

JOYCE STUDIES IN ITALY

21

**LANGUAGE
AND LANGUAGES
IN JOYCE'S FICTION**

Edited by
Serenella Zanotti

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ANICIA

Volume pubblicato con il contributo di The James Joyce Italian Foundation

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Direttore responsabile: Franca Ruggieri

Registrazione Num.R.G, 1885/2016, Tribunale Ordinario di Cassino

ISSN 2281 – 373X

© 2019, Editoriale Anicia s.r.l. - Roma

<http://www.edizionianicia.it/store/>

info@edizionianicia.it

Single copy price: €18.00

Subscription rates (one issue annually):

Personal: €18.00

Institutional: €30.00

The journal will be published on the following website:

<https://thejamesjoyceitalianfoundation.wordpress.com/>

Purchases can be made by directly contacting the publisher and then completing a bank transfer covering the price of the book and postage costs (this is €5.00 within Italy, but varies according to the country of destination).

Address: James Joyce Italian Foundation

Dipartimento di Lingue, Culture e Letterature Straniere

Via Valco di San Paolo, 19

00146 Roma

joyce_found@os.uniroma3.it

franca.ruggieri@uniroma3.it

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“IS HE AS INNOCENT AS HIS SPEECH?”:
RURAL HIBERNO-ENGLISH IN *STEPHEN HERO* AND
A PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS A YOUNG MAN

Though James Joyce is primarily associated with Dublin and the city, a number of important rural characters are prevalent from some of his earliest writing onwards. As well as the presence of rural migrants in Dublin, Joyce’s protagonists, notably Stephen D(a)edalus, make several important journeys into the countryside where they encounter rural characters and a markedly different way of life. One of the most intriguing ways this dichotomy between the rural and urban is represented in Joyce is through language, and most especially accent. This paper will trace the development of Joyce’s representation of the rural accent within the Hiberno-English dialect from *Stephen Hero* to *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. It will argue that the way Joyce’s rural characters give voice to themselves tells us much about how his views on national identity developed between these two works. Writing about Joyce’s use of Hiberno-English in *A Portrait*, M. Angeles Conde-Parrilla states that Joyce’s “dialectal dimension [...] reveals a clear cultural and political stance” (Conde-Parrilla 2013: 39). Similarly, I will argue that Joyce’s depiction of the rural accent is both influenced by and eventually a reaction against received colonial stereotypes.

The fascination with rural Ireland shown by Joyce’s contemporaries within the Irish Literary Revival is often explained by the idea that Dublin in the late-nineteenth century was “overrun by unplanned migrations of rural folk, who had no sooner settled than they were consumed by a fake nostalgia for a pastoral Ireland they had ‘lost’” (Kiberd 1996: 492). However, the statistics do not bear this out. Between 1851 and

1911, Ireland underwent unprecedented levels of depopulation following the Famine, with roughly four million people leaving the country, the majority from rural Ireland (Guinnane 1997: 101). While Belfast saw an almost fourfold increase in its population, from 98,000 in 1851 to 387,000 in 1911, Dublin's population only increased from 247,000 to 305,000 (Guinnane 1997: 121). No other Irish city grew during this time, meaning that those leaving rural Ireland were mostly becoming urbanized in cities across Britain and the United States rather than Dublin (Guinnane 1997: 88, 124). Nevertheless, it is this perception of Dublin being overrun by rural migrants that works its way into Joyce's novels. The best example of a rural migrant to Dublin is the student Davin in *A Portrait*, or Mad-den, as he is named in *Stephen Hero*, both based on Joyce's university friend George Clancy (*JIII* 61). Another student migrant is Temple, while Stephen's father Simon has originally migrated from Cork. In addition to the presence of rural characters in the city, at key points in *Stephen Hero* and *A Portrait*, Joyce takes us on a journey out to the countryside, beyond the Pale, where contact with a wilder, primitive – and, most importantly, Gaelic – population is promised. Interest in the purportedly exotic west of Ireland increased thanks to the Revival, with travelogue accounts, such as John Millington Synge's *The Aran Islands* (1907), becoming popular. In taking his characters out of the city, Joyce achieves a similar effect, and in 1912 Joyce himself described a trip to the Aran Islands for *Il Piccolo della Sera* (*OCPW* 342).

