

EDEN

A film by AMOS GITAI





THE 58TH INTERNATIONAL VENICE FILM FESTIVAL



Official Competition

Régine Konckier • Jean-Luc Ormières • Amos Gitai
present

SAMANTHA MORTON

DANNY HUSTON

THOMAS JANE

EDEN

A film by AMOS GITAI

Based on the novel "Homely Girl"
written by ARTHUR MILLER

a LES FILMS BALENCIAGA • TF1 INTERNATIONAL • CINEVIA FILMS
RFK INTERNATIONAL (Paris) • R&C PRODUZIONI (Rome) • AGAV HAFAKOT (Tel-Aviv) Coproduction

Length: 1h30

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interview with Amos Gitai

How did the project for Eden start?

It was very simple. The producers offered me to read the book and I then went to meet Arthur Miller in New York. Then, there was a whole series of transformations in order to "uproot" the text from its context, until the treatment became almost minimalist. The finished film offers an approach that is between ideology and sensuality, which is the central theme of Miller's novel. It is also a contemplation of a subject that has always interested me: how a handful of individuals find themselves "trapped" by History with a capital H. In *Eden*, it's the Second World War, with its twists and turns of events and their impact on a little group of characters concerned with their daily lives, their desires and lines of thought, while outside the world is in the process of changing forever. So, I took Miller's text and I set the action in Palestine at the end of the British mandate. The characters became ex-patriots. And so *Eden* is an uprooted film, a little like its characters. We see this in the way they dress; they are strangers in this land. When Samantha walks around on the building site among the Arab workers, it is obvious that she doesn't belong to that world. My characters are "parachuted" into that historical context.

But in the beginning, you had envisaged shooting the film in New York at the time that Miller's book is set, in the early 40's?

That idea existed, but I wasn't convinced. There are two solutions for a foreign filmmaker who wants to make a movie in the United States: either to make an underground movie on a small budget, completely outside the system, which is an interesting option, or to obtain the medium-size American budget, with all the restrictions that implies, including a large production structure and a certain rigidity. There's nothing in between. You can't make a low-budget European film in the US if your ambition is to make "a real American film." So, the decision was made to repatriate the film to Israel, while keeping the "alienated" or distanced aspect that links it to Palestine.

The real dilemma for me was to what extent I should emphasise the specific historical and geographical elements in which the film was situated. Some scenes were shot but didn't make it into the final edit. For example, a scene with the unionised workers in which there were portraits of Stalin and Lenin. This was deleted in the editing room to avoid giving the film too much of a didactic or explanatory tone. I wanted it to remain more intimate and abstract.

Some scenes in the film show British soldiers: scenes of arrests or patrols. Few people realise what the British mandate was like before the founding of the State of Israel.

But a series of keys make it possible to understand the historical situation as it was experienced by this community of characters in Palestine. Some of them leave Connecticut to go to Palestine. We hear certain historical texts read, some of which resonate in the present context of current events in the Middle East. For example, I put words from a utopian manifesto of the Zionist left into Dov Ernst's mouth. It talks about an alliance between Jewish and Arab workers. This might seem absurd

today, but it was an important idea in the 30's. Or speeches on the radio. These are like little external signals coming from the outside into the characters' daily lives, but which give us the feeling that there are more vast historical events going on at the same time. The character played by Arthur Miller himself brings up the question of the buying up of land. This is also an historical signal.

Where do Arthur Miller's lines in the film come from?

I worked with Arthur Miller on various historical sources. For example some texts of the Peace Alliance, which was a group of people that formed around Gershom Sholem, who was corresponding with Walter Benjamin. The character of the father played by Miller displays a certain scepticism about the idea of founding a Jewish State in the region. His words also have resonance in terms of what



is happening today. Let's say it's a pretty sceptical point of view. Today's situation poses questions not only in terms of the Israeli or Palestinian position, which are more or less just, but also about the ability of the State of Israel to remain a vital and energetic project despite the hostility surrounding it. That is the "subconscious" intention at the very heart of the film.

How did you persuade Arthur Miller to act in the film?

