

On Narration and Theory

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These remarks are prompted by Howard Mancing's article on "Cervantes as Narrator of *Don Quijote*" in this journal. Howard and I have known each other for many years, so my comments are offered in the spirit of friendly exchange. He may be surprised to learn that I feel empathy—even nostalgia—for his basic premise, that Cervantes is the narrator of *Don Quixote*. I read the book exactly that way the first time through. I was 22 then. Today, alas, I have been seduced into thinking that fictional tales told almost entirely in third person have a narrator other than the author, a narrator that may be explicit or implicit. There was a growing sensation of *déjà-vu* as I proceeded with Howard's article, and it dawned on me finally that I had offered a brief response to this thesis in 1988, in my *Don Quixote: An Anatomy of Subversive Discourse* (30). What he presents in his recent article is a variation on a position he has maintained for many years, a perspective now supplemented by an accessory that gives new meaning to "cutting-edge": Ockham's razor (i.e., the principle of parsimony).

Howard is to be congratulated on his skillful wielding of Ockham's freshly-stopped straight razor, without apparent damage to any body parts. The unkindest cut of all, in my estimation, is to Cervantes' narrative art. If Cervantes was *manco* before, he may be considered doubly so now, thanks to the commonsense paring

away of his intratextual extremities by this sharp object. Viewed from another perspective, one student of art might appreciate, here we have Cervantes as Saturn, devouring and assimilating his diegetic offspring. Think of the painting by Goya that hangs in the Prado. Or, in terms Sancho might savor, the baby has been tossed out with the bath water.

It strikes me that we find in the article another instance of a common problem for literary criticism: the importation of concepts and approaches from other fields. A concept that may be useful in logic, or in reducing redundancy and technical jargon in theological postulates, is not necessarily the appropriate instrument for dealing with complex prose fiction. Beyond that, if simplification is a good thing, we should perhaps pursue it at the mimetic level as well. A logical next step would be to pare down the unnecessary verbiage—involving adventures, interactions and dialogues of hero and helper, etc.—to a few elementary propositions, in the manner initiated by Propp and carried to its logical extreme by Greimas and Todorov.

Common sense is not all that common, but it too is a fallible guide when it comes to analyzing literature. It can lead astray, as we see when the article equates discursive and creative writing at the bottom of p. 120. This blending is remindful of another well-known reader's commonsensical conflation of history and poetry. Common sense would say that writing is writing, after all. Surely there is no need to put a fine point on it. There is also the commonsensical collapsing of Lanser's private narrator into Genette's intradiegetic narrator (127), which is not accurate for *Don Quixote*, as I read it; private narrators like Dorotea, the Captive Captain, and Cardenio are situated at Genette's metadiegetic level. Then there is the commonsense quest for the originary manifestation of festive tone, which Howard locates in the prologue. In fact, that "festive, satiric, intellectually subtle" tone (126) has already been succinctly developed and put on display for the discreet reader in the 1605 title, well before we come to the prologue. The article also applies the principle of parsimony to spelling ("discrete" for "discreet," 122). Paring down this redundant pair to a single written form offers an ingenious illustration of why orthographic renderings should not proliferate beyond the absolutely neces-

sary. This instance could serve as a telling emblem for the argument about telling advanced in the essay.

Let me try now to revive this ox of mine that has been so grievously gored—not mortally, to be sure (although it was a close shave). It might be said initially that my “theoreticized” scheme of voices and presences was arrived at without any awareness of Continental theorizing, beyond Jakobson’s communication model, supplemented by some basic concepts about authors and narrators derived from Booth, and the fundamental distinction between discursive and creative writing assimilated from Frye. It was assembled almost entirely on the basis of close reading and was fully in place before Genette’s levels of narration and types of narrator came to my attention. It makes no claim to being theoretical, despite my coinage of the term “supernarrator” (“super” in the sense of “above”). I call these masks narrators or presences, as the case may be. It was first presented outside the classroom at the AIH at Brown in 1983 (“Las voces”). By 1988, when my *Anatomy* appeared—through the good offices of Tom Lathrop, who effectively commissioned the book—I had acquired a modest knowledge of Genette and applied what I knew at the time, primarily in Chapter 4, well after presenting my hierarchy of voices and presences in Chapters 1 and 2. Although I would modify a number of things in that book if I were writing it today, its reception has been gratifying. It is one of four by U.S. critics listed by Riley in the select bibliography on *Don Quixote* in his updating of the Jarvis translation for Oxford, and it is the only book by a North American Hispanist excerpted in Scaramuzza Vidoni’s *Rileggere Cervantes* (“un tentativo di presentare le maggiori innovazioni [since the mid ‘70s],” 7).