However, whether the rural characters have journeyed into the city, or we are journeying out to their regions, almost invariably the first characteristic mentioned is the manner in which these characters speak the English language. Attitudes to the dialect of English spoken in Ireland¹

¹ Numerous terms have been used to refer to this dialect. P.W. Joyce uses “Anglo-Irish” (Joyce 1979: v), while Raymond Hickey favours “Irish English” (Hickey 2007: 5). Gisela Zingg opts for “Hiberno-English” on the basis that it does not hold any “social or political implications whatsoever” (unlike “Anglo-Irish”), while also noting that “Hiberno-English” avoids the suggestion that the dialect is based solely on the influence of the Irish language, a possibility that “Irish English” might imply (Zingg 2013: 33). Given its now generally widespread use, I will refer to the dialect here as Hiberno-English, while dealing most especially with its rural form. It should be noted that some references use the terms “accent” and “dialect” somewhat interchangeably, though I am treating Hiberno-English as a dialect with variations and accents within it. I will use the word “accent” to

and most especially that of the varying accents present in the country are revealing of an urban-rural divide at this time. A.J. Bliss, setting aside the Scottish dialects of Ulster, distinguishes between three forms of Hiberno-English, these being rural, urban, and educated Hiberno-English (qtd. in Filppula 1991: 51). Markku Filppula notes that of these, the rural variety is said to correspond closest to the grammatical features of the *substratum*, Irish, while “the educated variety is closest to standard English. Urban speech is characterised as being somewhere in between” (Filppula 1991: 51). Katie Wales notes that rural Hiberno-English “has always tended to be socially stigmatised by town- and city-dwellers”, being seen as representative of the negative aspects of Irish society, namely “its poverty, ignorance and backwardness” (Wales 1992: 8). This seems, to a large degree, the result of Irish people’s own insecurities regarding their speech, due primarily to the co-opting of English attitudes to the perceived deviancy of Hiberno-English, with the rural variety simply the dialect in its most undiluted form. Rahul Chakraborty notes that by “re-ject[ing] an accent”, one also simultaneously rejects the “speakers’ identity through his or her race, ethnic heritage, national origin, regional affiliation, or economic class” (Chakraborty 2017: 59), while Peter Trudgill points out that apparently aesthetic judgements of accents such as “pleasant,” “harsh” etc., are in fact social judgements, noting that “[w]e like and dislike accents because of what they stand for, not for what they are” (qtd. in Masterson et al. 1983: 216). We are afforded a window into the Irish person’s insecurity regarding their accent in *Ulysses*, when we are told that Gerty MacDowell has been reading John Walker’s *Critical Pronouncing Dictionary*, first published in 1791 (U 13.342-43). This dictionary provided advice to anyone who happened to have a Scottish, Welsh, Cockney, regional English, or Irish accent. B.H. Smart’s 1836 pronouncing dictionary is a conscious update to Walker’s work, being entitled *Walker Remodelled*. This version also provides the Irish reader with some “HINTS FOR SOFTENING AN HIBERNIAN BROGUE” so that “our western friend” may “avoid hurling out his words with a superfluous quantity of breath” (Smart 1836: xli). The section provides some examples of typical phonetical mistakes made by Irish people, before suggest-

refer to the dialect’s phonology. Joyce mostly uses “accent” as a catch-all term when writing of rural characters’ speech patterns.

ing that the reader “may find an abundance of similar hints, combined with infinite humour, in many a tale written by countrymen and countrywomen” (Smart 1836: xli). The insinuation is that these rural individuals are less likely to be fully literate or used to standard English spelling and will therefore probably spell out words the way they themselves pronounce them – and, indeed, the way the Irish reader of this dictionary might be pronouncing them, unbeknown to him/herself. By drawing attention to the tales written by country people, this dictionary does implicitly acknowledge the existence of a variety of accents within Hiberno-English; and while English attitudes to Hiberno-English in general were condescending, when it came to the rural accent specifically, they ranged from bafflement to outright intolerance. An extreme example occurred during the Parnell Commission in London in 1888, when a witness for a Galway landlord spoke in court about agrarian violence. According to *The Irish Times*’ account of the case, the Galway man’s accent was so incomprehensible to the courtroom that it was “suggested that it might be as well to get an interpreter” (“Parnell Commission”). Finally, the bench grew so impatient that they instead had the witness hand up the sheet of paper from which he was reading rather than listen any further to his dulcet tones.

