“SCHULMEISTERS MARIE” AND “BLAUBART”: TWO SHORT STORIES BY E. MARLITT

A. N. MAKAROV

Vyatka State University, Russia

O. Yu. POLYAKOV

Vyatka State University, Russia

O. A. POLYAKOVA

Vyatka State University, Russia

I. A. TYUTYUNNIK

Vyatka State University, Russia

S. I. TYUTYUNNIK

Vyatka State University, Russia

ABSTRACT

The paper focuses on two short stories by E. Marlitt (E. John, 1825-1887), a most famous German woman writer of the nineteenth century. One of them, “Schulmeisters Marie” (“Schoolmaster’s Marie”), was published much after its being written. Although it was eclipsed by another Marlitt’s work, “Die zwölf Apostel” (“The Twelve Apostles”), written simultaneously with it, it may be considered a successful beginning of the writer’s literary activities as it exposes her considerable skill of characterization and plot making. The second of the stories, analysed in the article, “Blaubart” (“Bluebeard”), not only reminds the reader of an old folklore and literary plot but also provides at least two interpretations associated with either biblical Kain and Abel or, in a wider context, with the plots about rival brothers/families in the world literature (for instance, F. M. Klinger’s tragedy “Die Zwillinge” (“The Twins”) or Shakespeare’s “Romeo and Juliet”).

Keywords: *Nineteenth Century German Literature; German Women Writers of The Nineteenth Century; German Journals for Family Reading; “Die Gartenlaube”; E. Marlitt’s Oeuvre; E. Marlitt’s Story “Schulmeisters Marie” (“Schoolmaster’s Marie”); Marlitt’s “Blaubart” (“Bluebeard”).*

INTRODUCTION

E. Marlitt (Friederike Henriette Christiane Eugenie John, 1825–1887), one of the most famous German women writers of the nineteenth century, authored short stories and novels which brought fame to her and to “Die Gartenlaube”, the journal she contributed to (Brauer, 2006; Kienzle, 1975; Vierhufe, 2007). Almost all Marlitt’s works were translated in her lifetime in many languages, including Russian, and gained wide popularity abroad (Hösch, 2000; Kosch, 1953; Sagarra, 1990). In spite of this, her critics blamed her for the collaboration with a family journal whose publications were intended for unsophisticated readers who did not belong to the nation’s intellectual elite. Consequently, the merits of her works were underappreciated, and many readers did not try seriously to comprehend Marlitt’s oeuvre, thinking that a woman was not capable of creating a significant piece of art (May, 2014; Rochester, 2010).

Some literary historians used to believe that Marlitt was well-known only in 19 c. and then forgotten (Haas 2009, p. 7-8). Actually, her heritage was and is in great demand at the book market, her stories

and novels are published in Germany and other countries (Dingeldey, 2007; Rochester, 2010). This fact prompts the necessity of further studies of her works in order to reveal the specificity of the author's poetics.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A.K. Bulygin, a scholar from St. Petersburg, in his article "Grand grandmother Isaura: E. Marlitt and her novel "The Second Wife" renders the writer's biography and comments on the readers' reception of her works. He highlights the dramatic circumstances of E. Marlitt's turn to literary activities caused by her progressive deafness (Bulygin, 2008). She had to give up the career of a singer and for some time hesitated about what activity to take up. But, as her early biographer noted, her sharp wit and strong soul prevented her from giving in to despair; as she was practically minded and brave enough, she did not feel too desolate (Arens 1994; Bulygin 2008). There was one more circumstance which motivated her turn to writing: The Princess of Schwarzburg-Sondershausen, who had been her generous sponsor, could not support her any longer (Marlitt, n. d.; Hobohm, 2010; Hofmann, 2005; Klein, 2012).

At that period, Marlitt was working at her first short stories ("Schulmeisters Marie" and "Die zwölf Apostel") and the novel "Goldelse", hesitating to offer them to the public. Her brother, to whose family she read her pieces, sent the stories to Ernst Keil, the publisher of "Die Gartenlaube", who turned down „Schulmeisters Marie“ and accepted "Die zwölf Apostel". He explained his refusal by the former being a typical "countryside story", one of those published excessively at that time. It is true that the action of "Schulmeisters Marie" takes place in the rural settings, but the author does not imitate her contemporaries, she is concerned not with drawing picturesque country scenes, but with showing real human characters, typical and individuated at the same time (Vierhufe, 2007).

METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

"Schulmeisters Marie" was published only in 1888, after E. Marlitt had gained considerable popularity with German readers. In it, the author portrays characters not as schemes but as typical representatives of provincial Germany with their specific social traits.

We agree with H. Arens who objects to those scholars who regard "Schulmeisters Marie" as a "countryside story" (Arens, 1994; Potthast, 1926). The matter is, Marlitt chose a village as the place of action with the only aim to focus effectively on a rather limited circle of characters and to foreground the socio-ethical conflict of the main characters and their environment, the provincial majority, which belittles their reputation. Humiliation of a man in this environment is caused by the confidence of the rich of their superiority. Marlitt successfully portrays their shallowness, self-assumption, mendacity and ingratitude, the qualities which were characteristic not only of village life. The author turns to the countryside scenery to show on a limited scale the processes which were typical of all German society of the period (Defant, 2010).

Alongside with this, Marlitt presents "little people" (or great ambitions of those) be they well-to-do and self-assured or less prosperous, but rather influential in their rural society. Their portrayal serves a background of the love story of Marie, a school teacher's daughter, and Joseph, a rich bachelor. They meet during a wedding ceremony at the tavern „Die grüne Tanne“ in Ringelshausen (Marlitt, 1994b). Several pages of the story are devoted to the depiction of the wedding, and the narration is focused on Marie who did not take part in the ceremony and sat alone at the window with her needlework. The writer foregrounded this character, making it clear that she would be one of the central characters of the story.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The exposition of the story reveals the troubles of a school teacher's widow and her daughter Marie. Marie's mother is suspected of having stolen the parson's money (the owner of the tavern declared her being guilty), and also Marie is blamed for her "amoral" behavior, for after spending a year in the city she came back home with a child. The tavern owner's son Bastel tells the general opinion of the village inhabitants that it is her child, though actually it is not (Marlitt, 1994b). Like his father, Bastel

is disposed against the school teacher and his daughter and spreads rumours about them, relying on his father's and damsel Dora's opinions (the latter is the village "defender of morals"). (Marlitt, 1994b). The tavern owner's hatred towards the teacher's wife, as it becomes clear later, is caused by her refusal to accept his marriage proposal (Marlitt, 1994b).

The criminal element, the theft, is not the most important one in the composition of the story: it just sharpens the conflict and highlights the main traits of the characters. For Joseph, this accident is a trial of his feelings for Marie. From the very beginning, he did not believe in the village gossip, thinking, probably, the beloved's beauty a proper token of her virtue and innocence. Her behavior during the wedding and after it made his conviction even stronger (Schönberg, 1986). So, Joseph's struggle for redeeming the good name of Marie and her mother was associated for him with the removal of the barriers to his happiness.

The love affair reveals the strength of Marie's character: she would rather refuse from her happiness than sacrifice her principles and family values (Hansen, 2013; Kontje, 2004). Unlike Joseph, she had to suffer a lot because of the villagers' prejudiced attitude to her and her mother. Misfortunes made her character stronger and shaped her convictions. As the Christian doctrine, prescribing filial obedience to parents, is a compulsory source of her behavior (Bible, n.d.), she is ready to sacrifice her love for the young man, because his mother is against their relationship. The firmness of Marie's moral principles leads her to an intensive suffering, but she cannot violate them because she was brought up in accordance with biblical values, not social ones, to which the villagers, including damsel Dora, the parson's housekeeper, stick to, thinking it an indisputable rule to succumb to opinions of the rich. Unlike those who are sure that wealthy people must be a source of moral authority, she relies not on the superiors' opinions, but on the truths of Christianity.

Joseph's struggle for his beloved is intermingled with the revealing of the mystery of the child, living in Marie's family, who turns to be the daughter of Ann, her woman friend from the neighbouring town. This woman has to keep her motherhood in secret, but after getting to know about the gossip about Marie and the child, tells the truth to Joseph's mother, confusing her greatly as she becomes conscious of her being unjust towards Marie.

