

**“Imagining Futures: Climate Fiction, Cinema and the Ecological Imagination”**

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**Abstract:**

The accelerating climate crisis has prompted an unprecedented surge in creative expressions that reimagine humanity’s relationship with nature. This paper explores the evolving genre of *Climate Fiction (Cli-Fi)* as a vital site of ecocritical engagement and speculative reflection on ecological futures. Through an analysis of seminal literary works such as Amitav Ghosh’s *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (2016) and *The Nutmeg’s Curse: Parables for a Planet in Crisis* (2021) from the Indian Literary Canon to Margaret Atwood’s *MaddAddam* trilogy (2013), Kim Stanley Robinson’s *The Ministry for the Future* (2020), and Octavia E. Butler’s *Parable* series (1993), alongside their cinematic adaptations and other influential filmic texts like *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004) and *Snowpiercer* (2013) from the West, to *Kantara* (2022/2025) and *Dashavtar* (2025) from our regional cinematic canon, this study examines how narratives of climate change, biodiversity loss, and resource depletion articulate global environmental injustices and post humanist visions. This study further examines the essential contributions of various significant cinemas, both from the West and from Indian celluloid in raising concerns on the rising environmental depletion through the film medium. By placing literary imagination and visual storytelling at the very centre, the paper underscores how literature, culture, and cinema collectively shape ecological consciousness and foster sustainable imaginations. This paper attempts to situate *Cli-Fi* within the broader framework of environmental humanities, emphasizing its potential to bridge scientific discourse and public emotion through affective storytelling. Ultimately, the research argues that *Climate Fiction* functions not merely as a mirror of crisis but as a catalyst for envisioning equitable and ecologically resilient futures.

**Keywords:** Climate Fiction, Anthropocentrism, Environmental Humanities, Ecocriticism, Myth, Indigenous Knowledge, Transdisciplinarity

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**Introduction**

Climate change has emerged as the defining crisis of the twenty-first century, reshaping social structures, ecological systems, and cultural imaginations. As environmental degradation accelerates and climatic shocks become increasingly visible, literature and cinema have responded with an unprecedented surge of creative works that envision humanity's precarious relationship with nature. The genre of Climate Fiction (Cli-Fi) has thus become a vital cultural site for reflecting on ecological anxieties and imagining possible futures. Through speculative narratives, dystopian visions, and imaginative ecological storytelling, Cli-Fi raises urgent questions about biodiversity loss, resource depletion, climate injustice, and the ethics of survival. This research paper builds upon the ideas articulated in the abstract and explores how seminal literary works and their direct as well as indirect cinematic adaptations reimagine ecological futures. Novels such as Amitav Ghosh's *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (2016) and *The Nutmeg's Curse: Parables for a Planet in Crisis* (2021), (observantly inclined towards Eastern cultures) collectively reframe the climate crisis as not merely an environmental or scientific emergency, but fundamentally a crisis of culture, history, imagination, and narrative. Whereas Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy, Kim Stanley Robinson's *The Ministry for the Future*, and Octavia E. Butler's *Parable* series provide complex ecological imaginaries grounded in scientific possibility along with sociopolitical critique. Their cinematic counterparts (Science Fiction Disaster Films) like *The Day After Tomorrow*, *Snowpiercer*, *Interstellar*, and *WALL-E*, *Kantara* and *Dashavtar* extend these themes through compelling visual storytelling that dramatizes climate catastrophe and planetary decline. Through an ecocritical lens, this paper examines how literature and cinema collectively foster ecological consciousness and promote a sustainable imagination. Ultimately, the study argues that Climate Fiction functions not merely as a mirror reflecting planetary crisis but as a catalyst for envisioning resilient, equitable, and ecologically attuned futures.

