

EDWARD MACDOWELL'S PIANO CONCERTO NO. 2 IN THE CONTEXT OF THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE AMERICAN BRANCH OF THE GENRE

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SUMMARY. Research attention in the article is directed to the initial stage of the formation of the American piano concerto, which is represented by two works of Edward MacDowell. Written during the young composer's stay in Germany, they are firmly based on the traditions of European music and demonstrate mastery of genre models that had formed in the works by Mendelssohn, Schumann, Liszt, Grieg, Saint-Saëns, as well as MacDowell's teacher – Joachim Raff. The article analyzes the compositional and thematic organization of Piano Concerto No. 2, traces the figurative and stylistic origins of this music, as well as highlights the ratio of instrumental parts and methods of soloing. It was concluded that, in contrast to the First Concerto, where a generalized virtual model of a romantic concerto acts as a reference point for the composer, in the Second one, there is a tangible desire for an individualized reproduction of the interesting findings of the predecessors and advancement along the path of searching for one's own approach to the embodiment of the genre.

Keywords: musical culture of the USA, Edward MacDowell's creativity, genre models, instrumental concert, European traditions.

Introduction

The history of the American piano concerto begins in the 1880s, when the young Edward MacDowell, who had just completed his studies at Dr. Hoch's Konservatorium in Frankfurt, decided to try his hand at this genre,

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which had proven to be quite attractive for him as a pianist. Concerto No. 1 op. 15 was written in the spring of 1882 – in just two weeks, because the author was in a great hurry to meet the deadline set by his teacher Joachim Raff. In June of the same year, the first performance of the concerto took place, although not in public: it happened in Weimar, in the house of F. Liszt, to whom MacDowell, on the advice of Raff, went to show his opus. The famous Hungarian gave some advice to the novice composer and after some time he graciously accepted the dedication of the concerto addressed to him. The concept of Concerto No. 2 op. 23 appeared two years later and, since no one pushed the composer this time, the work on it stretched for about two years. This piece was first performed in the USA – in New York in 1889, performed by the author and the Theodore Thomas Orchestra. It was dedicated to the famous Venezuelan pianist Teresa Carreño, who at one time gave young Eduard piano lessons, and later performed this concerto more than forty times with orchestras all around the world. And although both of MacDowell's concertos have firmly entered the piano repertoire, the second of them is rightly considered more original in design and more perfect in the implementation of this design. So, two samples of the genre, created by the composer almost one after the other, not only proved the talent of their author, but also demonstrated the ability to learn in the process of work, abandoning mastered forms and techniques in favor of experimentation.

Information about MacDowell's concerts is contained in the fundamental works of American researchers, such as Lawrence Gilman, John F. Porte and Douglas Bomberger. Thus, in the monograph by John Lawrence Gilman², written during the composer's lifetime, the history of the creation of the First Concerto is covered in detail, and a brief description of the Second Concerto is given. Edvard Grieg and Ferenc Liszt's influences are indicated, and the logic of building the whole, the cohesion and symmetry of the form, flexibility of thematic development are emphasized. But the main advantages of this book lie in the close contact of its author with his "hero", which allows the reader to learn almost "first-hand" not only about the little-known details of the composer's creative life, but also about his aesthetic views and artistic principles. In John F. Porte's monograph, only two pages of text are devoted to the concertos, which is explained by the scholar's attitude towards them as student works that cannot yet present MacDowell's true style: «It must always be remembered, however, that a two-page piece from *Sea Pieces, Op. 55*, or *New England Idyls, Op. 62*, or any mature work

² Gilman, Lawrence. *Edward MacDowell*: E-text prepared by David Newman and the Project Gutenberg Online Distributed Proofreading Team.
URL: <https://gutenberg.org/files/14109/14109-h/14109-h.htm>

