

Bring your Questions and Responses to

**“The Cuban Exile: An Open Forum on
ONCE REMOVED”**

January 10, 1988
New Mexico Repertory Theatre
217 Johnson Street
Santa Fe

January 24, 1988
KiMo Theatre
423 Central Avenue NW
Albuquerque

with essayists
David R. Maciel and Nelson P. Valdés
moderated by David Richard Jones

STARTING TIME: 4:20 P.M. (approx.)

The forum follows matinee performances of *ONCE REMOVED*
and is open to the public without charge.

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The Humanities and the Stage
1987-88 Season Booklet #3

Once Removed

by **Eduardo Machado**

Introduction

by **David Richard Jones**

Eduardo Machado was born in Cuba in 1953. His upper-middle class family, after sympathizing with Fidel Castro's rebellion, grew increasingly hostile to Castro's regime. In 1961 Machado and his brother flew to Florida where an aunt and uncle lived in Hialeah. A year later, after his parents joined the young pioneers, Machado's father accepted the offer of a Catholic relief agency to relocate in California's San Fernando Valley. Here he found work in his former field, accounting, with a firm which he now owns. By his mid-teens, Eduardo was well-read and restless. After an exploratory trip to New York at age sixteen, he returned to California, finished high school while living with cousins in Van Nuys, studied acting in Los Angeles, and married at age nineteen.

As an actor, Machado worked with prestigious local groups—Carmen Zapata's Bilingual Foundation for the Arts and Ensemble Studio Theatre (E.S.T) in Los Angeles, a respected summer festival of new writing in Padua Hills—but grew dissatisfied with acting and with others' plays. "I didn't feel I was ever going to be able to express anything about myself," he now says about these years. He was helped by meetings at Padua Hills with such "real" playwrights as Murray Mednick and Sam Shepard. Drawn into writing by Maria Irene Fornes—"the reason I'm a writer today"—he learned in her writing workshops "to let plays shape

themselves, to listen to the characters." At the same time, Machado was asked by his psychiatrist to write a letter to his mother and father. More dutiful to his shrink than to his parents, like so many Americans, Machado wrote one draft of a letter, tore it up, wrote many more drafts, tore them up, and suddenly out popped a play. It was a conflation of family stories and upstairs incidents about a woman very like Olga in *Once Removed*. A few days later, he produced another short drama about incestuous brothers, which became the steamy topic of *Fabiola*. Five days later, Machado wrote another short piece about the mother of these boys. Soon he scraped these playlets together into a longer work entitled *Worms*, Castro's term for the Cuban bourgeoisie and an insult heard in nearly all of Machado's plays.

From this beginning in 1980, Machado rose through the theatrical ranks in a way that testifies to the national receptivity to young playwrights, including Hispanic playwrights, during recent decades. In 1981, after a reading of *Worms* at E.S.T., he received the first of two playwriting fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts. He moved to New York City, joined the Playwrights Unit at E.S.T. in that city, and enrolled in another Fornes workshop. In 1982 *Rosario and the Gypsies*, an avant-garde musical about a flamenco troupe, appeared at the New York E.S.T. in a marathon of new plays. During 1983-1985 the plays of his "Floating Islands" trilogy—*The Modern Ladies of Guanabacoa*, *Fabiola*, and *Broken Eggs*—were produced by E.S.T. and Theatre for the New City and published by Theatre Communications Group in its "Plays in Process" series. In 1986 he began translating this trilogy when *Las Damas Modernas de Guanabacoa* appeared at Repertorio Español directed by René Buch, the most prominent Cuban in New York theatre and the godfather of La Compañía de Teatro de Albuquerque. In the same year *Once Removed* received a staged reading in the prestigious Hispanic Playwrights Project at South Coast Repertory in Costa Mesa, California. 1987 productions of Machado's plays include *Why to Refuse* at Theatre for the New City, with the playwright in a leading role, and *Revoltillo*, Machado's translation of *Broken Eggs*, at Repertorio Español. His newest play, about the sugar business, is entitled *Sweet Powder* and has been commissioned by South Coast Rep.

Beyond these biographical and theatrical details, the best introduction to Machado's drama is through his "Floating Islands" plays, which portray the destiny of a modern Cuban family.