Like most of my generation of Hispanists, I came late to the table of high theory, and, while I find theory stimulating, and use it, I do so with reservations. Theory today is not a pretty sight, as Herman Rapaport reminds us in *The Theory Mess*. It is, in addition, what Derrida, borrowing from Plato, might call a *pharmakon*, that is, a poison and a cure, a blessing and a curse. One aspect of theory that merits some comment is its frequently derivative nature. Genette’s so-called theory of narrative discourse, as figured forth in *Figures III*, is more a description of actual narrative prac-

tice (that of Proust) than anything else. In this instance at least—and there are others, even Derrida—it is fair to say that theory is based on practice. There is illustrious precedent for *theoria* as a description of *praxis*, of course. The *Poetics* of Aristotle is primarily a description of the tragedies of his day (with an overlay of moralizing that has hampered discussion of that form ever since). It is curious, by the way, that Bakhtin, one of the figures to be reckoned with in any graduate course on literary theory, should express such reservations about “theoreticism.” Likely he refers to theories other than his own.

In the sense that Aristotle’s and Genette’s descriptions of practice are considered theory, perhaps my description of the diegetic dimension of *Don Quixote* could be also. I have suggested that Genette’s description would be richer and more complete had he based it on Cervantes, for there are narrative devices and strategies in *Don Quixote* that find no resonance in his analysis of *A la recherche du temps perdu*. One would be the temporal prestidigitation, which I describe as an analeptic prolepsis, at the beginning of II, 44. Nor does he have anything to say about editorial voices or supernarrators. Nor does he speak of presences (my term) versus actual text speakers. Nor does he deal with disnarration, which is likewise masterfully employed by Cervantes, nor, for that matter, the narratee—both concepts that we owe to Gerald Prince. Nor does he discuss the motivation or lack of motivation of narrators (e.g., second pseudo-author vs. first pseudo-author). Nor is there anything about abandoning one extradiegetic narrator (the first author) for another (the editor persona, end of I, 8). Nor do we find anything about pseudo-authors who may seem to be narrators but are not. Nor, for that matter, is there any real provision for an intra-intradiegetic level, which is where we would have to situate Cide Hamete if we were to allow for the remote possibility of his being a narrator. He would be at that deeply embedded level because his writing is framed by a translator and an editorial voice, who would occupy the intradiegetic and extradiegetic levels, respectively.

I share some of Howard’s (and Bakhtin’s) reservations about theory, its excesses and shortcomings, and have expressed these misgivings on more than one occasion. Let me cite one example,

relating to Genette's sometimes confusing terminology concocted from Greek and Latin etyma (in particular, "metadiegetic"), where I point out that "the quest for the *mot juste* is sometimes carried to absurd lengths on the assumption that the remote and the arcane are the proper archive of adequate expression. There is a hortatory, even incantational, power that attaches to obscure vocabulary from ancient or otherwise unknown languages, as soothsayers and seers the world over seem to be aware. The shamans of paratextuality and the parergon are quite traditional in that regard" ("Plato, Cervantes, Derrida" 183). In a footnote on the same page, I cite Genette's disavowal of everyday language and defense of jargon, however, namely that "le 'jargon' technique a du moins cet avantage qu'en général chacun de ses utilisateurs sait et indique quel sens il donne à chacun de ses termes" (*Palimpsestes* 11). In other words, jargon can be both precise and confusing, as "metadiegetic" illustrates. We know what he means by the term, since he defines it and uses it accordingly, but the "meta" prefix implies something quite different: rather than inside and embedded, it suggests outside and above.

There is another aspect to be considered, however. Our vocabulary for dealing with prose fiction had been somewhat impoverished until Genette introduced his types of narrator and levels of narration. Poetry and drama had traditionally received greater attention, as presumably higher and more serious forms of literary expression, and consequently enjoyed a more developed critical lexicon. We should probably think twice, therefore, before we criticize attempts to enrich our terminology, and, moreover, to help us distinguish more carefully among the many dimensions of narrative expression.

