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## Conceptual Metaphor in Discourses of Women and Marriage in Seventeenth-Century Comedy

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### ABSTRACT

Conceptual metaphors reflect general conceptions of women and marriage in seventeenth-century comedy. Through the comparison of Molière's *The School for Husbands* (1661) and *The School for Wives* (1662) with Wycherley's *The Country Wife* (1675), the author of the present paper analyzes metaphors depicting women's position and marriage in contemporary English and French society. The cognitive linguistic analysis (based on Johnson & Lakoff, 1980; Kövecses, 2005; 2010) was complemented with elements of Sociocriticism (Duchet, 1979), an approach that defines text as a social act. Sociocriticism claims that literary texts mirror the reality of their age, and they therefore need to be interpreted according to their own socio-cultural context. Women of the 1600s had an inferior status within the dominant male discourse, and this fact is unambiguously manifested in the metaphors extracted from the comedies. However, there are some considerable differences in the realization of these metaphors in the analyzed plays. First, metaphors in *The Country Wife* are visually more ingenuous than those applied in *The School for Husbands* and *The School for Wives*. Second, metaphors in Wycherley's play are closely connected to the everyday life of the characters (i.e., members of the English gentry and aristocracy), as opposed to Molière's comedies, in which metaphors are conventional both on the general and specific level, and thus provide little culture-specific information on the issue. A third difference is that metaphorical correspondences in *The Country Wife* are made explicit, and they run through the whole of the play, establishing coherence to the discourse. In contrast, the two French plays do not unbind any of the relevant metaphors. As a conclusion, it can be stated that whereas in *The Country Wife* the representation of women and marriage is based on extended conceptual metaphors reflecting contemporary socio-cultural

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context, in *The School for Husbands* and *The School for Wives* conceptual metaphors reinforce but do not constitute the basis of illustrating the issue in question.

**Key words:** Conceptual metaphor, Marriage, Wives and husbands in 1600s, Women, 17<sup>th</sup> century.

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## 1.0 Introduction

Women of the 1600s occupied a marginalized position within the dominant male discourse, and this inequality between men and women manifested itself in practically all areas of life, including education and law. This study presents an analysis of how women's status and the concept of marriage were depicted through the linguistic realizations of conceptual metaphors in three of the most prominent 17<sup>th</sup> century comedies, namely William Wycherley's *The Country Wife* (1675), and Molière's *The School for Husbands* (1661) and *The School for Wives* (1662). The theory of Cognitive Linguistics (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980); Kövecses, 2005; 2010) was combined with Sociocriticism (Duchet, 1979), an approach which claims that every piece of text mirrors social reality. Conceptual metaphors in all three plays support the socially accepted views of women occupying an inferior position as compared to men, and marriage being a mostly economic arrangement in early modernism.

The realization of metaphors in Wycherley's comedy and in Molière's plays shows notable differences at three levels: first, metaphors<sup>2</sup> in *The Country Wife* are visually more ingenuous; second, metaphors in this play are closely connected to the everyday life of the characters as opposed to Molière's comedies, in which metaphors are conventional both on the conceptual and language level, and provide little culture-specific information; third, and most important, metaphors in *The Country Wife* run through the whole of the play, and therefore create the coherence of the discourse. This third difference leads to the conclusion that whereas in Wycherley's play conceptual metaphor, by continuously restating and reinforcing the dominant male voice, constitutes a cornerstone of the discourse, metaphors in Molière's comedies simply reinforce the cultural practice of the age, but are not constitutive as such to the texts. This instance of analyzing literature through Cognitive Linguistics, more precisely, through Conceptual Metaphor Theory (introduced in Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), may provide a more profound insight to the socio-cultural relations of the age, since it emphasizes the inherently mutual relationship of language, thought and culture (e.g., Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), literature being a manifestation of culture, or, in terms of Sociocriticism, a social act (Duchet, 1979).