The Modern Ladies of Guanabacoa are modern indeed for the Cuba of 1928-1930. Females of several generations struggle to bob their hair, express their sexual freedom, and smoke cigarettes in front of the family's men. These men are more old-fashioned, for the father pays more attention to his barely-concealed adultery than to his butcher shop, and his sons therefore consider him "the greatest stud in the Province of Havana." Into the family comes Oscar Hernandez, a taxi driver who courts and marries a spinster daughter named Manuela. Oscar believes that the U.S. "is the future," that "the only justice is capital," and that "the business for the decade of the thirties is transportation," specifically bus service. His creed haunts these plays and Cuban history: "Life is easy. You just have to make sure you win, that's all." The family wins financial power and continues its matriarchal line with the conception of Oscar and Manuela's daughter, Sonia Luz Hernandez,

who becomes the materfamilias of this cycle. But they lose when the father is assassinated, not by his American mistress's husband (as everyone expects) but by high-level opponents of Oscar's business machinations.

Fabiola shows Sonia Luz Hernandez, husband Osvaldo Marquez, and the rest of his family between 1955 and 1967, by which time Sonia and Osvaldo have migrated and achieved affluence in the U.S.A. Much of *Fabiola* is about futile attempts to recapture the past, and it begins with a seance designed to contact the recently deceased title character, the wife of Osvaldo's brother, Pedro. More important to the play's emotional line, *Fabiola*'s death leads to the revival of the brothers' homosexual relations and hence to Pedro's obsessive tailspin and suicide. As in Machado's other plays, these characters are simultaneously unable to live in Cuba and unable to free themselves from Cuba. Osvaldo and Pedro's mother believes that her family and class "sinned" against the country: "We didn't love it enough." Sonia protests her departure: "I can't go to Hialeah; I belong a block away from my mother and father's house," which is precisely where the play is set. In its final scene, nearly a decade after the revolution, Pedro encounters two *milicianos* who have come to inventory the family possessions. "Let me stay," he tells them as he sheds all his clothes. "Make me part of the inventory. I am a part of this room."

Broken Eggs takes place in 1979 at a Jewish country club in Los Angeles, where Sonia's daughter Lizette is about to be married to a boy named Rifkin. Here, from 8 a.m. to noon on a hot January day, the Marquez and Hernandez clans reunite: Sonia, who never adjusted to the "doom" of exile; Manucla, her mother; Osvaldo, who divorced Sonia and remarried a hateful Argentinian; Osvaldo's sister Miriam, who soothes herself with Valium; his father Alfredo, who soothes himself with Cuban mythological history; Oscar, the gay son of Osvaldo and Sonia who snorts cocaine because he "never found any answers"; and Oscar's second sister, Manucla Sonia, who calls herself "Mimi" and is pregnant. These characters are the "broken eggs" of the famous revolutionary dictum about how to make an omelette. They are also funny, wickedly analytical of their exile, and quite paralyzed in relation to the future.

This trilogy, Eduardo Machado's life, and *Once Removed* hinge alike on the condition of exile that is central to Cuban-American life. The essays in this booklet elucidate that condition. David R. Maciel gives us a general historical overview comparing the emigration of Cuban-Americans to the Mexican-American experience more familiar in New Mexico and the Southwest. Sociologist Nelson P. Valdés reflects on Cuban history and the meanings of exile, for Valdés too left Cuba in the post-revolutionary years. Both pieces should help spectators at the New Mexico Repertory Theatre appreciate the tragicomic lives in Machado's new play and the serious conditions of Cuban-Americans highlighted by the prison riots of November 1987 and by a recent spate of books on Miami and its Cuban population.

David Richard Jones is Literary Manager of the New Mexico Repertory Theatre, Associate Professor of English at the University of New Mexico, and the coordinating humanist for "The Humanities and the Stage."

Mexican and Cuban Migration to the United States

by David R. Maciel

The controversial issue of Latin American migration to the United States includes economic, political, legal, social and even moral considerations. In the last two decades the immigration question has received intensified attention from the academic community, policy makers, and mass media. These contemporary concerns have led to serious attempts at legislative reform, such as the Simpson-Rodino Bill. Throughout the controversy, xenophobic sentiments—anti-immigrant, and especially anti-Latino—have been manifested by various sectors of U.S. society.