**Climate Fiction within the Environmental Humanities-**

The environmental humanities emphasize the interconnectedness of ecological, cultural, ethical, and political dimensions of human life. While the natural sciences provide data on rising temperatures, melting ice caps, and shifting ecosystems, the humanities articulate the emotions, ethical dilemmas, and historical responsibilities that accompany ecological change. Climate Fiction, therefore occupies a central place within this interdisciplinary field, transforming scientific realities into accessible, affective narratives. Rob Nixon's concept of "slow violence"—"a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight" (Nixon 2)—is particularly relevant to Cli-Fi. Climate change is rarely immediate or spectacular; instead, it unfolds across decades, disproportionately affecting marginalized communities. Literary and cinematic narratives make this invisible violence visible, amplifying voices often silenced in political discourse. Similarly, Ursula K. Heise's theory

of “eco-cosmopolitanism” argues for imagining planetary belonging beyond national borders (Heise 22). Climate Fiction’s global perspectives foster such expansive ecological identities and is aligned with the same. Thus, Cli-Fi emerges not simply as a subgenre of science fiction but as an essential cultural discourse engaging with the most urgent ethical and environmental questions of our era.

### **Reimagining Climate Awareness through Amitav Ghosh’s Narrative of Imagination-**

In the context of the Indian literary canon, Ghosh’s work stands out as it synthesizes postcolonial critique, environmental humanities, history, and political philosophy with narrative strategies associated with speculative fiction and climate writing. Although neither *The Great Derangement* nor *The Nutmeg’s Curse* are “climate novels” in a generic sense, both texts expand and redefine what cli-fi can be: a transdisciplinary, historically grounded, and culturally rooted mode of storytelling capable of addressing global ecological precarity. Through his analysis of colonialism, extractivism, capitalism, and the ‘Anthropocene’, Ghosh situates climate change within patterns of systemic violence that have long shaped South Asian histories. His contribution thus marks a significant departure from dominant Western-centric cli-fi traditions, foregrounding indigenous cosmologies, precolonial epistemologies, and the ecological consciousness embedded in Eastern cultures.

In *The Great Derangement*, Ghosh provocatively asks why the arts—especially novels—have largely failed to grapple with climate change. He argues that modern fiction’s allegiance to bourgeois norms of probability, linearity, and psychological realism has made it structurally incapable of representing rare, catastrophic, non-human-scale events (Ghosh, *Great Derangement* 15–17). Extraordinary climatic phenomena such as tornadoes, floods, or storms do not easily fit into the individualized, domestic, and mundane narrative arcs of the modern realist novel, he asserts.

Ghosh critiques literary cultures of the West for relegating climate events to the margins of “genre fiction,” especially science fiction, fantasy, and disaster narratives. He believes these genres often exaggerate, simplify, or spectacularize climate change, thereby creating a discursive distance between the reader and the material realities of planetary crisis. In contrast, Indian literature—especially folklore, epic traditions, and indigenous stories—has historically been more open to the uncanny, the improbable, and the nonhuman. *The Mahabharata*, *The Ramayana*, and diverse regional oral traditions revolve around cosmological dramas, divine interventions, and ecological upheavals. Thus, Ghosh argues that it is not Indian literary traditions but the colonial imposition of European realism that has suppressed imaginative ecological consciousness (Ghosh, *Great Derangement* 82–85). This argument positions Ghosh as central to a non-Western cli-fi discourse that reconnects storytelling with deep time, interspecies relationships, and ecological ethics. Instead of

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viewing climate change as an isolated 21st-century phenomenon, he situates it within material histories of empire, resource extraction, and capitalist expansion. This move aligns with broader planetary humanities approaches, positioning cli-fi as a genre that must engage with political economy, environmental justice, and cultural memory.

*The Nutmeg's Curse* pushes Ghosh's earlier arguments further by exploring how colonial violence and extractivist worldviews have shaped the contemporary planetary crisis. The book uses the nutmeg—native to the Banda Islands—as a symbolic anchor for a larger narrative about genocide, resource extraction, and ecological domination under European imperialism (Ghosh, *Nutmeg's Curse* 3–7). Through rich historical analysis, Ghosh shows how the Dutch East India Company's annihilation of the Bandanese people in the 17th century represents an early form of fossil-fuel modernity, where land, nature, and human beings were systematically transformed into exploitable resources.

