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'SAVE OUR SOUL!'- LAMENTATIONS FROM THE BATTLE FIELDS: PITY AND HUMANISTIC VALUES IN WAR POEMS

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ABSTRACT

Accounts of the World War I were written by British soldiers who had not only experienced and witnessed traumatic events in battle but also depicted them in poetry and prose which suppose to be explored the humanistic values to the readers. Among those works, war poems are spelled out the futility and agony of war in highly intensive way. The paper tries to elucidate the pity and humanistic values of war poems through the select works of Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon. Artistic creation is one of the best of reflecting reality and, at the same time, of perceiving and apprehending it; it is also one of the strongest levelers of influencing the development of humanity. By emphasizing the authentic and pragmatic details of war life of soldiers with poetry, these poets evidently try to arouse sympathy for the soldiers as much as they indirectly deride and raze at the idealistic view which portrays an imaginary glorious picture of war. If one can go through the works of Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon, he/she can understand the culmination of their effort to the evolvement of tranquility and universal brotherhood.

Keywords: War, Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, Futility, Rupert Brooke, Humanistic Values.

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"This book is not about heroes. English Poetry is not yet fit to speak of them. Neither it about deeds, or lands, nor anything about glory, honour, might, majesty, dominion, or power, except war. Above all I am not concerned with Poetry. My subject is War, and the pity of War. The Poetry is in the pity. Yet these elegies are to this generation in no sense consolatory. They maybe to the next. All a poet can do today is warning. That is why true Poets must be truthful" -- Wilfred Owen, from a preface to a planned book of his poetry (43).

'War'— these three letters make a history. War is one of the basic aspects of present history and it makes history more interesting. War is the greatest of all the evils invented by humanity; but for countries war matters a lot. There are a lot of differences between the words 'humanity' and the people of a particular 'country'. Since a country makes up for a political entity, it never accepts the domain of humanitarian generosity. War has always caused the deepest remorse and suffering in human history. Almost all the societies, from ancient to the

modern times, have undergone the trauma of war and its related pains. The zenith of such destructive force of war was seen in the twentieth century with two massive world wars which rattled the globe and effected unmeasured casualties of all possible kind. The western countries and societies experienced the intense consequences of war in a far reaching scale from the beginning of the World War I to the 1960s. The period from the starting of the World War I to the post-World War II got the attention of the writers, especially poets, playwrights, novelist, artists and other literary critics, since the particular age (1915-1960) was marked by the sufferings caused by the wars, which penetrated into the inner psyche of the individuals.

Most of the works on war themes are in the form of poems, and these poems attract our critical attention for many reasons. Since those poems have pain as their central theme, they make our mind to realize the so-called reality of political discrimination. In that space, English literature continuously discusses the theme of war in the modern era. But the writers of war has been made their prolonged creative works for a very long time and even the oldest work of western canon, Homer's 'Iliad' has reflected the story of the Trojan War and by the way of epic poetry, Virgil's 'The Aeneid' also came out with the impression of war as central theme. Sir Philip Sidney's love sonnets repeatedly use the images of war in order to describe the conflict of love and Wordsworth's 'Salisbury Plain' poem discusses the post war effects in terms of injury and widowhood at the time of Romantic period. Continuing that legacy, Tennyson's 'Charge of the Light Brigade' celebrated and condemned the loss of life in one moment of Battle of Balaclava during the Crimean war and several writers who register their hopelessness in war and address complex issues of patriotism and sufferings in their writings during Vietnam war and the south African war of 19th and 20th centuries. The devastating effects of World War I and II are unforgettable since the whole world suffered a lot for the sake of mere power conflicts.

