

### **The semiotics and politics of the female body: A comprehensive analysis of *Elfen Lied* and its opening song**

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*This paper develops an exhaustive analysis of the Japanese animation series *Elfen Lied* (2004) and its opening song, "Lilium", which is an exceptional case within its field of production because its lyrics are written in Latin. The purpose of my analysis is to determine if "Lilium" and its visual presentation really have something to do (thematically and stylistically) with the series it presents, or not. My hypothesis is that "Lilium", both in its musical level and in its visual presentation, fulfils all the formal characteristics of both a lied and an overture; and, given the latter, anticipates core thematic and stylistic elements of the work it precedes. Moreover, it even subtly anticipates the ideological content of the series, which consists of a critical reading of gender roles and feminism in contemporary Japanese and global society. To demonstrate these hypotheses, I made a detailed analysis of *Elfen Lied*, paying special attention to its animated adaptation but not ignoring its original manga version; and then I analyzed "Lilium" in its three aspects: its visual presentation, its lyric and its musical score. I have analyzed and emphasized how the abundant intertextualities present in "Lilium" were productive for creating music and for transmitting the artistic and ideological content present in the series. The paper adopts an interdisciplinary perspective, and uses theoretical tools from the fields of semiotics, intertextuality, and reception theory.*

The song «Lilium», written by Japanese composers Konishi Kayō and Kondō Yukio<sup>1</sup> and used as the opening song of the animated series *Elfen Lied* (2004), quickly became one of the the most popular and emblematic *anime* songs of the last 20 years. This is due to several reasons. Firstly, *Lilium* retakes a practice which was common in the Japanese animation of the '70s, '80s, and '90s: the song composed *ad hoc* for the series it introduces. In the decades mentioned above, it was common for the opening and ending songs to be created by the same band or composer who wrote the instrumental incidental music of each series<sup>2</sup>; however, from 2000 onwards, openings and

endings are mostly songs still unpublished, extracted from an upcoming album to be edited by some band or some famous or emerging soloist, and who have little or nothing to do (thematic and/or aesthetically speaking) with the series in which they appear<sup>3</sup>. The animated series, therefore, has become, as a cultural phenomenon, a kind of shop front which can be chosen by the record companies to exhibit and sell their future releases. *Lilium*, therefore, is remarkable for recovering a traditional practice, today fallen into disuse, in its field of cultural production.

Another reason why *Lilium* has managed to excel are its lyrics, written in correct Latin. This is

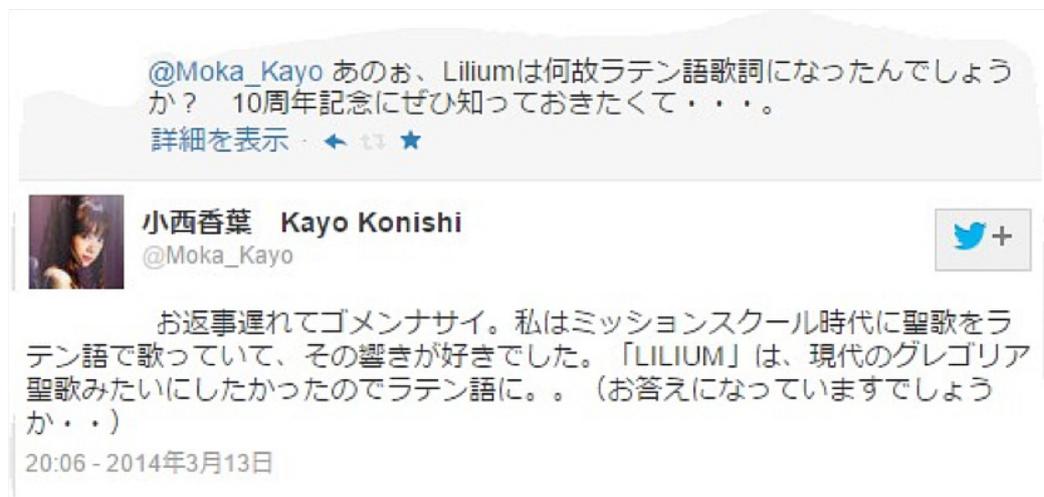


absolutely exceptional in the field of Japanese animation<sup>4</sup>; so much so that a Japanese fan contacted Konishi Kayō via Twitter on March the 13<sup>th</sup> 2014, to ask her specifically why the lyrics of *Lilium* were written in Latin<sup>5</sup>.

In *anime*, the opening and ending songs

of the story. Nevertheless, as a matter of fact *Elfen Lied* has a constant self-indulgence in this type of discursive isotopy breaks: issues of deep social concern such as bullying or sexual abuse and horrendous spectacles such as the unrestricted practice of physical violence coexist all the time with erotic insinua-

**Fig. 1** Twitter exchange between Konishi Kayō and a fan about the use of Latin in the lyrics of *Lilium*.



of each episode usually have lyrics in Japanese<sup>6</sup>, in English<sup>7</sup>, or (as is very common in Japanese pop music nowadays) in a not always successful mixture of both languages<sup>8</sup>; *Lilium*, therefore, is a unique phenomenon since no other series of animation before and after *Elfen Lied* chose to follow the same creative path.

Finally, the design of its visual presentation introduces several elements that are completely unusual in its field of production<sup>9</sup> and, therefore, also contributed to making *Lilium* a memorable song whose popularity, almost 15 years after its edition, has not waned yet.

However, one of the most peculiar features of *Lilium* is the strong antiphrasis noticed between its melancholic and kindly melodic character and the abundance of physical and psychological violence present in *Elfen Lied*. Certainly, being completely unexpected in the naive reading that the audience would do in its first viewing of the series, this antiphrasis contributes to make even more powerful the extreme violence of the first six minutes

and immature jokes that are not always consistent with their context of appearance. This situation causes *Elfen Lied* to be a series of «awkward and confusing reading»<sup>10</sup>. Transferring this matter to the opening sequence of the series, one might ask whether *Lilium* actually has something to do with *Elfen Lied* at the semantic level or if it is another one of the discursive inadequacies which the series regularly draws to as a narrative resource.

