Tarrying with Trauma While Improvising Gender in *Who Do You Think You Are?*

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"For Munro, a thing can be true, and not true, but true nonetheless."

—Margaret Atwood, The Guardian.

Published in 1978, Alice Munro's collection of linked stories, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, portrays the multi-dimensionality of coping with gender norms imposed on women in small-town southwestern Ontario during the 1940s to 1970. The collection's community of Hanratty in Munro's mythical home territory of Huron County upholds the "Who do you think you are?" ethic that enforces humility and develops internal shame for those who draw attention to themselves. Margaret Atwood attests that shame has become Munro's emotional hallmark: Munro stakes "a major claim to shame" in her stories ("Portrait" 99). For Rose, Munro's protagonist throughout this story collection, this entwines with the shame from trauma induced by physical punishments from her father and stepmother and her simultaneous defiance of gender scripts. Failure at conforming to the gender scripts of her time is, for Rose, what Jack Halberstam defines as "the queer art of failure": it is a triumph of personal authenticity over gender essentialism and an acceptance of human imperfection (qtd in Goldman 87). Judith Butler's seminal 1988 theory of gender performativity postulates that improvising and contesting, or acting outside of, gender expectations incur obvious and covert social punishments, but that performing gender includes the possibility of innovation ("Performative" 527, 531). For Rose, the acts of surviving trauma and contesting gender scripts cause the "sticky affects" of shame and humiliation identified by Amelia DeFalco; the feeling that hope is unwarranted or not granted to women; an emotional freezing or dissociation; and emotional economies (DeFalco and York 2), which are willful withdrawals of emotion in stressful situations. A sadomasochistic emphasis on power in love relationships leads to the failure of those relationships. The failure of Rose's marriage leads to the desperate measure of swapping her relationship with her daughter for the freedom to pursue her career. Ultimately, the self-abnegation of the "Who do you think you are?" ethic leads to Rose's silence on the topic of love with her family members, though she intuits that they love her and expresses her love for them through action. Trauma causes disconnection from others and from self; however, the collection also shows Rose innovating gender and subverting the intergenerational cycle of the victim becoming the victimizer by achieving both a sense of community and by strengthening personal authenticity. Her methods for empowerment and

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authenticity[1] include storytelling, acting, and a final emotionally costly letting go of the cultural ideal of long-term heterosexual fidelity.

Critics associate the prevalence of shame within the collection with the failure to adhere to social scripts. Historically, women bear abuse and trauma: "women who bear witness to these atrocities [ie. rape] are still at risk, as all women are at risk" (Tal "Discourse" 155).[2] For Rose, who is beaten at ages ten through twelve and molested on a train at age 19, trauma and fear cause the "sticky" affects of "shame, disgust, repulsion, and guilt" (DeFalco 37). Using Sara Ahmed's "definition of affects as "what sticks, or what sustains or preserves, the connection between ideas, values and objects,'' York adds that Munro's female protagonists become "stuck" in sticky emotions "despite social disapprobation" (210). Thus, "sticky" describes how the negative affects cultivated in Rose's childhood remain with her throughout her life. DeFalco and York argue that "in Munro's work, affects expose and destabilize, threaten and transgress prevailing gender and sexual politics" (2). This applies to what Marlene Goldman identifies as "body shame" resulting from one's failure to "mimic the norm" (81). Thus, "Affective Performativity…opens up the possibility of departure from social scripts" but it can never be disentangled from social punishments (DeFalco and York 8).

The collection is, as all her stories are, a portrayal of Munro's experience. Munro's "tarrying with our ugliest emotions" (York 213) in telling Rose's story is a representation of what York calls her "theory of fiction as tarrying with difficult affects and knowledges" (212). In "The Ottawa Valley," the narrator Alice Munro,[3] who was unable to give enough attention to her mother who was dying of Parkinson's disease, confesses that fictional artifice has proved insufficient to exorcise the ghost of her mother that haunts her: "she has *stuck* to me as close as ever and refused to fall away, and I could go on, and on, applying what skills I have, using what tricks I know, and it would always be the same" (qtd in DeFalco 50). DeFalco asserts that the trick of writing fiction as a buffer between storyteller and material fails and "the narrator's mother remains stuck to [the narrator]…bonded by affects (shame and regret)" (50). For these two reasons – because the collection expresses Munro's theory of fiction and because it is profoundly linked to her own "tarrying with difficult emotions and knowledges" – York insists that *Who Do You Think You Are?* is located at the "epicentre" of Munro's work (213). While the author is tormented by what her daughter calls "the way she shut herself off" from her mother in her final illness for fear of being engulfed by "pity and grief" (S. Munro 161), the character Rose is tormented by the trauma induced by her father's childhood beatings. Goldman uses Gersham Kaufman's definition of shame: "To feel shame is to feel *seen* in a painfully diminished sense…to live with shame is to experience the very essence or heart of the self as wanting"

[1] Rose does not explicitly decide to use her improvisation of gender as a means of processing her trauma, rather, Rose's pursuit of an authentic life leads to improvisations of gender in her context and aids in overcoming shame.

[2] As a pioneering scholar in the field of Trauma Studies (Tal "Trauma Studies"), Kali Tal connects this historical binary with the historical property value of women and rape as a crime against property ("Discourse" 155).

[3] In some stories, Munro admits to a direct retelling of her life while insisting that the pieces are still "stories."

(80). For Rose, trauma causes a continual re-immersion in feelings of shame, fear, and humiliation; a feeling that hope itself is unwarranted for or not granted to women.

In Rose's childhood, the treatment of women and children in 1940s rural Ontario establishes the historical residue of heteronormative social norms upheld by abuse and trauma. Butler insists that performing gender is "an innovative affair" of "ongoing continuous dramatic acts" that reflect the body's "mode of embodying" possibilities and how the body "is a manner of doing, dramatizing, and *reproducing* a historical situation" ("Performative" 521). In "Royal Beatings," Rose's beating "begins within the confines of accepted social behaviour" because in the 1940s rural Southern Ontario, physical violence as discipline from a father "would not have been unusual or particularly frowned upon" (Garner and Murray 3). These experiences nonetheless create "a unique worldview" for Rose, because as children "our developing brain sorts and stores our personal experiences, making our personal 'codebook' that helps us interpret the world" (Perry and Winfrey 31). Bruce D. Perry and Oprah Winfrey argue that the brains of children with abusive fathers connect men with "threat, anger and fear. And this worldview gets built in—men are dangerous, threatening" (32).[4] During the beatings, Rose's father adopts his dual, layered, role as his dramatic persona, "the King of Royal Beatings" ("Beatings" 3), and her everyday father.[5] He is both "acting and he means it" as he feels both "hatred and pleasure" ("Beatings" 18-19). Rose views him as a monarchical figurehead in her imagined story. In accordance with the gender script of female submission to male authority, she plays her role as the theatrically abject victim; her ongoing life shows her submitting psychologically to her stern and judgmental father.