Joseph's mother, according to Marlitt, is an honest person with a bright and pure soul. This old woman took part in the wedding, described at the beginning of the story, as she was the groom's stepmother. She was respected by the rural society, but was not this respect motivated by her prosperity? - asks the writer. In case of doubts about her financial state, anyone could find proofs, observing the tavern owner's behavior towards her, his exaggerated politeness and helpfulness. The tavern owner was an extremely unpleasant man, contrasted to Joseph's mother who put up with his chattering, as she was a well-bred person (Marlitt, 1994).

As a matter of fact, only one of the villagers is morally equal to Marie and her mother. It is a local teacher who, not being the native of Ringelshausen, can see the situation objectively. Some time later he moves to another place, and Marie loses a decent supporter in her conflict with the village society whose leader is damsel Dora, portrayed in the story as a heartless and spiteful person.

These qualities are exposed just at the very beginning of the story, in the scene of dancing. To find shelter from the pairs who were shooting along, two breathless small girls hid behind the chair in which damsel Dora, whom they were scared of, was sitting. At that moment, a dancing pair pushed the smaller girl, and she caught at a ribbon on damsel Dora's cap. Damsel Dora cried loudly as the cap fell down, and the guests rushed to help her pick it up and dust it off. Dora lashed out at the offender. The tavern owner's puny son interfered and, offering the small girl be taught a proper lesson, was about to kick her. The child was defended by the mother, the teacher's widow.

Among the guests was a high slender young man whose noble and easy manners distinguished him from the crowd (Marlitt, 1994). It was Joseph, the groom's stepbrother and Frau Sanner's only son and inheritor. He wanted to learn more about the criminal case of the teacher's widow. Damsel Dora would not speak about this theft and retired quickly. The tavern owner then started to tell him, spitefully and

angrily, about the woman and her husband, the teacher, who had loved her very much. After his death she became so poor that she decided to steal the parson's money – that was the general opinion of the villagers. Later it would become clear that it was damsel Dora's son who had committed the crime, but now all Joseph's interlocutors insisted that the teacher's widow was to blame. For them it was an indisputable fact, because the most respectable people of the village shared this opinion. The owner of the tavern supposed that the stolen money was hidden somewhere, and later the teacher's widow would collect it and emigrate to America (she had articulated her wish to leave the native country before). Joseph did not believe these words (Marlitt, 1994).

Joseph appreciated Marie's determination to defend her mother, her strength of will, which did not run counter to her femininity, and independence, so untypical for the village girls. He regarded Marie as a unique phenomenon (Marlitt, 1994). Joseph's character was created, to a great extent, after its biblical prototype. He is handsome, clever and just, though a little egotistic, especially at the beginning of the story. He thinks that his love is a self-justifying feeling which should be above his mother's opinion. One should also have in mind that, in spite of her good human qualities, his mother did believe the opinionated villagers and resented Marie and her mother at first.

E. Marlitt's story is well structured, and its events do not contradict one another. Even if compared with her first published work, "Die zwölf Apostel", having more artistic merits, it demonstrates the author's evident talent for characterization and bears the traces of an individual artistic personality (Hansen, 2013; Kontje, 2004).

In 1866, E. John-Marlitt published her new story called "Blaubart" ("Barbe-bleu", "Bluebeard"). The title reminds the reader of the fabulous character of Charles Perrault (1628–1703), brothers Grimm (Jacob Ludwig Carl Grimm, 1785–1863; Wilhelm Carl Grimm, 1786–1859) or Giambattista Basile (1566-1632; this writer is less known to the wide audience). The personage they focused on murdered his wives who dared to open his mysterious room (Ashliman, 1999).

The stories about "Barbe-bleu" had circulated for ages and were borrowed by literature from folklore. Basile, Perrault, and brothers Grimm adapted them to their epoch, to the national culture, thus their characters differ substantially from one another and from their folklore prototype. What is common to them all is Barbe-bleu's cruelty towards the "weak sex" representative who dared to disobey the "strong one" (Ashliman, 1999).

The plot is based on the famous story of Gilles de Montmorency-Laval (1405–1440), a rich baron, the Marshal of France and an associate of Jeanne d'Arc, also known as Gilles de Rays or Gilles de Retz, a friend of king Charles VII. When he fell out of royal favour, the king supported fabrications about de Rays killing children and committing lots of other atrocities. This story was reproduced in folklore for centuries and then it migrated to Jacques Offenbach's opera-buff "Barbe-bleu" (1866), mystery drama "The Castle of the Duke Blue Beard" (1910) by Béla Balázs, which was used by Béla Bartók for composing his only opera with the same title (1919); and also this plot was embodied in many films (1901, 1951, 1972, 1973, 1996, 2008, 2013), and cartoons (1979, 2013), etc.