The latter hypothesis could be ruled out. Since *Lilium* was specially commissioned for a series that was already fully developed at the time of its composition, it is reasonable to conjecture that the composers, together with the director of the audiovisual project, conceived of it as representative of the content of the work. For this reason, I propose to perform a comprehensive analysis of *Lilium*, carefully observing the lyrics of the song, the visual design of its presentation, and its musical score, with the aim of putting in evidence the connections between *Lilium* and *Elfen Lied*. To fulfill our objectives, I will analyze *Lilium* from an interdisciplinary perspective,

simultaneously using tools provided by the theory of reception, semiotics, plastic arts, and musical theory.

However, in order to effectively and successfully carry out our analysis, before approaching the analysis of *Lilium* we must examine the narratological content of the story to which our object of study serves as an introduction, in order to be able to establish links between one and the other. Therefore, given the context of appearance of *Lilium*, my analysis of *Elfen Lied* will focus in the animated adaptation directed by Yoshioka Takao and Kanbe Mamoru; however, I will always keep in mind the original Japanese edition of the *manga* created in 2002 by Okamoto Rin, which consists of the original version of the story to be analyzed.

### The series

Before we begin, I think it is a good idea to give a short summary of *Elfen Lied*'s storyline, considering the possibility that some readers of this article may not be familiar with it.

The series tells the story of Lucy, a teenager who belongs to a new humanoid race called "diclonius". This species is characterized by having some sort of horns that resemble the cat's ears, telekinetic powers, and a homicidal instinct that leads them to murder human beings in an apparently indiscriminate way.

The story begins with Lucy's memorably violent escape from a science lab where she was being held for the purpose of study. At the last moment, a sniper hits a bullet in Lucy's head, knocking her unconscious and dropping her in the sea. This causes Lucy to become amnesiac and, as a result, an alternative, more childlike personality emerges from her. In this state, she is found

by the cousins Kōta (who is new to the city and is escaping from a painful event in his past) and Yuka (who is secretly in love with Kōta), who take her home and give her shelter. Since the amnesiac Lucy can only pronounce the word "Nyū", Kōta and Yuka give her precisely that onomatopoeia as a name. Lucy, Kōta and Yuka are joined by Mayu, a girl who has decided to become homeless to escape the sexual abuse of her stepfather, and her dog. Together, they decide to try to build a sort of family.

Lucy's escape causes the laboratory in which she was held to send both paramilitary forces and other diclonii (for example, a very young diclonius girl called Nana) to try to recapture her. This puts at risk both the peaceful life of the characters and that of their growing family. In addition, though Nyū is often the dominant personality, Lucy still emerges again at different times, especially when Nyū feels threatened. As the series goes on, past connections, which are often tragic, are revealed among the main characters, especially Lucy and Kouta.

Now that this brief plot summary has been made, we can begin the analysis of the work. Let's start by analyzing the title of the story. *Elfen Lied*, according to GENETTE 1988, HOEK 1981 and LAHLOU 1989, has a rhematic title, since it refers to another artistic work; in this case, it is a homonymous poem by the German Romantic poet Eduard Mörike (1804-1875) which was put into music in 1888 by the Austrian post-Romantic composer Hugo Wolf<sup>11</sup>.

When a literary work employs a rhematic title, it is often the case that the author considers that his work has strong thematic connections with the one to which he is referring. Let us then examine the poem *Elfen Lied* by Eduard Mörike<sup>12</sup>:

Bei Nacht im Dorf der Wächter rief: «Elfe!»  
Ein ganz kleines Elfchen im Walde schlief  
wohl um die Elfe!  
Und meint, es rief ihm aus dem Tal  
bei seinem Namen die Nachtigall,  
oder Silpelit hätt' ihm gerufen.  
Reibt sich der Elf' die Augen aus,  
begibt sich vor sein Schneckenhaus  
und ist als wie ein trunken Mann,  
sein Schläflein war nicht voll getan,  
und humpelt also tippe tapp



durch's Haselholz in's Tal hinab,  
schlupft an der Mauer hin so dicht,  
da sitzt der Glühwurm Licht an Licht.  
«Was sind das helle Fensterlein?  
Da drin wird eine Hochzeit sein:  
die Kleinen sitzen bei'm Mahle,  
und treiben's in dem Saale.  
Da guck' ich wohl ein wenig 'nein!»  
Pfui, stößt den Kopf an harten Stein!  
Elfe, gelt, du hast genug?  
Gukuk! Gukuk! Gukuk!

Mörike's poem is intertextual, since it is a parody of an homonymous poem written previously by Goethe and, as such, its understanding depends on the knowledge of the content of its hypotext. Goethe's *Elfen Lied* describes a dance of elves and goblins celebrated in the moonlight at midnight. As we can see, Mörike's elf, on the other hand, fails to participate in this dance because he hits his head with a wall and becomes unconscious. The reason for our elf's error is that he woke up an hour before the right appointed time and he is so asleep for that reason that he can not see his surroundings properly. The bitter humor of the composition lies in a play on words: 'Elfe' can mean both 'elf' and 'eleven'; therefore, due to the confusion caused by this homonymy, the protagonist of the story misinterprets the cry of the bellman as a call directed to his person and not as the calling of the hour.

We have, therefore, an elf, a physical pain caused by the harshness of the environment, and an inability to see reality. We must now observe whether these same elements appear in the homonymous *manga* and in its animated adaptation.

The presence of (somewhat) elven creatures in *Elfen Lied* can be quickly confirmed:

Like other genre movies, any given horror film will convey synchronic associations, ideological and social messages that are part of a certain period or historical moment. One can analyze horror films in terms of these periods or moments, just as one can do with Westerns or gangster movies. But, unlike those genres, horror also goes deeper, to explore more fundamental questions about the nature of human existence, questions that, in some profound ways, go beyond culture and society as these are organized in any given period or form. Here lies the special significance of horror, the factors that truly differentiate it from the other genres and that make it conform most deeply with our contemporary sense of the world.<sup>14</sup>

they are the *diclonii*, the new humanoid race whose presence in the narrative universe of the series endangers the continuity of humanity. These *diclonii* can be identified at first sight by two protuberances that, like horns, stick out from their head<sup>13</sup>. On the subject of what would be the harshness of the environment and the elf's impossibility of seeing reality, we will have to stop longer.