It is therefore in a linguistic context dominated by condescension and shame that we find ourselves when Stephen makes the acquaintance of Madden in *Stephen Hero* and Davin in *A Portrait*. Our introduction to Madden notes that he speaks in a “brogue accenting the first syllable of Matriculation” (*SH* 25), while in *A Portrait* Davin speaks in a “simple accent” (*P* 182). The brogue, a term used to refer to the rural Irish accent, is of disputed origin, coming either from the Irish word for a shoe worn by rural people (*bróg*) or possibly *barróg*, meaning a hold on the tongue (Hickey 2007: 7). The brogue was especially dominant as a characteristic of the stage Irishman, and thus acted as a symbol of inadequacy and humiliation to the Irish person. Martin J. Croghan writes that the brogue was “an instrument of political culture [used] to portray the Irish as deviant” (Croghan 1986: 259). By immediately drawing attention to Madden’s brogue, Joyce sets up his character as a stage Irishman figure. Indeed, Madden is conscious of Stephen’s proclivity for viewing rural Irishmen in this way, admonishing him when he mimics “the old peasant

down the country” by saying, “I suppose you heard that sentence in some ‘stage-Irishman’ play” (*SH* 64). Hickey notes that “[i]n linguistic terms there are no established features which are diagnostic of Stage Irish. Rather the salient features of (largely rural) Irish English are emphasised” (Hickey 2007: 8). Madden is therefore more than aware that the mockery inherent in stage Irishism is specifically mockery of the rural Irish, and that by mimicking the “old peasant”, Stephen is drawing on colonial stereotypes. But while Madden might be able to at least hold his own, the other rural student in *Stephen Hero* does not fare so well. Temple is from the west of Ireland and is introduced to us as “a raw Gipsy-looking youth with a shambling gait and a shambling manner of speaking” (*SH* 107). Temple’s speeches invariably fade into what Joyce describes as “indistinct mutterings” (*SH* 107) while at times his “shapeless mouth [...] was flecked with a thin foam as it strove to enunciate a difficult word” (*SH* 223). Temple, therefore, goes well beyond Madden’s brogue and is a picture of an Irishman for whom the English language exists on a plane far above their capacity to master.

Stephen’s attitude to these rural characters’ accents is one of condescension borne out of “shame for what he perceives as the plebeian and ignoble variety of the poor and backward Irish” (Conde-Parrilla 2013: 40). I would argue, however, that in addition to this shame is a sense of insecurity that, in the eyes of the colonial master, he too might possess some of the characteristics of rural Hiberno-English. Stephen is said to have “traces of a Cork accent in his speech”, showing that he has imbibed aspects of his father’s accent (*P* 94). This insecurity manifests itself in his tendency to mock “Davin’s dialectalisms” such as when he responds to one of his stories by saying “that’s not the strange thing that happened you?”, leaving out the preposition *to* required by the verb *happen*, as is common in rural Ireland (Conde-Parilla 2013: 40).² And yet, Stephen is aware that behind Davin’s “simple accent” is an acute intelligence, one which is happy to use the apparent simplicity of its delivery to masquerade its perspicacity. He reminds Davin of the first day they met when the

² Interestingly, however, just a few lines previously, Davin has in fact uttered this phrase using the preposition *to* (“A thing happened to myself” [*P* 181]). While Davin’s use of *myself* rather than *me* is non-standard, Stephen’s specific choice of imitation is, on this occasion at least, misplaced.

rural student put “a very strong stress on the first syllable” of the word *matriculation*, as Madden had also done. For Stephen, this was a give-away regarding Davin’s rural roots and assumed naivety. However, Stephen is no longer so sure. He now asks himself, “*Is he as innocent as his speech?*” (P 202). This is an important turning-point in the attitude to both language and rural characters in *A Portrait* as well as in Joyce’s work in general. The scene takes place shortly after Stephen’s much commented-upon conversation with the English Dean of Studies, in which the differences between the English the Dean speaks, so-called standard English, and Stephen’s variety is driven home. The Dean’s language, like the rural accents Stephen has been mocking up to this point, is at once “so familiar and so foreign” (P 189). T.P. Dolan characterizes this moment as one of “painful recognition” for Stephen (Dolan 1991: 131), in which he realizes that English will always be an “acquired speech” for him (P 189). This scene also marks a sudden moment of identification with the rural characters, as it dawns on Stephen that, to the Dean’s ears, there is little to differentiate between his accent and Davin’s – the simplicity is shared.

