

Newsletter

Conference on Basic Writing

A special interest group of CCCC



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National Basic Writing Conference October 1992

Eugene Hammond
Carolyn Kirkpatrick

CBW will sponsor the 4th National Basic Writing Conference October 8-10, 1992, in the Washington DC metropolitan area. Co-sponsors of the event are the University of Maryland and NCTE.

The National Basic Writing Conference was first organized in 1985 by Sallyanne Fitzgerald of the University of Missouri. As Sallyanne (now a CBW Executive Committee member) wrote in 1989, "The Basic Writing Conference grew out of . . . frustration with professional conferences like NCTE, CCCC, and NADE, where only a few sessions could be devoted to basic writing." Many of you attended the three successful conferences she ran in St. Louis in 1985, 1987, and (co-sponsored by CBW) 1989. Now mark the date of the fourth national conference on your calendar: **Thursday evening through Saturday afternoon, October 8-10, 1992.**

The fourth national conference will expand from one day to two and a half and will be held at the University of Maryland-College Park (UMCP) on the outskirts of Washington DC. In the future, CBW plans to hold the conference every two years in different parts of the country.

David Bartholomae to be keynote speaker.

Keynote speaker for the 1992 conference will be David Bartholomae of the University of Pittsburgh, respected both for his service to CCCC (he was chair in 1987-88) and his work on basic writing pedagogy (*Facts, Artifacts and Counterfacts* among many influential publications). David is a thought-provoking speaker, and we are delighted that he could accept CBW's invitation to help define the agenda for this event.

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CONFERENCE HELD ON THE TEACHING OF GRAMMAR

Janet Gilbert

Is grammar a ghost from classrooms past? Is there, in the words of editor Bill McCleary, editor of *Composition Chronicle*, "no proof that teaching grammar does anybody any good"? Is there no proof that teaching grammar to basic writers does them any good?

Fifty-some people must have found evidence in favor of grammar instruction that prompted them to travel this past July from as far away as Oregon, Texas, and Colorado through the Appalachian Mountains to Penn College of Technology in Williamsport, Pennsylvania, for a conference entitled "The Teaching of Grammar." These educators believed in their evidence and talked about it through two solidly packed days and into the nights. At the Second National Conference of the Association of Teachers of English Grammar (ATEG), a commitment to teaching language in composition "classrooms present" was very much alive.

The person who started all this was Ed Vavra. Confronted with one too many rejection notice for his submissions on the role of grammar in the writing process, Vavra convened the first meeting of ATEG in the summer of 1990 at Shenandoah College in Virginia. Martha Kolln of Penn State University joined Ed as keynote speaker for the first conference and became president of the new association. George Oliver from University of Maryland became an enthusiastic vice-president. And this year's keynote speaker Bill McCleary was willing to listen.

The "no proof" skepticism McCleary expressed in beginning the 1991 conference was based upon his own experience in the classroom as well as the oft-cited results of research. McCleary especially nominated for the hall of shame the grammar workbooks for basic writers. However, in rejecting the ways we have introduced grammar to writing students in the past, McCleary did

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From the Chair

In This Issue

In our last issue, we invited reports from CBW members on conferences they have attended; in this issue we are happy to include one such report. Janet Gilbert contributes an account (beginning on page 1) of the conference on the teaching of grammar organized by Ed Vavra, which has become a yearly summer event.

If you plan to attend a conference and would like to report on it *from a basic writing perspective*, give us a call.

Also in this issue are a survey on critical issues in basic writing (insert), a ballot for the election of new CBW officers (insert), and our regular features Reviews (page 5) and Bulletin Board (page 7).

New Associate Chair

One of the great pleasures in working with CBW over the past three years has been working with Carolyn Kirkpatrick. She has been a well-spring of ideas and a source of both knowledge and insight in the area of basic writing; and she has been a consistent source of encouragement and understanding to all of us who are not as well-organized as she. But as the time for change in the leadership of CBW approaches, Carolyn has decided to step down as associate chair so she can serve as co-chair of the 1992 national basic writing conference, along with Gene Hammond of the University of Maryland. I will miss her greatly as associate chair but am gratified to know that the national conference is in such good hands.