by MacDowell is of greater artistic value than the whole of the concerto in question», – Porte writes about the First Concerto³. In the most modern monograph by Douglas Bomberger⁴, the events of MacDowell's life are reproduced in detail, established stereotypes about certain of his actions are debunked, and interesting assumptions about the relationship between childhood impressions and mature personality traits are made. The piano concertos receive a concise description in the mentioned monograph, within which, however, apt remarks are made regarding the influence of the virtuoso manner of F. Liszt, the motivic work of the Beethoven model and the supporting role of solo cadenzas. Alan Levy⁵, a cultural historian, does not aim to analyze musical works, but covers the life of the composer in detail, relying on numerous documents on letters. The pathos of his work lies in the desire to return attention to this somewhat forgotten composer. MacDowell's concertos are also mentioned in review studies: «A History of American Classical Music» by Barrymore Scherer⁶ and «From Psalm to Symphony: A History of Music in New England» by Nicholas Tawa⁷. N. Tawa considers these two works to be the most successful within the early body of work of the American composer – those that revealed the best sides of his talent. Christine Kefferstan's dissertation⁸ and Ohran Noh's report at the conference of The International Edvard Grieg Society⁹ are directly devoted to MacDowell's concertos. The first of these works discusses issues related to MacDowell's studies in Europe, the influence of his piano teachers there, the composers and works he admired, and provides an analysis of each of the concertos. In the second work, attention is focused on the common features of the piano concerto by Grieg, a Norwegian, and the first of the concertos by the American MacDowell – composers who, after having received a musical education in Germany, went down in history as the founders of national composition schools.

³ Porte, John F. *A great American tone poet: His life and music*. London, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co. Ltd, 1922, p. 48.

⁴ Bomberger, Douglas. *MacDowell*. New York, Oxford University Press, USA, 2013.

⁵ Levy, Alan H. *Edward MacDowell: An American Master*. Lanham, MD, Scarecrow Press, 1998.

⁶ Scherer, Barrymore L. *A history of American classical music*. Naxos Books, 2007.

⁷ Tawa, Nicholas E. *From Psalm to Symphony: A History of Music in New England*. Boston, Northeastern University Press, 2001.

⁸ Kefferstan, Christine Bane. *The Piano Concertos of Edward MacDowell*, DMA thesis, University of Cincinnati, 1984.

⁹ Noh, Ohran. *Edvard Grieg's Influence on American Music: The Case of the Piano Concertos in A-Minor from the Pen of Edvard Grieg and Edward MacDowell*. Paper presented at The International Edvard Grieg Society Conference in Bergen, Norway, 30 May 2007. URL: <http://griegsociety.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Ohran-Noh-paper-2007.pdf>

It should be noted that in all the listed studies, MacDowell's piano concertos are considered mainly in the context of the author's stylistic evolution, but another perspective of the study – the genre one – seems to be no less important. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to identify the sources from which the American concerto was born, and the paths taken by its founder in search of his own interpretation of the genre.

American concerto sources

Both of MacDowell's piano concertos were created in Europe, where the future composer came in 1876 to receive a prestigious musical education, thereby securing a decent professional future. D. Bomberger writes the following: «...his European study was a life-changing experience. Over the next twelve years, he would become thoroughly immersed in European way of life, and the musical attitudes imparted by his European teachers would form the basis of his aesthetic views throughout his life»¹⁰.

Among MacDowell's teachers' names of pianists like Antoine-François Marmontel, Siegmund Lebert, Carl Heymann and theoreticians like Augustin Savard, Louis Ehlert, Joachim Raff should be mentioned. Each of them contributed to the formation of the creative personality of the founder of American academic music, but the leading role was certainly played by Joachim Raff, who directed his attention towards composition. L. Gilman quotes MacDowell's words, which he said many years later: «I had acquired from early boyhood the idea that it was expected of me to become a pianist, and every moment spent in "scribbling" seemed to be stolen from the more legitimate work of piano practice», adding the following: «It was Raff—Raff, who said to him once: "Your music will be played when mine is forgotten" – who opened his eyes»¹¹.

Raff's influence on MacDowell should be examined in two ways. On the one hand, his professional activity in his youth was closely related to the radical wing of musical romanticism: he lived in Weimar in the first half of the 1850s, he was a student and personal assistant of Ferenc Liszt at the time when, according to D. Bomberger, he «was making his most important contributions to the "Music of the Future" or New German School»¹², and he wrote and published the work «The Wagner Question» in the «Neue

¹⁰ Bomberger, Douglas. *MacDowell*. New York, Oxford University Press, USA, 2013, p. 23.