The First World War provides one of the seminal moments of the twentieth-century in which literate soldiers,

plunged into inhuman conditions, reacted to their surroundings in poems reflecting Wordsworth's spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings. (Stallworthy 13)

Here, the paper aims to explore and explicate the humanistic view of war poems through the select works of Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon and Robert Brooke. Solider, it is the word which reflects the real sacrifice, but their poems reflect the real effect of war and humanistic values. War poets are young men who express the extreme emotions of fear, anger and love through their poems. Their powerful words in their poetry show the pity and terrible conditions of war in front of our eyes. They themselves have become symbols of innocence, exposure, courage and integrity. Through their poems they express their feelings and thoughts of the reality of the evil of war. Apart from patriotism, they have the real feelings of a universal brotherhood. Poets like Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, Robert Graves, Robert Brooke, Herbert Read and Isaac Rosenberg are some of the greatest war poets in the history of English literature. They are buried in a so-called respectful manner but their poems are alive among the people of all countries in a true manner and this makes them to be a true respectable. Mocking the war is one of the basic aspects of war poems. They hate the war and are against the war even though they fought for their country.

"All a poet can do today be warn. That is why the true poets must be truthful" (Owen 43). These are the words of Wilfred Owen who wrote war poems for the whole humanity. There are a lot of difference between the "man" and the "solider". No doubt, the latter one is more dangerous and filled with personal and traumatic feelings. Those traumatic feelings are reflected by the way of creative works, especially through poems (war poem). At the time of World War I and post war period, many reports had came that soldiers those who worked in frontline and line of control were suffering from traumatic diseases, particularly "war neuroses" and had been treated by physicians and psychiatrists. In his work, "Introduction to Psychoanalysis and the War Neuroses", Freud states:

The war that has recently ended produced and brought under observation an immense number of these traumatic cases. ...The great majority of physicians no longer believe that the so-called 'war neurotics' are ill as a result of tangible organic injuries to the nervous system, and the more clear-sighted among them have already decided, instead of using the indefinite description of a 'functional change', to introduce the unambiguous terms 'mental change'. Although the war neuroses manifested themselves for the most part as motor disturbance—tremors and paralyses.... (212)

According to the war poets, 'war' is not the way to touch the target of peace. They explain the bad condition of humanity through their poems. They are not the enemy of other countries, but their country makes them as an enemy of others. Here the word country refers to the higher officials in military and politicians who send their soldiers to futile fight. Siegfried Sassoon's poem "The General" is the best example for this concept.

Their poems reflect loss of innocence and the horrible mental and physical toll World War I inflicted on the world. Before looking at any war poetry, we can glance at a range of vivid images of war from the Middle Ages onwards that means foot soldiers in armour depicted in a battle in front of a church or pantheon. All the soldiers had happy expressions on their faces. The fact that it was drawn in front of church made the battle look right and holy. This gave the impression that god was on their side and it symbolizes the victory. The soldiers also looked very courageous and their facial expression was very innocent. All of these images give very affirmative view on war. All these aspects are taken as act of bravery and it creates a thrill and joy to join in armed forces. If we turn through the pages of World War I recruitment posters, we can easily know important messages in the recruiting posters: "Your country, children and family need you to help fight", "Take up the Sword of Justice", "Your Country's Call: Isn't this Worth Fighting For? Enlist Now", "Will They Never Come" (Hibberd, Poetry of the Great War 120-121). In those days had posters

aimed at women giving the message that if your man is not worthy to fight for his country, is he worthy for you? These made people feel very patriotic, especially the young men. Those posters did not actually contain the images of battlefield or agony of war, just illustration of men looking happy and walking off to have a bit of fun with weapons. War poets show the real images of war through their poems. War poet did what the posters failed to capture to bring an impact.

If one goes through the light of war poems, he/she can understand not only the most horrible condition of war, but also the values of universal amity that are put to test in such horrible circumstances. First of all, the paper attempts to explain the poem of Rupert Brooke's "The Soldier". This poem explains the patriotic view of soldier who wants his death as a valuable one for his country. Dying in war is just like a noble act. He expresses a self-sacrificial and martyr like attitude toward his death. The life of the soldier has been distilled to a life of goodness, and that life is owned to England. The poet does not want others to mourn for him but to remember him by upholding the principles for which he died.