I thought it would be interesting because he'd give a certain interpretation to the film, a sort of key to understanding it. The

fact that he plays in the film shows that he actively participated in the "kidnapping" of the film to Palestine where I'd decided to repatriate it. The fact that he was voluntarily involved made the experience that much more exciting. Arthur Miller has a very measured attitude toward the history of Israel. He is neither hysterically pro-Israel nor militantly and hermetically anti-Israel. He is the typical embodiment of the Jew of the Diaspora in a typical fashion: intelligent and sceptical, which I like a lot. That's one of the reasons I wanted him to be in the film. He didn't want to come to Israel because he considered it too tiring as well as too risky. So we shot his scenes in his house in Connecticut. His character also refuses to go to Palestine, though without judging his son and daughter for going there to live. But he too considers that there are risks. He is the oldest character in the film, and yet he's the one who loves life. In this sense, he is not at all mystical. He believes that physical existence is primordial. I wanted to pay tribute to this wisdom that belongs to some of the personages of the Jewish Diaspora. And Arthur Miller embodies that ideally.

In the two scenes in which Arthur Miller appears, he plays opposite Danny Huston, his son in the film and in reality the son of John Huston. This makes for a fortuitous association with The Misfits, for which Arthur Miller wrote the screenplay. That helped Arthur Miller a lot, as he had never acted in a film before. It was like a joke he was playing on his own biography. Miller found it amusing to act with Danny Huston, who is intelligent and who didn't throw back at him an image of a "professional" American actor.

The film is both Samantha's personal and intimate story: a woman torn between her husband, her lover and her father—and a historical panorama that embraces a community of characters in a larger fictional framework.

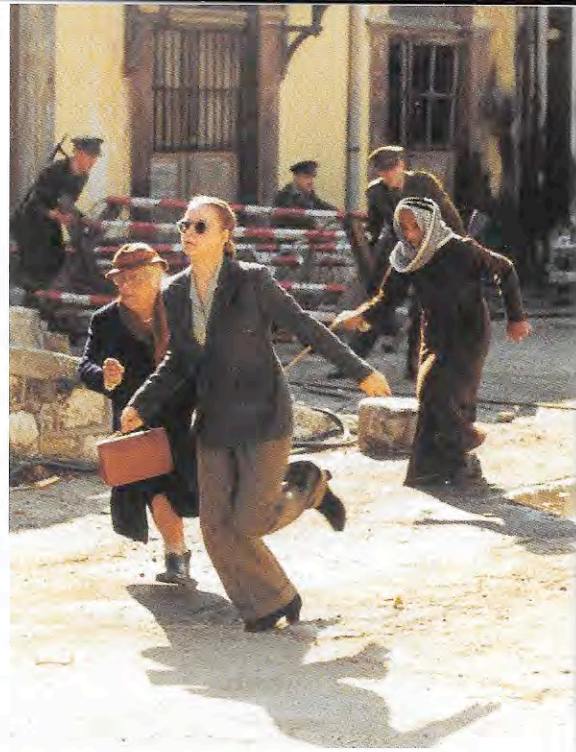
There is quite a similarity between the period described in the film and the current period in which the film is produced. Many people are living their lives, their intimate stories, their desires, while at the same time being trapped in a wider historical context that is more brutal. This can be felt today in the streets of Tel Aviv where there's an enormous anxiety that comes from the fact that people are very disturbed. In *Eden*, I didn't want to say anything too determined either about fate or about people's ideological motivations. I wanted to remain ambiguous within a hyper-politicised context and avoid anything doctrinaire. Today, the Middle East is like two cars heading in the same direction. Inevitably, they're going to collide. And we the viewers are looking on at an accident that is impossible to prevent a feeling of complete helplessness. I didn't want to say anything more specific than that, even though I know that this ambiguity bothers people.

We sometimes feel it's a refusal to choose.

If I had said things clearly about Jewish immigration during the British mandate, without finding a way of incorporating what Arthur Miller says about the Jews buying up land and the risk of plundering the Arabs, the film would have immediately been re-cycled as part of an ideological discourse. I preferred an undefined objective without a too-constructed background, as that would have inevitably led us into an ideology-based film. It's true that my films have a particular relationship with History. They are inscribed in an historical context, but their ambition is not to serve in a feudal way a simplistic point of view.

What did you wish to preserve from Arthur Miller's novel?