The disciplinary beatings uphold social rules for Rose's performance within Rose's family, as each family member is, as Garner and Murray note, "constrained by the social script and must move into their specific role in the struggle" (3). At first, Rose does not accept the beating: "She runs around the room…Her father blocks her…She runs, she screams, she implores" ("Beatings" 19). However, Rose has learned that by submitting to the abuser's performance as a daughter and as a victim, she can end the beating and survive. Rose submits to his violence: "The very last-ditch willing sound of humiliation and defeat it is, for it seems Rose must play her part in this with the same grossness, the same exaggeration, that her father displays, playing his. She plays his victim" ("Beatings" 20). Garner and Murray argue that "the scene can only be concluded by Rose's full recognition of her father's dominion, the victim's recognition of the power of the aggressor and his indubitable rights in the ideological discourses of 1940s Canada" (4). By learning to perform as a victim of her father's abuse, Rose is surviving the interaction but also submitting to tarry with the sticky emotions of fear and shame.

[4] *What Happened to You: Conversations on Trauma, Resilience and Healing* is a collaboration between a child psychiatrist and neuroscientist, and the successful host and supervising producer of *The Oprah Winfrey Show* who suffered severe trauma in her childhood; as such, it is a conversation that seeks to bring together scientific and personal perspectives.

[5] Alice Munro was beaten by her father, Robert Laidlaw, between the ages of 10 and 12; as her daughter testifies, Alice was a willful and naughty girl who "talked back" (S. Munro 151); thus, in the small-town culture of the forties, she was subject to physical punishment. Munro held back "Royal Beatings" from publication until well after her father's death, but in 1978 she fictionalized it in depicting its traumatic impacts on Rose.

Rose is oppressed not only by the physical and emotional pain of the beatings, but also by the cultural injunction against self-importance and display implied in the put-down "Who do you think you are?" Rose experiences the "shame that Tomkins associates with the physical act of averting one's face and gaze from the source of humiliation and judgement" (DeFalco and York 8). She does not answer her father when he speaks; instead, she bows her head in a posture of submission. She feels that her father knows all "her gaudy ambitions," and thinks less of her for them: "He knew them all, and Rose was ashamed, just to be in the same room as him. She felt that she disgraced him…and would…in the future…But she was not repenting…she did not mean to change" ("Half" 49). Rose also correctly assumes that "Flo was his idea of what a woman ought to be," meaning practical, industrious, and down-to-earth ("Half" 49); he expects a woman to be intellectually childish and finds Rose's ambition to become an actress inappropriate for the gender binary of the time. By surmising that, to her father, she was not "the right kind of woman" ("Half" 50), Rose admits to innovating gender through her acts: in her showing off, daydreaming, and living in her head, Rose concludes that she embodies "what he must have thought of as the worst qualities in himself" ("Half" 50).

Yet even as the beaten child, Rose knows that her father has a profound love for her because she discovers the evidence of his own victimhood. The energy of the anger that fuels his unrestrained beatings comes from his own victimization. He is pleased by the intensity of the performative moment of the beating: "His face loosens and changes and grows younger" ("Beatings" 18); at the same time, in striking out against Rose, he is rebelling against the psychological pain of his own life. Rose's father has been daydreaming about literature and philosophy as he repairs small appliances for ridiculously low prices in his shed behind the family's store ("Beatings" 4). The proof comes in the notes that Rose discovers posted above his workbench: "Will of God?...All things are alive. Spinoza" ("Beatings" 5). Later, she overhears him quoting *The Tempest* as he mumbles to himself in the shed: "The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces" (Shakespeare qtd in "Beatings" 6). Rose's father lives an inner life of imagination but has had to keep these musings to himself, as they are not acceptable for a man in rural Canadian working-class society.[6] Rose's father is a fictionalization of Munro's own father, who suffered from depressive anxiety because his intellectual passions had to be kept secret; eventually, he succumbed to working at the local iron foundry and enjoyed both the physical labour and the camaraderie of the job (S. Munro 110).[7] Sheila Munro nonetheless attests to a deep sense of sadness that marked his life: "There was an air of resignation about him, covered over with dignity, which had to do, I think, with a failure in the end to find any refuge" (99). Yet, Rose's father's intellectual interests repressed by social norms become a bridge between father

[6] Similarly, Rose's husband Patrick Blatchford, though a member of a wealthy family that owns a chain of department stores, suffers profoundly from his father's disdain ("Maid" 90). Patrick's mother also contributes to Patrick's, and the household's, emotional turmoil. During their first meeting, Rose notes that "something like a fog went out from [Patrick's mother]: affront, disapproval, dismay" ("Maid" 90). When the Blatchfords "wrangle" with each other and complain at dinner, Rose observes that she "had never imagined so much true malevolence collected in one place" ("Maid" 91), demonstrating that trauma is not particular to any class.

[7] Robert Laidlaw partially satisfied his writerly ambitions. He wrote a memoir *Boyhood Summer, 1912* near the end of this life and published a historical novel titled *The MacGregors* in the final year of his life (S. Munro 98).

and daughter as Rose's insights about her father lead her to intuit that he profoundly loves and approves of her: "She knew he felt pride in her…the truth was…that he would not have her otherwise and willed her as she was. Or one part of him did" ("Half" 50). Rose's relationship with her father is portrayed through imbrication: layers of submission and docility are overlaid with layers of unspoken closeness and love, and the two layers are like shingles on a roof.