A body of England's, breathing English air,
Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home.
And think, this heart, all evil shed away,
A pulse in the eternal mind, no less...
(Brooke 61- 62)

The poet explains that making his own dead body is a symbol for all of England. In the 9th line of the poem, he imagined in the first stanza now occurred, "this heart, all evil shed away, a pulse in the eternal mind". In the end of the poem the soldier celebrates the idea of self-sacrifice. According to the dead soldier, it is an honour to die for one's country and no thought should be given to personal desire, because the desire of the soldier and the desire of the country should be one. Through Brooke's statements, it reveals that he is too obsessed with his own sacrifice, regarding the going to war himself. As Winston Churchill states in obituary note of "The Times" on 26th April 1915:

He expected to die: he was willing to die for the dear England whose beauty and

majesty he knew: and he advanced towards the brink in perfect serenity, with absolute conviction of the rightness of his country's cause and a heart devoid of hate for fellow-men. (38)

The patriotic intensity of Brooke has conveyed through personified the country England as mother who gave life to the soldiers. He describes:

A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,
Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam,
A body of England's, breathing English air,
Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home. (61)

Through the above statement the readers can easily understand that why the soldiers of England are ready to sacrifice their life in order to save their country.

The whole poem expresses the patriotic feeling. Humanistic feeling is always beyond patriotic feeling and experience. So it is necessary to analyze the inner feelings of soldiers through their works. In general, every soldier has the patriotic feeling and they are ready to die for their country, but it is quite evident that they hate the useless war and loss of human life.

The poem "The Soldier" is one of the famous works of Brooke. Poets have always glorified war, and Brooke did his best to continue the tradition, and sacrifice himself in this effort. His death made him the hero of the first phase of the war and a canonized symbol of all the gifted young people destroyed by the conflict.

If I should die, think only this of me: That
there's some corner of a foreign field
That is for even England. (61)

However, Brooke's poetry with its patriotic mood and credulous enthusiasm went out of fashion as the realities of warfare were fully understood. His poems had a tremendous impact on some of his contemporaries who are in same patriotic mood and ready to die for their country. The eruption of World War I interfered Rupert Brooke's career as a poet. He was commissioned in Winston Churchill's Royal Naval Division. Brooke did not see much action and trench life in war. That is why he wrote the war

poem in the old traditional way. But the soldiers who felt the warfare action never write in the traditional way. For example, poets like Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon and Isaac Rosenberg are some of the war poets who broke the traditional way of war and gave the real meaning of war, i.e., horror, pain and pity both in terms of content and form. In other words, the language and diction employed by these poets also exemplified the feelings of remorse and grief.

Among these, Owen's war poetry is often a passionate expression of outrage at the horrors of war and pity for the young soldiers sacrificed in it. His diverse use of instantly understandable imagery and technique is what makes him the most memorable of the war poets. He bitterly rejects the patriotic reasoning for war in the poem "Dulce et Decorum Est".

The very beginning of the poem visualizes a gas attack on a group of men as they march toward a brief respite, while the second part, written in direct address intensely explain the poet's pain and anger at being forced to witness such horror. Owen wanted to share with the public the true cost of war. Going through this poem we can know Owen's anger and agony of war and its wastage. In the very first sentence, Owen describes the soldier as "old beggars" and "like hags". This use of similes is used to draw the reader's sympathy on the soldiers as well as aimed at satirizing the futility of war. This description is also placed in opposite to the thought of traditional view of war and further elucidate that the soldiers have lost their youth and dignity.

Wilfred Owen shows their wound in "Knock Kneed" and "bent double". This gives an impression of not only their physical wounds but mental injury as well. Soldiers are mostly affected by mental disorders. Most of the soldiers at frontline were admitted in mental hospital during the time of World War I. Owen describes how the soldiers went "lame", "blind", "drunk" and deaf as if they were stripped of their senses, and made oblivious and unaware; this almost makes them no longer human, a complete contrast from traditional images of war.

In this poem, war is shown not to be an honourable or sweet situation to die, but unforgiving and deadly experience that not easily

survived, nor easily forgotten. The glorification of war is something that Owen was strongly against. This value is very present in the poem, "Dulce et Decorum Est", especially in the last stanza. It refers to the famous Latin saying, "Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori" which means "it is sweet and fitting or proper to die for one's country". The title is intensely satirical against the enthralling glorifications of wars in history and common parlance.