This argument has profound implications for cli-fi because it situates climate change not as an unintended outcome of industrialization, but as a predictable result of a worldview that reduces Earth to a mechanical system devoid of spirit or agency. Ghosh describes this as the “colonial metaphysics” that shaped modernity—a worldview that suppresses indigenous animism, mythic consciousness, and ecological relationality (Ghosh, *Nutmeg's Curse* 48–52). For Indian literature, long shaped by colonial education systems and realist conventions, this reclamation of ecological epistemologies becomes foundational to imagining sustainable futures.

Ghosh's narrative strategy in *The Nutmeg's Curse* blends storytelling, historical documentation, and mythic imagination, making it a unique form of non-fictional cli-fi. While the text does not employ fictional characters, it embodies the core impulses of cli-fi: narrativizing ecological trauma, imagining more-than-human worlds, and exposing environmental injustices. This positions the book as part of a larger Indian tradition represented by writers such as Mahasweta Devi, Indra Sinha, Arundhati Roy, and Vandana Shiva, whose works critique development, environmental degradation, and the lived experiences of marginalized communities.

A defining contribution of Ghosh's works is their insistence on the centrality of the Global South to any serious climate discourse. In *The Great Derangement*, he condemns the Western “carbon aristocracy” for moralizing about climate responsibility while historically contributing disproportionately to carbon emissions (Ghosh, *Great Derangement* 111). Ghosh highlights how South Asian populations, especially the poor, are disproportionately affected by climate disasters—from cyclone-prone regions of Bengal to drought-hit areas of

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central India. This resonates with global environmental justice movements that foreground racialized, caste-marked, and economically disadvantaged communities.

Ghosh's *The Nutmeg's Curse* too expands this argument by showing how colonial histories continue to structure global inequalities in climate vulnerability. The destruction of indigenous cultures, the militarization of resource zones, and the refugee crises triggered by climate extremities are all connected to centuries of ecological plunder. Ghosh even draws parallels between historical genocides and contemporary forms of slow violence that displace millions through sea-level rise, drought, and resource scarcity (Ghosh, *Nutmeg's Curse* 178–83).

These insights greatly enrich cli-fi by grounding speculative futures in real histories of oppression, unlike much Western cli-fi which imagines future apocalypses in abstract, dystopian terms. Ghosh even shows that for many in South Asia; the apocalypse has already begun. Floods, heatwaves, crop failures, and mass migrations are no longer speculative—they are lived realities. Thus, Indian cli-fi (or climate non-fiction) becomes inherently political, shaped by postcolonial critique and environmental injustice.

Another notable contribution of Ghosh's ecocritical work is his attempt to recover indigenous cosmologies and animistic worldviews suppressed by colonial modernity. In *The Nutmeg's Curse*, he foregrounds the worldviews of Native American, Pacific Islander, and South Asian communities who perceive land, rivers, forests, and animals as living entities with agency (Ghosh, *Nutmeg's Curse* 79–84). He argues that the desacralization of nature—a key feature of Western Enlightenment thinking—lies at the heart of ecological collapse.

This argument is deeply relevant to the Indian literary canon because precolonial Indian cultures have long embraced ecological spirituality. Texts ranging from the *Upanishads* to tribal folklore portray nature as sentient and divine. Ghosh's work reinvigorates this imagination, bridging cli-fi with eco-spiritual traditions and offering narrative strategies as opposed to colonial extractivism. In doing so, he expands cli-fi beyond the dystopian futures common in Western literature, offering instead a regenerative, culturally grounded ecological ethic. Ghosh's intervention thus positions Indian cli-fi as a literature of resistance, memory, and alternative ecological imagination.

#### **Narrative, Myth, and the Possibilities of Cli-Fi-**

Ghosh's critique of modernity is intricately tied to his call for narrative reinvention. By revealing the limitations of the realist novel and the colonial epistemologies embedded in Western literary norms, he urges writers to reconsider the role of myth, the uncanny, and the nonhuman in storytelling. In *The Great Derangement*, he argues that mythic and

premodern storytelling traditions—which embrace cosmic events, divine interventions, and nonhuman agency—are better suited for representing the unpredictability and magnitude of climate phenomena (Ghosh, *Great Derangement* 63–67). This could possibly be the reason why his own fictional works, particularly *The Ibis Trilogy* and *Gun Island* (2019), blend realism with mythic structures, demonstrating a hybrid narrative mode that bridges literary fiction and cli-fi.