As another victim-victimizer, Flo re-establishes patriarchal, and thus heteronormative, structures within the family in conjunction with the father's violence through punitive conventions against improvising gender. Flo, Rose's stepmother, "will not allow [Rose] to humiliate her through her repetitive insolence" (Garner and Murray 4). Flo's own codebook of trauma, shaped by the enduring similar trauma in her own childhood, informs her instigation of the beatings and her provision of comfort after them. At 12, Flo's father gives her away to a farming family where she is beaten for insubordination when she mockingly imitates the wife of the home ("Half" 47). She "ha[s] the scar still" (47) and learns that disrespectful behaviour requires discipline. As Goldman puts it, Flo "remains in the grip of shame, identifies with her abuser…and projects her rage and shame onto Rose" when she assists in staging Rose's beatings (91). Flo "calls Rose's father" into the house from his shed workshop for the beating; Flo feels humiliated and enraged by what she calls "Rose's smart-aleck behaviour, rudeness and sloppiness and conceit" ("Beatings" 16). Flo's secondary role, to console Rose post-beating, teaches Rose that surviving requires repressing those "sticky" affects of shame and humiliation that result from trauma. This undermines Rose's resistance to trauma, as Judith Herman[8] notes: "the capricious granting of small indulgences undermines the psychological resistance of the victim far more effectively than unremitting deprivation and fear" (78). Indeed, Rose "scuffles, resists, loses dignity," smelling the "humiliating" cold cream and sniffling "with shame" while eating the consolation treats ("Beatings" 21). This underlines DeFalco's argument that "cultures that value autonomy and invulnerability scoff at tears, fears, swoons, and sighs" (37). Flo's lesson of emotional repression teaches Rose the quality DeFalco identifies in Munro's female protagonists: "the young, poor, white women living in repressive families and repressive rural communities…can't afford affect because it threatens to aggravate and amplify their subordinate status" (DeFalco 39).

Hemmed in by the self-erasure of girls and women expected in Huron County culture, Rose develops inclinations for acting and storytelling as a means of dealing with her "sticky" emotions. Flo's multidimensional role further influences her step-daughter, as Rose inherits this skill from Flo: "Flo and Rose had switched roles. Now Rose was the one bringing stories home" ("Half" 43). While Rose's transformation "into chronicler," with swagger and without nerves ("Half" 44), points to the empowering aspects of the practice, it also points to a desire to avoid emotion. DeFalco suggests that in becoming the storyteller, Rose retreats emotionally and ethically from the material of the story: "the refusal to risk being affected is the refusal to engage and be responsible" (49). Storytelling thus becomes Rose's means of disconnecting from the

[8] Harvard psychiatrist Judith Herman's book *Trauma and Recover: The Aftermath of Violence—From Domestic Abuse to Political Power* is regarded a classic in the field of trauma studies and considers the dual historical development of men's and women's trauma.

"sticky" affects of her social context. In the context of working class, rural Ontario with limited access to fresh fruit, Rose told the story in Health class that she ate half a grapefruit for breakfast each morning: "Rose was pleased with herself…with the way she had said it, in so bold, yet natural, a voice" ("Half" 43). Telling the story was Rose's way of vying for status with the town kids, "to align herself with towners, against her place of origin" ("Half" 42), for Rose is from the rougher and poorer West Hanratty rather than Hanratty proper. Rose does not tell Flo the story of the grapefruit, because she is inheriting Flo's storytelling pose of distanced condescension: "Rose would not have told her anything in which she did not play a superior, an onlooker's part" ("Half" 44). After she achieves urban success, Rose distances herself from the rural poverty of her childhood by mythologizing it, and in Franny's case, disconnecting from the violence within her community that her later audience prides itself on finding self-righteously "deplorable" ("Privilege" 30). As her acting career progresses, Rose becomes proud of her working-class roots and her ability to rise above them, while she deplores authors who lack such knowledge and experience: as she admits, she becomes "a prig about poverty," disparaging Katherine Mansfield's upper-class world with its unawareness of poverty ("Half" 52). Stories become a means of empowerment, when, at a party, Rose feels socially powerless until she asserts a superior position in the comical story of her powerless cat, who she accidentally kills in her clothes dryer. With this story, Rose "penetrate[s]" the party as her audience moans or laughs and the room becomes "less hostile" ("Luck" 165). As with Flo's, Rose's stories come with attendant ironies: they place her in a superior stance required for self-empowerment but serve as emotional economies; devices that make her invulnerable and emotionally disconnected from violence and class shame.

Flo's instillation of fear and regulatory emotional practices post-beating, and her own victimization, reveal how one becomes a woman**.** Quoting Simone de Beauvoir's maxim that "one is not born, but rather *becomes* a woman" (301), Butler defines the term *woman* as "an ongoing discursive practice" and "a becoming, a constructing that cannot rightfully be said to originate or to end" (Butler *Gender Trouble* 45). Butler also recognizes that "acts either conform to an expected gender identity or contest that expectation in some way" ("Performative" 527); therefore, "there are clear punishments for contesting the script by performing out of turn or through unwarranted improvisations" (531). Thus, Rose's codebook of shame and her emotional economies develop through punitive practices designed to prohibit innovating gender as part of the regulatory social conventions within the community.

Acting and storytelling develop in reaction to trauma and to the emotional disconnection of Rose's codebook as they simultaneously become Rose's means of empowerment and reconnection. It is important to note that Flo gifts Rose not only with the legacy of storytelling but with that of mimicry. In her youth, Flo has been beaten for her mimicry, but that does not mean that she can resist the impulse. Flo goes downtown to Hanratty proper and returns with mocking stories of the middle-class people. She makes them seem like "monsters [of] self-approbation" ("Beatings" 13). Flo also mocks Becky Tyde, the girl deformed by polio who visits the store occasionally, with "her humoring voice, full of false geniality" ("Beatings" 8). As an experienced woman within her culture, Flo uses stories to instill warranted caution in Rose. All of Flo's stories of the horrific behaviours of men in the larger world are paralleled by Rose's later stories of the

horrors of her poverty-stricken childhood, including those of being beaten by her father and being molested by the supposed United Church minister on the train during her first independent trip to Toronto; in fact, Flo told her to watch out "for people dressed up as ministers" ("Swans" 59). Rose inherits Flo's abilities as a mimic, and Flo's consternation about men's threat of violence predicts Rose's adult experience.