In his poem, Owen deliberately expresses the sense of enemy's common humanity by explaining their pathetic conditions at the time of war. We deduce such notions in his poem "Strange Meeting":

"I am the enemy you killed, my friend.
I knew you in this dark: for so you frowned
Yesterday through me as you jabbed and
killed.
I parried; but my hands were loath and
cold.
Let us sleep now. . . ." (139)

The poem "Strange Meeting" shows the humanistic view of two soldiers who are in hell. In material world, only evil things which rule the human society and thus human suffers a lot. Owen mentions that relieving from material world cause there is no mourned.

"Strange friend," I said, "here is no cause to
mourn."
"None," said that other, "save the undone
years,
The hopelessness. Whatever hope is
yours,..." (138)

The above verse shows that the ghost soldier (poet) says to his strange friend about the reality of the material world and the hell. Here the word "other" refers to the dead soldier who wakes up in the hell of death. And the words "undergone years" refers that many years they wasted their life in war. The dead soldier says that he has no cause to mourn in hell except one thing. It is his wasted years by dying in war. War has made him die young and rendered him hopeless. Through these lines we know that the soldiers are in hopelessness of war and they are waiting for the love of this whole humanity. The meeting of two soldiers is not about glory, honour or

power but it is about absurdity of war and the loss of sense of humanity. John Middleton Murry writes:

He had, more surely than any other poet of his generation, the potentiality of greatness; and he actually wrote one great poem. 'Strange Meeting' is complete, achieved, unfaltering, and it is not solitary, for although Owen wrote no other poem which is wholly on this secure imaginative level, we cannot but regard it as the culmination of poems hardly less achieved. (62-63)

'Futility' is another important poem of Wilfred Owen deals with the theme of uselessness of dying in war. This poem is in the form of command and questions and explains about the soldier who is recently died. The soldier's dead body is put under the rays of sun. Because the sun is the symbol of life and it has the power to bring to life, the clays of a cold star and a plant from a dead cold seed are contrasted here with sun's inability to bring back to life a body of soldier that is still warm. As Cox states the real meaning of the title 'Futility':

'Futility' is not only a social protest but a religious questioning. It faces the mystery of life in sentiments that would remain profoundly true for the bereaved, even if war itself could by some miracle be abolished. The 'futility' of the title does not refer simply to human follies; it refers beyond these, also, to the human condition itself. It is one side of the tragic vision of man — the perception that if man is the jest and the riddle of the world, this is only because he is first and chiefly its glory. (56)

The poet grieves for his fellow dead soldier and explains the power of sun that gives life to seeds and also our earth. So it is very easy to give life to this soldier. The second section in the poem expresses with a sense of sad despair the futility of the soldiers' attempt. The second part of the poem begins:

Think how it wakes the seeds—
Woke, once, the clays of a cold star.
Are limbs, so dear-achieved, are sides
Full-nerved, - still warm, - too hard to stir?
Was it for this the clay grew tall?

—O what made fatuous sunbeams toil

To break earth's sleep at all? (Owen 156)

The sun is able to revitalize and bring back the life to cold dead seeds, and it can wake the clays of a dead cold star, though its limbs and sides be "Full-nerved" and "still warm", it cannot resurrect a dead body of the beloved soldier. Not only the poet expresses his abortiveness but also manifests his helplessness and anger that he could not able to save the dying fellow soldier.

Owen's technique of writing is not only exploring his agonized war life but depends on all the soldiers who suffer in trenches. For example, 'Strange Meeting' and 'Futility' are best of his explanation of the grief-full psychic condition of soldiers. The dramatic monologues of the poem 'Strange Meeting' attract the attention of the readers who can easily understand the retrospective horrors of war by the conversation of two soldiers. This symbolizes that Owen's writing is portrayed the suffering of soldiers of all nation in past, present and future. In his poems not one death is expressed but many, who are the fellow men with same blood and flesh even though if they are enemy. Even in his poem 'Exposure', he has used the first person plural rather than singular. So that, the readers can understand that he seems to be speaking for all the soldiers of the war, not only just for himself. Sassoon, one of the contemporaries of Owen, also explains this circumstance as:

His conclusions about War are so entirely in accordance with my own that I cannot attempt to judge his work with any critical detachment. I can only affirm that he was a man of absolute integrity of mind. He never wrote his poems (as so many war-poets did) to make the effect of a personal gesture. He pitied others; he did not pity himself. (53)

Next to Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon is another important anti-war poet who actively revolutionized against war at the time of World War I. So it is necessary to dwell in the mind of Siegfried Sassoon through his works. Like Owen, in many of his poems, Sassoon expresses humanitarian commiseration with the enemy, especially German soldiers and their family. In his poems "Reconciliation" and "The

Glory of Women", he deliberately expressed such views which would cause the readers more astounding.