Beyond the classifications that can be made of *Elfen Lied* according to the public which it is intended for and the nature of the content of its narrative, the certain thing is that the series fulfills all the characteristics that PINEDO 2004, pp. 90-91, recognizes in the postmodern audiovisual narrative of horror: namely, the constant presence of physical violence, the presence of a decadent and nihilistic world, the disruption of the body as a spectacle, the transgression of sociocultural boundaries and the preference for ambiguous or open endings. For this reason, I will consider *Elfen Lied* hereafter as a characteristic example of this type of horror story.

PRINCE draws attention to the fact that horror often poses, as a second-level reading, a discussion on particularly pressing sociocultural issues:

McROY observes that this situation can be seen with special emphasis on Japanese horror film, which historically, but with spe-

cial force in the last three decades, has consistently produced

politically-charged motion pictures emerging within an historical moment when the artificiality of social, national, and physiological boundaries has never been more apparent, and during which the desire to re-inscribe these borders has never been, in the eyes of some cultural theorists, more pressing<sup>15</sup>.

This urgent historical context, according

to McROY, originates from

a myriad of complex political, social and ecological issues, including –but by no means limited to– apprehensions over the impact of western cultural and military imperialism, and the struggle to establish a coherent and distinctly Japanese national identity<sup>16</sup>.

The impact of these problems on the traditional Japanese culture is huge and has produced abundant bibliography that we can not comment in detail here without moving away from our subject. I will only point out

that in present-day Japan there is a deep identity crisis provoked by the process of modernization, which has ended up establishing, in MATSUI's terms,

a self-contradictory social structure in which utilitarian competition was encouraged, while the preservation of the overprotective structure of the Japanese family by public institutions prevents the development of individualism and original thinking<sup>17</sup>.

Within this panorama, the current role of women is also put into question and discussed, both in Japanese horror films<sup>18</sup> and non-genre ones<sup>19</sup>. As in other aspects of these social strains that contemporary Japanese society are experiencing today according to the aforementioned authors, the core of debate about the role of women is to determine which of two representations of the feminine is the best: whether it is the one that represents women through love, tenderness and empathy, or whether it is the one that does so in connection with individualism, physical violence, abuse and competition.

With these observations, we can venture the hypothesis that *Elfen Lied*, below its erotic and violent content, below the catalog of social and sexual perversions that it systematically performs, is nothing more than a discussion about the role of women in Japanese society and, by extension, in the world.

*Elfen Lied* presents a series of young women of various ages whose common char-

acteristic (with the sole exception of Yuka) is that they have been victims of various forms of physical, sexual and/or gender-based violence. Their perpetrators are invariably male, and their representation is usually divided into two groups: the cold calculating manipulators (Kakusawa, the CEO of the diclonii research laboratory, for example) or the violent rude men who make frequent references to their sexual organs (Bandou, one of the mercenaries trying to capture Lucy, for example). All this, so far, is nothing more than the representation that feminism has historically constructed of both genders; specially, Second and Third Wave Feminism.

The fundamental difference that separates the series' protagonist, Lucy, from the rest of the female body of society (leaving aside the whole fantascientific question of her belonging to a new humanoid race) is the fact that she has decided to take revenge on male abuse, and to take that decision into practice. But here, although we could iden-



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tify and sympathize with the protagonist's choice, also appear the issues. To begin with, Lucy does not use her telekinetic powers to defend herself against aggressors; she uses them to attack indiscriminately anyone who crosses his path, including completely innocent people. For example, in the 8th minute of episode 9 of the series, we see her kill a whole family of strangers just because she heard them laugh (which, because of her existential situation, was intolerable to her). On more than one occasion we see her in the same episode murdering other families only to be able to feed herself with what those people had at that moment in their fridges.

As can be seen, these deaths are unjustified and unjustifiable because their motivations are not self-defense, or even revenge, but selfish: Lucy kills just because others have what she lacks. As she advances in age, she becomes so insensitive to the death of others that she ends up murdering people simply because it is what she finds most natural; so much so that, during her first encounter with Nana, Lucy claims that she had not killed any person before. The readers know, at this point in the plot, that this statement is false; that's why it confuses Nana. If we think that Lucy has no reason not to respect the Principle of Cooperation<sup>20</sup>, we must understand that Lucy, through conversational implicature, does not consider that humans are, precisely, humans.

There are two problems with this attitude our protagonist has. To begin with, Lucy has become precisely what she criticized at first. As BARBER 2009, p. 3, has very perceptively observed, Lucy appropriates the identity traits of her aggressors. So, when she is about to mutilate Bandou, she asks him if the situation is amusing to him in these terms: «楽しいかい?» ('tanoshii kai?')<sup>21</sup>. The use of the interrogative particle *kai* in replacement of the standard *ka* is a markedly masculine discursive feature. Therefore, Lucy, at the time of killing, assumes herself as a man; or rather, she identifies with her own representation of the masculine.

On the other hand, *Elfen Lied* stresses again and again that the path Lucy has chosen is not correct. In fact, the lives of the secondary characters of the series show that, in the face of the same problems, rather different decisions can be taken. Mayu, for example: she lived experiences similar (although it could be argued that they are even

more serious) to those of Lucy, and would therefore be equally justified to take revenge by her own hand. And yet, she does not do it: she chooses to bear her destiny, and she never mistrusts anybody else. It could be objected that Mayu does not agree with Lucy in choosing the violent way because she is not a diclonius; but there we have the case of Nana, who actually is a diclonius, and yet, in the face of similar life's experiences, chooses to use its power only to defend herself in case of being attacked.

The aggressive attitude of Lucy brings another problem, and it is that her actions are motivated exclusively by hate and resentment. Lucy herself explicitly admits this at 3 minutes 42 seconds of episode 9 of the *anime*, when she says she hates everyone. Is it that there is not anyone in the whole world who is not an evil being? Unfortunately, this attitude renders her impervious both to the good intentions of others and to the experience of love: how can one be bound up with others when is dominated by mistrust and hatred? That is the protagonist's main flaw, which is not shared by Mayu and Nana given that, with their stoic attitude to adversity, they do demonstrate to be able to bond with others through love and trust. And in fact, against Lucy's suppositions, there are indeed loving and protective men (Kōta) and there are diclonii who do not want to exterminate the others (Nana). The wall may have been hard; but that is not the fault of the humans, but of the elf who had a distorted point of view of the reality.