The motif of women being "smashed" physically and psychologically appears throughout the collection. Rose's contesting gender norms simultaneously exists with the widespread risk of trauma for women that permeates Rose's public school, where "fights and sex and pilferage were the most important things going on" ("Privilege" 32). Goldman connects beatings with the feeling of being "smashed" (92). Women are "smashed," abused. Rose witnesses a girl with an intellectual disability, Franny McGill, repeatedly raped by her brother and father, leaving Franny "stunned, bewildered, by continual assault" that the community fails to stop ("Privilege" 30). According to local legend, Franny's disability springs from being "smashed against the wall" by her father ("Privilege" 29). Similarly, during the molestation by the supposed minister, Rose fantasizes being "smashed" when she longs to be "[p]ounded, pleasured, reduced, exhausted" ("Swans" 120). Through this fantasy, she internalizes the violent nature of submission to a masculine counterpart and dissociates by going "deeper and deeper into a protective mode" (Perry and Winfrey 86-87).[9] Later, Rose feels "smashed, under the skin" when anxious and humiliated about what her students may be saying about her ("Simon's Luck" 168). This "smashing" persists from Rose's childhood, when she performs an emotional economy by deliberately inuring herself to Franny's repeated abuse: "Rose was interested but not alarmed…it was only further abuse" ("Privilege" 30). For Butler, gender "is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time [and] instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts"* (516). Thus, the "smashing" of women constructs identity and expectations of submission within Rose constituted in her cultural context and tied to abuse.

Munro's autobiographical connection to Franny's abuse from her memories of childhood qualifies the collection as part of Tal's "literature of trauma…written from the need to tell and retell the story of the traumatic experience, to make it 'real' to both the victim and the community" as "validation and cathartic vehicle for the traumatized author" ("Worlds" 21). Munro admits that Franny's abuse and incest are "'the most autobiographical thing[s] in *Who Do You Think You Are*?' and [they] galvanized her fierce desire to document her experiences at the school she 'actually attended'" (Goldman 93). Through fictionalized individual experiences, Munro communicates what Tal asserts as a cultural condition: "[w]omen and girls are taught to believe that they provoke men into assaulting them, and that they will bring pain and humiliation onto themselves for dressing, speaking, or acting in a provocative manner" ("Worlds" 20). At school, Rose learns to act as prey: "She learned never to go near the school basement…not to attract in any way the attention of the big boys, who seemed like wild dogs, to her, just as quick and strong…jubilant in attack" ("Privilege" 30).

[9] For an explanation of "freezing" in reaction to threats, see Perry and Winfrey 85.

Rose's emotional lessons extend beyond avoiding violence. Hanratty's community upholds the "Who do you think you are?" ethic that enforces humility, fosters self-abnegation, and induces shame in those who draw attention to themselves. The people of Hanratty do not support anyone who "talks back" or "acts smart." In Hanratty, "one of the most derogatory things that could be said about anyone was that he or she was fond of parading around" ("Who" 203). When Rose's teacher accuses her of self-display, the narrator states that "this was not the first time Rose had been asked who she thought she was" ("Who" 208). Rose understands that the teacher was trying to teach her the lesson that she and "many other people believed she needed" ("Who" 209). Yet, Rose refuses to learn the lesson of conformity by ignoring the question: "she paid no attention to it" ("Who" 208).[10] While defying these social constraints imposed on her free expression of her selfhood, the moral imperative of self-erasure imposed by the repressive "Who do you think you are?" ethic entwines with the shame inflicted by trauma to have a lasting impact. As a successful actress, Rose still feels an inner sense of failure "she couldn't seize upon or explain" ("Who" 216). Rose finds that success and fame may come, but not without the inner censure that they are excessive and unwarranted; having them, she is an impostor. As Janet, a successful writer in "The Moons of Jupiter" finds, the implied message from her father is that "Fame must be striven for, then apologized for. Getting it or not getting it, you will be to blame" (76).[11] For both Janet and Rose, the cost of this ethic is emotional distance from their respective fathers and an emotional withdrawal in stressful situations.

A lesson on survival for Rose, stemming from the context of gender-based trauma present in Hanratty, is that hope remains at an emotional distance and mixes with humiliation. The collection depicts Rose learning that the self is unworthy: only self-abnegation will bring social approval; furthermore, hope itself is out of place and painful, an unwelcome guest. Rose is disgusted with Franny's hope: "in spite of everything there was something hopeful about her…it was necessary to fend her off firmly" ("Privilege" 29). Yet Rose must learn to repress her own hope: for her first love, or what Flo calls her "idol," Rose chooses Cora, a "tall, solid, womanly" older girl ("Privilege" 36). Flo is sickened not by "future homosexuality," but by love and the danger of Rose's "headlong hopefulness, readiness, need" ("Privilege" 39). Rose sees "Flo trying to warn and alter her" ("Privilege" 40), to make her less vulnerable to emotional risk. The humiliation of hope remains with Rose into adulthood. When missing Simon, she feels that "[t]he most mortifying thing of all was simply hope, which burrows so deceitfully at first, masks itself cunningly, but not for long" ("Luck" 180). According to Rose, "in a week's time [hope] can be out…singing hymns at heaven's gate" ("Luck" 180). This is an allusion to Shakespeare's sonnet

[10] Munro defied the "Who" ethic in her own life as a young girl who "talked back" and "'wasn't a nice child [when] being nice meant such a terrible abdication of self'" (S. Munro 151).

[11] Before deciding that *Who Do You Think You Are?* should focus on Rose as the main protagonist, Munro intended to include the "The Moons of Jupiter" in the collection but omitted it during the collection's reorganization (348). Thacker calls "Moons" "a lyric poem to Robert Laidlaw" because Munro's father became "an intimate presence in the fabric of her breakthrough stories," including "The Moons of Jupiter" and "Beggar Maid" (316). As an intimate fictionalization of Munro's relationship with her father, "Moons" articulates the same repressive ethic and its attendant emotional distancing portrayed in the *Who* collection. Of note, "The Moons of Jupiter" became the title story of her next collection.

that begins “When, in disgrace with fortune and men’s eyes / I all alone beweep my outcast state” (Shakespeare 1-2). Unlike the lover who believes his love will support him in his disgrace and “outcast state” (Shakespeare 2), Rose associates the hope of Simon’s return with humiliation. She hopes that Simon will return but imagines their relationship later dying (“Luck” 180). Hope persists in Rose, as it does even in Franny, but it becomes almost unbearable; surviving it becomes a matter of distancing herself from its emotional intensity or performing “affective economies” (DeFalco and York).