## 2.0 Literature review

### 2.01 The status of women in 17<sup>th</sup> century

Women occupied an inferior position as compared to men at almost every level in society: they were not allowed to take on a job, and neither their legal, nor their social position made advancement possible. In the 1600s, only 14% of the female population was literate to a greater or lesser degree (Mouysset, 2009). Clearly, women of different classes were exposed to different social stimuli and experiences, but, on the whole, it can be stated that mainstream ideology promoted women's submission to men. This practice is constantly present in Molière's and Wycherley's work. However, account books (Mouysset, 2009) and hereditary laws (for France see Dousset, 2009; for the British Isles see Laurence, 2009) of the age reveal that women's role within the family was largely determined by family structure and mentality, and by the customs and legal traditions of the region. Although it was possible that in some families or regions women enjoyed a more favourable status in the group they

<sup>2</sup> The terms 'metaphor' and 'conceptual metaphor' will henceforth refer to metaphors both at conceptual and at language-level, for the sake of simplicity.

were member of, the dominant ideology of the age arranged social and family roles in a way that men occupied the privileged position.

## 2.02 The renewal of theatre in 17<sup>th</sup> century England and France

The 17<sup>th</sup> century brought about significant changes in the theatrical culture of the two countries. In England, the long years of Shakespearean tradition were replaced by a new genre called “comedy of manners” or “Restoration comedy.” Comedy of manners meant a new, refreshed concept of theatre, since it dealt with topical issues in contemporary English society, a theme that had been largely ignored before the Restoration in 1660 (Dobson [In: Payne, 2000]; Miles, 1914). Besides entertainment, Restoration plays served as a space for playwrights to express their criticism on contemporary values and social practices.

With the return of Charles II, not only theatrical traditions changed, but the composition of the audience as well. As London theatres were monopolized by the Crown, the audience, which, in the time of Shakespeare, presented the full range of the social spectrum, was now narrowed down to the aristocracy and the upper middle-class (Langhaus, [In: Payne, 2000]). Restoration plays were characterized by witty and ambiguous language use, the breaking down of taboos and the open discussion of sexuality. Conservative critics, such as Shadwell, considered wit, the essential device of the genre, immoral and destructive (Corman, [In: Payne, 2000]). In addition, the Royal Court embraced French culture, which meant the insinuation of French literature into English literary tradition, including theatre (Miles, 1914). Among the most notable playwrights of the age were Sir William Davenant (1606-1668), John Dryden (1631-1700), George Etherege (1635-1692), and William Wycherley (1640-1715).

As to France, it is Molière’s (Jean-Baptiste Poquelin, 1622-1673) appearance in the Palais Royal of Louis XIV (1643-1715) that is considered a water-shed event in the History of French theatre. Molière created a new genre known as the “comédie des mœurs”, which, instead of the strict observance of Aristotelian unities (i.e., time, place and action), places the emphasis on moral edification. As Miles (1914) remarks, in the comédie des mœurs it is not the action, but the behaviour of characters in society that takes privilege over other aspects. The genre has therefore a very strong critical function, pointing out that contemporary society suffers from collective hypocrisy, and that people themselves are imperfect, what is more, morally defective. Despite all the criticism on the part of moralists and the Church, Molière’s plays remained incredibly popular amongst theatre-goers. By making the audience<sup>3</sup> laugh at their own moral debility, Molière justified the function of the comédie des mœurs, evoking Horatius’ saying, *ridendo dicere verum* (approx. ‘Tell the truth while laughing’) (Bertrand, 1999).

The French Court’s style and French culture in general had a significant influence on English literary life, and comedy was no exception to this. Restoration comedy playwrights borrowed characters, actions, even whole scenes from Molière’s plays (Miles, 1914; for a critique on the scarcity of literature in connection with Molière’s influence on Restoration Plays, see Knutson, 1988). Wycherley’s *The Country Wife* (1675) is an example par excellence of this practice, as it is basically the result of the playwright’s combining *The School for Husbands* (1661) and *The School for Wives* (1662). In Molière’s plays, the female protagonists, Isabelle and Agnès, are engaged to aging, old-fashioned, paranoid and hypocrite men, namely, Sganarelle and Arnolfe.

The problem is that the women are emotionally attached to other men, whom, after facing a lot of hardships and outsmarting their autocratic fiancés, they marry in the end. *The Country Wife* follows a very similar line of actions, with the difference being that the female protagonist, Margery, is already married to Mr Pinchwife and falls in love not with an honest young man, but with a notorious London womanizer named Horner (in the play, most, if not all, characters have a telling name). The central themes of the plays are the value of marriage, the role of women, and adultery.