As we see, the image of Barbe-bleu was employed by different arts in the course of ages. So it was in the XIX century, although we do not find many direct references to it. In Russia, this plot was known due to translations from French, and we may suppose that it was integrated into the passive stock of the national folklore, for it was not actualized, as literature had to respond to more urgent problems of social nature.

In this context, E. Marlitt's "Blaubart" ("Bluebeard") is not directly based on the well-known plot but is connected with it allusively. Alongside with it, it is an original, uncomplicated piece (Arens, 1994) which enables a reader to imagine its events in partial connection with the story of Barbe-bleu and, rather unexpectedly, with Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet".

The amazing intersection of the two fundamentally different works allowed Marlitt to talk about her characters taking into account the reader's knowledge of the content of the fairy tale and the dramatic composition. Her story, by the way, contains another allusion - to one of the oldest stories noted in the Bible - a story about the fratricide of Kain and Abel or the same story from Roman history about the brothers Romulus and Remus. This intertextual plane released Marlitt from the need to discuss her characters in detail, as she relied on preliminary sufficiently extensive knowledge of the reading public. Declaring the well-known story of "Barbe-bleu" the subject of her work, Marlitt was certainly aware that readers would expect the depiction of something similar to what they had known from the works of folklore for a long time, namely, the dangerous situation of a beautiful wife living with a villainous husband. And really, the parallels with the prototext are obvious: in Marlitt's story there is also an unknown young woman whose face is hidden under the veil, and a young man to whom rumor ascribes precisely those terrible properties that were inherent in the folklore character Barbe-bleu (to be more exact, he is believed to keep this woman by force, since she never leaves the estate on her own). However, the hints to the prototype are scanty. The only thing that can somehow make Marlitt's personage related to the folklore character is that the young woman lives in his house as a captive, without the right to go beyond it. At least that's what most people in this small town think. Their assumptions are based on the fact that the woman is never alone. Even in the garden of her house she is under the constant supervision of a servant (Andermatt, 1987). The observers ground their opinion that she is very young on the grace of her movements and they believe that she is the wife of the man called Barbe-bleu. Moreover, it was a young man with a magnificent bearing (as it turns out, he was a military man) and excellent features.

In fact, the title of E. Marlitt's story might be different, for example, "Romeo and Juliet" as in Shakespeare's work, "Kain and Abel" as in the Bible or "Die Zwillinge" ("The Twins") as in F. M. Klinger (the story of hostile brothers is widespread in world literature), for the narrative is based on the variants we have just mentioned. All three possibilities are established in the work of the German writer. The narrative is based on the motive of decades – long enmity between two close relatives, two cousins, and then between their families. Both families had been living side by side, in the same estate to which the common gate was leading. The heads of the families were close friends who never quarreled and perfectly understood each other. Their wives were on friendly terms too, as well as the children of both families. Everything began to change at the time when the heads of the families started collecting pieces of art. Both of them were not very good judges of the works of art, so their collections contained of a large number of exhibits of little value. But it should be noted that one of the cousins, Erich, understood art better than the other, Hubert. It led to a certain extent to his sense of superiority.

Initially it was not manifested in any dislike or, indeed, enmity. Everything changed in the moment when Hubert's wife received from her relative, whose only heir she was, the authentic canvas of Anthony van Dyck (1599–1641). This inheritance drastically changed everything and varied the life of both families. Hubert's new acquisition completely changed the attitude of other people to his art collection. Neighbors crowded Hubert's house to admire the real Van Dyck. It is clear that this caused a dislike that developed into Erich's hatred, who could not accept this new state of affairs. The situation was particularly changed to the worse when one day the picture disappeared. Hubert was sure that it was Erich who had stolen it. Though the work of Van Dyck was not detected in Erich's collection, Hubert considered and called him a thief. Since that time the families quarrelled, and this tension quickly developed into hatred, which only grew stronger as years passed.