The French title of Arthur Miller's novel is *Une Fille Quelconque* (*An Ordinary Girl*). She is a totally subdued character, not somebody who takes a stand. And she's evolving in the middle of other people's ideas, looking for her own sensuality. I didn't want to make Samantha into a militant: that would have been a betrayal of the spirit of Miller's book. What interested me was to observe the character's solitude, her "lack of being". Every film poses the question of its own validity. Adapting





Arthur Miller's novel, which takes place in New York in the communist milieu of the 30's and 40's so it seemed to me that, despite its charm, that had already been done. I felt it was a well-trodden path. I preferred to "kidnap" the novel and put it into a different context, while at the same time remaining true to the spirit of the book which goes against dramatising the characters and against psychological or ideological simplification.

What is the core of the story?

It is first of all the dissonance of a woman who can't find her place in a world of men who are all obsessed with ideology or the pursuit of profit. She doesn't find her place among them because she has no autonomy. This is the most important thing that is retained from Miller's novel. And then there's the way that, little by little, History seeps into this intimate story. It seems to me that this concerns the majority of people living in conflict

situations or within ideologies that crush them.

They are observers of a show that they are at the same time part of. Today in the Middle East, people watch their own history on television. They are limited to being extras in their own life stories. It's a very unsettling position because they are not the actors, they have no power of decision, they can't do anything to change the course of history or their own attitudes. And so they become prisoners in a cage, watching the great events go by, with nothing for themselves but these small moments of frustration or the small things of daily life: watching a sunset, having their personal emotions. The use of English in the film accentuates this uprootedness and disarray.

Yes, why use English?

English created the link between Israel and elsewhere, whether that be Connecticut or any other country in the world. In the film, I chose to remain unspecific: there's just a snowy landscape that contrasts with shots of the sand and the desert of Palestine. I could have shown Manhattan with its skyscrapers, but that would have been too figurative a reference.

Do you mean that you didn't choose English because it's the language of the cinema, but because it's the language of exile, of characters in transit?

Yes, it's not the language of any country. Samantha is not really typical of the Jewish pioneers who came to live in Israel. She is not like the female character in *Kadosh*, who was subjugated by religion yet able to sacrifice herself in order not to go against her faith. Samantha is an unusual character who is not typical of the pioneers or the refugees who came to Palestine after enormous suffering and who had a reason to be there. Actually, people like her did not stay in Israel because they did not find a way to survive in such a dense historical situation. Generally speaking, you had to have a posture: you had to become a nationalist or a militant against something, but you had to be committed in one way or another. *Eden* describes a reality that is very present in Israel. A huge

number of Jews of the Diaspora came to live in Israel, but they live there as if in internal exile. They come from France, the US or elsewhere, they put up with the heat, the mosquitoes and other problems; overall, they agree with the idea of living in Israel but they are unable to commit themselves. Often, they only speak French or English, or they speak Hebrew but with a very heavy accent. They're there and they're not there. They don't know what they're doing there, but they don't want to be anywhere else. We could imagine the same situation in Paris among Americans who live there because of a romantic notion: they love the country, they appreciate the French language, but they only partially belong to French daily life. This is a component of Israel, which is a mosaic of many different components. The characters in *Eden* have a satellite relationship with that land: they're there without being there.

Why the title Eden?