<sup>3</sup> To add that, with the exception of *Le Misanthrope* (1666), all characters in Molière’s plays were members of the bourgeoisie, since the audience was made up of the aristocracy.

Despite the number of similarities, there are considerable differences at the level of content, structure, and language between the English play and the French comedies (see Mavrocordato [In: Mavrocordato & Wycherley, 1968]; Aradi, 2014). One of these salient differences is the use and realization of conceptual metaphors, a building block of metaphorical coherence (Kövecses, 2010). The following sections present a detailed and comparative analysis of the conceptual metaphors in Wycherley's greatest success, *The Country Wife* (1675) and in Molière's *The School for Husbands* (1661) and *The School for Wives* (1662).

### 3.0 Theoretical framework, methodology

In the analysis, Conceptual Metaphor Theory or CMT (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) was combined with the perspective of Sociocriticism (Duchet, 1979)<sup>4</sup>. According to CMT, human thought is essentially metaphorical. The conceptualization of the world happens through conceptual metaphors and metonymies, meaning that the human mind grasps abstract concepts with the help of concrete, physical phenomena. From this follows that the conceptualization of the world springs from the physical world, and is largely determined by spatio-temporal experience. Conceptual metaphors and metonymies define thought to a great degree, and they are manifested in cultural practices, and in everyday language.

For example, the expression *my blood boils* in the sentence 'My blood boils whenever I see him' originates in the physiological experience that our temperature increases when we are in an intensified emotional state. The corresponding conceptual metaphors to this example are INTENSITY IS HEAT and ANGER IS A HOT FLUID IN A CONTAINER (in CMT, conceptual metaphors and metonymies are traditionally written in small capitals), the container being the human body (Kövecses & Benczes, 2010; Kövecses, 2005; 2010). In CMT terms, the abstract concept we try to grasp is the target domain, whereas the concrete, physical concept we use to understand abstract concepts is the source domain. CMT treats the physical world (including the body), language, and culture as entities mutually influencing each other (e.g., Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Kövecses & Benczes, 2010; Kövecses, 2005; 2010). That is, language forms thought just as much as thought defines language use, or filters our perception of the physical world.

When contemplating poetic metaphor and, in general, literature within the CMT framework, the approved view is that poetic language is based on everyday language, and that analysis of conceptual metaphors in literary texts is, at the same time, the analysis of everyday conceptualization processes (e.g., Kövecses, 2005; 2010). In what concerns Sociocriticism, this approach was directly influenced by Marxist literary theory and the works of Lucien Goldmann. Sociocriticism claims that every instance of literary text is, at the same time, a social act, because social reality is inherently coded in the text, and, even if it is not explicitly stated at the level of language, it is never hidden, it can always be decoded and read (Duchet, 1979).

The logic is as follows: if, as Sociocriticism claims, the text is a social act that is the reflection of a reality filtered by an ideology or ideologies, and this reality is linguistically manifest, then conceptual metaphors in a text are carriers of the same reality, and therefore contribute to establishing coherence within the text. Following the principle of Sociocriticism, it is very likely that metaphorical creativity (i.e. the creation of novel metaphors) in a text is primarily context-induced, that is, it is largely effected by the social setting and the immediate cultural context. The analysis of metaphors happened in five steps:

1. Extraction of the conceptual metaphors from the plays;
2. Analysis of their source domains and target domains;
3. Analysis of how they establish intratextual coherence (i.e., coherence within the same text);

<sup>4</sup> In his influential work on Sociocriticism (1979), Duchet claims that, due to the variety of theoretical frameworks it involves, Sociocriticism is best defined as an approach ('une perspective') rather than a unified theory.

4. Comparison and contrast of metaphors in the English comedy and in the French plays based on points 1-3; and, finally
5. Looking at how they reflect the given socio-cultural context (what we know about it and they correspond to that knowledge).