The Gaelic League and Irish Literary Revival brought with them a renewed interest in the Irish language, and though attempts to spread its learning never truly got beyond some token phrases for much of the Anglophone population, the rural accents of the west of Ireland provided an opportunity to hear the underlying structures and influence of the Irish language. One of best examples of this newfound interest in Hiberno-English came from a namesake of Joyce, the academic P.W. Joyce’s *English as We Speak It in Ireland* (1910). This book is a collection of Hiberno-English quirks assembled by P.W. Joyce over many years. Throughout, he attempts to explain the peculiarities of English in Ireland by way of the underlying *substratum*, Irish, as well as through the influence of Elizabethan English. P.W. Joyce notes early on that though Hiberno-English is “most marked among our peasantry [...] in fact none of us are free from it, no matter how well educated” (Joyce 1979: 7). This was a warning to the educated Dubliner like Stephen, who may have thought himself above the rustic speech of his fellow countrymen. One of the most memorable tales in *English as We Speak It in Ireland* is of a journey to Killarney that P.W. Joyce takes with a young gentleman whom he de-

scribes as a “‘a superior person’, as anyone could gather from his *dandified* speech” (Joyce 1979: 91). They meet with an old countryman who welcomes them by offering a “nice refreshing cup of *tay*”. The dandy accepts, adding “I shall be very glad to have a cup of *tee* – laying a particular stress on *tee*”. P.W. Joyce admits to feeling “a shrinking of shame for our humanity. Now which of these two was the vulgarian?” (Joyce 1979: 92). This passage is revealing for the change in attitude that has taken place in relation to the rural accent – no longer a comic feature of the stage Irishman, it is now viewed as a legitimate form of English. Unlike Stephen, the shame P.W. Joyce feels is not directed at the “quaint turn of old English speech” (*P* 180), but rather at his fellow traveller who presumes superiority through accent. We are not told if the dandy is Irish, but the fact that P.W. Joyce feels shame rather than indignation, suggests that he most likely is.

Joyce was familiar with his namesake – in fact, a number of the colloquial expressions found throughout his work are mentioned in *English as We Speak It in Ireland* (Dolan 1991: 137), including the riddle Stephen poses to his students in “Nestor” (Kaczvinsky 1988: 266). It appears that he also took note of P.W. Joyce’s warnings regarding condescension towards rural Hiberno-English. To demonstrate this, I will compare a scene, not all unlike the one from P.W. Joyce above, that features in *Stephen Hero*, and that is drastically rewritten in *A Portrait*. The scene takes place towards the end of both works and involves a recounted tale of a journey out of Dublin and a meeting with an old peasant man. In *Stephen Hero* we are on the Killucan Road, near Mullingar, which is located about eighty kilometres west of Dublin – though hardly considered the wilderness, this is still outside the Pale and would therefore have appeared quite rural to Stephen’s urban eyes – while in the scene from *A Portrait*, we are deep in the west of Ireland. The scene from *Stephen Hero* is recounted as follows:

The officer and a friend found themselves one evening surprised by a heavy shower far out on the Killucan road and forced to take refuge in a peasant’s cabin. [...] The officer’s friend who was a learned young lady observed a figure scrawled in chalk over the fireplace and asked what it was. The peasant said:

—Me grandson Johnny done that the time the circus was in the town. He seen the pictures on the walls and began pesterin' his mother for fourpence to see th' elephants. But sure when he got in an' all divil elephant was in it. But it was him drew that there.

The young lady laughed and the old man blinked his red eyes at the fire and went on smoking evenly and talking to himself:

—I've heerd tell them elephants is most natural things, that they has the notions of a Christian ... I wanse seen meself a picture of niggers ridin on wan of 'em – aye and beating blazes out of 'im with a stick. Begorra ye'd have more trouble with the childre³ is in it now that [*sic*] with one of thim big fellows.