In "Reconciliation" Sassoon expresses his humanitarian vision to enemy soldiers by asking the English populace that visits their dead sons to remember the German soldiers while they are praying for their sons. He adds:

When you are standing at your hero's grave,
Or near some homeless village where he died, Remember,
through your heart's rekindling pride,
The German soldiers who were loyal and brave. (100)

He wrote on the subjects which were drawn purely from his personal experience but the way he registered his experience is not only shown his sufferings but the soldiers of the whole. This poetic documentation of his wide experiences naturally resulted in a realistic approach towards soldiers and their kin. As an infantry officer from the British Army, his poetic expressions exceptionally reject the militaristic values or attitude. His portrayal of soldiers, including enemy soldiers was aimed to describe the real anguish of the oblivious soldiers in front line.

He shows his sympathy with the German mothers in the poem "Glory of Women", who dreaming of their sons' return and knitting socks to send them to the battle while they were actually killed, lying dead in mud. He sympathizes with German soldiers by illustrating the attitude of innocent mothers who do not have any aware of war. Sassoon says:

O German mother dreaming by the fire,
while you are knitting socks to send your son
His face is trodden deeper in the mud.
(Sassoon 193)

The poem "The General" is another important and renowned work of Sassoon which ironically depicts the piteous situation of innocent soldiers. At the age of 28, he entered into the military and after he understood the effects of war and came to know the importance of humanistic values. Within seven lines the poem "The General" shows the soldiers'

wretched condition in a highly intensive way.
"Good-morning, good-morning!" the
General said
When we met him last week on our way to
the line.
Now the soldiers he smiled at are most of
'em dead,
And we're cursing his staff for incompetent
swine.
"He's a cheery old card," grunted Harry to
Jack
As they slogged up to Arras with rifle and
pack.
But he did for them both by his plan of
attack. (97)

This poem criticizes the higher officers (Generals), who never come for battlefield and simply give the orders that are not even useful. The poem reflects how the generals killed their soldiers by the way of action in war. General gives the rifle to their soldiers and send them for their death which rightly gets explored in the poem. By telling "But he did for them both by his plan of attack" (97), Sassoon portrays the most pungent irony of the poem, which calls the reader to understand the condition of the innocent soldiers.

The poem also describes another bitter irony that though the soldiers were the one to lose their life in the battle, only officers who were normally sophisticated and free from traumatic experience. Here, Sassoon tries to illustrate the lack of humanity shown to the ordinary soldiers. The way Sassoon wrote the critical situation of soldiers is highly ironic in all of his poems. The uniqueness of this work was inseparably fused with his intimate relationship with comrades. The same uniqueness and intimate experience have become the essence of all his writing ranging from philosophical, political and anti-pugnacious. As Wilfred Owen admires about the Sassoon's works:

...I have just been reading Siegfried Sassoon and am feeling at a very pitch of emotion. Nothing like his trench life sketches has ever been written or ever will be written. Shakespeare reads vapid after these. Not of course because Sassoon is a greater artist, but because of the subject, I mean. I think if

I had the choice of making friends with Tennyson or with Sassoon, I should go to Sassoon. (Owen 44)

In World War I many of the troopers were died because of the ineptitude and irresponsibility of higher officers and Sassoon highlights that ironically in the poem "The General". In "As they slogged up to Arras with rifle and pack", Sassoon depicts that though the soldiers know it is a futile operation, they ready to die for their country.

The Battle of Arras offers up yet another example of incompetence, a wrong-headed strategy in which the general's "plan of attack" accounts not for an unseen enemy but for the long suffering and tolerant British "Tommy". (Campbell 144)

The higher officers like the General who never been to battlefield and without any genuine idea, simply giving orders to the innocent soldiers which are subjected to inhumane and brutal action. Sassoon illustrates the bitterest sarcasm of the poem in the last line, "But he did for them both by his plan of attack", this immensely shows that the General is the one who killed the soldiers of own not the enemy.