*Gun Island*, for instance, takes readers across Venice, Bengal, and the Sundarbans, weaving folklore with climate disasters such as cyclones and species migration. While outside the immediate purview of this essay, *Gun Island* exemplifies the narrative strategies that *The Great Derangement* calls for, and *The Nutmeg's Curse* contextualizes historically and philosophically. By encouraging Indian writers to reclaim mythic imagination and indigenous ecological worldviews, Ghosh redefines cli-fi as a mode of cultural resistance and ecological re-enchantment.

#### **Transdisciplinarity and the Future of Ecocritical Humanities-**

Both *The Great Derangement* and *The Nutmeg's Curse* function at the intersection of anthropology, history, political ecology, and literary studies. This transdisciplinary approach is essential for the evolution of cli-fi because climate change is itself a multi-scalar, multi-dimensional phenomenon. By demonstrating how colonial history, fossil-fuel modernity, militarization, migration, and cultural memory intersect, Ghosh models an ecocritical methodology that writers and scholars in India can draw from. In Indian universities—especially in fields like English studies, cultural studies, and comparative literature—Ghosh's work as part of the syllabus has catalysed new approaches to teaching climate humanities. His critique of literary realism offers students alternative frameworks for analysing texts. His emphasis on Global South perspectives equips scholars with tools to interrogate environmental injustice and his call for imaginative storytelling encourages writers to experiment with hybrid genres, bridging fiction, myth, and environmental studies. Amitav Ghosh's *The Great Derangement* and *The Nutmeg's Curse* are foundational texts for understanding the cultural, historical, and narrative dimensions of the climate crisis from an Indian perspective. While not conventional works of climate fiction, both texts radically expand the boundaries of the genre by bridging ecological critique with postcolonial history, indigenous worldviews, mythic imagination, and environmental justice.

Ghosh establishes that cli-fi must not only predict speculative futures but also confront colonial pasts. It must challenge literary norms that suppress ecological consciousness. It must restore narrative spaces where nonhuman agency, myth, and cosmic forces can be meaningfully represented and it must amplify voices from regions most affected by climate collapse. Through his writings, Ghosh redefines cli-fi as a global,

culturally plural, historically grounded, and ecologically ethical mode of storytelling. His work pushes Indian literature toward new horizons, making him an indispensable figure in 21<sup>st</sup> Century ecocritical and climate humanities discourse.

**Literary Climate Fiction of the West: Ecological Imaginaries and Posthuman Futures-**

Margaret Atwood's *'MaddAddam'* trilogy—*Oryx and Crake* (2003), *The Year of the Flood* (2009), and *MaddAddam* (2013)—is foundational to modern Cli-Fi of the west. Atwood portrays a world ravaged by genetic engineering, corporate monopolies, and ecological collapse. Her speculative future is deeply intertwined with present-day scientific trajectories, prompting readers to consider the ethical risks of unchecked biotechnology. The trilogy imagines a post-apocalyptic world where biodiversity has been replaced by laboratory-created hybrid animals and genetically engineered humans known as the 'Crakers'. As critic J. Brooks Bouson notes, Atwood's work "exposes the disastrous environmental consequences of corporate greed and human hubris" (Bouson 14). Through multiple narrative perspectives, Atwood dramatizes the collapse of ecosystems and the fragile hope for new forms of coexistence.

Kim Stanley Robinson in his *'The Ministry for the Future'* (2020) offers a rigorously detailed exploration of climate governance and global ecological justice. Opening with a catastrophic heatwave in India that kills millions, the novel foregrounds the disproportionate impact of climate disasters on vulnerable populations. Robinson's *The Ministry for the Future* embodies a global commitment to representing the rights of future generations. The novel's multi-voiced structure mirrors the complexity of the climate crisis, blending scientific exposition, fictional testimonies, and philosophical reflection. According to scholars like Jonathan Alexander, Robinson "reimagines climate change as a problem demanding collective political imagination rather than individual action alone" (Alexander 57). Themes of geoengineering, refugee crises, carbon sequestration, and alternative economic systems highlight both the dangers and possibilities of climate intervention.