Yet Hispanic emigration to the U.S., whether legal or illegal, is an ongoing process involving millions of people. Both Mexican and Cuban immigrants play important political and economic roles within contemporary American institutions. A closer look, however, shows that these groups have played very different roles.

Mexican emigration has involved one of the largest population movements in history. It has contributed to the growth of the Chicano community, to the complex international issues facing Mexico and the U.S., and to the prevalence of Mexican customs, traditions and values in the U.S. Consequently, existing characteristics of the Mexican community in the U.S. are continuously reinforced and strong social and economic ties with Mexico persist. Cuban-Americans, by contrast, constitute the third largest Latino group in the U.S., representing 5.5% of the total U.S. Latino population. (Strangely, Cubans are the only Hispanic subgroup to be systematically counted.)

Immigrants from these two countries have arrived according to different patterns as well. From the nineteenth century to the present, the migration northward from Mexico has been a continuous process although its intensity has varied with the economic and political relations between Mexico and the U.S. In recent decades, Mexico, just across a lengthy border free of natural obstacles, has supplied a larger number of permanent visa migrants to the U.S. than any other single country.

Cuban emigration, by contrast, was sporadic and small until 1959 when a large movement began. In 1962, a second wave followed the Cuban Missile Crisis. Periodic Cuban emigration to the U.S. resumed in 1965 until 1973 when it was reduced to a trickle. Beginning in 1980, Cuba began to ship out dissidents and others, eventually sending 125,000 to the U.S. As shown by the prison riots in Georgia and Louisiana, the ramifications of this population shift are still being understood by immigration officials, policy makers, social service professionals, city and state administrators and law enforcement agencies.

Though Cuban immigration has declined since 1980, the number of Cuban-Americans is now about 10% of Cuba's total population. Despite this percentage, Cuban emigrants are not entirely representative of Cuban social structure. Until very recently, for example, the majority were upper and middle class professionals and entrepreneurs, and their concentration in major cities further enhanced their visibility and influence. Socio-economically Cubans are at the top of the Latino

groups. Politically they are the most conservative Latinos on foreign and social issues. They also show the highest rate of citizenship among immigrant Latinos. Recently, however, the social composition of Cuba's emigrants has changed because of the Mariel group, making the Cuban-American population more representative of mainland Cuba.

Meanwhile, Mexican immigrants, in comparison to other immigrants and to the general population in Mexico, are younger and less skilled. Not surprisingly, lack of employment and low wages are the commonly stated reasons for emigration. These immigrants "plan" into the future, are willing to take risks, and are not—as commonly believed—submissive to authority and tradition. The lower education and skill levels of many Mexican immigrants suggest that they would be disadvantaged vis-a-vis European immigrants and native-born Americans of all races and backgrounds. However, since 1950 there has been increasing diversity in the skills and educational levels of Mexican immigrants. There have also been more undocumented women, whose numbers now represent 15% of the annual total. Women typically migrate as dependents of males but often do not remain dependents in later years. In terms of prior income, Mexican emigrants come from the lower half of their communities—but not the lowest sector.

Other profound differences exist between the two migration experiences, especially in the response of the U.S. to the immigrant groups. Because of the class makeup and political ideology of Cubans, the U.S. has not only encouraged their immigration but has also provided generous economic incentives and relocation help for the Cuban immigrants (loans, educational and community programs, job training, etc.). Also, most Americans have approved of Cuban immigrants because they were fleeing a communist country.

On the other hand, Mexican immigrants have traditionally faced neglect, abuse, and harassment. In times of U.S. economic prosperity, they have been welcomed as cheap labor, but in times of economic downturns or adverse public opinion, they have been deported. In the Great Depression, for example, one and a half million immigrants were sent back to Mexico. No federal or state assistance has ever been secured for Mexican immigrants. Public officials and the media have also used them as scapegoats for ills in the U.S. economy.