This collision resembles to some extent the situation of the families of Montague and Capulet, that became famous due to the tragedy of W. Shakespeare "Romeo and Juliet" (1597). In Marlitt's story, two families are also at war. The reason for their intransigence, related to the loss of Van Dyck's painting, has already been mentioned. This hatred had been lasting for many decades and did not lose its sharpness in the course of time, having involved children and grandchildren. And now two houses, two close relatives and two neighboring estates, which once had had one gate, turned out to be separated by hatred and a green fence in the form of a bush that was no less significant than a real

brick fence. There remained no traces of past kindness and well-being, except for the garden house, which stood in the middle of the estate and which had to be destroyed (Kontje, 2004).

In Marlitt's story we can see one more version of the plot, associated with a biblical theme, – an enmity of the brothers on the analogy of relations between Abel and Cain. Although there is no murder here, but the tension of hatred does not diminish it, especially since the deaths of two initially main characters, with whom the emergence of such a situation is connected, can also be understood as the result of their unnecessarily tense mental state, in which they didn't bear the burden.

And from the subsequent narrative it becomes known that their heirs also died early. As a matter of fact, there remained two characters with whom the movement of the plot is connected – a young master of one of the estates, to whom the rumor gave the name of Blaubart (Barbe-bleu), and a girl named Lili, who was close to Mrs. Hofrätin (Court Counsellor) Falk, an owner of the second estate, but was not her relative.

As we can see, E. Marlitt brings to reader's mind simultaneously two folklore motifs and one literary plot that essentially create the background of her story's events. Undoubtedly, the constructive device of "Blaubart" is the reminiscence which is intended to give the subject a greater saturation, that is, to enrich the situation with additional lines and nuances. According to the author's idea, they are to give the reader a better awareness of the subject matter and help him comprehend the tragic conflict, which although didn't lead to the physical elimination of one of the parties, nevertheless dramatically complicated the lives of both families. The events which are beyond this narrative, the early deaths of family members concentrated the reader's attention on the incidents that will continue in the lives of the surviving representatives – Barbe-bleu and Lili, the girl connected with the second family, from which only a woman remained and who in the family and the city was called Aunt Barbara. She was also called so by a young girl named Lili. It's true that Lily was not aunt Barbara's relative, but was her best friend's daughter, nevertheless she was perceived by Barbara as her daughter and heiress.

The story begins with the appearance of Lili at the gate of her aunt's house, where she arrived after a break of several years. Before that, she had used to spend many weeks in the aunt's house playing with the tenant's children whose father rented a neighboring house formerly owned by Hubert. One of his remaining heirs left his estate for the residence of this German state at the insistence of his wealthy wife seeking life in high society. A distant bell rang, then quick steps approached. A red cotton umbrella appeared behind the garden gate with a thin old man in a striped waistcoat and an old-fashioned frock coat reaching his heels. A large, stately woman approached the door (Marlitt, 1994a). This woman, Court Counsellor Falk, was not the most comfortable neighbor for the residents of the city R., because she told them the truth straight in the face and plainly (Marlitt, 1994a) and obstinately interceded for those who were slandered by city talkers and gossips. However, her performances were more than compensated by the help she provided due to her considerable wealth. Any resident of the city could count on her support, and children always received sweets from her and could frolic on the lawn of the house. That's what turned her into an aunt for everyone. Her father worshiped her, she also loved him boundlessly. She married Court Counselor Falk, but this happy marriage didn't last long. Since his death she had been living as a widow in her father's house with servants – Sauer and a sixty year old cook named Dorte.

Two cousins – Hubert and Erich Dorn – lived in the houses with their families. Their lives served as a model for others, because they never argued or quarreled with each other. Their children loved each other and sometimes argued. But their mothers were wise enough not to interfere in children's quarrels. The two families were friendly to one another and had dinner together in the garden house. But then the changes came. They were connected with the passion for collecting, which pervaded both families. At first the wives laughed at their husbands' hobby, and then they saw with fear that the anger and envy were growing because of new acquisitions. Quarrels became more and more severe.

This continued without much trouble for some time, until the wife of Hubert inherited the true picture of Van Dyck. She gave it to her husband, who added it to his collection (Marlitt, 1994). It was a blow

for Erich, for he himself drew well, but in his collection, there was nothing comparable to the original of this great artist. He saw with anger how friends and acquaintances rushed to Hubert's house to look at the painting of the great artist.