Since intellectual history often comes full circle, it should surprise no one that similar debates were being waged by the Scholastics of the 12th and 13th centuries. William of Ockham was a force in questioning much of what he considered to be the overly abstruse and technical dissertations of Anselm, Duns Scotus, Thomas Aquinas, and others. He applied the venerable principle of parsimony to the arguments of his adversaries, one and all, so single-mindedly that the principle came to be associated with him and came to be called Ockham's razor. Much that he ques-

tioned was what he considered to be redundancy and non-essential technical language. He apparently favored a jargon-free natural language.

As Desmond Paul Henry points out in his piece on medieval philosophy in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, "the sort of technical assertions that for Anselm and following thinkers had been a necessary consequence of the special requirements of logical and philosophical discourse, and that for them enshrined propriety to a degree to which the looseness of ordinary speech could not aspire" (5: 256) were nevertheless challenged by Ockham. So I have on occasion played Ockham to Genette, regarding his use of technical language, while Howard does something similar concerning my notion of the special requirements of critical discourse, relating to diegesis in *Don Quixote*. It seems that a bit of Bill Ockham lives on in both of us.

Howard and I agree on at least some aspects of two of his basic premises, that Cervantes *could* be considered the narrator of *Don Quixote* and that the confection and application of "theory" can be ill-considered or overdone. I further agree that the author speaks in his own voice in the prologue and said as much in 1988, after citing Lanser: "Cervantes himself may thus be said to speak in the obvious places, the prologues and dedications" (45). He is a "dramatized author" for all that, since he creates a skit in which he plays a role, pretending to be inept while also pretending to assimilate and apply his friend's good advice. In what other ways do we differ? Mainly in the details, the qualifications I would offer to his main premise and the clarifications about my supposed "theoreticism" (a dreadful word, by the way, rather like Efron's "Dulcineism"). Although Cervantes could be considered the narrator, I see that as a reductive approach that diminishes his artistic achievement. Howard speaks of the "diabolical complexity of the simple narrative scheme Cervantes employs" (135). I appreciate his clever conjoining of complexity and simplicity, although I fail to find complexity in the reduction of all of the public narrators to one. We might also infer from Howard's phrase that complexity is diabolical, while simplicity is divine (or at least Cervantine).

It is that diabolical complexity that I tried to address in 1988

by outlining a hierarchy of narrative voices, attempting to show how and where one replaces another in the diegetic plot having to do with the confection, translation, and transmission of the text of Don Quixote's misadventures, and, ultimately, how the authority of one and all is subverted. Clearly, Cervantes controls the puppets, on both the mimetic and diegetic planes, and could even be considered the supra-supernarrator (only kidding, Howard). All the voices and presences are merely masks he puts on, and all of this masquerading adds, of course, to the carnival-like atmosphere, perceived by Bakhtin among others. So the "simple" fact is that Cervantes is the master manipulator who sets the process in motion and controls it throughout. The devil is in the details of this problematical simplicity.

Let me draw for a moment on Ockham—with misgivings—for support of my panoply of voices. Duns Scotus, the Subtle Doctor, had argued that a thing can be both singular in nature and yet formally distinct. This would seem to be Howard's position with regard to Cervantes as narrator, i.e., that the public narrators are singular (all Cervantes), yet they are formally distinct (the pen and Cide Hamete specifically, 133–34). Arguing against this view, Ockham proposed that "if the specific nature and the individuating difference are really identical, they cannot be formally distinct; and if they are formally distinct, they cannot be really identical" (Moody 308). So Ockham's razor is double-edged. It cuts both ways. (There is, of course, considerably more to the argument than I am able to rehearse here.) My position is that the voices put on display are not singular, not identical one to another, and, moreover, that both Cervantes' narrative art and his prescience in that aesthetic achievement—*vis-à-vis* modern and postmodern narrative—lie precisely in our recognition of those voices and the place of each in the diegetic scheme of things, with concomitant awareness of the artful strategy of metalepsis.