Due to her father’s male domination and her own consequent emotional economies, Rose’s romantic relationships become fraught with the struggle for power, and she tarries with the negative emotions caused by men’s unlimited social power during her failed marriage to Patrick. Rose understands that their first meeting, in which Patrick comforts her after she has been assaulted by some anonymous leg-grabber in the library, turns her into a “*damsel in distress*” (“Maid” 79), but she does not identify with the “milky surrender” of the maid in the painting *King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid* mentioned to her by Patrick: “She studied the Beggar Maid, meek and voluptuous, with her shy white feet. The milky surrender of her, the helplessness and gratitude” (82). What Rose does desire, ironically, is the image of masculinity as physically dominant established by her father’s beatings: such a man, like King Cophetua whom she associates with virility, “would make a puddle of her, with his fierce desire. There would be no apologizing with him, none of that flinching, that lack of faith, that seemed to be revealed in all transactions with Patrick” (82). According to Maria Loschnigg, “Rose does not actually identify with ‘the Beggar Maid,’ but she nonetheless flirts with this idea of total submission” (65). Similarly, Berndt argues that Rose is aware of Patrick’s “lack of self-confidence and social awkwardness” but is intrigued by his “courtship fantasy” (529). Rose distorts her love relationship by perceiving it as a struggle for power, just as Patrick does, and as Rose had done as a girl when she longed to be the ambitious Lady MacBeth, who urges her reluctant husband to commit regicide for the sake of power (“Half” 52). Therefore, while Rose refuses to fully submit to Patrick’s delusory fantasy of chivalrous devotion, beneath which lies his actual class arrogance (and beneath that lies the constant belittling by his father), she engages with submission as a characteristic of womanhood taught by the social norms of the time, and she unthinkingly accepts the image of a physically dominant and virile masculinity that Patrick, with cruel irony, fails to fulfill.

Rose’s expression of love for Patrick becomes tied to power. Rose submits to his code of chivalric devotion: when Patrick asks if she loves him, he “look[s] at her in a scared and threatening way. Then when she said yes he said how lucky he was” (“Maid” 83). Rose “[doesn’t] like the worship, really; it was only the idea of it she liked” (“Maid” 88). However, at the end of their brief breakup, Rose feels “a violent temptation” to “hurl herself” at Patrick and proclaim her love in a picture of laughter and forgiveness, and she does (“Maid” 101). After their divorce, she blames her own submission to vanity, “to see if she could [bring him back his happiness]. She could not resist such a test of power” (“Maid” 101). For Rose, asserting her love for Patrick becomes a means of attaining power within their relationship.

Yet, Rose’s submission is imbricated with authenticity, as Rose attempts to conform to Patrick’s sexual expectations but simultaneously contests them with her body’s genuine desire

for food, in an expression of "body shame," springing from the failure "to mimic the norm," as identified by Marlene Goldman (81). Rose internalizes that "poverty in girls was not attractive unless combined with sweet sluttishness, stupidity" (Munro "Maid" 76). In bed, Rose performs pleasure, but when finished, her body desires "something delicious to eat, a sundae at Boomers" (87). Berndt argues that Rose fails to express what she feels must be the norm of sexual expectations for poor girls but simultaneously expresses her authentic desire for sweets:

> It is not a coincidence that she is greedy for sweets rather than wanting…nourishing substance…And it is a rather delicious irony that her hunger for luscious treats easily surpasses her longing for sexual intimacy with Patrick…Unlike her satisfaction about having mastered the task of sexual intimacy, which betrays a common wish to conform to social conventions, the pleasure that Rose experiences when consuming sweets is genuine and sensual. (531)

Rose acknowledges she "was destroying herself for him." She knows Patrick's dissatisfaction with her "jittery sexual boldness" aligns with his overarching desire to transform her as he "love[s] some obedient image of herself that she could not see" ("Maid" 88). Goldman argues that Rose "repeatedly grants all her lovers…absolute power to validate or annihilate her sense of self-worth" as she "initially cleaves to masochistic fantasies of patriarchal control" (95). Sex with Patrick requires his absolution of her failure to meet his expectations: when he desires to make love, he makes an "indulgent little clucking noise that meant she was absolved of all her failings for the moment" ("Mischief" 133); hence, sex irritates Rose "the way Modern Art irritated Patrick" ("Mischief" 122). Her body shame continues in her later relationships as she feels "[Simon's] body would never be in question" but hers would always seem to be "putrefying" ("Luck" 181). Because of her trauma, Rose diffidently cedes control of her relationship to Patrick and thus submits herself to ongoing shame.

When Patrick exerts emotional violence on Rose by wanting to transform her, Rose reacts with reciprocal violence by insulting him with "[y]ou're a sissy…[y]ou're a prude" ("Maid" 98), and temporarily ending their relationship, stating she never loved him (98). In addition to this emotional toxicity, the physical violence of their marriage reproduces Rose's father's physical violence, because, as Herman notes, "no ordinary relationship offers the same intensity as the pathological bond with the abuser" (92):

> [Rose] had scars on her wrists and her body, which she had made…with a razor blade. Once in the kitchen of this house Patrick had tried to choke her. Once she had run outside and knelt in her nightgown, tearing up handfuls of grass. ("Providence" 143)

Further, the roles of victim and victimizer are blurred throughout their marriage as Rose admits: "Sometimes she flew at him; sometimes he beat her" ("Maid" 101). This informs Rose's engagement with sadomasochism, as argued by Yuhui 9: "Rose's relations with…Patrick descend into what René Girard describes as pathological sadomasochism" (1). Bao argues that Rose "might seem reflexively to reject such a role [ie. the peripheral figure to be pitied and salvaged more than loved] but her behaviour in fact embraces it, seeks to provoke him to

dominate her. In short, she wants Patrick to take on a role that is familiar to her" (9). By sexualizing Patrick in the snow, Rose communicates a desire for Patrick to act aggressively, in line with the masculine stereotypes of the time, which she, ironically, shares: "Her bullying hand went for his fly. To stop her, to keep her quiet, Patrick had to struggle with her…As soon as he started to fight she was relieved…but she had to keep resisting, until he proved himself stronger" ("Maid" 85). Rose admits her motivation: "[S]he was sick of herself as much as him…Some outrageous and cruel things were being shouted inside her" ("Maid" 83). Rose desires the aggressive model of male behaviour established in her codebook through gender-based violence in Hanratty. Bao argues that "the trajectory for this sadomasochism is situated in class and culture. Rose's background makes her unable to bear the 'fondling' that a woman from an entirely different background…might not at all have seen as sign of masculine weakness" (10).