In relation to this is where we can find an explanation for the use in *Elfen Lied* of the trite cliché of the character with double personality that passes from one of them to the other each time a blow to the head is suffered. In the case of our series, the two personalities of Lucy symbolize the two vital and spiritual positions that are in conflict within her. Her conscious base personality is dominated by hatred and revenge (as we have already seen) and by instinct (since it is stated in the series that killing is part of diclonii's instinct). On the other hand, her latent, unconscious personality, baptized as Nyū because these are the only sounds she can articulate, is quite the opposite. Characterized with all the traits of early childhood (since she needs to learn to dress, to eat using cutlery and even to talk), Nyū encompasses the part of Lucy that has to do with desire: her



need to rediscover the world with a naive and innocent look, stripped of her painful experiences. It is not strange, then, that only under her personality of Nyū is that our protagonist makes the decision to try to repair the pendulum clock that is broken in the house of Kōta and Yuka: her personality of Nyū is the refuge of the regenerative and constructive force our protagonist still possesses deep under her resentment. The great test of Lucy/Nyū, therefore, is to find a way to cure her soul and unify her two personalities so that she can, on the one hand, become not only whole again but also the beloved and loving subject who she longs to be, and on the other be able to achieve a more mature and rational use of her defense mechanisms<sup>22</sup>.

This is where the original version of the story differs from its animated adaptation. In the *manga* by Okamoto Rin, it is made clear that it is not possible to coexist between humans and diclonii and that, for society to persist, all diclonii must be exterminated. This includes, of course, Lucy, who is killed by Kōta after a highly melodramatic showdown where Lucy's homicidal instinct overcomes her desire to be loved. In the *anime*, the issue is more benign with our protagonist, given that exactly the opposite occurs: Lucy and Kōta are able to forgive each other and declare their mutual love, after which they kiss and melt in a long and emotional hug.

This, at the individual level. At the social level, the series affirms that happiness can only be achieved through the constitution of a traditional family whose bonds are built with honest love. We see it confirmed in several significant details. In the first place, all the families presented to us throughout the series' narrative that were dysfunctional or founded under dubious principles end badly. On the other hand, the most important protagonists and deuteragonists, despite the fact that there is no blood bond between them, manage to build a valid and functional family; and they do so because their relationships are built on the basis of honest love and mutual trust that they all have to each other. Mayu herself openly acknowledges this at 8 minutes 30 seconds of episode 12 of the series. In addition, this is reinforced by the accentuated traditionalism of the surroundings where the plot takes place: our characters live in a traditional Japanese house of floating wood floor and sliding rice-paper-panel walls, and this accommodation is surrounded

by shinto temples and cherry trees in bloom. A more traditional context for a goal as traditional as the construction of a traditional family can not be imagined. In fact, what our characters build might have been transformed into what Shulamith Firestone called *household*<sup>23</sup>; and, to tell the truth, the bawdy jokes that abound throughout and across the series stimulate in the viewers the fantasy that this could indeed have happened. But, curiously enough, in the series' closure these postmodern, dysfunctional subjects who are marked by trauma and by various forms of oppression have chosen to overcome their limitations and build a family in the traditional sense of the term; and, with it, they have managed to obtain the happiness that all they wanted since the beginning of their story.

In this sense, the closure of *Elfen Lied*, which many viewers have considered as open or confusing, is not so in the least. Lucy, voluntarily exposing herself to enemy fire and losing her only remaining horn, has managed to give up her diclonius status and, consequently, the place of resentment that prevented her from being happy. Her later return to Kōta and Yuka's home occurs as a clear reintegration of Lucy to the family and social core; the happiness of Mayu's dog when he sees her, added to the fact that the broken pendulum clock begins spontaneously to work again, are all clues that point to it.

Now that the analysis of the content of the series is done, I will examine the possible connections of these thematic lines with the opening song and its visual presentation.

### The song: its visual presentation

As I have pointed out in this article's introduction, the art of the visual level of *Lilium* presents characteristics that are unusual in the field of Japanese animation, and this contributed to make it a memorable song. The nature of this peculiarity has already been pointed out frequently: the visual presentation of *Lilium* adapts several famous paintings by the Austrian painter Gustav Klimt (1862-1918): *Nuda Veritas* (1899), *Wasserschlangen II (Freundinnen)* (1904-7), *Bildnis der Adele Bloch-Bauer I* (1907), *Der Kuss* (1908) y *Stoclet-Fries* (1905-11)<sup>24</sup>. The visual presentation recreates Klimt's paintings even in the smallest details and gives them animation, although it replaces the original female figures by the characters of the

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series; especially by Lucy. It has been pointed out that this responds to a special request from the director, Kanbe Mamoru, who is a confessed admirer of Klimt's work<sup>25</sup>. However, it seems to me very significant that Kanbe Mamoru has preferred to adapt Klimt's paintings rather than to produce an ad hoc animation (as, in fact, is the common practice in the *anime* industry) because Klimt has become a prominent figure in the history of art precisely because the naked and strongly eroticized female body is the fundamental theme of all its production<sup>26</sup>. In his exploration

of this subject, Klimt concludes that women are dual beings, since they can be both a dangerous *femme fatale* and an ideal *magna mater*<sup>27</sup>. Also, in his treatment of the female body, Klimt recreates both the iconography and ornamentation of Byzantine religious mosaics and their technique (including the use of pure gold as a working material), which lets him not only give strong religious connotations to the explicitly eroticized female bodies he portrays, but also blur the boundaries both between genders and between the concepts of instinct and desire. For example,

'In *The Kiss* he [Klimt] has taken away the male-female tension from the two bodies and delegated it to the opposition of rectangular and round patterns. Thus, instinct and desire have been encoded in a scheme of ornamental contrasts'. This shift of the instinctive element from persons and bodies to ornaments also brings the sexes closer together. Although a distinction is preserved in the form of ornamentation, this is indeed the only area where it continues to exist. The body language of the two figures, on the other hand, the possible different gestures, postures and physiognomy hardly contain any distinctive features at all<sup>28</sup>.