There may be other problems with the simple scheme Howard proposes. We are told that "Cide Hamete narrates," while Cervantes "edits and writes" (133). But then we are reminded that Cervantes is "the public narrator," whereas Cide Hamete is now called "the private narrator" (133). Later we learn that *Don*

Quixote's "many private narrators are easily perceived for what they are" (135). Are we to understand that Cide Hamete is a private narrator in the same way as Dorotea and Cardenio, who tell their personal stories? Is Cide Hamete telling his own story? Is that what makes him a private narrator? How is it that Dorotea's and Cardenio's private narratives are embedded within the story of another private narrator, Cide Hamete? Would this not tend to raise Cide Hamete in the narrational hierarchy to the level of a frame narrator and public purveyor of those private stories? Simplicity may be more complex than we thought.

Howard devotes considerable attention to Cervantes' role as narrator. I prefer to focus on his role as author. Here I might trot out another voice from the past, Confucius, in the interest of diversity. The Oriental sage supposedly said that the beginning of wisdom is to call things by their right names. This is not to exclude the possibility of an author-narrator, however, and this brings me back to the pseudo-author/narrator of I, 1–8. Paz Gago's useful distinction between pseudo-authors (e.g., first author, second author, and Cide Hamete) and narrators does not hold in this instance, because the *primer autor* is clearly both, as is the second author also during his brief moment on the page. The only one who is definitely not a narrator is Cide Hamete, as I maintained in 1988 (8, 36, and *passim*), and as Paz Gago, Martín Morán, and Stoopen—today's preeminent Cervantine narratologists—have confirmed (although Martín Morán equivocates, while Stoopen miraculously resuscitates the first author—Haley's aptly-termed "discarded voice"—and recycles him as a redundant editor).

Another strategy Cervantes uses—about which Genette is silent, since he does not find it in Proust—is to begin with one extradiegetic narrator, the *primer autor*, then switch horses well before mid-stream, at the end of chapter 8. This new extradiegetic narrator is the editorial voice I have called the supernarrator, an entity whose role will be considerably more developed in 1615. He represents orality, in the editorial comments addressed to his narratee, while Cide Hamete represents writing, with all the dangerous difference and deferral inherent in that medium, much of which is intimated through his evident alterity, as well as his

marginalized and uncertain status in the Spain of that time (especially after 1609). His alien nature is appropriate to the alienated form of expression he represents (alienated, that is, from its origins in orality).

Howard does my discussion of the diegetic dimension little good service when he suggests that I exclude Cervantes from his own text and dismiss him from my design “in a single sentence” (119). He must have overlooked p. 15, where I note that Cervantes “shifts masks on us without warning,” thus implicitly acknowledging that he is very much inside the text, as a controlling presence, and also p. 6, where I state that “anyone who has read the *Quixote* knows that the textual boundary is extremely porous, that Cervantes is both inside and outside his creation simultaneously, not unlike Velázquez in *Las meninas*, and that art has a way of transcending and even mocking inflexible frames and categories.” As Derrida puts it, in another connection, “il y a du cadre, mais le cadre n'existe pas” (93). Freely translated, this means that there is a process of framing, but the frame, as such, does not exist.

These ideas on framing were developed further in a paper given at the AIH in Barcelona in 1989 (“*Don Quijote*: meditación del marco”), where I distributed a handout illustrating the porosity of the several narrative frames, most of which are susceptible to transgression in either direction. This was suggested by drawing one side of each frame with broken lines. One very important lesson to be learned from Genette has to do with metalepsis, the infraction of narrative levels, of the sort that occurs at the end of I, 8, when a new narrative voice appears, unannounced and unexpectedly, to assume control of the discourse. The intervention of this new frame narrator—who obviously knows more and is therefore more powerful than either the first or second author—can immediately be seen, retrospectively, to demote the first narrative voice, which we had innocently assumed to be the frame narrator, to subordinate or intradiegetic status. This is quite a remarkable maneuver.

Metalepsis will become the norm in Part II, where there are some subtle and creative instances. Although Cide Hamete is a pseudo-author and not a narrator, we can still speak of metalep-

sis in relation to voices that intrude upon his text, since these represent an infraction of a protocol in effect at the moment, namely that we are reading a translation of the Arabic text. In II, 63, for example, a voice surfaces from within that text to express solidarity with the Christian forces involved in the naval skirmish (“nuestras galeras,” “nuestras arrumbadas”). Cide Hamete would be out of character in expressing such sentiments, since our “filósofo mahomético” is culturally aligned with the antagonists in this battle. This is a metalepsis, through which the editor persona asserts himself and his cultural identity, relegating the heathen historian to the margins in the process. Although Cervantes does not fully situate the extradiegetic frame in Part I until the end of I, 8, and does not really develop the editorial voice in 1605, the editor persona, or supernarrator, is the established extradiegetic narrator of Part II from the first words of the text: “Cuenta Cide Hamete Benengeli.”