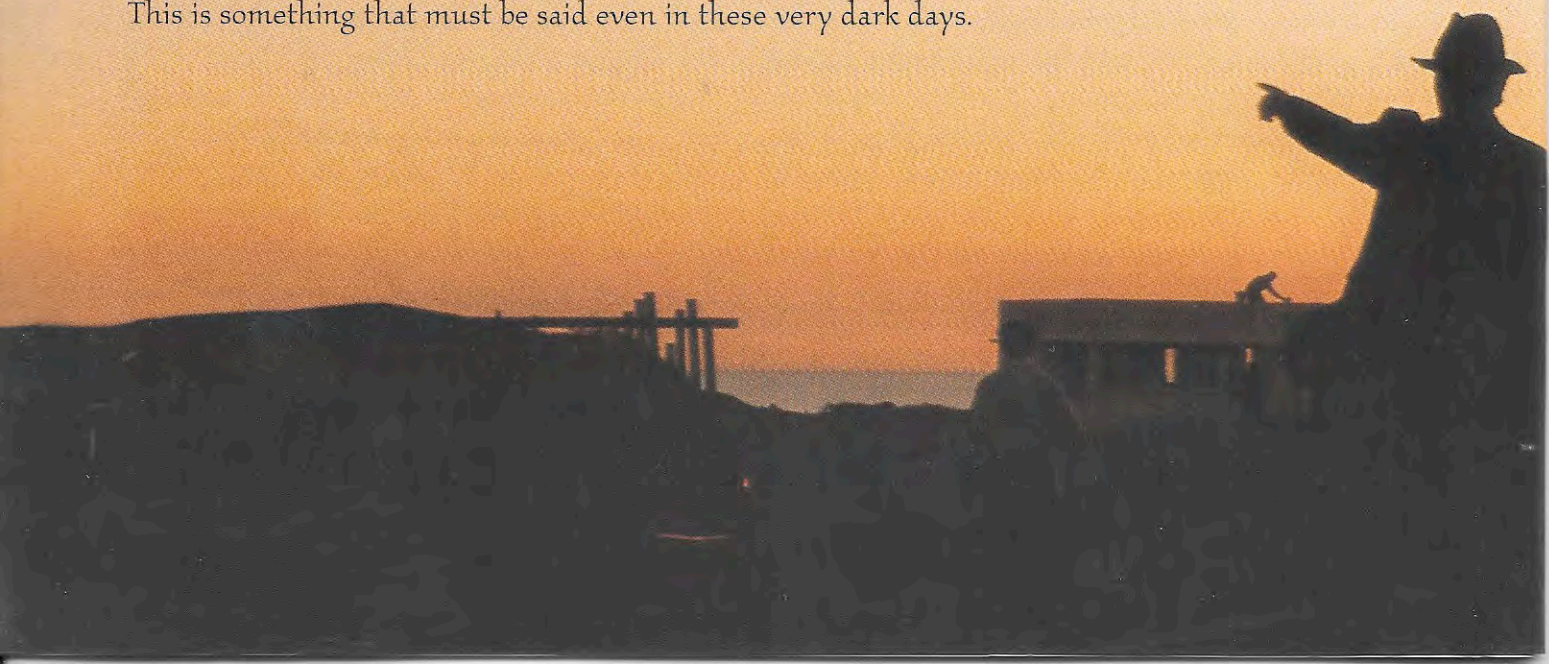
Because it's an undefined paradise. A bi-national Utopia that's never ending. Even today, the bi-national plan comes back like a lost paradise of the Middle East that we'll never see because of the enormous damage caused by nationalism. Through my different films, I try to find answers. I don't find any, or else they're very limited ones.

We get the feeling that you reflect any mythological retrospective projection about the birth or creation of Israel.

Israel needs to not be trapped in its own romantic mythology. I prefer to emphasise a modern attitude that's open and democratic, even if that's a cliché: to submit a multi-faceted vision that's anti-monochromatic, more heterogeneous, that goes against any single mythology. *Devarim* had a modern vision of Israelis as people just like anyone else. The image of the "mythological and combative" Israeli has been very useful to the propaganda of the Jewish right which favours founding colonies on Arab territory.