¹¹ Gilman, Lawrence. *Edward MacDowell*: E-text prepared by David Newman and the Project Gutenberg Online Distributed Proofreading Team.

URL: <https://gutenberg.org/files/14109/14109-h/14109-h.htm>

¹² Bomberger, Douglas. *MacDowell*. New York, Oxford University Press, USA, 2013, p. 48.

Zeitschrift für Musik» magazine which revolved around a critical review of the opera «Lohengrin». It was Raff who introduced MacDowell to Liszt when he visited Frankfurt in 1879, and this acquaintance played an important role in the young musician's later career. Liszt not only supported his compositional efforts by approving the newly written piano concerto, but also invited him to perform at the Zurich festival «Allgemeiner Deutscher Musik-Verein» and helped with the first printing of his works by the respected publishing house «Breitkopf & Härtel».

On the other hand, Raff did not want to be limited in his activities, administrative or creative, only by the instructions of the school of Ferenc Liszt and Richard Wagner. This affected, for example, the formation of the teaching staff of Dr. Hoch's Konservatorium, the first director of which he used to be: the invitation to the walls of the educational institution at the same time ardent supporters and opponents of the new German school initially led to numerous discords and dismissals. He also sought to find «a middle ground between the progressive aesthetic orientation of the Liszt camp and the conservative orientation of Brahms and his followers»¹³ in his own works, which sometimes caused contemporaries to accuse him of eclecticism and lack of originality. It is interesting that critics saw the influence of the same composers that are felt in MacDowell's music in Raff's music – Mendelssohn, Schumann, Chopin, Liszt, Wagner. In his teaching activities, Raff gave his student freedom: instead of the routine exercises that he had mastered at the Paris Conservatory, he worked with him on original compositions, at the same time adhering to the opinion that «schools» in music are artificial formations, that music is now eclectic and that all national musical traits are a common property. This opinion will further determine the position of MacDowell himself in relation to the so-called «American composer's concerts»: «"American" concerts suggest to my mind that people wish that American music should stand by itself and have its own standard of criticism – All that American art wishes and needs is the fair criticism that ought to be meted out to the productions of other Nations»¹⁴.

¹³ Bomberger, Douglas. *MacDowell*. New York, Oxford University Press, USA, 2013, p. 48.

¹⁴ *ibid*, p. 118.

However, it should be noted that MacDowell's artistic orientations were determined not only by the authority of the teacher, but also by performance practice. Thus, his repertoire as a pianist included, among others, the works of Schumann, Chopin, Liszt, Beethoven, Saint-Saëns. Special attention is drawn to the repeated performance of the Second Piano Concerto by Camille Saint-Saëns, the compositional structure of which is mirrored in the structure of the Second Concerto by MacDowell himself. In the concerts of the American period, the program contained mainly works by the same composers, to which their own works were added in the second section.

Finally, let's mention the name of one more composer whose work had a considerable influence on the music of the American composer – Edvard Grieg. The two artists never met in person, but their correspondence, which began in 1899, testifies to mutual respect and creative sympathy. From one of MacDowell's letters to Grieg, we can learn about his long-standing fascination with the Norwegian's music: «your music lies closer to my heart than I can well say. I have dedicated much to you in my thoughts, and this will be my excuse for sending you some of my music»¹⁵. With a high degree of probability, we can assume that among the works by Edvard Grieg, which MacDowell could hear in the European period of his life, there was also a piano concerto, and that some artistic ideas of the Grieg concerto could be reflected in his own examples of this genre. Ohran Noh, in his work «Edvard Grieg's Influence on American Music: Reflections on the Piano Concertos in A Minor by Edvard Grieg and Edward MacDowell», carefully examines the common features of the two mentioned works and concludes that it is important for Grieg's concerto to observe of the German romantic tradition and later nationalist idioms are also presented in the final movement of MacDowell's first piano concerto¹⁶.

Piano Concerto No. 2 op. 23 MacDowell: in search of an individual interpretation of the genre

If the first of MacDowell's piano concertos testifies to a confident mastery of the genre, the second one demonstrates a desire for its individualized interpretation. This desire manifests itself very clearly in the deviation from the traditional structure of the concerto cycle: instead of the

¹⁵ Bomberger, Douglas. *MacDowell*. New York, Oxford University Press, USA, 2013, p. 229.