Metalepsis is one of two major strategies that tend to be neglected in narratological studies of the *Quixote*. The other is disnarration, probably because we tend to ignore the paths not taken, and that is largely what disnarration deals with. Gerald Prince offers two sub-categories of disnarration—the unnarrated and the unnarratable—and these are all I have time to touch on here. I do so in order to illustrate Cervantes’ mastery of narrative technique and, at the same time, his anticipation in practice of procedures that have only recently been codified by “theory.” In the delightfully duplicitous passage that follows, the unnarrated and unnarratable are brilliantly conjoined:

Sucedió, pues, que en más de seis días no le sucedió cosa digna de ponerse en escritura, al cabo de los cuales, yendo fuera de camino, le tomó la noche entre unas espesas encinas o alcornoques; que en esto no guarda la puntualidad Cide Hamete que en otras cosas suele. (II, 60)

Hard upon the ellipsis involving the events and conversations of six entire days comes the quibble over the kind of trees offering refuge, as the unnarrated gives way to the unnarratable. We are perhaps the poorer for not knowing what happened dur-

ing the week in question, but it matters not a whit whether the trees were of one kind or another. That sort of distinction falls below the threshold of narrativity. What is interesting here is that our narrator (the editor/supernarrator) displays a clear awareness of the two types of disnarration, moving easily from one to the other within a remarkably limited space. It must also be evident that Cervantes himself possesses a clear awareness of these two types of disnarration, since he is able to move easily from one to the other within the confines of a single sentence. Equally remarkable is that here we have practice anticipating theory by almost 400 years. Gerald Prince did not publish his theory of the disnarrated until 1988.

Returning now to Howard's article, we should probably look askance at any description that would conflate the first author's negative posture toward the main character with the second author's enthusiastic presentation, saying merely that they are both "Cervantes." The markers that distinguish one from the other seem to me quite clear. The first describes the main character's discourse as nonsense, deflates his high-sounding rhetoric, and insinuates that the Knight hasn't a brain in his head. The second seems quite taken with him, to judge by his hyperbolic and baseless praise. As for the textual marker that tells us we have an explicit narrator in place within the text (Mancing 127–30), what better evidence than the intervention of the editorial voice at the end of I, 8?

It is true that we come to this marker belatedly, well after the beginning of the text, but we should probably expect some originality from Cervantes. This editor's allusions to *el autor* and *el segundo autor* confirm, finally, that here we have an explicit narrator, one who, moreover, refers to other narrators. The change of voice here, from the implicit narrator, the first author, is fairly obvious. Some commentators collapse this voice into that of the second author, however. If it is the second author, it is the only time in the two volumes—if memory serves—when a narrator speaks of himself in third person. It would be a rather conspicuous anomaly. I feel that patterning takes precedence over eccentricity. Narrators in the *Quixote* sometimes refer to themselves in first person, but never in third person. That is the established

pattern. Also, if this voice can be that of the second author, speaking of himself in third person, it might as easily still be that of the first author, referring to himself now in third person, with self-disparaging irony. It seems clear to me that it is a new voice and that it therefore represents a transgression of the narrative frame seemingly in place, a metalepsis.

A similar sighting occurs in I, 52, with the comment “Pero el autor desta historia....” This follows the pattern of “Pero está el daño de todo esto que...deja pendiente el autor desta historia...” of I, 8. The editorial voice is the same, although the author referred to in I, 52 would seem to be Cide Hamete, since he is our author of record since I, 9. The editor’s memory does not serve him well at this point, for he conflates procedures of Cide Hamete with those of the first author. Cide Hamete is not a researcher. This lapse begins the process of subverting the editor’s authority, since he shows himself here to be untrustworthy. The two instances cited (I, 8 and 52) represent a modest beginning for this nascent supernarrator, but he will make a stronger showing in Part II, where he asserts himself from the outset, with the previously mentioned tagline, “cuenta Cide Hamete Benengeli.” Is this Cervantes? Yes and no. Cervantes is writing it, but he is simultaneously wearing a mask and playing a role, much as he did in the first prologue. Could we call him a dramatized author at this point in the text? Perhaps. Does it make him a narrator? In a very general sense, yes, provided we recognize that he has donned one of his several *disfraces*, that of the editor persona.