We extremely fortunate that Suellynn Duffey has agreed to take on the responsibilities of associate chair for the remainder of Carolyn's term. Suellynn has been director of the Writing Workshops (the basic writing program) at Ohio State for the past six years. She has been an enthusiastic member of CBW since its rebirth at CCCC in St. Louis in March of 1988, serving first on its informal steering committee and then on the first elected

executive committee. We're happy to continue to tap her ideas and enthusiasm.

CBW Slate

Each spring we call for volunteers, and each fall we elect three new members of the CBW executive committee. The committee meets at CCCC and advises on ongoing activities throughout the year by phone and letter. This year's slate is Juanita Lewis of Bennett College, North Carolina; Kay Puttock of Mankato State University, Minnesota; and Karen Uehling of Boise State University, Idaho.

We are also due to select a new associate chair to take office next March for a two-year term. Jeanne Gunner, from UCLA, a member of the first elected executive committee, has accepted our invitation to take on this new role for CBW.

In making these nominations CBW seeks both new blood and diversity of points of view, geographical areas, and types of institution. We hope that some of you reading this will be moved to volunteer for next year's slate.

Brief bios of all four nominees appear opposite. We ask you to return the enclosed ballot to confirm them in office.

Critical Issues in Basic Writing

CBW will hold the Fourth National Basic Writing Conference October 8-10, 1992. Co-chairs Gene Hammond and Carolyn Kirkpatrick report on plans for the conference beginning on page 1 of this issue.

You can contribute to these plans immediately by responding to CBW Survey #3, on the back of the enclosed ballot. In connection with the conference theme, "Critical Issues in Basic Writing," we ask about members' sense of our field: What challenges or issues are we confronting (or failing to confront)? Where should our energies be directed in the immediate future? Please return the insert right away to avoid the Christmas rush.

The *CBW Newsletter* is published twice a year, in the fall and spring, by the Conference on Basic Writing, a special interest group of the Conference on College Communication and Composition. The editors are Peter Dow Adams & Carolyn Kirkpatrick. Opinions expressed in these pages are those of the writers and do not necessarily reflect the views of the editors, the officers of CBW, CBW's Executive Committee, or CCCC.

Membership in the Conference on Basic Writing is \$5 for 1 year, \$9 for 2 years, and \$12 for 3 years and includes a subscription to the *CBW Newsletter*. Address: Peter Dow Adams, English Department, Essex Community College, Baltimore County, Maryland 21237.

Executive Committee Slate

Below are brief bios of the nominee for associate chair and the three nominees for the executive committee of CBW. We thank them for their willingness to contribute their time and energy and look forward to working with them in the months ahead.

For Associate Chair

Jeanne Gunner teaches basic writing, advanced composition, and introductory literature in the UCLA Writing Programs. Her textbooks, *The Course of Ideas* and *Beyond the Conventions* (HarperCollins), reflect her continuing interest in curricular issues in basic writing. She has also written on the professional status of composition instructors, the use of computers in basic writing instruction, and the role of style in the composing process. Jeanne has been a CBW member since 1986 and served on the CBW Executive Committee 1990-1991.

For Executive Committee

Juanita F. Lewis, a native of northwestern North Carolina, reports that she became acquainted early with misconceptions about Appalachian speech and language. She has encountered variations of those misconceptions throughout her teaching experience, both in reference to her own writing and speaking style and to that of her students who belong to ethnic and racial minorities. Her interest in the teaching of basic writing stems from that experience and from her attempt to resolve contradictions within composition programs at the colleges where she has taught. Serving as Greenwood Press's editor for Moran and Jacobi's *Research in Basic Writing* provided Lewis with a tentative theoretical and pragmatic framework for assessing basic writing courses and texts. She currently serves as chair of the Department of English and Foreign Languages at Bennett College in Greensboro, NC.

Kay Puttock, who teaches at Mankato State University in Minnesota, first joined CBW (and its interim advisory committee) at the memorable meeting at St. Louis in 1988. Although trained in literature rather than composition, she spends most of her time teaching basic composition, and is in fact the only person at her institution to do so. She also trained tutors and administered the Writing Center—before the Center was closed this year for lack of funding. Kay has published articles and reviews in the *CBW Newsletter*, *TETYC* and elsewhere.