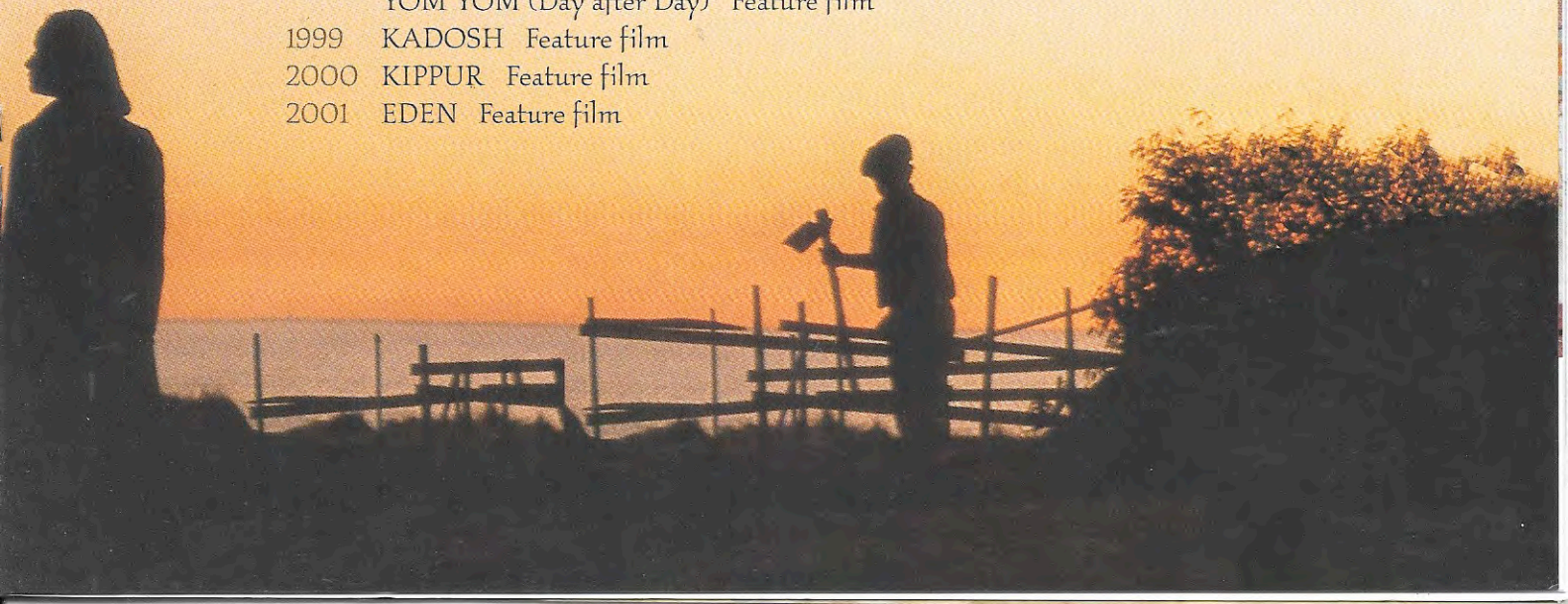
Being combative can be the response to a necessity; if you are forced to defend yourself, you have to, you can't disarm unilaterally.

This is something that must be said even in these very dark days.



Amos Gitai's filmography

- 1980 BAYIT (The House) Documentary
1981 WADI Documentary
IN SEARCH OF IDENTITY Documentary
AMERICAN MYTHOLOGIES Documentary
1982 YOMAN SADE (Field diary) Documentary
1983 ANANAS Documentary
1984 BANGKOK-BAHREIN Documentary
1985 ESTHER Feature film
1987 BRAND NEW DAY Musical documentary
1989 BERLIN-JERUSALEM Feature film
1990 NAISSANCE D'UN GOLEM Feature film / Documentary
1991 GOLEM, L'ESPRIT DE L'EXIL (Gholem, the Spirit of the Exile) Feature film
WADI Documentary
1992 GIBELLINA, METAMORPHOSIS OF A MELODY Documentary
1993 QUEEN MARY Documentary
JARDIN PÉTRIFIÉ Feature film
LA GUERRE DES FILS DE LUMIÈRE CONTRE LES FILS DES TÉNÈBRES Documentary
IN THE VALLEY OF THE WUPPER Documentary
1994 IN THE NAME OF THE DUCE Documentary
GIVE PEACE A CHANCE. LE JOURNAL D'AMOS GITAI Documentary
1995 ZIHRON DEVARIM (Things) Feature film
1996 L'ARÈNE DU MEURTRE Documentary
MILIM Documentary
1997 WAR AND PEACE IN VESOUL Feature film
1998 HOUSE IN JERUSALEM Documentary
ZION Documentary
YOM YOM (Day after Day) Feature film
1999 KADOSH Feature film
2000 KIPPUR Feature film
2001 EDEN Feature film



The father and the son

(Arthur Miller and Danny Huston)

Extract from EDEN

The father : You know, I didn't mean to depress you, but when you get there, don't buy too much land because... uh... it occurs to me, what's going to happen to those Arabs? Where do they go? I don't know how much is enough, or how much is too much, but there must be a right amount that they should keep or not keep. Don't you think?

The son : Yeah, I do, but I'm just not really interested in doing right or wrong. You know, it's just a business for me. It's just the market here is very volatile, and I see opportunities there that I don't see here anymore.