As a cost of engagement with oppressive frameworks of power that inform her expectations of love and punish improvisations, Rose submits to punitive and controlling romantic relationships during her affairs with Clifford and Tom. Rose maintains a constrained position of sticky affects, of humiliation and shame, when "in love" during her affair with Clifford ("Mischief" 105). Anna Fornari argues that "the secret tryst was Rose's attempt at erasing humiliation, yet it served only to increase it…Once again Rose had put herself in a situation where she was not free" (135). Their meeting at Powell River reinforces Clifford's power, as he keeps her waiting and calls their meeting "only mischief" (130). When Rose moves to Kelowna with Anna, ending her decade of marriage with Patrick, she cannot make the transition without a link to a man. Though she has had only one weekend in Victoria with Tom, a married History professor in Calgary, Rose considers that "[w]ithout this connection to a man, she might have seen herself as an uncertain and pathetic person; that connection held her new life in place" ("Providence" 152). When leaving Simon, Rose admits she has found many "overblown excuses" for leaving or staying in a place "on account of some man" ("Luck" 180). After her divorce, Rose exists in a liminal stage: she performs within the cycle of a patriarchal prison yet progresses in developing authenticity.

As a cost of trauma, Rose disconnects from Anna, yet innovates her performance of gender through single motherhood as she transitions to further independence. Rose must provide for Anna through a performance of motherhood that opposes the mainstream cultural structure of the loving couple and the family in favour of living unconventionally as single mother and daughter. Rose exhibits guilt, or fear, regarding her provision for Anna when she sees Anna alone "in front of the television eating Captain Crunch" at dinner time (150), yet she also feels a sense of maternal accomplishment as she both does her job and comes to understand domesticity, "the meaning of shelter" (151). According to Kristina Getz, "Rose succeeds in making a home—however briefly—for her daughter that is independent of the interference of any male figure, effectively free from the limitations and expectations of patriarchal motherhood" (104). Yet even Rose must acknowledge that the abuse within her marriage has pushed the cycle of trauma onto their daughter: "for Anna this bloody fabric her parents had made…was still the true web of life, of father and mother, of beginning and shelter" (Providence 143). Leaving the marriage creates the potential to subvert the pattern of victim and victimizer. Rose's new life

comes with a major cost: losing custody of Anna; yet it also has a major benefit: the freedom to pursue her career. The brutality of the exchange is heartbreaking. Patrick takes Anna back to live with him and his girlfriend Elizabeth, because it would be better for Anna than "traipsing around with Rose in her new independent existence" (160). This suggests that mothers should not "traipse," they should be "stable," like Elizabeth (160). Getz argues that "Providence" exists as an early example of Canadian fiction "that explores the conflicts inherent to maternal experiences of feminist liberation." Further, "Providence," written in the context of the peak of second-wave feminism, "suggests that reconciling motherhood with liberation and self-realization…is, in fact, impossible" (Getz 96-98). Thus, improvising gender requires a cost: "Rose is unable to escape what she perceives as a binary choice, relinquishing her motherhood in exchange for her freedom" (Getz 109). As Jacques Derrida states, "life is living on, life is survival" (qtd. in Morgenstern). The text focuses on the high cost of Rose's ongoing efforts at innovating gender for a woman in her social context and in her time. Herman notes that in the aftermath of trauma "[i]t is the victims, not the perpetrators, who feel guilty" (53). Again, it is a matter of imbrication: Rose innovates gender and pays a devastating cost; she develops an inner sense of failure and shame, yet this becomes a productive failure leading to authenticity over gender essentialism.

This innovating act within her role as a mother, punished with disconnection from Anna, leads Rose to let go of the constraints imposed by marriage. Goldman uses Jack Halberstam's term "the queer art of failure" as defining "generative and productive forms of failure, including the failures associated with imperfection, illness and disability" (87). Rose's romantic relationships consistently fail, though with Simon, this failure is due to his unknown illness rather than Rose's self-defined emotional imperfections. Simon digs her a garden, comically imitating the Yorkshire gardener, Mellors, in D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterly's Lover* when seeking her approval of his work: "I hope I done it to your satisfaction, mum" ("Luck" 175). When she clings to humiliation as part of the emotional codebook of her trauma, he urges her "not to be so thin-skinned" ("Luck"175). Rose's infatuation escalates to her declaration of love: "Simon…you're the man of my life!" ("Luck" 175). Although their relationship is healthier than the abusive, humiliating relationships of Rose's past, in a moment of shame, she blames herself when he fails to arrive for the weekend: "this was a situation she had created…it seemed she never learned any lessons at all" ("Luck" 178). Rose continues to associate her romantic relationships with failure, but this instance proves to be productive for her freedom.

Rose's road trip west represents her letting go of the trauma and shame that have dogged her relationships in favour of freedom and innovation. She leaves behind her diffident dependence on male power. The further she drives, the more her love for Simon and her need to be connected to a man for self-worth lessen:

> And so it was, back and forth, as if the rear end of the car was held by a magnetic force, which ebbed and strengthened…but the strength was never quite enough to make her turn, and after a while she became almost impersonally curious, seeing it as a real physical force and wondering if it was getting weaker, as she drove, as if at some point far

> ahead the car and she would leap free of it, and she would recognize the moment when she left its field. ("Luck" 181)

At a small town in view of the Cypress Hills, Rose releases her obligation to meet romantic expectations and embraces freedom. Further west, "[o]n the Hope-Princeton highway she got out of the car and stood in the cool rain of the coastal mountains. She felt relatively safe, and exhausted, and sane, though she knew she had left some people behind who would not agree with that. Luck was with her" ("Luck" 183). When Rose accepts the role of "pseudo-mother" for "eccentrics and drifters" on a television show in Vancouver, she feels like "old horsehide" compared to her acting peers on the coast, with whom emotional fragility is lauded as the byword of the day ("Luck" 183). This role, likely based on Molly, the nurturing mother-figure who runs the town café and community meeting point Molly's Reach in the television series *The Beachcombers* that ran from 1972 to 1990 ("Molly's Reach"), influences Rose's personal development in favour of connection with community: "She was already beginning to adopt some of the turns of phrase, the mannerisms, of the character she was to play" ("Luck" 183). A new confidence emerges in Rose, yet her victory is ambivalent since this newfound emotional distance is also an impairment of emotional openness: it is an exercise of extreme prudence about romantic attachments that maintains the rather severe affective economies of turning her back on the cultural ideal of lifelong heterosexual happiness.