¹⁶ Noh, Ohran. *Edvard Grieg's Influence on American Music: The Case of the Piano Concertos in A-Minor from the Pen of Edvard Grieg and Edward MacDowell*. Paper presented at The International Edvard Grieg Society Conference in Bergen, Norway, 30 May 2007. URL: <http://griegsociety.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Ohran-Noh-paper-2007.pdf>

standard cycle of three movements «fast – slow – fast» that took place in the concerto op. 15, here the rather slow first part (*Larghetto calmato*, which later speeds up a little – *Poco più mosso, e con passione*) is followed by a rapid scherzo (*Presto giocoso*) and an internally contrasting finale in terms of tempo (*Largo – Molto allegro* *allegro* with subsequent frequent tempo fluctuations).

The first movement, *Larghetto calmato*, d-moll, 6/8, opens with a sweeping introduction that has three-part contours marked timbral: orchestra – piano – orchestra. The elegiac orchestral theme evokes many associations – with Schumann, Wagner, Brahms, Tchaikovsky, and B. Scherer, even writes about predicting «the brooding language of Rachmaninov»¹⁷. The piano presents another mode of lyrics – passionate, pathetic. The theme consists of short declamatory motives, compressed in the volume of a minor third and presented in a dense chordal arrangement. They are interspersed with virtuosic passages covering the seven-octave range. The characterized section of the introduction performs the function of a solo cadenza – the first of three available in this part. The return of the initial thematic material in the third section, together with the orchestral sound, increases the recapitulation effect.

The exposition of the sonata form grows intonationally from the introduction. The primary theme is based on one of the motifs of the orchestral introduction (a motif with a diminished fourth – m. 8) and contains an "inset" from the solo cadenza (mm. 3–6 after reh. D). The secondary theme also comes from the orchestral introduction, but the chromatic bends are straightened here, taking on a completely diatonic sound. Stylistically, the theme of the exhibition is related to the influences of not only Liszt and Wagner, but also Schumann (the primary theme) and Tchaikovsky (the secondary theme). The development is mainly based on the material of the solo cadenza and the primary theme. Both themes appear here in the original figurative filling and in transformation: the powerful sounding of the cadential theme in the brass instruments against the background of the chordal passages of the piano *fff* (reh. H) and the major continuation of the primary theme accompanied by the pastoral trills of the piano (reh. L) The central position in the development belongs to another solo cadenza. Its first 6 measures accurately repeat the declamatory chordal phrases with passages in response that took place in the opening cadenza, but then the theme of the primary theme comes to the fore, the development of which gradually returns the movement to the main dramatic direction. The recapitulation opens with an orchestral performance of the primary theme, which is unexpectedly interrupted by the soloist's third cadenza. As in the two

¹⁷ Scherer, Berrymore L. *A history of American classical music*. Naxos Books, 2007, p. 48.

previous cadenzas, the thematic elements of the actual cadenza and the primary theme are interwoven here, which, however, are quickly replaced by virtuosic passages. The renewed conduct of the primary theme in the orchestra (reh. P) flows into its major version in the piano arrangement, and then is replaced by the orchestral sounding of the secondary theme in the same key of D-dur. The laconic coda (m. 7 after reh. R) is built on singing the intonations of the primary theme, which dissolve into *ppp* arpeggiated tonic chords.

The second movement of the concerto, *Presto giocoso*, B-dur, 2/4, is a scherzo that critics and scholars characterize as «dazzling» (M. Tobias), «elegantly puckish» (J. Lyons), «pure fireworks» (B. Scherer). The origins of this music are connected with the idea of a symphonic poem based on William Shakespeare's play «Much Ado About Nothing», which MacDowell and his wife saw in London during their honeymoon in 1884. The incorporation of the scherzo into the concerto cycle as the second movement appeals to the above-mentioned Piano Concerto in g-moll op. 22 C. Saint-Saëns, who occupied a stable place in McDowell's repertoire as a pianist. The light, playful, charming character of this scherzo also appeals to the music of the French contemporary. M. Tobias cites the statements of the composer's wife Marian MacDowell, which clarify the image conceived by the composer: «He favored the mischievous demons or elves that fly in clouds through the air like pixies they were light gossamer nothings, delicate as a feather, wafted by swift March breezes»¹⁸. In the two compared scherzos, the general outlines of the form, the basis of which is the rondo-sonata, also coincide.