The same use of the ornamentation with squares and circles can be applied identically to the *Stoclet-Fries*, whose adaptation is the first image that can be seen in the opening of *Elfen Lied*. Therefore, the decision to adapt Klimt's famous paintings for the visual presentation of *Lilium* is an intelligent decision on the part of Kanbe Mamoru, since the treatment of the feminine in Klimt coincides with its characterization in *Elfen Lied*: both present women as dual subjects, gender is-

issues are a fundamental theme in both productions, and in *Elfen Lied* we can observe the same tension between the instinct (of killing) and the desire (of loving) of the female protagonist that FLIEDL has observed in Klimt's women.

However, this does not exhaust the analysis of the visual presentation of *Lilium*. There is one highly significant detail that we must address: the manual gesture of Lucy in the first section of the opening:

**Fig. 2** Visual presentation of *Lilium*, 9 seconds.



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This position of the hand of the female protagonist is a complete take away of the pictorial intertextuality of the opening, which in the rest of its extension is almost a carbon copy of its hypotexts: in the original picture by Klimt, the female figure does not

make any gesture with her hand. And this is a significant difference, given that the artists of *Elfen Lied* have repeated it twice: the first of them, in the cover art of the first volume of the DVD edition of the series:

**Fig. 3** Elfen Lied, DVD edition, Volume 1 cover.



This has already been perceived by some followers of the series, and its meaning has been discussed in various Internet forums, without much success<sup>29</sup>; the supposed connection of this manual gesture to various religions, orders and lodges has been pointed out. None of these proposed explanations is convincing.

In his master's thesis, KUNESH 1990 has reached the conclusions that seem most accurate and conclusive. The author has managed to identify this manual gesture: it is the pseudo-zygodactylous gesture. Analyzing its evolution through centuries and cultures, the

author has come to the conclusion that the pseudo-zygodactylous gesture is a symbolic representation of the act of lactation. Analyzing a large number of votive images of goddesses from different societies, from Ancient Egypt to Renaissance, Kunesh remarks that the pseudo-zygodactylous posture is evidenced in all this iconography to signal the act of the nipple being offered to the baby by his mother. Therefore, it is a way of characterizing the feminine gender in its role of mother, of disinterested giver of life, of food and, therefore, of love<sup>30</sup>.

Let's look at two examples:

**Fig. 4** Flemish Anonymus, *Madonna lactans*, XVI century.



**Fig. 5** Pieter Coecke van Aelst, *Virgin nursing the child*, ca. 1530.



As may be suspected, the pseudo-zygodactylous gesture is especially frequent in representations of the Virgin Mary in her invocation of Virgo Lactans.

However, there is a detail that KUNESH does not perceive because it is, of course, an issue unrelated to his subject: this manual posture also has a special significance in yoga. In this discipline, the middle finger is linked to the element of ether, Saturn, and the throat *chakra*, so it governs purity in mind and heart as well as the ability to overcome obstacles and difficulties in our lives<sup>31</sup>. On the other hand, the ring finger represents the element of earth, the sun, and the root *chakra*; for this reason, governs both the attributes of serenity, and hope for the future as well as the ability to maintain balance in risky situations<sup>32</sup>. Therefore, their union in forming a *mudrā*<sup>33</sup> implies that the participant wishes to maintain its purity and balance and, therefore, to expel or heal their lack, which can be evidenced through emotions such as anger or hatred.

If we consider Lucy's pseudo-zygodactylous gesture from this syncretic perspective, we will see that her unexpected appearance in the imitation of the Klimtian *Stoclet-Fries* is not a random intervention by the creators of the visual presentation of *Lilium*. On the contrary, it turns out to be a «détail concret»<sup>34</sup> that emphasizes both the duality of the protagonist of *Elfen Lied* and the objective of her spiritual journey: as a woman, she is a being born to love (and, therefore, she is comparable to the Virgin Mary in a symbolic level) that has stopped being so because she lost her balance, and then she must heal her hatred in order to recover her essence.

There is one more element that reinforces this reading of mine: the second appearance of the pseudo-zygodactylous gesture in *Elfen Lied*, which occurs precisely in the outcome of its plot. Lucy and Kōta manage to talk in complete honesty when everything seems lost, they forgive each other, they declare their mutual love, they kiss; and then we see this:

**Fig. 6** *Elfen Lied*, episode 13, 20 minutes 46 seconds.



This image is highly eloquent. In the first place, it is a repetition of the embrace of the *Stoclet-Fries* by Klimt whose title, as it must be remembered, is *Die Erfüllung*; i.e. “The satisfaction”. Secondly, this repetition, which includes that of the pseudo-zygodactylous gesture, occurs at the moment in which Lucy succeeds in satisfying and fulfilling her personal goals that had been frustrated up to that point: to heal her resentment and recover through Kōta her condition of giver and

receiver of love. The recent loss of one of its horns, which distances it from her condition of being a diclonius and draws her near to social reintegration as a human being, is evidently a causative element of high significance for this spiritual and social regeneration of Lucy.

### The song: its lyrics

However, the design of the visual presentation of *Lilium* is not the only level where the presence of intertextuality is evidenced as a compositional principle. In fact, the whole lyrics of *Lilium* are an intertextual exercise, since they are a cento; that is, «a literary work made up of quotations from other authors»<sup>35</sup>. Intertextuality is, therefo-

re, fundamental for the understanding of a cento, since its *raison d'être* lies in the resemantization that originates from the juxtaposition of the original quotations in novel contexts; but for this, the reader must be able to recognize the source for each of the fragments of the text of the cento.

Let us then examine the lyrics of *Lilium* and its source materials:

Lyrics	Sources
<i>Os iusti meditabitur sapientiam et lingua eius loquetur iudicium.</i>	<i>Psalms, 37:30.</i>
<i>Beatus vir qui suffert temptationem quoniam cum probatus fuerit accipiet coronam vitae.</i>	<i>James, 1:12</i> (partial quote; the final part of the versicle is missing).
<i>Kyrie, ignis divine, eleison.</i>	Melchior Cibinensis, <i>Processus sub forma missae</i> , “Kyrie” (partial quote; the final part of the phrase is missing).
<i>O quam sancta, quam serena, quam benigna, quam amoena, O castitatis lilium.</i>	<i>Ave mundi spes Maria, 7-8</i> (partial quote; the final part of each versicle is missing).