The father : Yeah, well, the odd thing is, you know, when your sister was here, her idealism alarmed me, and now, that I'm sitting with you, I wish we had more of it. It's a dilemma. I... I guess you are... maybe you are right in going with that kind of idea in mind, but there is something very strange about it to me still.

The son : You know, everything I know is something you taught me. I...

The father : Yeah, but I taught you that in a country with 150 million people in it, and is 3000 miles wide... You are going into tiny place where every inch of land is important.

The son : Business is business.

The father : Well, let's hope it's business and not something else.

The son : Will you wish me a good trip?

The father : I wish you well for everything and when you get there, tell your sister to write me a letter more than once every two months. I miss her a lot, and I hope she is happy.

The son : It should be quite something, the Promised Land, don't you think?

The father : I suppose. I'm just... I hold my breath, whenever I think of it.

The son : The sky is blue and the smell of incense, the music, the women, the immigrants buying land, the opportunities for a deal. Heh.

The father : The Arabian Nights

The son : The Arabian Nights

The father : But that's a poem, and this is real.

The son : But this land was founded on dreams.

The father : God, it might work. I'm not going to say it won't. It's a question that's gonna take a long time to answer. But good luck.



Samantha Morton

- 1998 UNDER THE SKIN by Carin Adler
1999 SWEET AND LOWDOWN by Woody Allen
JESUS' SON by Alison Maclean
DREAMING OF JOSEPH LEES by Eric Styles
2000 PANDAEMONIUM by Julien Temple
2001 EDEN by Amos Gitai
MINORITY REPORT by Steven Spielberg



Thomas Jane

- 1993 NEMESIS by Albert Pyun
1996 THE CROW : THE CITY OF ANGELS by Tim Pope
1997 THE LAST TIME I COMMITTED SUICIDE by Stephen Kay
FACE/OFF by John Woo
BOOGIE NIGHTS by Paul Thomas Andersen
1998 THURSDAY by Skip Woods
THE THIN RED LINE by Terrence Malick
THE VELOCITY OF GARY by Dan Ireland
1999 DEEP BLUE SEA by Renny Harlin
MAGNOLIA by Paul T. Anderson
MOLLY by John Duigan
2000 UNDER SUSPICION by Stephen Hopkins
2001 EDEN by Amos Gitai

Danny Huston

- 1995 LEAVING LAS VEGAS by Mike Figgis
1997 ANNA KARENINA by Bernard Rose
1998 SPANISH FLY by Daphna Kastner
SUSAN'S PLAN by John Landis
2000 TIMECODE by Mike Figgis
2001 EDEN by Amos Gitai

Daphna Kastner

- 1983 THE LONELY LADY by Peter Sasdy
1990 EATING by Henry Jaglom
1991 JULIA HAS TWO LOVERS by Bashar Shbib
1992 LANA IN LOVE by Bashar Shbib
VENICE / VENICE by Henry Jaglom
1998 SPANISH FLY by Daphna Kastner
2000 TIMECODE by Mike Figgis
2001 EDEN by Amos Gitai

cast list

Samantha SAMANTHA MORTON
Dov THOMAS JANE
Kalkovski LUKE HOLLAND
Kalman DANNY HUSTON
Silvia DAPHNA KASTNER
Father ARTHUR MILLER

crew list

Screenplay AMOS GITAI
MARIE-JOSE SANSELME
and NICK VILLIERS
based on the novel "HOMELY GIRL"
by ARTHUR MILLER

Directed by AMOS GITAI

Produced by REGINE KONCKIER
JEAN-LUC ORMIERES
AMOS GITAI

Coproducers DIDIER SAPAUT
JOSE COVO
TILDE CORSI
GIANNI ROMOLI

Line Producers LAURENT TRUCHOT
SHUKI FRIEDMAN
KEVIN GALLAGHER

Director of Photography RENATO BERTA

Production Designer THIERRY FRANÇOIS

Art Director EYTAN LEVY

Costume Designer LAURA DINULESCO

Sound MICHEL KHARAT
ALEX CLAUDE
JOHN PURCELL
CYRIL HOLTZ
PHILIPPE AMOUROUX

Editors KOBI NETANEL
MONICA COLEMAN

Music Violinist IHAB NIMER
Symphony N°1 by GUSTAV MAHLER
with CONCERTGEBOUWAMSTERDAM
Conducted by LEONARD BERNSTEIN

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