One morning the picture disappeared. Mutual reproaches sprang up, and then on the same day there appeared the workers who planted the bushes exactly in the middle between the houses, removing the chestnuts that had grown there before. Then Erich had a stroke and died. His wife hated neighbors until her last days and instilled hatred to her only granddaughter – Aunt Barbara. Lili could not understand this old family feud. The conflicts seemed petty to her, but the court decided the case in favor of the neighbor, and within eight days the aunt had to take away the part of the house occupying the neighbor's territory. The pictures of Erich Dorn, Aunt Barbara's grandfather, hang on the walls in the garden house showing his insignificant talent. One of them depicted Orestes, driven by furies, and this picture frightened Lili. In general, the picture was weak with the exception of Orestes' head. Erich liked to view paintings in the garden house, and his last words were "The Garden House". Thus, his wife took these words as his will and tried to inspire respect to aunt Barbara too. It's clear that Barbara would hate anyone who would have encroached on this house. Lili also believed that, one could talk with a neighbor about this house.

A young master of the neighboring house, an interesting and attractive man, similar to Joseph, the hero of the story "Schulmeisters Marie", by his human qualities, nevertheless, differs from him significantly. The main difference is that Joseph can be named a rural man, a person without life experience and broad views, while Barbe-bleu has an incomparably greater horizon. He saw the world, took part in wars and became a nobleman. At the same time, he is not a person who lacks any aesthetic interests, he beautifully plays the cello and has a liking to the old garden house (Arens, 1994) – which, in fact, can be associated by analogy with the magazine "Die Gartenlaube", for which Marlitt wrote and where she was published, – "Die Gartenlaube" as something old, but cozy, to which a person becomes attached with all his soul.

An unexpected event occurs in the story about Barbe-bleu. In the counselor's house there was so-called "green living room", and the counselor ordered Sauer and Dorte to ventilate and clean this room. This green living room had been cleaned. They moved the furniture from the garden house and also the paintings which the counselor and Lili carefully cleaned, and Sauer had to hang them. Sauer began to hang the pictures, but the picture with Orestes fell. There appeared the stripes on it in all directions, and to the aunt's surprise two eyes could be seen behind the layer of paint. The counselor expelled Sauer from the room, quickly covered the cracks with her hand. She grabbed the scissors and cut the top layer of the canvas. She found a delightful portrait of a young girl by Van Dyck underneath it. Then she realized that her ancestor had stolen the picture, that is, the Hubert family was right, calling him a thief. Being a fair person, the counselor did not doubt for a minute that she should return the picture to the legal owner, the young neighbor. The aunt said that it was Lili who could correct the greatest injustice, and gave the picture to a young man who suddenly threw it into the fireplace. But the aunt saved the canvas, and the next day the house was demolished as well as the green fence, and peace between the families was restored.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of both stories by E. Marlitt "Schulmeisters Marie" (circa 1864–1865) and "Blaubart" (1866) indicates their compositional and characterological affinity. If we turn to the images of women-protagonists, we'll note their similarity to each other. Marie and Lili are close to each other: they are lovely, feminine, they both have strong characters, full of dignity. They are able to suppress their own feelings and follow the moral requirements and responsibilities: Marie in her support of her mother and unwillingness to contradict the opinion of her beloved's mother, and Lili in her desire to support Aunt Barbara in her attitude towards a neighbor (Lili is extremely negative about him as the representative of the hostile branch of the family, although she understands that she already loves him with all her heart). The images of the young men are also similar in some ways. They are both handsome, passionate, seeking to overcome the obstacles that hinder their love. The second young man, von Dorn, is more interesting than Joseph. He is more talented, more resistant in life situations

and relationships, we can say that he is a more many-sided personality. Young von Dorn saw a lot, suffered greatly, got nobility, went through the war, but he did not lose the ability to love and feel the beauty not only of Lili, who he almost immediately loved with all his heart. He can experience aesthetic pleasure not only admiring the beauty of Lili, but also enjoying the beauty of music that he deeply feels and is able to convey this feeling to others, without even thinking of influencing them consciously. Both Marlitt's stories are similar to each other by the writer's deep penetration into the world of her characters.

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