One might wonder why Konishi Kayō and Kondou Yukio decided to use these texts to elaborate the lyrics of their song. It has been observed that the director of the series, Kanbe Mamoru, made the specific request to the composers that the opening of *Elfen Lied* had religious connotations<sup>36</sup>; in addition, in her already quoted Twitter exchange, Konishi Kayō explained that she had studied as a child in a Catholic school, that she had been in contact with Latin there, and that she loves the sound of that language since then. It is evident that having made contact with Christian liturgy and Latin makes the composers of *Lilium* experts in the ad hoc repertoire, its discourse and its lexicon. However, this is not enough to explain the cause of this creative choice. Of the four original quotations, two come from the Bible: one from the Old Testament; the other one, from the New. The last fragment of the lyrics comes from a medieval antiphonal sequence, used in the Marian cult. The most unusual of all the intertextual sources used in the composition is undoubtedly the third one, which comes from an alchemical text apparently

written in 1525 and published in 1602 and whose author employs the liturgical texts of the Catholic Mass to describe the alchemical process. Of course, this is a disruptive text, since it is the only one of the four intertextual sources whose liturgical use would clearly not be approved in any way by canon law.

Let us then observe the contexts of appearance of the original quotations, to see if, in this way, we can shed some light on the matter. Both the fragment chosen from the Epistle of James and the one from the Psalms have similar contents in specific and ideological terms. The clause taken from James is the one that closes the opening section of the epistle, which contrasts the lives of the humble and the rich: while the latter, despite possessing riches and power, will ultimately be humbled by the Lord, the humble should be exalted in his condition, since in the end he will be rewarded with no less than the crown of life. For this reason, James urges the humble to consider: “My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into diverse temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your

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faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.”<sup>37</sup>. That is to say, it is not enough to be humble and suffer; we must endure with patience and dignity that suffering. That is, without losing the spiritual balance. The quote that *Lilium* takes from *Psalms 37* is even more explicit in this regard. In this biblical text, a detailed account is made of the opposing destiny of the just and the ungodly. Yahweh will punish the latter and reward the righteous; for that reason, the just must give up anger and not get hot (because that is worse)<sup>38</sup>, and let Yahweh work justice. As Yahweh does not forsake those who love him and holds them with his hand, the righteous can walk safely, rise up after falling... and speak with wisdom and judgment.

Here we can already realize that the lyrics of *Lilium* are referring, through the mechanism of semantic appropriation characteristic of the cento intertextuality, to the spiritual transformation that the protagonist character of *Elfen Lied* must accomplish about her dual nature. As we have already stated, *Elfen Lied* raises as the starting point of its ideological content the fact that Lucy is indeed just; therefore, Lucy must lay down her hatred and face the trials that were imposed upon her from another spiritual position, as both the Apostle James and the Psalms re-

commend, because that anger negates the original purity of the just. Once reached this attitude change, Lucy can reconnect with her aspects of purity and love, recalled through the evocation of the Virgin Mary by means of a liturgical hymn dedicated to her. I have already showed how the visual presentation of *Lilium*, through the pseudo-zygodactylous manual gesture, symbolically equates Lucy with the Virgin Mary; here, the lyrics of *Lilium* reinforces that identification. In fact, the fragment taken from the *Ave spes mundi Maria* is nothing more than a list of the attributes that emanate from a pure and loving feminine figure like the Virgin Mary (as expressed explicitly by the mention of chastity and symbolically by the appearance of the lily<sup>39</sup>) which, in turn, also apply to Lucy. Also, it is affirmed that this spiritual transformation can be achieved not only with one's own effort but also with the help of God; and, therefore, the lyrics of *Lilium* draws a fragment of an alchemical text which describes metaphorically the process of transmutation of lead into gold or, which is the same, the sublimation of the negative passions of the soul into virtues.

There is another detail of the symbolism of the lily that comes to reinforce my interpretation. The lily is mentioned explicitly by Jesus Christ himself, and he used it as a symbol of the virtue of patience:

Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?<sup>40</sup>

The lily is, therefore, a symbol of the advisable act of letting oneself be carried away by Divine Providence, since it provides for all our needs<sup>41</sup>. That is the same thing that both the Psalms and the Epistle of James recommended in the previous pieces of the cento.

### The song: its score

Let us now proceed to analyze carefully the musical level of our object of study. Here is the score of the song<sup>42</sup>:

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### Lilium

Kayo Konishi / Yukio Kondō

$\text{♩} = 60$   
*p*

Os i - us - ti me - di - ta - bi -

tur sa - pi - en - tiam et lin - gua e - i - us lo - que - tur

iu - di - cium. Bea - tus vir qui su - ffert temp - ta - tio -



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9

nem quo-ni-am cum pro-ba-tus fue-rit acc'-piet co-ro-nam vi-

12

*f*

tae. Ky-ri - e ig - nis div' - ne,

14

*p*

e - le - i - son. O quam

15

sanc - ta, quam se - re - na, quam be - nig -

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na, \_\_\_\_\_ quam a - mo - e - na, O cas - ti - tar's li - li - um.

The piece has a total of 20 bars, and has a bipartite re-expositive structure: A-A'-B-A'. It has the texture of accompanied melody; meaning that the most important and significant section of the work is the vocal line, while the instrumental part serves only to accompany and harmonize the singing. In fact, the metric change from 4/4 to 3/4 evident in Section A and its re-exposures (bars 2, 8 and 16) is precisely due to the preponderance of the sung phrase over the instrumental part: the latter adjusts to the former, not the other way round<sup>43</sup>. This directly links *Lilium* to the musical genre of lied<sup>44</sup>, which is mentioned

explicitly in the title of the series it introduces.