Karen S. Uehling, who served as chair of CBW from 1983-86, specializes in basic writing at Boise State University, but she has taught almost every expository writing course her university offers, including technical writing and a graduate course in the teaching of basic writing. Uehling also works with interns in basic writing and supervises teaching assistants in composition. Under a 1980-81 NEH year-long fellowship she joined Ross Winterowd's seminar "Literature and Literacy" at the University of Southern California, where she investigated the composing processes of basic writers. Her current research interest is writing instruction for the "new" students on campus. Uehling is currently writing *Starting Out or Starting Over: A Guide for Writing*, a basic writing text for HarperCollins and will also edit an accompanying reader.

1992 Conference on Basic Writing continued from page 1.

Since next year marks the 15th anniversary of the publication of Mina Shaughnessy's ground-breaking *Errors and Expectations*, it seems a good time to take stock: how far have we in basic writing come in the past 15 years? Have basic writing programs lost ground politically, as John Trimbur asserted in our last CCCC session? Have we reached any consensus at all about what and how we should teach?

How has the so-called new paradigm in composition affected our field? Have teachers accepted Bartholomae's challenge to provide intellectually substantial fare in BW classes? Has the new interest in literacy studies made the label "basic writing" passé?

It seems a good time to take stock: how far have we in basic writing come in the 15 years since *Errors and Expectations*?

What should we be doing about assessment? Computers? The expanding ESL population?

With these and other questions in mind, the steering committee has chosen "Critical Issues in Basic Writing" as the 1992 conference theme. This year's CBW survey (see insert) calls for your sense of some of the issues that need to be addressed.

Additional plenary panelists will be invited to speak to the most pressing issues that you identify, and a

Continued on next page.

special Saturday afternoon session-of-the-whole will respond to the "critical issues" as our invited speakers have formulated them—perhaps suggesting solutions or resolutions, perhaps pointing to issues that were not addressed. Ways of communicating our conclusions will also be considered. We hope you'll be there to join the conversation.

Have we reached any consensus at all about what and how we should teach?

The conference will of course also feature concurrent sessions with papers, panels, and workshops on a wide range of topics that touch on basic writing, including language issues, reports on successful programs and practices, as well as any and all of the questions raised above. It's not too early to be thinking about specific proposals: the proposal deadline is April 20, 1992, one month after the 1992 CCCC meeting in Cincinnati.

We're planning a conference worth traveling for. While we can't control the cost of plane fare, the conference itself will be affordable. The conference fee, projected at \$95, will include several meals. The pleasant conference center on the University of Maryland campus offers rooms at about \$60, for either a single or a double. Parking is free. The local committee will assist those of you who are coming from a distance to make arrangements to visit Washington, DC, about 20 minutes away from UMCP by bus, subway, or car.

Proposal deadline: April 20, 1992

More detailed conference materials, including a formal call for proposals, will be sent to all CBW members in the coming months. In the meantime, direct any questions or suggestions to Carolyn: Department of English, York College/CUNY, Jamaica, NY 11451. Phone: 718/262-2470.

Gene Hammond and Carolyn Kirkpatrick are co-coordinators of the 1992 CBW National Conference. Gene chairs the Department of English and teaches at UMCP. Carolyn has served as CBW Associate Chair and teaches at York College/CUNY.

Grammar Conference continued from page 1.

not rule out what he termed a "search for a new model." If grammar is ever again to be viable in composition instruction, McCleary believes it must return with these characteristics:

1. *informal*—not a matter of right and wrong
2. *active*—used to write
3. *holistic*—applicable to whole pieces of writing
4. *useful*—even outside of English classrooms

Above all, a new model for instruction in grammar must actually solve the language problems of student writers.

There was no agreement among the compositionists who presented papers in 1991 about the directions a new model for teaching grammar should take. But there certainly was an energetic sharing of ideas!

In rejecting the ways we have introduced grammar to writing students in the past, McCleary did not rule out what he termed a "search for a new model."

Most of the presenters followed Martha Kolln's lead toward a descriptive approach to grammar, but a few—notably Ben Varner of University of Northern Colorado and George Kovacs of Briarcliffe College—made emphatic claims for a prescriptive approach. Most presenters drew upon the system from traditional or structuralist grammar, but a few, like Cornelia Paraskevas of Western Oregon State University, have found ways to apply transformational grammar directly in composition classes so students can discover their own performance errors. And a few, particularly John Broderick of Old Dominion University and I, are searching for a new understanding of processes in language through the systemic functional grammar of Michael Halliday.