#### 4.0 Analysis

This section presents the analysis of some of the most relevant conceptual metaphors from the point of view of discourse coherence. As the plays revolve around contemporary issues relating to women, marriage and adultery, it comes naturally that the general metaphor upon which a system of metaphors is built is connected to these concepts, and presents them through an ideological filter. I found this metaphor to be WOMEN ARE POSSESSIONS in all the three plays. Now, what is remarkable on the level of the specific conceptual metaphors is the realization of 'possession', which acts as the source domain of the metaphor. Here is a list of the most common conceptual metaphors that instantiate the WOMEN ARE POSSESSIONS metaphor in the examined plays:

The Country Wife (1675)	The School for Husbands (1661), The School for Wives (1662)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• WOMEN ARE PREY</li> <li>• WOMEN ARE BREEDING ANIMALS</li> <li>• WOMEN ARE PETS (SPANIELS)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• WOMEN ARE SOUP</li> </ul>

To this list can be added those metaphors that do not follow the same structure, but are tightly connected to the idea:

The Country Wife (1675)	The School for Husbands (1661), The School for Wives (1662)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LOVE IS WAR             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– LOVE IS HUNTING</li> <li>– THE GALLANT IS A HUNTER</li> <li>– LOVE IS GAMBLING</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LOVE IS WAR             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– LOVE IS GAMBLING</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

The question is whether the general metaphor WOMEN ARE POSSESSIONS can be considered a megametaphor. By definition, megametaphors or extended metaphors are “large-scale metaphors “behind” a text that underlie other, more local metaphors (called “micrometaphors”). Their cognitive function is to organize the local metaphors into a coherent metaphorical structure in the text.” (Kövecses, 2010: 325).

Taking a look at the tables again, it can be seen that the metaphor WOMEN ARE POSSESSIONS cover all the metaphors, using different elements of the corresponding concepts. In the case of the two Molière plays, however, there are only two metaphors that are connected to the topic of the plays; in other words, *The School for Husbands* and *The School for Wives* are short of conceptual metaphors, which leads to the observation that conceptual metaphors do not really establish coherence in these plays. They are there to express and reinforce the dominant ideology, but they are not constitutive to it. The only metaphor the author of the present paper would consider as novel is the WOMEN ARE SOUP one, which is realized as follows:

Tell me, is it not true that, when you have your broth in your hand, and some hungry person comes up to eat it, you would be in a rage, and be ready to beat him? (Molière, *The School for Wives* II:3)

Here we find the following correspondences:

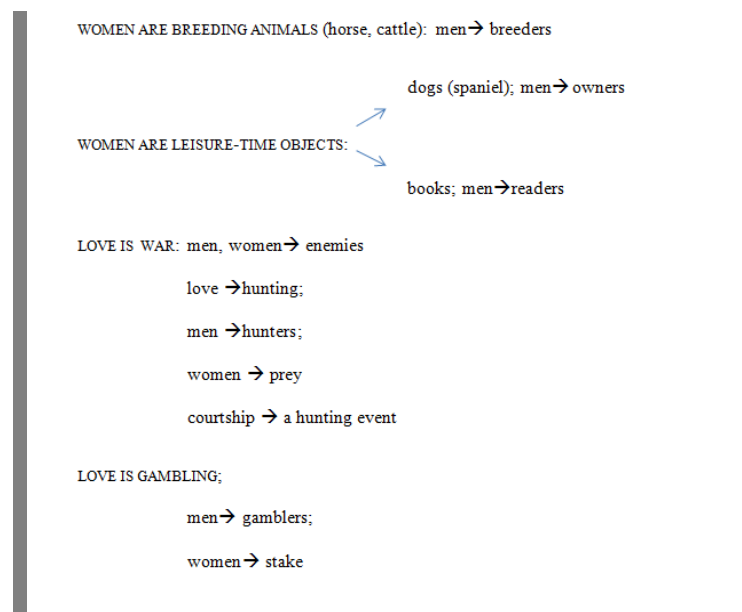
women → broth  
 men → owner of the broth  
 aspirant lover → some hungry person



jealousy of love → jealousy of food

As a conclusion, WOMEN ARE POSSESSIONS is most probably not a megametaphor in the two Molière plays.