Partly as a result of these different attitudes, Cubans have come as permanent immigrants while most Mexican immigrants since the 1940s are temporary migrant workers who often return to Mexico and have no intentions of becoming permanent U.S. citizens. Studies suggest that Mexican immigrants, who display a strong desire for their eventual return to Mexico, are dissatisfied with their status in Mexico and seek to change it. In spite of official U.S. policies, Mexicans will continue to look to the U.S. as a safety valve until their economy improves and the U.S. need for cheap, unskilled labor diminishes.

The future is uncertain but problematic for many Latino immigrants.

David R. Maciel is a Professor of History at the University of New Mexico. His research and teaching specialties include the U.S. Southwest, modern Mexico, and modern Latin American history.

The Exile Experience

by Nelson P. Valdés

*Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon hand
Glow world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.
"Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she
With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"*

—Emma Lazarus, "The New Colossus" (1889)

Social revolutions are abrupt, profound, thorough and all-encompassing processes of radical social change. They affect every facet of everyday life. As such, social revolutions have an impact on everyone, regardless of whether they wish to change or not. The Cuban Revolution of 1959 has been a case in point. As the Revolution transformed institutions, social relations and practices, people had to take a position on those changes. One could not escape. Everything became politicized. In such a context, history and biography interacted in numerous ways. Personal troubles and difficulties were transformed into political issues. The individual became object as well as subject of the very forces shaping that revolution—be they economic, political, domestic or foreign. Those unable to cope with the changes, or unwilling to accept them, often chose exile. It was not an easy choice.

The play *Once Removed*, by Eduardo Machado, presents some aspects of the Cuban exile experience in the United States. The play portrays the difficulties of a family that arrived in Hialeah, Florida in 1960. It is a story of lives in disarray, of confusion with the new culture. The family lives in a closed world, surrounded by apartment walls, interacting mainly with one another, and remembering. For exiles have a different sense of time. They cannot help but compare the present with the past. They are married to the Angel of History, and like Lot's wife, constantly keep looking back. Memories, always memories. Only other exiles share this past. Yet this very break with a historical community allows the exile to re-create, re-define and even re-write the past, to live as he or she wishes to be perceived. Or, as a character in the play states, "Nobody here has any idea."

Machado shows us an exile family that apparently had some wealth in Cuba but lost most of it, with only some jewels remaining of their previous status. These jewels have become fetishes. They provide a sense of accomplishment and meaning. Possessions, in this case, represent identity. It would be a mistake to think that this is just crass materialism.

This family also seems to have a formalistic attachment to Catholicism, yet fails to demonstrate even minimal religious values. It is a family immersed in the cult of the mother ("Momism"), but its authority relations remain patriarchal. The family left behind a nationalist revolution but not its nationalism or national pride: "No daughter of mine is going to confess to a foreigner," and "It's not your flag, why should you pledge to it everyday." In other words, theirs is a world of contradictions.

These Cubans are not immigrants; they are exiles. The immigrant, like the exile leaves his/her country. But the departure is undertaken for totally different reasons. Desiring upward social mobility, the immigrant departs in search of better economic opportunities. The immigrant does not take a stand on the prevailing political system left behind; it is of no consequence. The choice is personal. Moreover, the immigrant usually can return home.

The exile faces different conditions. As a rule, the exile takes a position on the politics, society, culture or economy of his/her country. The exile disagrees with the prevailing national arrangements and, unable to change them, decides to leave. There is no room for compromise. The departure could very well mean downward social mobility, as was the case of the family in Machado's play. Of course, after social revolutions, many go into exile after they have experienced a *loss of power and influence* in their own country.

This affluent Cuban family lacks any sense of history. There is neither discussion nor understanding of what actually happened to them, or why. Here the playwright has adopted a fairly common view among intellectuals of the Cuban exile: the Cuban upper class was not cultured, sophisticated or in any way cosmopolitan enough to comprehend the world. Edmundo Desnoes once stated that the Revolution was a "revenge against a stupid Cuban middle class that really did not know how to understand the problems of a modern world." They did not shape history; they were shaped by it. This was not surprising. The wealthy in Cuba emerged and flourished as an appendage of American capital, management and know-how. They lacked independence and initiative. That dependence created in the ruling class a mind-set that merely waited for the U.S. to make decisions on their behalf. Once the Revolution took place, the Cuban bourgeoisie or middle class chose exile in the hope that the U.S. Government would do the dirty work of fighting the Revolution and putting them back in their respective positions of power and influence. Like Antigone's father, the Cuban middle class was blind and exiled.