Octavia E. Butler's *'Parable of the Sower'* (1993) and *'Parable of the Talents'* (1998) depict a near-future America destabilized by climate change, economic inequality, and sociopolitical extremism. Climate-induced scarcity, violence, and displacement shape every aspect of the narrative, mirroring real-world patterns of environmental injustice. Butler employs a prophetic vision, anticipating debates about climate migration, resource wars, and authoritarian responses to environmental stress. As Ayanna Jamieson argues, 'Earthseed', primarily a fictional Afrofuturist religion created by Butler in her *Parable Series* offers "a framework for environmental and social justice rooted in collective survival" (Jamieson 88). Together, the aforementioned literary works present climate futures that are dystopian yet deeply instructive, highlighting systemic failures while illustrating the potential of

communal, ethical, and posthuman forms of resilience. Although not all the novels discussed above have direct film adaptations, their cinematic influence is unmistakable. Adaptations and parallel narratives help reinforce key ecological messages of cli-fi and extend them to wider audiences.

#### **The Handmaid's Tale and Atwood's Cinematic Influence-**

While Atwood's *The MaddAddam* trilogy has not yet been adapted for film, her earlier novel *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) was adapted into a successful Hulu series. Its ecological themes—pollution, infertility, and environmental collapse—mirror the anxieties present in *MaddAddam*. Both works warn of the consequences of patriarchal and corporate control over natural and biological resources.

#### **Robinson's Vision and Documentary Influence-**

Robinson's ecological vision has shaped numerous documentaries and visual essays on climate change, including works produced by environmental organizations that rely on speculative scenarios similar to those depicted in *The Ministry for the Future*.

#### **Climate Cinema: Visualizing the Planetary Crisis-**

Roland Emmerich's *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004) based on the book *The Coming Global Superstorm* (1999) by Art Bell and Whitley Strieber, remains one of the most widely recognized climate disaster films. Although the film exaggerates the speed of climatic shifts, its depiction of global weather catastrophes, mass migration, and political paralysis resonates strongly with scientific predictions. As Joanna Zylinska notes, disaster cinema often “reveals cultural anxieties about the fragility of human civilization” (Zylinska 45). The film thus functions as a cultural visual piece that popularizes climate science and highlights global vulnerability.

Bong Joon-ho's *Snowpiercer* (2013), based on a French climate fiction graphic novel *Le Transperceneige* by Jacques Lob, Benjamin Legrand and Jean-Marc Rochette presents a frozen post-apocalyptic earth resulting from a failed geoengineering experiment. Humanity survives aboard a perpetually moving train rigidly divided by class. The film critiques capitalist structures that perpetuate climate injustice, illustrating how ecological collapse intensifies socioeconomic inequality. The narrative of this film literalizes the metaphor of “climate apartheid”—a world in which the wealthy insulate themselves while the poor suffer the consequences of environmental degradation.

Director Christopher Nolan's *Interstellar* (2014) is another significant film that went above and beyond to achieve authenticity and has upped the bar for both previous and upcoming science fiction movies. It offers a profound meditation on ecological collapse and interstellar hope. Set in a future where crop blight, dust storms, and atmospheric decline render earth uninhabitable, the film explores humanity's desperate search for survival

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beyond the planet. In order to portray the Blackhole/Wormhole as realistically as possible, Nolan, who is renowned for using 'Practical Effects' in his films to give viewers a visceral experience, hired American theoretical physicist and author Kip Thorne, who is recognised for his contributions to gravitational physics and astrophysics. In addition to leaving spectators in amazement, Nolan's choice caused NASA scientists to contact the film's creators to inform them that this is the most accurate representation of a wormhole they had seen. According to film scholar David Higgins, *Interstellar* "reimagines the Anthropocene as both a scientific and emotional crisis" (Higgins 112). The film blends astrophysical concepts with ecological warnings, suggesting that the failure to protect earth may force humanity into exile.