To support this statement, it is necessary to examine some pragmatic features of these texts, namely, the lack of ambiguity and wit in language. Among others, *The Country Wife* is characterized by its richness in contextually ambiguous language use and powerful, witty remarks so typical of English discourse. It may follow from this fact that the English play is abundant in visually emphatic conceptual metaphors which are all the realizations of the metaphor WOMEN ARE POSSESSIONS. By looking at the listed conceptual metaphors, it is possible to establish several correspondences, which reveal a fine network of associations between the following concepts (called “frames” in CMT, written in small capitals): WAR, (hunting, gambling), LOVE, RELATIONSHIPS (courtship, marriage), GENDER, BREEDING, LEISURE. These correspondences are the following:



Metaphors in *The Country Wife* make up a coherent whole. This intratextual coherence is present both within this network of metaphors and at the level of discourse. The WOMEN ARE POSSESSIONS metaphor can therefore be considered a mega metaphor in the English play.

It has already been established how this coherence works at the level of language. In the following, some of the above metaphors are presented in detail. Emphasis is placed on metaphors in *The Country Wife*, for the reasons explained above. First of all, however, it is essential to clarify the “device” by which intratextual coherence is established in *The Country Wife*. The following examples show that this coherence is created mostly by metaphorical analogy, that is, by a series of related metaphorical threads (Kövecses, 2010).

First, the realizations of the LOVE IS GAMBLING metaphor in *The Country Wife* and in *The School for Wives* are presented.

(1)

[...] a Wife that designs to make a Cully of her Husband will be sure to let him win the first stake of love, by the world.

(*The Country Wife*, IV:4)

[when courting] we gamble with dice, when, if you do not get what you want, you must be shrewd and good-tempered, to amend your luck by good management.

(*The School for Wives*, IV:8)

In both quotes, it is the woman's love → prize, and getting the woman → winning the game correspondences that are emphasized in the metaphors. Although in the first quote the type of game is not specified, it is clear that we talk about gambling. The difference may lie in the phase of courtship the metaphors refer to. Whereas in the quote from the French comedy, it talks about courtship in general, in *The Country Wife* it is the virginity of the bride that is the prize of the husband. And, taking a closer look, an important socio-cultural aspect of marriage is revealed: the bride preserves her virginity (the first stake of love) in order to earn the trust of the husband so that later she can cheat on him (the word "cully" means "dupe", and came into use in the 1660s).

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, adultery was a common phenomenon as a result of marriages of convenience, and the extra-matrimonial relationships of the couple were known to both of the partners, even if they pretended ignorance. From this angle, preserving one's virginity until marriage is nothing but an act of hypocrisy to live up to the expectations of high society. In this sense then, virginity is not a real stake, but rather, a consolation prize. This comparison demonstrates that metaphors in *The Country Wife* reflect contemporary socio-cultural elements as opposed to the generalities evoked in the Molière plays.

Apart from the exploitation of socio-cultural elements, metaphors in *The Country Wife* establish intratextual coherence because of their details; examining the number of correspondences, it becomes clear that these metaphors are far richer than metaphors in the Molière plays. To underpin this statement, the already mentioned soup-metaphor is placed under scrutiny:

(2)

Tell me, is it not true that, when you have your broth in your hand, and some hungry person comes up to eat it, you would be in a rage, and be ready to beat him?

(Molière, *The School for Wives* II:3)

The correspondences may be established as the following:

women	→	broth
men	→	owner of the broth
aspirant lover	→	some hungry person
jealousy of love	→	jealousy of food

Now, take a quote from *The Country Wife* which contains the metaphor WOMEN ARE BREEDING ANIMALS.

[...]At least we are a little surer of the breed *there[in the country]*, know what her keeping has been, whether foiled or unsound.