The exile experience is always much more complex than would appear to be the case in Machado's play. Exiles do not live in a vacuum. Peter L. Rose has noted that the exiles' experience is "part of an intricate sociopolitical web that must be seen as the background against which any portrait of their travails must be painted and any dissection of their innermost thoughts and feelings must be pinned." There are, in fact, different waves of Cuban exiles, each wave representing a different period in the history of the Cuban revolutionary process, as well as different social characteristics.

From 1959 to the present, close to 900,000 Cubans have left their country. In the U.S., they constitute the second largest foreign-born minority group as well

as the third largest Hispanic group. In 1980, according to the U.S. Census, there were approximately 803,000 Cubans residing in this country.

When the revolutionaries seized power in January 1959, a first wave of exiles arrived in the U.S. They were the military and political elite that had been identified with the Batista dictatorship. They left Cuba because they had been ousted from power, and they were fearful of being put on trial. This first wave was essentially made up of *Batistianos*. A second wave of exiles was produced during the fall of 1960 when the revolutionary regime decreed a series of laws that changed ownership of corporations, industries, businesses and real estate. The nationalization of a significant portion of the private sector alienated executives, corporation managers, lawyers, bankers and those connected with servicing those interests. Exile had been determined by the radical nature of the regime. These exiles were professionals, white and often well-educated. Machado's play is focused on some of the characteristics of this particular exile group.

Cubans left in greater numbers in late 1960 and early 1961. Many expected that the U.S. Marines would invade at any time. Over 14,000 children alone were sent out of the country in what the U.S. called "Operation Peter Pan." (I was one of those children.) The entire cost of removing these children from the island was paid by Washington.

The Marines did not invade Cuba, but the Central Intelligence Agency did organize an expeditionary force made up of Cuban exiles. (Machado's play touches briefly on the planned invasion.) But the invasion was defeated within 48 hours in April 1961, and this led to the further radicalization of the Revolution. From April 1961 to October 1962, as the prospects of overthrowing the Revolution became dimmer, the Cuban middle class began to leave in larger numbers. They were dentists, teachers, middle management personnel, skilled laborers and their families. All the evidence suggests that professionals, managers, and clerics were over-represented. The working class, peasants, rural workers, blacks, and poor were not very well represented in this group. Social class had an impact on attitude toward the Revolution.

From January 1962 to November 1965, approximately 290,000 came to the U.S. By December 1965 the U.S. and Cuba agreed on the establishment of "freedom flights." During the next eight years, 340,000 Cubans left their country for the U.S. Many of them were relatives of those who had left earlier. In April 1973 Cuba put an end to the flights due to the growing number of hit-and-run attacks carried out by Cuban exiles. Nonetheless, from May 1973 to April 1980, about 50,000 Cubans managed to leave the country and enter the U.S. Most of them had traveled to Spain before arriving here.

Beginning in 1976, relations between Cuba and the U.S. improved. Exile attacks had come to an end, and the normalization of relations seemed imminent. (The U.S. had broken diplomatic and trade relations with Havana in January 1961.) Due to the improved climate in bilateral relations, it was possible for Cuban exiles to visit their families on the island after 1978. As the number of visitors increased, the demand to go to the U.S. once again appeared. Those seeking to do so were no longer the wealthy and powerful of Cuba, but persons who had benefited from

the revolution. But there was no formal migration channel to leave Cuba and enter the U.S.

A similar problem had existed prior to the "freedom flights." At that time the Cuban government told Cubans in the U.S. that they could pick up their relatives by boat. And many did so. In 1965 about 5,000 Cubans arrived in the U.S. that way. In 1980 the same offer was made. And in a matter of months the U.S. had 124,789 new Cuban arrivals on its shores (the so-called "Marielitos").