The young lady who was much amused began to tell the peasant about the animals of prehistoric times. The old man heard her out in silence and then said slowly:

—Aw, there must be terrible quare craythurs at the latther ind of the world. (*SH* 241-2)

As we can immediately see, this extract is a rare and extreme example of phonetic spelling in Joyce's work – at least before *Finnegans Wake*. Visually, the extract immediately draws attention to the assault being carried out on standard English spelling, at points ceasing to appear as English at all. By doing this Joyce is co-opting many of the stereotypical portrayals of peasant Irishmen by English writers. In an influential piece on dialect writing, Sumner Ives remarks that “[b]y the very fact that he has represented the speech in unconventional spellings, the author has *passed judgement*” (Ives 1971: 165; my emphasis). By denying the Irish peasant full possession of the primary hallmark of English civilization – that is, the English language – one also denies the peasant the claim to being civilized at all. Martin J. Croghan calls this form of writing “brogue-write” and highlights how publishers of the time “tolerated and encouraged brogue-write, but often resisted Hiberno-English unless it were misspelled, as if correct spelling could only be the perfect reflection of some received, but undefined British English” (Croghan 1986: 262). Here we have a perfect example of what B.H. Smart must have imagined

³ Slocum and Cahoon gloss this word with the suggestion that Joyce intended to write “children” here (*SH* 242). However, “childer” has often traditionally been used in Hiberno-English instead of “children” (Dolan 2012: 53), and it is possible that this is what Joyce is attempting to write out phonetically here.

the “tale written by countrymen and countrywomen” would look like. A large number of brogue stereotypes are present here, including: use of the personal pronoun as a possessive pronoun (*Me grandson Johnny, meself*); use of the past participle instead of the preterite (*Johnny done that, He seen the pictures*); elision of letters (*pesterin’, th’, an’, ‘em, childre*); mispronunciation of vowels (*divil, heerd, wanse, wan, thim, quare, craythurs, ind*); aspiration (*latther*); colloquial expressions (*all divil elephant was in it*,⁴ *beating blazes, Begorra, latther ind of the world*); use of *ye* to denote second person plural; incorrect conjugation (elephants *is, they has, childre is*); initial unstressed element (*But sure* when he got in); cleft sentences, using *it* to foreground the expression, followed by the omission of the relative pronoun *who* (*But it was him drew that there*); use of *and* as a “loose connective” (Dolan 1984: 48) in the same manner as the Irish word *agus* (when he got in *an’ all divil elephant was in it*); religious expressions (notions of a *Christian*); use of intensifying adjectives (*terrible quare craythurs*).

However, by the time Joyce comes to write *A Portrait*, the scene with the old peasant has changed dramatically. The old man is no longer a comic figure, slurring over his words, but rather a quiet, brooding individual.

John Alphonsus Mulrennan has just returned from the west of Ireland. (European and Asiatic papers please copy.) He told us he met an old man there in a mountain cabin. Old man had red eyes and short pipe. Old man spoke Irish. Mulrennan spoke Irish. Then old man and Mulrennan spoke English. Mulrennan spoke to him about universe and stars. Old man sat, listened, smoked, spat. Then said:

—Ah, there must be terrible queer creatures at the latter end of the world.

⁴ In a letter to his brother Stanislaus, Joyce explains this phrase: “Again, no old toothless Irishman would say ‘Divil an elephant’: he would say ‘divil elephant’ Nora says ‘Divil up I’ll get till you come back’” [*sic*] (*JIII* 191). As well as providing a striking image of Joyce’s conception of the “toothless” Irish peasant, this extract also reveals the influence that Nora had on Joyce’s portrayal of the western peasantry. It should also be noted that the phrase *in it* is a direct translation of the Irish *ann* meaning *there* (Dolan 1991: 138). The peasant woman that Davin meets in *A Portrait* also uses this turn of phrase when she tries to coax him into the house by saying “*There’s no one in it but ourselves*” (*P* 182).