Disney Pixar's 'WALL-E' (2008) is yet another example but it presents a contrasting ecological vision—one of environmental restoration. Depicting earth abandoned due to pollution and waste accumulation, the film satirizes hyper-consumerism and corporate irresponsibility. *WALL-E*, the last functioning waste-collecting robot, discovers a plant symbolizing ecological rebirth. The film suggests that ecological recovery is possible through care, responsibility, and sustained environmental stewardship. Together, *Interstellar* and *WALL-E* offer imaginative post-Earth futures: one depicting the necessity of planetary exile, the other emphasizing the possibility of return and renewal.

#### **Indian Regional Cinema on Environmental Injustice:**

It can be observed that regional cinema in India, unlike the mainstream cinema has increasingly become a vital site for ecocritical discussions with recent films such as *Kantara* (2022/2025) and the Marathi film *Dashavtar* (2025) exemplifying how localized narratives attempts to foreground ecological crises. *Kantara* employs indigenous belief systems, ritual performance, and forest-centric lifeworld's at the centre to critique climate degradation and environmental injustice. By situating the 'Bhoota Kola' tradition at the heart of land conflicts, the film challenges the capitalist notions of ownership, presenting nature as a sentient, moral force rather than an exploitable commodity. Its depiction of state and corporate encroachment exposes how marginalized communities bear the brunt of ecological destruction, aligning the film closely with prior discourses on environmental injustice. These films are well received by audiences due to their familiarity with the content. From the perspective of reception, Linda Hutcheon argues that 'audiences engage with adaptations as texts layered with traces of the original, experienced through the memory of prior works that resonates through repetition with variation' (cited in Gitanjali et al., 2025). In this context, prior works on climate degradation and environmental injustice provide these filmmakers with a popular and well-received framework; thus, the message against these environmental crises is conveyed more effectively to the audience.

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Similarly, *Dashavtar*, the first Marathi film to be released in a Malayalam version, reimagines mythological cosmology to address contemporary ecological anxiety. Drawing on the ten incarnations of Lord Vishnu, the film allegorically maps evolutionary processes, species extinction, and human-induced climate imbalance. By blending mythology with ecological consciousness, *Dashavtar* critiques anthropocentrism and foregrounds the ethical responsibility of humans toward planetary coexistence. Collectively, these regional films enrich the ecological imagination by offering culturally rooted climate narratives, as suggested by Amitav Ghosh that resist linear, technocratic visions of the future. They demonstrate how regional cinema can function as climate fiction, fostering ecological awareness while imagining sustainable futures grounded in indigenous knowledge, myth, and ethical environmental relationships.

**Conclusion: A Call for Indian Climate Fiction and Science Fiction Cinema-**

Both literature and cinema play a crucial role in shaping ecological imagination. By making abstract scientific predictions emotionally resonant, climate narratives cultivate a sense of urgency and ethical responsibility. Amitav Ghosh also argues that literature must respond to the climate crisis by expanding narrative imaginations (Ghosh 161). Similarly, cinema through its ‘Natural Disaster’ genre fosters visual literacy about planetary change. Through dystopian warnings, speculative futures, and posthuman possibilities, Cli-Fi prompts audiences to confront uncomfortable realities about consumption, inequality, and environmental exploitation by mankind. The genre motivates reflection on the moral responsibilities humans bear toward nonhuman species and future generations.

India, despite its ecological diversity and climate vulnerability, has produced relatively few mainstream climate fictions works or science-fiction films that speak of environmental collapse. Given the subcontinent’s exposure to floods, droughts, heatwaves, and pollution, Indian literature and cinema possess immense potential to explore climate futures embedded in local histories, cultural values, and ecological traditions. There is a pressing need for Indian storytellers—novelists, filmmakers, poets, playwrights collectively—to engage more deeply with the climate crisis. Indian Cli-Fi and science-fiction cinema, if produced more frequently, have immense potential to bridge traditional ecological knowledge with contemporary climate realities, offering narratives that resonate across linguistic, cultural, and regional contexts. Through this paper, Climate Fiction and its Cinematic parallels can be seen not only as a reflection of ecological crisis but also as a catalyst for imagining sustainable futures. It won’t be wrong to conclude this research paper with a hope aligned with that of Amitav Ghosh’s, that Indian literature and cinema shall embrace this genre to a greater extent, contributing to a global ecological imagination grounded in justice, resilience, and planetary care.

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