Howard would situate Cervantes at the diegetic level, as the omniscient, omnipresent, omnivorous narrator. We might also situate him at the mimetic level, as I do implicitly when I claim that “Don Quixote is a mock-hero; Cervantes is the hero of the *Quixote*” (*Anatomy* 166). As author, he undeniably is the dominant presence on both levels. If I exclude the historical author from a discussion of the narrative voices, it is in the interest of what I consider to be elementary critical rigor. It should be clear, nevertheless, that I do not exclude him from the text and, moreover, that everything I have written about the *Quixote* is designed to glorify Cervantes’ role in the scheme of things—often at the expense of the main character. My approach is very un-Unamu-

nian. I am a *cervantista* much more than a *quijotista* (although I respond to both @aol.com). It puzzles me that anyone should take me for one of those who “would banish the historical author from any role whatsoever in the text” (118) or would participate in “the nearly universal assumption that the author...is absolutely absent from the text” (119). In my view, he is there in the larger sense, but not necessarily there in the narrower sense of being a narrator per se. Howard goes on to state that “it is important to recognize—explicitly—that Cervantes wrote *Don Quijote*” (120). He did indeed, with all the complexity and prescience we find in it today. That should be enough.

As we approach the end, it might be appropriate to express misgivings about two of Howard’s sources of inspiration, Lanser and Ockham. Susan Lanser’s book is very useful, and I acknowledged that in 1988, but I would say today that it is more so for issues of point of view than for types of narrator and levels of narration. It is primarily a study of point of view, as the subtitle indicates. It is also an attempt at simplification of Genette, and on that score it pales by comparison to the original. She reduces his extradiegetic, intradiegetic, and metadiegetic levels to two: public and private. In this case, simplicity may be good, but precision is better. As for Ockham, he does not fare well in the piece previously mentioned from *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. The writer concludes that Ockham’s argumentation against certain ideas of Duns Scotus is “totally misplaced” (255), while the commentary continues on the next page with further elaboration of “the same blindness.” (If I used Ockham earlier attempting to make a point in my favor, it does not mean that I endorse his logical but irrational dismantling of other Scholastics’ schemas. I endorse only one aspect of his refutation of Duns Scotus.)

Finally, if Howard is concerned to address theory-based formulations, he might better turn to Paz Gago, Martín Morán, and Stoopen, all of whom have subsequently offered more elaborate and sophisticated expositions on these matters than I was capable of doing in 1988. It is a little perplexing that Howard should have waited fifteen (or more) years to critique my schema in print. It is also puzzling that he limits himself to my book of 1988, with no reference to the several studies I have published in the interim—

on the title ("The Title as Text"), on the role of Cide Hamete ("The Role of Cide Hamete Benengeli"), on framing and metalepsis ("Don Quixote: meditación del marco," and "Ars combinatoria"), on disnarration ("Antimodelos narrativos"), on the quest for origins ("Plato, Cervantes, Derrida" and "Don Quixote: Translation and Interpretation"), on motivated and unmotivated narrators ("Del interés de los narradores"), on the sounds of silence ("Sounds of Silence"), on focalization ("La recepción del sentido" and "Don Quixote: The Quest for a Superreader"), on narratees and readers ("La recepción del sentido" and "Some Narratological Problems"), on a newer formalism ("Don Quixote: On the Preeminence of Formal Features," "The Janus-Like Discourse," and "Don Quixote: Kind Reconsidered")—some of which modify or expand upon positions taken in that book. These more recent studies might have alleviated his discomfort. Some responsibility is mine, however, for I am very bad at circulating offprints. Much of this more recent material has been integrated into a book that will appear shortly with Susquehanna University Press: *Don Quixote, Don Juan & Related Subjects: Form and Tradition in Spanish Literature, 1330–1630*. Perhaps Howard will have occasion to review it one day soon.

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