This last wave was very different from all the others. This group of Cubans resembled economic migrants much more closely than exiles. These were people seeking economic opportunities abroad, rather than rejecting all facets of the revolution. If in the 1960s about 32% of the exiles were professionals and managers, their numbers had dropped considerably by 1980. Only 11.2% of the latter group were professionals, while 70.9% were blue collar workers. Perhaps even more dramatic was the change in racial composition. Blacks made up less than 5% of all previous exile waves, but in 1980, 40% of the Cubans were black.

Of all "Marielitos," 19.2% (or 23,970 persons) had been in prison in Cuba. And of that prison population 1,774 were considered "serious criminals." No less than 600 mental patients also reached the U.S.

The U.S. Government was not prepared for such an influx. A program to deal with all of these people was never developed. The earlier waves of Cubans were welcomed. Numerous programs were in place to integrate them into American society. Thousands of young Cubans received scholarships. Special programs trained professionals to make use of their law or medical degrees here. Cuban businessmen received loans at very low interest rates. Those Cubans were exiles rather than migrants. They had come to the U.S. because they disagreed with the radical revolution going on in their country. They did not want to be assimilated. The "Marielitos," on the other hand, closely resembled the traditional Latin American migrant to the United States: when they arrived, they did not find much support. The recent events at Oakdale and Atlanta are just a reminder of the tragedy.

The earlier exile slowly has been transformed into a migrant as well. Memories disappear. New values and traditions are adopted. Children are born. The language is lost. Culture and tradition become less well defined. Cuban exile Julio Miranda writes,

Tu eres Cubano?

No. Yo soy dos cubanos

Que era, en realidad:

Yo soy medio Cubano,

la mitad de uno,

o acaso la tercera

o la cuarta parte,

una cubanidad que disminuye

Are you Cuban?

No. I am two Cubans

As a matter of fact I was:

I am half Cuban,

just half of one,

or perhaps a third

or a fourth,

a Cuban identity that diminishes

The 19th century Cuban poet and independence leader, José Martí, once wrote during a period of exile from the island, "I have two fatherlands: Cuba and the world." For many this statement remains true. We were born in Cuba and as such

inherited a past with specific symbols, meanings, language and hopes. It was a fairly provincial world with the heart and the spirit often dominating existence. But the United States is another world, another identity, always changing, transient. It is a world of achievement—the present and the future, with little or no concern with the past, roots or tradition. The United States of America: universalistic, metropolitan in most places, diverse, a maelstrom of cultures, where relativity reigns supreme. Meanwhile the exile searches for the constancy of what is known, remembered, and cherished.

What is exile? The place, away from home, “once removed,” where one eventually discovers one’s roots in the very process of becoming someone else. A true exile is immersed in politics, for politics permeates everything. The exile detests neutrality, and often cannot accept it, or even understand it. Exile is departure, separation, diaspora, rootlessness. It is also a search, a movement. It is a desire to return, to restore, to belong while knowing that that particular community cannot be constituted again. Gabriel García Márquez has written that for many Latin Americans “exile is their fatherland.” Exile is the ultimate existential journey, often a lonely one. But as James Joyce knew, it can also be the road to universal citizenship.

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Thoughts from José Martí (1853-1895)

“We are free, but not to be evil, not to be indifferent to human suffering, not to profit from the people, from the work created and sustained through their spirit of political association, while refusing to contribute to the political state that we profit from. . . . Man is not free to watch impassively the enslavement and dishonor of men, nor their struggles for liberty and honor.”

“It is probable that no self-respecting Cuban would like to see his country annexed to a nation where the leaders of opinion share towards him the prejudices excusable only to vulgar jingoism or rampant ignorance. No honest Cuban will stoop to be received as a moral pest. . . . in a community where his ability is denied, his morality insulted, and his character despised.”

“Whenever the word ‘art’ is spoken, the will feels chained to a strange and powerful force, inspiration is heightened, there is a sensation akin to the fulfillment of happiness, and a grateful rejoicing for a blessing. Art means flight from vulgarity, holding fast to greatness, forgetting ourselves, ennobling ourselves, and living. The only way to forgive our creator is to forget the burdensome, incomprehensible and mad gift of life.”

“Liberty is not a banner in whose shadow the victors devour the vanquished and overwhelm them with untiring rancor; liberty is a robust madwoman whose father, the sweetest of fathers, is love, and whose mother, the richest of mothers, is peace.”

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