I fear him. I fear his redrimmed horny eyes. It is with him I must struggle all through this night till day come, till he or I lie dead, gripping him by the sinewy throat till ... Till what? Till he yield to me? No. I mean him no harm. (*P* 251-2)

Here, the peasant's speech is reduced to the line "Ah, there must be terrible queer creatures at the latter end of the world". All the words are spelled as they would be in standard written English, even the "Aw" from *Stephen Hero* is turned into the more conventional "Ah". The emphasis is instead on the subtler elements of Hiberno-English: the use of "terrible" as an intensifying adjective, the colloquial expression "the latter end of the world". Rural Hiberno-English is here insinuated by the way common words are used in uncommon ways, leading to a much greater degree of subtlety than the previous scene in *Stephen Hero*. While Joyce is no longer crudely drawing attention to the supposed hurling out of words with a superfluous quantity of breath, the unique voice of the peasant remains here. However, rather than a stage Irish type, we now are presented with an individual. Though situated in a mountain cabin, the peasant refuses to play up to either the colonial or Revivalist stereotype: he might engage Mulrennan in a few words of Irish, but inevitably he switches to English out of convenience "as the contents of Mulrennan's phrase-book [are] exhausted" (Kiberd 1979: 15). Rather than the garrulous Paddy of the London stage, this figure is content to mostly sit in silence and listen. When he eventually does speak, it is with an authority over the English language that the distortion of "brogue-write" simply did not allow. The final paragraph confirms the peasant's position in a changing Ireland – no longer a figure of ridicule as in *Stephen Hero*, he has now become someone for Stephen to fear. His instinct is to view him as an adversary, the opposite of everything the internationally-minded Stephen should stand for, and yet the desire to have him "yield", like the dandy putting the old man in his place, is no longer there. Instead, he has realized that they have more in common than he had previously accounted for – in short, Stephen "mean[s] him no harm" (*P* 252).

As mentioned, in 1912, Joyce journeyed west to the Aran Islands and wrote an account of his trip called "The Mirage of the Fisherman of Aran". On the main island he meets a man, whom he describes as follows:

An islander, who speaks an English all of his own, bids us good day, adding that it has been a horrible summer, thanks be to God. The phrase which at first seems to be one of the usual Irish blunders comes, rather, from the inmost heart of human resignation. [...] Under his apparent simplicity there is something sceptical, humorous, spectral. He looks away when he has spoken and lets the enthusiastic scholar note down in his pocket-book the amazing fact that it was from yonder whitethorn bush that Joseph of Arimathea cut his walking stick. (*OCPW* 204)

While Joyce emphasizes the unique characteristics of the islander's speech, he is still quick to point out that it is a form of English nonetheless, and not to be confused with the stereotypical Irish bulls and brogues propagated by English writers. Like the peasant in *A Portrait*, the islander's speech is laconic, yet seemingly deep with meaning. As with Davin, the simplicity is only apparent, and he engages in a kind of playacting that has arisen thanks to the burgeoning tourist industry. Despite writing for an Italian audience, Joyce refuses to opt for an easy stereotype drawn along colonial lines. This would appear to be a rebuke of Synge's islanders who at times are described as speaking in a "primitive babble" (Synge 1995: 42). It is probable that encounters such as this inspired the editing that took place between *Stephen Hero* and *A Portrait*, reflecting a change in attitude at both a national and a personal level towards the rural peasant and his speech. In light of what Croghan has said about publishers being unwilling to print Hiberno-English unless it were misspelled, Joyce's rewriting takes on a much greater political significance than it may first appear to have. By choosing to write out the peasant's speech in standard English spelling, though crucially without removing the unique manner of phrasing, Joyce is making the case that rural Hiberno-English is not an incoherent mess of sounds, but rather is as legitimate a variant of English as any other. The shame of the previous generation, exemplified by Stephen's father, who has been trying – and failing – to lose his Cork accent for thirty years, appears to be gradually fading away (*P* 93). Joyce would go on to further emphasize his characters' Hiberno-English in *Ulysses*, with Dolan noting that "Stephen in the *Portrait* was unwillingly subversive in his speech; most of the characters in *Ulysses* are exuberantly subversive in theirs" (Dolan 1991: 140). Sub-

versive, indeed – but not substandard. From *Stephen Hero* to *A Portrait*, we see that the standardization of spelling need not entail the standardization of speech. Above all, what we are witnessing here is the start of a determined refusal to soften – or stereotype – one’s Hibernian brogue.

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