In the refrain, the dominant image is widely and thoroughly exposed. The initial theme – the *perpetuum mobile* in B-dur (m. 3) – is repeated and supplemented by several related themes that cling to each other, forming a rondo-like composition within the refrain. The secondary, or episodic, theme in es-moll (reh. H) is passionately lyrical, with its emotional coloring and individual intonation turns, it echoes the primary theme of the first movement, building a local arc in the cycle. The middle leading of the refrain is significantly shortened (reh. L), and the secondary theme is repeated first in b-moll (reh. N), and then again, the same as the first time, in es-moll. The final refrain transitions into a small coda (m. 9 after reh. V): the mysterious chords of the orchestra in a bunch with the *pp* dynamics and the note *perdendosi* («losing, disappearing») seem to cast a magical flair on the bright

¹⁸ Tobias, Marianne Williams. *Piano Concerto No 2. Edward MacDowell: Program Notes* // Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra, 2016. URL: <https://www.indianapolissymphony.org/backstage/program-notes/macdowell-piano-concert-no-2/>

performance that has just taken place. Thus, there is no development in MacDowell's rondo-sonata composition, but its function is partially compensated for by the elaborate connections between the sections, which are performed mainly by the soloist and have a virtuosic character.

Speaking about the stylistic features of the second movement of the concerto, one should point out not only the imitations that take place here, but also certain insights the syncopated chords that, according to B. Scherer, predict Francis Poulenc¹⁹, and according to MacDowell himself, are an attempt to reflect on a popular American genre – ragtime²⁰.

The third movement of the concerto, *Largo – Molto allegro*, D-dur, $\frac{3}{4}$, has a rather complex compositional and dramaturgical organization. Contrasting images – gloomy and bright, elegiac, and pathetic, scherzo and dramatic – alternate, invade, transform, forming a freely interpreted rondo-sonata composition. Like the first movement, the finale opens with an extended introduction, juxtaposing orchestral and piano sequences. The musical material contains both a direct citation of *Larghetto calmato* motifs and thematic formations derived from it. At the same time, one of the orchestral cues (reh. A) foreshadows the future as the primary theme, *Molto allegro*. Thus, the introduction to the finale connects the initial and final movements of the cycle: starting from the previously presented creative ideas, the composer forms a new vector of further development.

B. Scherer characterizes the general atmosphere of the next part of the finale as «a scintillating concertante waltz»²¹. Three themes of the exposition embody different figurative aspects of this dance. The third theme, in h-moll (reh. I), almost exactly outlines the melodic contours of the primary theme of the first movement, thus continuing the through line of lyrical and passionate images outlined in the scherzo. The development is replaced by a small episode (reh. M), which, from the thematic point of view, is an invasion of the intonations of the introduction, common to the extreme movements, from the harmonic – a turn to the main tonality, and from the timbre – a kind of quasi-cadenza²². Recapitulation (reh. O) largely deviates from the traditional scheme. The inclusion of another quasi-cadenza, which

¹⁹ Scherer, Berrymore L. *A history of American classical music*. Naxos Books, 2007, p. 48.

²⁰ Tawa, Nicholas E. *From Psalm to Symphony: A History of Music in New England*. Boston, Northeastern University Press, 2001, p. 188.

²¹ Scherer, Berrymore L. *A history of American classical music*. Naxos Books 2007, p. 48.

²² The orchestra here performs a secondary function, it either pauses, or tremolos, or duplicates individual sounds of piano passages.

is based on the same material as the previous one, attracts attention²³. It is also important to point out the use in the recapitulation, along with the themes of the finale, of the motives of the primary theme of the first movement, and both are figuratively reinterpreted in the direction of ghostliness, illusory, which is emphasized by the remarks *dolcissimo*, *morendo*, *leggiero* and the dynamics of *piano*, *pianissimo*. The final performance of the primary theme of the finale by brass instruments in its original form marks the transition to a sparkling coda that triumphantly closes the concerto.