Ed Vavra is committed to Vygotsky's concept of teaching language in sequences that correspond with natural language development from elementary school through college, while Maurice Scharton, Janice Neuleib, and Irene Brosnahan of Illinois State

CBW Survey #3: Critical Issues

To help us plan next year's National Basic Writing Conference, we are attempting to learn what issues members of CBW consider most crucial for the profession of basic writing in the next few years. Since we are attempting to learn something fairly complicated, we've provided for open-ended response. Answer any or all of the following questions. Don't worry about being idiosyncratic, one-sided, or repetitious: It's the range of opinion that we're after. But please do respond ASAP.

1. What areas of basic writing instruction are most in need of improvement? What do you consider the most crucial issues concerning *classroom practice*?
2. What issues or problems can you identify concerning the *contexts in which BW instruction takes place*: the programs, departments, colleges and universities, boards, legislatures, federal government, views of the public—you name it.
3. What *research questions* should the profession be addressing vis-a-vis BW?
4. Do you sense any discontinuities or gaps between *theory and practice* in our field?
5. Anything we've missed?

Conference on Basic Writing

This insert includes two important pieces of business: a ballot for the election of CBW officers and an informal survey. Please take a few minutes to complete these right now. (We all know that a response delayed sinks to the bottom of the heap.) You can fold and staple this sheet to return it to the address below, but we do need your stamp.

Ballot for Executive Committee

The associate chair serves for two years, and then becomes chair for two years. Executive committee members serve for two years; three members are elected to the committee each year. Biographical notes on the nominees appear on page 3 of this newsletter.

This slate was prepared by the chair and associate chair with the advice of the executive committee in accordance with the By-Laws of the Conference on Basic Writing. Please indicate your approval or disapproval by marking the appropriate box below.

Associate Chair: Jean Gunner (UCLA)

Executive Committee: Juanita F. Lewis (Bennett College, North Carolina)
Kay Puttock (Mankato State University, Minnesota)
Karen Uehling (Boise State University, Idaho)

- ☐ I approve of the slate as listed.
- ☐ I disapprove of the slate as listed.

Comments/Suggestions: _____

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TO: Peter Adams
English Department
Essex Community College
Baltimore, MD 21237

University have sought to match learning styles to teaching methods based upon the Myers-Briggs test.

Presenters talked about their classroom research, methods they use in composition classes and language labs, pedagogy they have developed in courses for future teachers or students planning to enter the business world, computer connections they have found, and even grammar games designed for composition courses.

True, there was no agreement among presenters about the directions a new model for teaching grammar should take, but by the end of the two days at Penn Tech there was a strong affirmation that student writers are well-served when they have gained some awareness of the system in language. And that before a "new model" that is informal, active, holistic, and useful can emerge, compositionists must empty their thinking of the assumptions that have made the old model inadequate and search together for new perspectives on the language of writing as well as new strategies to bring these perspectives to the classroom.

If any group needs to search for a "new model" for teaching written language in composition classes, it is

Above all, a new model for instruction in grammar must actually solve the language problems of student writers.

teachers of basic writing. Our students are the ones who, for whatever reasons of culture or learning characteristics, need the support of conscious acquisition of written patterns. Our students are the ones the old model fails with the most damaging consequences. While there was no specific focus upon problems of basic writers at this conference, an excellent opportunity exists for basic writing teachers to use this forum for communicating about language instruction in their classrooms when the Association of Teachers of English Grammar meets again in Williamsport, Pennsylvania, on June 18 and 19, 1992.

Membership in ATEG is \$7.50 per year, which includes the newsletter Syntax in the Schools. Direct inquiries or send proposals for the 1992 conference before April 1 to Ed Vavra at DIF 112, Penn College of Technology, One College Avenue, Williamsport, PA 17701.

R • E • V • I • E • W • S Recent Articles on Basic Writing

Teaching Literature in Basic Writing Classes

The increase in the teaching of literature in basic writing classes presents teachers with new problems and possibilities. Three recent articles of interest address issues that arise in the teaching of literature; a fourth presents a sequence of assignments to guide students in their writing about literature.