The harmonization of the work is tonal and uses the musical discourse characteristic of post-Romanticism, which links it stylistically with Hugo Wolf, the composer of the *Elfen Lied* which the title of the series explicitly refers to. Moreover, the motif present in measures 3 and 4 of *Lilium* and its re-exposures exhibits very noticeable echoes of the initial section of the *Pavane pour une infante défunte* by Maurice Ravel, as can be seen here:

Fig. 10 *Lilium*, measures 3 and 4.

3

tur \_\_\_\_\_ sa - pi - en - tiam \_\_\_\_\_ et lin - gua

Fig. 11 *Pavane pour une infante défunte*, measure 1.

This intertextual link with Ravel reinforces the link between *Lilium* and post-Romantic musical aesthetics. Moreover, both pieces coincide in performing a modern recreation of ancient musical elements. In the case of Ravel, it is the use of the Renaissance form

of the pavane, along with some harmonic features of that musical period; in the case of *Lilium*, the song tries to evoke, through the recurrent use of harmonic and ancient minors, the sound of the sacred hymnody; specifically, Gregorian chant. This is confir-

med by Konishi Kayō, who said in her Twitter feedback we have already quoted that she wanted *Lilium* to sound like a contemporary Gregorian chant. This recovery and reinterpretation of ancient aesthetics is precisely what is also done by Gustav Klimt, whose paintings are recreated in the visual presentation of the song. Therefore, the musical discourse of the song and the visual design of its accompanying presentation are in total discursive isotopy.

There are three significant details in which we will stop. First, the key signature of the song. *Lilium* is written in F sharp minor, a tonality that has very striking connotations according to the theory of affections. According to J. Mattheson, «Fis-moll [...] ob er gleich zu einer **grossen Betrübniß** leitet, ist dieselbe doch mehr *languissant und verliebt* als *lethal*; es hat sonst dieser Tohn etwas *abandonirtes / singulieres und misanthropisches an sich*»<sup>45</sup>. This description matches completely with the emotional nature of both *Lilium* and Lucy: love is present in both, although it is dominated by negative passions.

Which brings us to the second significant detail that we want to discuss in more depth: it is the section B, corresponding to the Kyrie. This section, as is expected in the form of lied which the piece belongs to, establishes a striking contrast with the previous section: the dynamics of nuances changes from a piano to a forte, the accompaniment performs arpeggios in semiquaver sextuplets which are not found in the rest of the composition, and so forth. But the most interesting feature is the emotional nature of this section: it is much brighter and more hopeful than the previous section. This is because section B begins in F sharp major, tonality which appears not by modulation but by functional equivalence, and is quickly abandoned. In other words, when section B arrives, our ear captures the idea of light and hope that the F sharp major chord suggests, but in reality the piece never left its sad and misanthropic minor mode and quickly the illusion of hope the major mode provided is diluted. This effectively reflects Lucy's conflict with her dual nature.

The third and last significant detail of the score of *Lilium* that we will deal with has to do with the golden section. If, following SMITH 2003, p. 83, we divide the total number of bars of the song by the golden number  $\phi$ ,

the result will indicate where the climax of the composition should be located if it has golden proportionality. If we do this with *Lilium*, we will get that the climax of the song should be a little after the first time of measure number 12. And that is precisely the place where section B begins, which is clearly the climax of the song. Therefore, «*Lilium*» has been composed according with golden proportionality.

### Summing up

This extensive analytical journey that we have undertaken gives us the following conclusions:

*Lilium*, as a piece of music, coincides in both its thematic and ideological aspects with the audiovisual work it precedes; therefore, there is no antiphysis between them. The antiphysis that is perceived between the opening of *Elfen Lied* and its first six minutes under a naïve reading is intentional and is only used like rhetorical device to underline and reinforce the violence of Lucy's escape.

The choices made in the visual, lyrical and musical levels during the creative process of *Lilium* form a unity of meaning because they are fully coherent with each other. Furthermore, it symbolically retakes central thematic features of the audiovisual work which it introduces.

Therefore, *Lilium* (although in the cultural field of Japanese animation is referred to as *opening*) meets the essential formal requirements of an overture in the sense that word has in the field of academic or classical music, as it is understood since Gluck<sup>46</sup>.

The visual, lyrical and musical levels of the semiotic object *Lilium* collaborate with each other and in solidarity to construct and transmit both a representation of women as dual subjects that are torn between their motherly nature and another one dominated by hatred and revenge, and the need to overcome the latter in pursuit of the recovery of the former. Therefore, *Lilium* and its associated images provide a collection of different reading-orienting strategies put into work with the aim of helping the viewer to understand *Elfen Lied* in that way. It should be noted that these strategies are not used by the author of the original *manga* but by the makers of its *anime* adaptation; therefore, the adapters use them with the aim that the viewers agree with their own reading of the original work.