Comparing the ratio of instrumental parts in MacDowell's First and Second Concertos, it should be noted that in the First Concerto, the sound of the piano and orchestra is balanced by their alternate juxtaposition. This principle is most consistently maintained in the first movement, and the transfer of timbre leadership is usually accompanied by thematic changes, which makes it possible to talk about the differentiation of thematic invention into orchestral and solo categories. The thematic differentiation of the instrumental parts can also be traced in the first movement of the Second Concerto, where the primary theme is almost always performed in the piano, and the secondary theme – in the orchestra. In other movements, the thematic balance is achieved by exchanging the material between partners. The number of actual «dialogues» (the alternation of different timbre lines on the syntactic level) increases in the Second Concerto, and the scherzo and the finale take the lead in this regard – due to their inherent dominance of the game logic of development, for which dialogues on the syntactic level are attributive. But the main difference between the concertos is a significant increase in the episodes of purely solo sound in the Second Concerto. Here there are constructions of different scales and functional loads – from laconic passage transitions between compositional sections (in the second movement) to extended piano cadenzas (in the first and third movements). The soloist's cadenzas play an important role in the dramaturgical development within the movements and in the cycle as a whole. It is through them that cross-cutting thematic threads which provide unity are drawn.

As for the piano part itself, it is even more virtuosic in the Second Concerto than in the First one. J. Porte, noting the growth of MacDowell's skill and artistic conviction, notes the following: «The only fault of the work is that its pianoforte part is far too continuously brilliant»²⁴. As in the First Concerto, the influence of Liszt's pianism is felt here, which is manifested in

²³ This cadence «disperses» in the space of the recapitulation, surrounding the reminiscence of the primary theme of the first part and the continuation of the secondary theme of the finale.

²⁴ Porte, John F. *A great American tone poet: His life and music*. London, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co. Ltd., 1922, p. 58.

the wide use of octave and chordal techniques, in the desire to expand the register horizons of the instrument, to the fullness of the sound. At the same time, the inclination to certain technical techniques is to a certain extent determined by the author's performance style. In particular, the steady sixteenth-note movement in the Presto tempo of the scherzo refrain reflects MacDowell's distinctive finger speed, which was his hallmark as a pianist. Here is a quote from a letter from long-time friend and colleague Templeton Strong, which he wrote to MacDowell while waiting for news about the New York premiere of the work: «Did you take the second movement at the awful rate you did here? God bless me! My head spins and I see notes and sparks and stars when I think of it!»²⁵.

Conclusions

There is nothing «American» in Edward MacDowell's piano concertos, which are formally the first examples of the American branch of the genre. They are firmly based on the traditions of European music and demonstrate the young composer's mastery of genre models formed in the work by Mendelssohn, Schumann, Liszt, Grieg, Saint-Saëns, and Raff. In the First Concerto, a generalized virtual model of a romantic concerto serves as a reference point for MacDowell: a three-part cycle with a typical tempo and figurative ratio of movements, a dialogue between the timbres of the piano and the orchestra, which is realized mainly in the horizontal dimension and is enhanced by thematic contrast, the virtuosity of the soloist's part with a concentrated outpouring of virtuosity in a clearly in the designated place of the form – a solo cadenza. In the Second Concerto, instead of following a generalized genre model, MacDowell strives for an individualized reproduction of the interesting finds of his predecessors and the search for his own approach to the embodiment of the genre. For instance, a specific prototype is clearly recognizable in the structure of the cycle (Concerto No. 2 by Saint-Saëns), while the interpretation of the opening cadenza indicates experimental intentions. Unlike similar constructions in the concerts of Grieg, Raff, Saint-Saëns, as well as in his previous concerto, here the piano cadenza is the middle part of a large-scale introduction surrounded by orchestral sections. In addition, it appears as the first link in a chain of solo episodes that layer the first and last movements of the cycle and act as a zone of through-thematic development within the concerto.

²⁵ Quote according to: Bomberger, Douglas: *MacDowell*. New York, Oxford University Press, USA, 2013, pp. 138–139.

So, the American piano concerto has European origins, as well as the work of its founder – Edward MacDowell. However, both MacDowell and the American piano concerto found their own «voice» in the process of evolution. Although, this happened much later: as late as the second decade of the 20th century, but a comparison of two MacDowell's concerto works showed the intensity of the movement in this direction.

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