Simon's dying disarranges Rose's understanding of her life and catalyzes her movement into a new life. The story "Simon's Luck" ends with this sentence: "Simon's dying struck Rose as that kind of disarrangement. It was preposterous, it was unfair, that such a chunk of information should have been left out, and that Rose even at this late date could have thought herself the only person who could seriously lack power" (185). This denouement emphasizes Rose's continuing need for empowerment, but also demonstrates that her impulsive and willful reaction to Simon's unexpected death from cancer has indeed empowered her to some extent. If the collection could be said to follow a continuous plot line, Rose's moment of letting go of her romantic dreams would be its climax. Rose's television series protects its viewers "from those predictable disasters…the disarrangements which demand new judgements and solutions" ("Luck" 185), but, according to Lawrence Mathews, what he calls Munro's "art of disarrangement" does not; rather, it provides frequent reminders that "in the face of life's complexity and mystery…one should proceed warily, in humility, even, in a sense, quixotically." Rose does often proceed cautiously, playing the role of the victim and the submissive female in the gender binary of her time; yet she remains steadfastly Rose and manages to improvise gender in a way that shows some of the chivalry and courage so falsely claimed by her husband Patrick. In pursuing her hopes of romantic love, Rose has imposed a mendacious pattern upon her own experience (Mathews), but in abandoning this delusory pursuit, Rose does indeed act bravely in improvising gender. Rose reclaims the courageous self that has always been present within her beneath the shame and trepidation caused by her early trauma. As Ted Morgan describes Rose in a *Saturday Review* commentary on the collection, "She is immensely likeable, and there is a gallantry in her willingness to take risks, open herself up to the chance of love, and measure herself against what she was and fled from" (qtd in Thacker 361). There is

gallantry too in her bravely abandoning the ideal of the heteronormative couple and in her continued loyalty to her personal and cultural roots.

Perry and Winfrey remind us that trauma causes disconnection from others, and that recovery from trauma involves reconnection: “a healthy community is a healing community, and a healing community is full of hope because it has seen its own people weather—survive and thrive” (203).[12] While Rose pays the price of innovating gender through her divorce and disconnection with Anna, she passes on a sense of happiness to her audience in her long-running television role as pseudo-mother to loners and misfits; in so doing, she subverts the victim and victimizer pattern. Herman states that in reconnection, “[the survivor] is ready to incorporate the lessons of her traumatic experience into her life. She is ready to increase her sense of power…to protect herself against further danger, and to deepen her alliances with those whom she has learned to trust” (197).[13]

Herman argues that the statement “‘I know I have myself’ could stand in as the emblem of the third and final stage of recovery. The survivor no longer feels possessed by her traumatic past; she is in possession of herself” (202). Rose’s improvisation of gender and its effects, namely separation and reconnection, indicates a path towards authenticity and self-knowledge that justify the improvisation of gender as a valid form of processing trauma, because her consequent reconnection with community leads to healing, freedom, and empowerment.

Rose finds reconnection within Hanratty, the source of trauma and shame from punitive social conventions. While Rose’s early relationship with Flo involved the shame associated with the beatings and with Flo’s harsh judgments, the relationship shifts as Rose takes on a comforting role in Flo’s process of aging; this parallels the comforts Flo has provided to Rose after the beatings. In Flo’s later years, Rose returns to Hanratty as often as possible to look in on her, and Rose shows great patience when Flo dresses up to attend an awards ceremony in Toronto. Clad in the hip seventies garb of a mauve jumpsuit and grey wig, Flo causes a “stir” when she sees a Black colleague of Rose’s and exclaims, in “simple, gratified astonishment,” “Look at the [N-word]!” (“Spelling” 199). Flo stands “astonished and unflinching in the middle of that gathering of the bearded and beaded, the unisexual and the unashamedly un-Anglo-Saxon” (“Spelling” 199). Rose later finds the wig when cleaning out her childhood home and brings it to Flo in the County Home. When Flo comically cries “‘is it a dead gray squirrel?’” Rose sticks “it on her head, to continue the comedy,” and Flo laugh[s] “so that she rocked back and forth in her crib” (“Spelling” 200). Through acting out comedy and providing Flo with emotional comfort in the Home, Rose reconnects with that younger part of herself who felt “a layer of loyalty and protectiveness…hardening around every memory she had, around the store and the town, the flat, somewhat scrubby, unremarkable town” (“Maid” 93-94). Even during her marriage to

[12] Herman identifies group solidarity as “the strongest antidote” to trauma (214).

[13] Herman uses “she” to describe the recovery from trauma since being traumatized is more commonly part of the female experience than the male experience.

Patrick, Rose never abandoned her loyalty to her working-class roots: “Her allegiances were far more proud and stubborn than his” (“Maid” 94).

Through loyalty to Hanratty and reconnection to familial relationships, despite their involvement in developing shame and trauma within Rose’s codebook, she finds healing and authenticity through common skills, those skills that became her means of finding a group of peers. Ironically, many in her community have come from the same roots. For her friends in the theatre community, she tells stories of her past (“Privilege” 30). For comic effect at parties, Rose reads out the letter from Flo expressing her shame at Rose’s nudity in the televised version of the play *The Trojan Women,* in which the female characters bared one breast. Rose does it “to show the gulf that lay behind her, though she did not realize…that such a gulf was nothing special” to her listeners (“Spelling” 198). The narrator states that “[m]ost of her friends…could lay claim to being disowned or prayed for, in some disappointed home” (“Spelling” 198). Rose’s successful innovation of social scripts is shared by her peers in the acting community, as many of them have come from families who view their careers, on some level, as failures. Rose’s common ground with this community of peers demonstrates reconnection as a tool for healing from trauma, as Herman clarifies: “With peers, [the survivor] can now seek mutual friendships that are not based on performance, image, or maintenance of a false self” (205). Rose’s reconnection to her engineer brother Brian demonstrates a compromise in favour of connection by means of storytelling. Brian disparages her career as an actress, but Rose finds a common ground on which they can relate affably in her stories of Milton Homer and Hanratty (“Who” 201).