## Notes

- 1 It should be noted that Japanese personal names are written in the order SURNAME Given Name. The transliteration to the Latin alphabet of the Japanese names mentioned throughout the present article was carried out following the Hepburn system.
- 2 That is the case, for instance, of *Seinto Seiya* (聖闘士星矢) (1986).
- 3 That is the case, for instance, of *Saraiya goyō* (さらい屋五葉) (2010).
- 4 I am fully aware that the existence of modern songs whose lyrics are written in Latin is an exceptional phenomenon even in Western pop music. However, in this field of cultural production there is a kind of niche where this phenomenon, although unusual, exhibits some examples: new-age pop music. In this area we can find, for example, Enya, who systematically includes at least one song with Latin lyrics per album: «Cursum perficio», from *Watermark* (1988); «Afer Ventus», from *Shepherd Moons* (1991); «Pax deorum», from *The memory of trees* (1995); «Tempus vernum», from *A day without rain* (2001)... We also find the French project +eRa+, whose lyrics are written in pseudo-Latin and pseudo-Greek, and its contemporary and compatriot Solyma, whose lyrics are written in Hebrew, Arabic, Greek and Latin. On the other hand, in the field of Japanese pop music, whether it is used as *anime* soundtrack or not, I know of no other examples of songs with Latin lyrics than «Lilium»; for this reason, I will maintain the uniqueness of this song in its field of cultural production.
- 5 We will discuss later the answer the composer offered to that question. In the meantime, I offer a translation of this dialogue on Twitter:  
«@Moka\_Kayo Umm, why *Lilium* was created with Latin lyrics? I wanted to know that at the 10th anniversary celebration... »  
«Sorry about the late reply. When I was in missionary school, I sang hymns in Latin and I really liked that sound. *Lilium* is in Latin because I wanted it to be like a modern Gregorian chant... (Did I managed to give an answer...?)».
- 6 For example, «Fukai mori» (「深い 森」), from the Japanese band Do As Infinity, licensed as the second ending of *Inuyasha* (犬夜叉) (2000-2004).
- 7 For example, «Kiri» (「霧」), from the Japanese band Monoral, licensed as the opening of *Ergo Proxy* (2006).
- 8 This is the case, for example, of “Be your girl”, by Kawabe Chieko, licensed as the ending of *Elfen Lied* (2004).
- 9 I will discuss these details below.
- 10 BARBER 2009, p. 6.
- 11 This lied by Hugo Wolf is quoted explicitly in the *Elfen Lied manga*; for instance, cfr. OKAMOTO 2003, vol. V, p. 154.
- 12 WOLF 1926, vol. II, pp. 20-3.
- 13 While in the *anime* of *Elfen Lied* the design of these horns is more similar to cat ears (and, therefore, they function as an erotic fetish of certain sexual fantasies present in current Japanese pop culture), in the *manga* those horns are much more similar to the Japanese representation of the ears of the elves; cfr. OKAMOTO 2002, vol. I, p. 56.
- 14 PRINCE 2004, p. 2.
- 15 McROY 2008, p. 4.
- 16 McROY 2005, p. 1.
- 17 MATSUI 2002, p.142.
- 18 BALMAIN 2009, pp. 93-112.
- 19 PINEDO 2004, p. 90.
- 20 GRICE 1975, p. 45.
- 21 OKAMOTO 2002, vol. I, p. 134.
- 22 It should be noted here that both Lucy’s dual nature and her cruel life-taking is not totally inconsistent with the representation of women in Japanese folklore and culture, where they are presented as having an ambiguous nature. Without leaving the cultural field of anime and manga, there we can find two typical stereotypes of female characters who exploit precisely this dual nature: the *yandere* (the “love-crazy” girl, whose sweet and tender appearance hides a pathologically obsessive and aggressive being) and the *tsundere* (which consists of girls who, through an inadequate use of their defence mechanisms, present themselves socially as aggressive or hostile when in reality they are very warm and sensitive people inside). Also to be taken into account is the large number of supernatural female entities in Japanese folklore, both traditional and urban, that are hostile and aggressive: although it is impossible, given the length of this article, to make a detailed analysis of this question, I will say that these supernatural female entities are generally characterized as having been women who suffered some kind of violence or injustice, typically by a male perpetrator, and who indiscriminately attack mortals in retaliation for such received injustice; this certainly fits Lucy’s profile. However, and while I am aware of this representation of women in Japanese culture, I believe that the characteristics of both *Lilium* and *Elfen Lied* and their connections to Christianity (which will be discussed below) allow me to support the hypothesis of women’s need to overcome their dual nature.
- 23 FIRESTONE 1971, pp. 229 ff.
- 24 This visual strategy extends to the ending of the series, which adapts in an identical way the painting by Klimt called *Danaë* (1907).
- 25 Cfr. <http://elfen-lied.wikia.com/wiki/Lilium>. Kanbe Mamoru would adapt Klimt’s paintings again in the opening of an animated series that he later directed, ソ・ラ・ノ・ヲ・ト (*So-Ra-No-Wo-To*) (2010).



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- 26 FLIEDL 1998, p. 14.  
27 FLIEDL 1998, p. 201.  
28 FLIEDL 1998, p. 116. The quotient belongs to a quote that Fliedl makes and translates from W. Hofmann, *Das Fleischerkennen*, in A. Pfabigan (ed.), *Ornament und Askese im Zeitgeist des Wien der Jahrhundertwende*, Vienna, 1985, p. 122.  
29 Cfr. <https://anime.stackexchange.com/questions/5472/whats-the-significance-of-the-w-finger-position-in-elfen-lied>  
30 However, the use of the pseudo-zygodactylous gesture is not exclusive to women: cfr. El Greco's famous painting *El caballero de la mano en el pecho* (1578-1580?). It is also often seen in various representations of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The meaning of the iconographic use of the pseudo-zygodactylous gesture in male figures is that the depicted men are carrying out an act of selfless giving and love similar to that of a mother.  
31 MENEN 2013, p. 10; HIRSCHI 2000, p. 52.  
32 MENEN 2013, p. 10; HIRSCHI 2000, p. 54.  
33 "Mudras are yoga movements involving only the arms and hands" (MENEN 2013, p. 11).  
34 BARTHES 1984, pp. 185-191.  
35 OED, s.v.  
36 Cfr. <http://elfen-lied.wikia.com/wiki/Lilium>.  
37 *James*, 1:2-4. I'm quoting from the King James version of the Gospels.  
38 *Psalms*, 37:8.  
39 CHEVALIER-GHEERBRANT 1986, p. 651, s.v. *lirio*.  
40 *Matthew*, 6:25-30. I'm quoting from the King James version of the Gospels.  
41 CHEVALIER-GHEERBRANT 1986, p. 651, s.v. *lirio*.  
42 Working with the score of *Lilium* was a very complex task to make feasible. In principle, there is no official score for the song, and all those circulating through the Internet are transcriptions made by different people with a greater or lesser degree of exactitude. For this reason, it was evident that I had to make my own transcription of *Lilium*, task that, not having any methodical musical training, I performed by ear listening to the song again and again until my transcript matched exactly with what was heard in the song. Of course, it was not my intention to incur in any copyright infringement, and my transcription of *Lilium* has been included in this article only for the needs of the academic research that I have carried out.  
43 The metric change from 4/4 to 5/4 that is evident at the end of section B (measure 14) is explained by the need to reintroduce the bar of anacrusis in the reexposure of A.  
44 GROVE 1880, vol. II, p. 133.  
45 MATHESON 1713, p. 251, §23. Emphasis and typographic changes are present in the original edition by the author's hand; I have limited myself to keeping them.  
46 GROVE 1880, p. 621.

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