Trimmer, Joseph F. "Telling Stories About Stories." *Teaching English in the Two-Year College* 17 (October 1990): 157-64. Trimmer relates his frustration in being "the voice of authority" about literature in a prose-fiction course. He reminisces about his own initiation into the literary/explication approach to literature that at first separated him, as it does many students, from what he felt was central in a story—his own experience of it. His subsequent adoption of that critical approach and of critics to bolster his perceptions was frustrated when he read *The Sound and the Fury* and found no "correct" view. His point is that unthinking adoption of this literary/critical approach not only divides teachers from students, but also students from their experience of a story. He argues that students will have their own readings whether we sanction them or not. Not to do so means being locked into teacher-student talk, not reader-reader talk, where our experiences of literature lie.

Tompkins, Jane. "Pedagogy of the Distressed." *College English* 52 (October 1990): 653-60. Tompkins also tells a story, that of her realization of the discrepancy between the values she espouses and her classroom practices that fostered what she calls "the performance model." Its "true goal was not to help the students learn but to perform before them in such a way that they would have a good opinion of me" (654). This model operates from two underlying fears—fear of exposure of her ignorance and the institutional fear of pedagogy. Tompkins's shift in pedagogy occurred when she taught an interdisciplinary course on emotion and knowledge where she could not be the

Continued on next page.

Reviews

continued from page 5.

expert in all areas. Thus, she redesigned the syllabus and delegated responsibility for different classes to the students. The result, she writes, was that, "I can never fool myself into believing that what I have to say is ultimately more important to the students than what they think and feel" (659). She concludes, *not* by calling for adoption of this model, but for understanding that our classroom practices are our politics and that the beginning of such politics should be a "gentler" focus on our "own needs as human beings" and "greater sensitivity to the needs of students" (660).

Hull, Glynda, and Mike Rose. "This Wooden Shack Place": The Logic of an Unconventional Reading." *College Composition and Communication* 41 (October 1990): 287-98. By telling the story of their efforts to understand the logic of one basic writing student's unconventional reading, Hull and Rose address the "questions of interpretation, expectation, and background knowledge" that will inevitably arise as basic writing teachers integrate reading into basic writing courses. What emerges from their study is the influence of background on both the student's reading and on the readings of those trained in English departments. They conclude that teacher talk—"the conversational pattern that channels students . . . into a more 'efficient' discourse" actually inhibits students' "participation in intellectual work" (296). They argue instead for placing knowledge-making at the center of pedagogy and for initiating a new conversational pattern—"encouragement, focusing, and reflection back" (296, 7). Both strategies rest on the assumptions that students are capable of such intellectual work and that "generating and questioning knowledge" are central in education (297). This new model does not mean a non-structured classroom, but rather one in which there is more transaction between the learners in the classroom—teachers and students.

All three of these articles examine teacher-student relationships during the teaching of literature. Trimmer's piece is anecdotal; Tompkins's, anecdotal and theoretical; Hull and Rose's, anecdotal and research-oriented; thus they offer different perspectives on a common problem—the status of student readings of literature.

Wilson, Allison. "Black Dialect in the Composition Classroom." *The Journal of the Mississippi Council of Teachers of English* 12 (Spring 1990): 8-22. Wilson, like the other authors, wants to focus on "analysis and presentation of meaningful content" (11), here, however, in contrast to a focus on surface errors rather than on variant readings. Her support for students and their inquiry is embedded in a series of sequenced assignments on Toni Morrison's *Sula*. These assignments foster students' critical inquiry and the writing of successively more "abstract" papers. The sequenced assignments, available in a series of appendices, are thoughtful and interesting. Wilson's article can be ordered for \$2 from Dan McQagge, English Department, Delta State University, Cleveland, MS 38733.

Wilson also calls on us to focus on "analysis and presentation of meaningful content" (11), which she

What students have to say—the content of their writing—matters more than "correct" approaches to literature or "correct" grammar.

contrasts with a focus on surface errors rather than on divergent or variant readings, the concern of the first three articles.