Though abuse and intuited love were imbricated in Rose’s childhood relationship with her father, Rose finds an intimate and authentic connection based on survival with a peer in Hanratty, Ralph Gillespie, though it remains on an intuited rather than a spoken level. Goldman argues that their childhood relationship “align[s] them with the ‘queer art of failure’” (96): Rose and Ralph connect in childhood through their similarities in imperfect “habits or tendencies” and through this “they developed the comradeship of captives, of soldiers who have no heart for the campaign, wishing only to survive and avoid action” (“Who” 211). As a child, when Ralph mimics Milton Homer, the town clown and the only one given license to “parade around” and to make a mockery of every parade he attends (“Who” 204). Rose desires the “the courage and the power” to be like Ralph, to “fill up in that magical, releasing way, transform herself” (“Half” 212). Halberstam states, “the queer art of failure involves the acceptance of the finite, the embrace of the absurd, the silly, the hopelessly goofy. Rather than resisting the endings and limits, let us instead revel in and cleave to all our own inevitable fantastical failures” (qtd in Goldman 88).

As adults, both Rose and Ralph embrace their fantastical failure to perform within Hanratty’s punitive expectations. When they meet at the Legion, “there was the same silent joke, the same conspiracy, comfort; the same, the same” (“Who” 217). Ralph’s mimicry of Milton Homer continues into adulthood as a means of authenticity in reaction to the trauma he endures: Ralph is smashed in an accident during his time in the Navy (“Who” 214). This physical smashing exemplifies the “commonality of affliction” between men’s combat trauma and women’s trauma from domestic abuse (Herman 32). Some in Hanratty hold a grudge

against Ralph, “so natural an attitude,” because he receives a military pension (“Who” 214); similarly, when recognized in Hanratty as a television personality, Rose feels “an absurd impulse to apologize [that is] stronger than usual” (“Who” 216). Ralph becomes a foil for Rose: they both endure the effects of trauma, but while Ralph deals with psychological trauma through self-medication with alcohol, leading to his early death in a drunken fall from the Legion steps (“Who” 219), Rose finds healing. In conversation with Ralph, Rose acknowledges her codebook of shame, and rather than simply stating it as fact as she does with Simon (“Luck” 175), with Ralph her shame eases: “That peculiar shame which she carried around with her seemed to have been eased…everything she had done could sometimes be seen as a mistake…but when she thought about [Ralph] afterwards her mistakes appeared unimportant” (“Who” 218). Indeed, as Goldman argues, “Rose typically idolizes and sexualizes men and allows them a kind of sadistic power over her,” but in her platonic friendship with Ralph, there is no distorting shame (98). Rose continues her affective economy upon Ralph’s death as “an honourable restraint [keeps] her quiet,” but in the denouement of the final story of the collection, she privately acknowledges their shared success in “the queer art of failure”: “she felt his life, close, closer than the lives of men she’d loved, one slot over from her own” (“Who” 219).

Rose’s intuited love for her father and connection with Ralph signal her indirect expression of love for those with whom she reconnects. Rose does not tell her father she loves him, nor does she express her lack of shame to Ralph, but instead chooses emotional economies by remaining silent. In reconnection, Rose sees her own people weather: Rose shows love for Flo by caring for her in Flo’s old age, feeling “fits of worry” that drive her to visit and arranging Flo’s care in the County Home (“Spelling” 193). With Brian, underneath their disagreements and “old competition,” she feels “they loved each other” but instead of telling him, she tries to avoid “sticky and stale arguments” (“Spelling” 192). That Rose is silenced from expressing her genuine love signals how the repressive small-town ethic of “Who do you think you are?” is imbricated with the shaming effects of trauma in causing her self-denial. Yet inwardly Rose knows that she has been loved and is loved; she has experienced a deep kinship with others; thus, her failure is inseparable from her triumph.

Herman states that “[e]mpowerment and reconnection are the core experiences of recovery.” With survival comes the possibility of reconnecting with freedom, and thus the possibility of hope. While Rose’s childhood trauma at the hands of her father resulted in a loss of hope, Rose becomes an entertainer, passing on a sense of liberation in contrast to the restrictive small-town cultural ethic of “Who do you think you are?” Rose survives the social constraints that developed her codebook of sticky affects by developing authentic skills in performance inherited from the family who caused her victimization, by reconnecting with family and by cultivating professional connections within the theatre community. To relieve tension after Rose’s childhood beatings, Flo lays “stiff as a board” across two chairs and does a trick, to which the family “crie[s] out in triumph.” This feat of physical strength brings the home back to equilibrium with “a feeling of permission, relaxation, even a current of happiness” (23), highlighting Rose’s multi-dimensional familial relationships. Although childhood violence has imposed sticky affects on her adult life, Rose innovates gender: she pursues a profession that allows her the courage to resist becoming a victimizer and instead cultivate emotional

equilibrium through reconnection with others and with self. As Margaret Atwood suggests, personal authenticity is, for “Munro’s women,” an “essential element, like air. The characters must get hold of at least some of it, by fair means or foul, or—they feel—they will go under” (*MBS* xvii).

In the later stages of her life, Rose finds empowerment through storytelling, acting, and her costly letting go of the cultural ideal of heterosexual fidelity that she previously clung to in her sadomasochistic marriage. In this letting go, Rose subverts the pattern of victim and victimizer and survives the punitive restrictions that cultivated emotional disconnection and affective economies. She survives, she innovates, she fails. The central irony of the collection is that Rose is oppressed by Huron County’s punitive “Who Do You Think You Are?” ethic, yet she takes the question seriously in an existential sense and pursues self-knowledge. Being an imaginative and self-aware person, her commitment to self-knowledge never falters, though at several points, the stories note a further irony: that the human capacity for self-knowledge is itself imperfect. Rose hears the call of authenticity and cannot help but respond. The disarrangements of her life are the challenges that also bring productive changes; her failures are her victories. Rose is multi-dimensional, as are the characters she interacts with; as with all of Munro’s central characters, they have depths that are only suggested: there is always more to be known about them. Munro’s vision includes the mysteries of character, narrative, and life. Rose’s tarrying with “sticky” affects of shame and humiliation is imbricated with fantastical failures in a multi-dimensional journey towards personal authenticity.

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