(Wycherley, *The Country Wife*, I:11)

This metaphor is rich of correspondences:

men ('we')	→	breeders
women ('her')	→	breeding animals
women's quality	→	breed
women's upbringing	→	the keeping of the animals
good upbringing	→	foiled keeping
poor upbringing	→	unsound keeping

What is more, the foiled versus unsound breeding-image evokes another frequent conceptual metaphor: ABSTRACT COMPLEX SYSTEMS ARE BUILDINGS. 'Foiled' and 'unsound' are adjectives used in architecture, and they relate to the strong versus weak quality of an architectural structure. The correspondences are as follows:

foiled keeping	→	strong quality structure
unsound keeping	→	weak structure
keeping an animal	→	the process of building
breeding an animal	→	building (=result of the process of building)

Basically, it is through the concept of breeding that women's upbringing enters into a metaphorical relationship with architecture, resulting in the metaphors that honesty (an honest woman) is a strong building, while dishonesty (a dishonest woman) is a weak building. The final example shows how conceptual metaphors establish intratextual coherence in *The Country Wife* under the mega metaphor WOMEN ARE POSSESSIONS.

### (3)

#### LOVE IS HUNTING

[...] Ask but all the young fellows of the town if they do not lose more time, like huntsmen, in starting the game, than in running it down. One knows not where to find 'em; who will or will not. Women of quality are so civil, you can hardly distinguish love from good breeding, and a man is often mistaken: but now I can be sure she that shows an aversion loves the sport, [...] (I:5)

#### WOMEN ARE PETS (SPANIELS)

[...] a Spaniel [...] can fawn, lie down, suffer beating, and fawn the more, barks at your Friends when they come to see you, makes your bed hard, gives you Fleas and the mange sometimes, and all the difference is the Spaniel's the more faithful Animal and fawns but upon one Master.

(II: introduction)

#### WOMEN ARE BREEDING ANIMALS

[...] At least we are a little surer of the breed there, know what her keeping has been, whether foiled or unsound. (I:11)

Then methinks you should bring her to be taught breeding.

(I:11)

#### LOVE IS GAMBLING

[...] a Wife that designs to make a Cully of her Husband will be sure to let him win the first stake of love, by the world. (IV:4)

And, finally, a simile contemplating the place of mistresses in men's life:

[simile] No, mistresses are like books. If you pore upon them too much, they doze you and make you unfit for Company. (I:6)

Besides the fact that these conceptual metaphors are micro metaphors of the underlying WOMEN ARE POSSESSIONS metaphors reflecting contemporary ideology on women and marriage, they are also an imprint of the London aristocracy (nobility and members of the higher upper class) and gentry's everyday life and leisure time. Their preferred activities included animal breeding (mostly horses), keeping domestic animals, hunting, gambling and culture. Most activities related to these hobbies were reserved to men (except for domestic animals, and culture, such as theatre-going), and, therefore, they constitute a good source domain for creating metaphors that emphasize their dominant social position.

From the point of view of metaphorical creativity, it can be said that it is context-induced, and uses primarily the social setting and the immediate cultural context to create the metaphors. Such cultural references are missing at the level of metaphor in Molière's referred plays. It is not to say that the socio-cultural context is not present or important in these plays. There are, for example, several references to the Church, an essential element of Louis XIV's society. The few metaphors that are present in these plays, however, do not reveal anything typical or unique to contemporary French society and to the issues raised in the analysis.

## 5.0 Conclusion

The aim of the present paper was to demonstrate how conceptual metaphors reflect the position of women and the concept of marriage in 17<sup>th</sup> century English and French comedy, through the analysis of



conceptual metaphors in three plays, namely, Wycherley's *The Country Wife* (1675), and Molière's *The School for Husbands* (1661) and *The School for Wives* (1662). The method of analysis was a combination of Conceptual Metaphor Theory and Sociocriticism. A detailed analysis of conceptual metaphors extracted from the three texts suggests that conceptual metaphors in *The Country Wife* are strongly constitutive of the established intratextual discourse coherence, whereas conceptual metaphors in the respective Molière plays only reinforce the dominant male discourse, but are not strongly present in the texts. This analysis was narrowed down to three plays, and thus the above conclusions are not automatically generalizable to the whole of seventeenth-century English and French comedy. A possible continuation of this research would be to examine all Restoration plays, and all of Molière's comedies, using the same theoretical framework. This way a research project could be set up to create a system of metaphors relating to the concept of women and marriage in seventeenth-century comedy, which would definitely provide a detailed picture of contemporary discourse on these issues.

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