Sassoon's experiences are converted as the sources of extracting hope for brotherhood life and it is transported to most of the soldiers through the instructing words of his poems. His opinions for the problems of the time were also exposed through the poems which also indirectly visualized the construction of newly developed fight less or warless society. Those poems are not addressed to any specific set of soldiers or people of particular country nor do they aim at propagating so called regional ideologies but invite the human race to perceive life in the light of humanitarian generosity.

Trench poetry like "Futility", "Dulce et Decorum Est", "Strange Meeting" "Reconciliation" and "The General" could only be written under the traumatic experience of modern warfare, as in the case of Isaac Rosenberg, who had only one brief leave in his twenty months at the Front, or in hospital, as in the case of Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen, who were wounded in the trenches and sent home for recovery. The freshness of this shock did not allow the trench poets to gain distance

to their battlefield experience of overall pandemonium.

Most of the war poets constantly reflect the pity of war in their poems. Only few poems show the patriotic reasoning for war. War poets have not being only affected by physical wounds but they have also mostly lost their mental peace. Most of the states wrongly think that war is the way to achieve the peace. But through the war poems we came to know that war eradicates the peace and the humanitarian values from the society. War pomes not only reveal the horror and the pity of war but also give the importance of humanistic values. Their poems are not depending upon any particular country because wars are universal phenomenon. Every country develops their military power so wars are inevitable universal phenomenon, but war poem teaches the humanistic values to the whole world. According to war poets, every soul is their kin and no one is their enemy because they know that their enemies have the same blood and the same pain in their body and mind. We already seen this concept in Owen's poem "The Strange Meeting", in that Wilfred Owen shows that the soldiers would try to wash off the blood of war by the way of universal brotherhood. In the poem "Dulce Et Decorum Est", Owen expresses his anger and explains the inhuman conditions of the innocent soldier. The poem title reflects that "it is sweet and fitting to die for one's country", but Owen opposes this slogan through his poem.

In this modern world, higher military officials and some politicians explain the war as just war, as ancient Romans and Greeks justified their war based on the use of force by a nation against their opponents or enemies in order to defend their territory or people from aggression. This creates a classification of war as just war and unjust war. But the war poets reveal the truth that there is no classification for pain, as just and unjust. Because war is war and its pain affects both the parties of the war. "The war, which began to the British as a 'picnic', had degenerated into a loathsome tragedy" (Campbell 11). The poem "The General" is the best example for the above concept. The Generals simply send their innocent soldiers to the war for their international conflict. Most of the soldiers went into

the war like Rupert Brooke and came out like Siegfried Sassoon.

War poems have the power to create the awareness of war and it always warns the readers about the war. War poems are reflective of the real feelings of the real heroes who not only fought for their country but on behalf of the whole humanity in order to attain the peace through their poems. We never understand the inner feelings of the soldiers because we thought that soldiers have more patriotic feelings, but in reality it is not a true one. Beyond so-called patriotic feelings, they have the thoughts of universal amity in their psyche which extremely proved by the poems of Wilfred Owen, particularly "Strange Meeting" and Siegfried Sassoon.

Every war creates a winner and loser but the use of violence in the war by the both sides hurt the mental and physical peace, not only of the soldiers but also the civilian community. Even though the civilian population also get disturbed by the war but it is soldiers, who are the people directly affected by the horrors of war.

Young men who join in the army without any awareness of war, they lost their freedom, peace, family and finally their soul. War poets show the real images of the war and explain their anger and agony of war and its wastage. Through their poems, they have broken the traditional view of the war. The poets of war are sleeping in their resting place but their poems are speaking and creating awareness with us. If they did not reveal the pity and horror of the war, we would have never come to know the real humanitarian values. These real heroes want only justice, freedom, racial equality and universal brotherhood. For them, these are the weapons to construct the human society.

War, these three letters make a history, but the history fills only with three words, i.e., Horror, Pain, and Pity.

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