not seem to be sufficient to address the problems of subalterns because she heavily concentrates on the criticism of imperial ideologies but overlooks the problems of the underprivileged characters. As they get less attention, her representation is not as inclusive as it should be. For instance, she foregrounds the problems of Antoinette who represents the creole, white middle-class but gives the secondary role to the underclass black servants. Christophine, Baptiste and other black servants are the marginalized workers. The narrative perspective shifts between Antoinette and her husband. However, her point of view is dominant in the narrative. So, the black workers' perspectives are overlooked. From the beginning of the story, the author focuses on Antoinette's family whose position in Jamaica is weakened as the Emancipation Act has been passed to empower the black people. Similarly, throughout the story, Antoinette and her relation with other people, specially, her husband, is given substantial space. The author is sympathetic to Antoinette and her family because she belongs to the minority group of European background people who no longer hold the powerful position as the colonial period is over. They are like the black majority, even weaker than them due the Emancipation Act that gave freedom to the black from the British colonial authority. So, Antoinette is different from the main stream European, like her husband. That is why it seems that the author creates a bond between Antoinette and Christophine, the black servant. Now both are in the similar situation. However, in terms of race and class, the problems of Christophine are different. So, the issues of the underprivileged, like her, need to be handled differently. Their representation could be the focus of the narrative but Rhys fails to do so.

As Bronte, Rhys constraints herself within the periphery of middle-class. Accordingly, she picks up the protagonist

from such background. Probably, Rhys's creole middle-class position influences her to be concerned to the problems of the creoles rather than underclass. She not only sheds light on Antoinette but also on another generation, the mother of Antoinette. For instance, Christophine serves the two generations of creole family. Antoinette's mother tells Antoinette about Christophine, "She was your father's wedding present to me-one of his presents. He thought I would be pleased with a Martinique girl" (19). The black woman could be the wedding present for the creole middle-class family. Christophine, mother's servant, is made daughter's family servant also. Though she serves as a family servant, Christophine is under the observation of city authority for practicing 'obeah', a ritual of magic spell. Previously, she was imprisoned on the accusation of such practice. A letter written to Antoinette's husband mentions it, "Indeed I have not forgotten the case. The woman in question was called Josephine or Christophine Dubois, some such name and she had been one of the Cosway servants. After she came out of jail, she disappeared . . . He'll send a couple of policemen up to your place and she won't get off lightly this time" (130). For practicing indigenous Voodoo, the authority intends to punish her. Due to the black racial background of Christophine, she comes under the scrutiny of the authority. In this context of oppression against Christophine, it is relevant to refer what Spivak views about gendered subalterns. She examines that there is double suppression against subaltern women due to the collusion between patriarchy and capitalism that configures the international division of labor for women (*In Other Worlds* 300). These instances illustrate that the fundamental problems of subalterns and disenfranchised raised by Spivak mostly remain unaddressed in case of *Wide Sargasso Sea*. However, Rhys's criticism on imperial politics and gender through her characters is commendable. In this sense,

Rhys partially succeeds to address the problems of the marginal.

Conclusion

Representations are contentious as the authors have ideological orientations. The sociopolitical background influences their views. So, the literary texts, like *Jane Eyre*, *Foe* and others reflect the ideological inclinations. The text written from the perspective of the imperial power center differ politically from the texts that try to represent the marginal societies. These texts: *The Tempest*, *Robinson Crusoe* and *Jane Eyre* reflect the Eurocentric views whereas others: *A Tempest*, *Foe* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* contend such views. Due to the institutional affiliations, authors' claim for neutrality and transparency in representation fail to be so. Since they live in ideologies, even unconsciously they are tilted to some ideologies. Therefore, Gayatri Spivak claims that it is quite difficult to speak on behalf of other as one fails to forget one's social position.

The analysis of the primary texts of this study uncovers that Shakespeare, Bronte, and Defoe write from the mainstream perspective whereas Rhys, Coetzee and Cesaire try to represent the peripheral societies. Since they try to reconstruct the knowledge to disrupt the unequal relation between the mainstreams and the peripheries, the possibility is that their critical narratives become the means to create awareness for the egalitarian relation.

The politics of representation determines in what ways the narrative is to be constructed. So, the politics of class, gender, race and others infiltrate into the literary texts. Similarly, others who disapprove such political ideologies modify the narratives. Comparatively, Rhys Coetzee and Cesaire, who write in favor of the peripherals, draw themselves closer to the subalterns and the disadvantaged groups as they contest the hegemonic ideologies. However, they do have limitations as they are not free from

the institutional affinity. Therefore, despite their attempts, these authors are not as inclusive as they are expected to be.

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