The four essays reviewed here underscore the idea that what students have to say—the content of their writing—matters more than "correct" approaches to literature or "correct" grammar. Read together, they offer much support for a classroom atmosphere that values thoughtfulness over correctness.

Sally Harrold
Southwestern Oregon Community College

This is a regular column discussing recent journal articles of interest to teachers and researchers working with basic writers. If you've recently written or read an article of interest, please send a copy to Sally Harrold, Department of English, Southwestern Oregon Community College, Coos Bay, OR 97420, for possible review in this column.

BULLETIN BOARD

The Midwest Regional Conference on English in the Two-Year College will be held Feb 6-8, 1992, in Lincoln, NE. Write Mary Jean Steenberg, Metro Community College, South Campus, English Dpt, P.O. Box 3777, Omaha, NE 68103 or call 402/449-8510.

The Southeast Regional Conference on English in the Two-Year College is scheduled for Feb 20-22, 1992, in Raleigh, NC. Write Hilda Barrow, Pitt Community College, P.O. Box Drawer 7007, Greenville, NC 27835-7007 or call 919/355-4416.

The National Conference on Research in English and the Assembly for Research of NCTE will host a conference in Chicago on the theme, "Teacher Thinking, Teacher Knowing—in Language and Literacy Education" Feb 14-16, 1992. Write Timothy Shanahan, University of Illinois at Chicago, M/C 147, Box 4348, Chicago, IL 60680 or call 312/996-4677.

The CCCC Annual Convention will be held this year in Cincinnati, OH, Mar 19-21, 1991. Preview booklet and registration materials will be mailed to members this month; others should write Membership Service Representative, NCTE, 1111 Kenyon Rd, Urbana, IL 61801.

The 8th Annual Computers and Writing Conference will take place in Indianapolis, IN, on May 1-3, 1992. Write Helen Schwartz, IUPUI English Dpt, 425 University Blvd, Indianapolis, IN 46202, call at 317/274-0083, or contact on BITNET ibgl100@indycms.

The Fourth Miami University Conference on the Teaching of Writing, to be held October 2-4, 1992, at Miami U, Oxford, OH, has issued a call for papers on the topic "New Directions in Portfolio Assessment." Proposal deadline is April 1, 1991. Send proposals to Don Daiker or Jeff Sommers, Dpt of English, Miami University, Oxford, OH 45056 or call 513/529-7110 or 529-5221.

The Fourth National Basic Writing Conference, sponsored by CBW, will be held Oct 9-10, 1992, at Univ of MD, College Park, just outside Washington, DC.

Deadline for program proposals is April 20, 1992. For details or to be placed on mailing list, write Carolyn Kirkpatrick, Dpt of English, York College/CUNY, Jamaica, NY 11451 or call 718/262-2470.

The 82nd Annual Conference of NCTE will be held in Louisville, KY, Nov 20-23, 1992. Program proposals are due by Jan 17, 1992. For a copy of the proposal form, write Membership Service Representative, NCTE, 1111 Kenyon Rd, Urbana, IL 61801.

Grants-in-Aid for research that has significance for the teaching or learning of English or language arts are awarded annually by the NCTE Research Foundation. Deadline for proposals is Feb 15, 1992. Application forms are available from Project Assistant, NCTE Research Foundation, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801 or call 217/328-3870.

The Council of Writing Program Administrators (WPA) is a nationwide organization that fosters communication and community among writing program administrators. It provides colleges and universities with consultant-evaluators to assess writing programs, and it sponsors a wide variety of professional activities to assist new and experienced writing program administrators and to bring together writing administrators from all parts of the country. For membership information, write Don Daiker, Dpt of English, Miami University, Oxford, OH 45056.

The Journal of Basic Writing invites submissions related to all aspects of basic writing. Of particular interest are accounts of teaching under unusual or difficult circumstances, cross-cultural reports, experiences with the new technologies, and articles taking a fresh approach to their topic. Write editors Peter Miller and Bill Bernhardt, *Journal of Basic Writing*, 535 East 80th Street, New York, NY 10021.

CBW Newsletter is happy to print in the "Bulletin Board" announcements that are likely to be of interest to its readers. Send such announcements to the editors by October 15 for the fall issue and February 1 for the spring issue.

Conference on Basic Writing
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TO:

