

From Neural Rupture to Narrative Deceit: Ishiguro's Portrayal of Trauma-Induced Memory Dysregulation

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Abstract

Kazuo Ishiguro effectively examines the interconnections of trauma, memory, and identity through his intensely reflective characters in his works. This paper examines two of his important works, *The Remains of the Day* (1989) and *Never Let Me Go* (2005), from trauma studies and neuroscience. It explores how Ishiguro's narratives explain trauma's psychological and neuronal structures through theoretical structures from Antonio Damasio's "Self Comes to Mind," Anne Whitehead's "Trauma Fiction," and Catherine Malabou's "The New Wounded from Neurosis to Brain Damage." The aim is to examine how trauma affects memory, identity, and power, subjecting aspects of woundedness that are both personal and societal. The research contributes to a developing interdisciplinary conversation that deepens our comprehension of Ishiguro's work by incorporating literary analysis with findings from neuroscience. It improves our understanding of how literature may reflect and inspire scientific investigations into the human condition while also stressing Ishiguro's complex representations of trauma. Additionally, the study highlights how the ongoing consequences of trauma mould Ishiguro's characters and affect their observation of themselves. Ishiguro's examination of both suppressed and broken memories leads him to develop characters whose emotional and psychological struggles urge the reader to consider the greater, frequently hidden traumas of the world. The study also emphasises how literature can be used to better understand the intricate structure of the brain by providing a setting for examining the emotional and intellectual sides of trauma in ways that enhance and expand the understanding of neuroscience.

Keywords: Kazuo Ishiguro, Trauma Studies, Neuroscience, Memory, Identity.

Introduction

This research paper examines the question of how Ishiguro's narration style mimics the neurological effects of trauma to create characters whose fragmented identities reflect the brain's inability to convert traumatic memories into a coherent self-narrative. While some studies have previously explored trauma in Ishiguro's work using psychological approaches. Some researchers have extrapolated his unique narration style without engaging through the lens mentioned above; few have brought together an engagement with neuroscience and literary narratology to demonstrate how Ishiguro's innovations in form directly mimic the neurobiological processes of memory disruption. Using Catherine Malabou's concept of "Cerebral Woundedness", Antonio Damasio's theories of emotional memory and self, and Anne Whitehead's Trauma Fiction framework, this research analyze *The Remains of the Day* (1989) and *Never Let Me Go* (2005) to demonstrate how Ishiguro's unreliable narration, disruptions in time, and silences of narration function as literary equivalents of the neurobiological effects of trauma.

Originally defined as a physical wound (Salazar, 2018; Silverstone, 2012), trauma can be understood metaphorically in his works as a fractured self, grappling with repressed memories and unresolved loss. The manifestations of trauma occur through distorted memories and emotional suppression, which mark trauma as both neurobiological and psychological disruption (Geetha & Sarulatha). This study considers two of Ishiguro's novels; *The Remains of the Day* (1989), and *Never Let Me Go* (2005), through the lenses of Malabou's *The New Wounded*, Damasio's *Self Comes to Mind*, and White's *Trauma Fiction*, which are theoretical texts that discuss; the nature of trauma's failure of memory consolidation (Bower & Sivers, 1998; Adolphs, 2002), the role of emotional memory in composing selfhood (Damasio), and how narrative disruptions indicate trauma (Whitehead). The effect of trauma on autobiographical coherence connects with ideas from the neurosciences that address the issue of "failure of memory consolidation" (Bower & Sivers, 1998; Adolphs, 2002).

In contrast to neuroscience, Assmann (2008) argues that cultural memory is a collective construct of identity that embodies the influence of trauma on not only the individual but also the collective (or societal). For example, Stevens in *The Remains of the Day* (1989) demonstrates selective memories, suppressing difficult feelings, and associating with a normalized self (Atkinson, 1995). The idea proposed by Damasio that selfhood is derived from linked emotional memories and sensory memories helps provide a rationale for this psychological aversion (Damasio, 1999; Vršič, 2023). In *Never Let Me Go* (2005), trauma takes on an additional form with the clones' incomplete, deliberately remembered memories (Lodge, 2002). Ishiguro's use of unsteady or fragmented non-linear and unreliable narration by the use of silences reflects the trauma fiction that Whitehead outlines, where temporal ruptures reflect a traumatized mind's experience of reality, which is unstable.

This theoretical framework is valuable for thinking about Ishiguro's characters, who have fragmented identities shaped by unresolved trauma, loss, and a breakdown in integrating their past and present experiences into coherent narratives. Ishiguro's narrative strategies fit precisely under Whitehead's intimate idea of trauma fiction, which she defines as a literary exercise that disrupts normative temporality because traumatic experience "carries the force of a literality which renders it resistant to narrative structures and linear temporalities" (2004, p. 5). Whitehead highlights three main qualities of trauma fiction: "temporal dislocation, repetition, and unreliable narration," which are all structural features that echo the psychological fragmentation of trauma survivors (2004, p. 84). Ishiguro does not use these strategies simply as stylistic choices; these strategies also act as required formal responses to trauma's resistant nature in conventional narrative representation. "But I see I have become somewhat lost in these old memories. This had never been my intention..." (1989, p.167). This statement demonstrates how the reconstructive process of the mind and the nervous system's motivation to forget can inform memory.

Review of Literature

Contemporary neuroscience claims that trauma and the functioning of the hippocampus (Postel, C., Mary, A., Dayan, J., Fraise, F., Vallée, T., Guillery-Girard, B., ... & Gagnepain, P., 2021) disrupt logical experience, which in turn hinders the formation of a coherent autobiographical self. Trauma generates "flashbulb memories" (Davidson, P.S., Cook, S.P., Glisky, E.L., Verfaellie, M., & Rapsak, S. Z., 2005), i.e., memories that are vivid but do not easily "temporalize" and "narrativize" within one another. Stevens's broken bonds are vividly

represented by fragmented memories of his life bearing down on him that he does not experience in a narrative with coherent life experiences. Each time Stevens repurposes and reclaims the fragmented memory as a narrative episode, he acts on his psychological need for narrative coherence and understanding, while also honoring the neurobiological reality of his trauma. Trauma fiction pushes this disintegration of memory into narrative. Whitehead characterizes trauma fiction's "formal characteristics" as broken narratives, unreliable narrators, and silence that perform trauma itself (2004, p. 7). The neurobiology of trauma enhances our understanding of Ishiguro's narrative strategies. This mode is the brain's default network assigned to self-referential thinking, the creation of autobiographical memory, and mind wandering, and in trauma, is disrupted, rupturing the fragile neural network that creates a coherent self.

"I've always been interested in memory, because it's the filter through which we read our past. It's always tinted, with self-deception, guilt, pride, nostalgia, whatever. I find memory endlessly fascinating, not so much from a neurological or philosophical viewpoint, but as this tool by which people tell themselves things about the lives they've led and about who they've become (Ishiguro, 2000, para. 5)", here we can get to see that memory isn't a perfect replay of past events or flashbacks but a reconstruct process which is influenced by emotions and cognitive biases. This research also helps to contextualize the kinds of temporal confusion, emotional dissociation, and narrative unreliability that Ishiguro's trauma survivors exhibit, as these symptoms align closely with clinical definitions of post-traumatic stress disorder. Also, Ishiguro's treatment of trauma goes beyond individual psychological dimensions to include what Assmann defines as the "social frameworks" of memory (2008, p. 111).

This interdisciplinary reading shows how Ishiguro's fiction works at the intersection between individual psychology, collective memory, and neurobiological reality. He is therefore not simply experimenting with narrative form or structure; he is responding to trauma's core challenge to representation itself, both in terms of narrative form and how trauma as a subject matter can undermine representation, representing what trauma is fundamentally challenging to us.

Before this last scene, in his meeting with Miss Kenton, Stevens reveals regret about what it would be if he did not conceal his feelings from her and adds (Güngör, P. S., 2023): "Indeed - why should I not admit it? – at that moment, my heart was breaking" (p. 239), here, Stevens expresses his personal trauma caused by repression and missed emotional connections or emotional detachment reflecting both personal and collective traumatic wounds.

Damasio's idea that trauma might disintegrate selfhood, resulting in both cognitive dissonance and emotional disengagement, focuses on the clones' aversion to totally confronting their preordained destiny in *Never Let Me Go*, which is what Whitehead (2004) calls trauma's destabilizing force upon narrative coherence. Catherine Malabou further develops this conversation when she warmly attends to the neurological aspect of trauma. In *The New Wounded: From Neurosis to Brain Damage* (2012), she signals a concept of "cerebral woundedness" and highlights that trauma injures not only the psyche but is also correlated with basic changes to the brain in terms of both its structure and function. This moves beyond the figurative and suggests trauma grounded in a new, real neurological change, which gives us a great explanatory device to understand Ishiguro's characters.

This paper argues that Kazuo Ishiguro's fiction serves as an important channel between literature and neuroscience by providing narrative frameworks that further our understanding of the psychological aspects of trauma by bridging both disciplines. Ishiguro's novels illustrate trauma as a fluid and ongoing event that reformats perception and identity, in contrast to a discrete event solely in the past. This unique method not only augments literary interpretation but also creates new interpretations for scientific research on trauma, memory, and consciousness. The current study explains how Kazuo Ishiguro's novels help us in our advanced understanding of the fractured psyche in trauma and make or create an important intersectional connection between literary imagination and scientific investigation.

This present research shows the aspect of neuroscience and trauma theory to analyze trauma, memory, and identity in the fiction of Kazuo Ishiguro. Through a deep analysis of novels such as *The Remains of the Day* (1989) and *Never Let Me Go* (2005), it is clear that Ishiguro's simple prose and split narratives reflect the psychological and neurological damage caused by trauma. Specifically, the characters' distorted memories and disrupted selves demonstrate the cognitive disruption prompted by the trauma of the individual and the collective, thus connecting Ishiguro's literary artistry to scientific understandings of consciousness.

Recent neuroscience research supports fiction's devices of trauma as biological realities, not choices made for artistic purposes. Caruth's discussion of trauma as beyond our efforts to understand coincides with Damasio's work, contending that trauma interrupts the brain's integration of memory and emotion; trauma disrupts dramatic identity and the autobiographical self. The ruptures of narrative stitch together the cognitive disruption in traumatized consciousness. Ishiguro exemplifies this confluence. In *The Remains of the Day* (1989), Stevens reconstructs the memory of painful history by molding it into his and others' self-identity; unreliable narration in the novel reflects how the mind is an unreliable witness, which acts as a neurological defense. The fragmented, non-linear structure of *Never Let Me Go* (2005) represents the nature of intrusive memory and that trauma is an unprocessed experience, just as it may appear in our brains. Fragmented consciousness yields Ishiguro's narrative form, which reflects Ishiguro's subjectivity of living a life under pressure, which is also, in the truest sense, what trauma is.

Fiction about trauma like this mainly engages in the representation and the illustration of experiences that shatter or destroy memory and identity, and often, the narrative does not follow a linear or coherent course (Rogers, N., 2004). Literature of trauma replicates trauma's cognitive consequences through literary devices like repetition, fragmentation, temporal dislocation, and unreliable narration as a way to mimic its effects (Whitehead, 2004). Freud and Caruth's models of trauma emphasize how trauma operates by shattering the psyche and disrupting memory, as trauma is inherently unspeakable but remains painfully present (Balaev, 2018). Accordingly, trauma narratives, including fiction, reveal the ambivalent form of trauma, which is a private wound (the individual identity-affecting aspect) and a social construct (the collective) influencing memory (Assmann, 2008). Trauma fiction, therefore, disrupts conventions of narrative storytelling and reduces memory and experience to an unpredictable and fractured experience that invites the reader to witness the ethical and affective forms of being in the presence of trauma (Morrissey, 2021).

"Cerebral woundedness," as defined by Catherine Malabou's *The New Wounded*, is the idea that physical and psychological trauma can cause significant alterations in the structure and

function of the brain. Following Malabou's assertion that literature is not fully in a position of neutrality without a neurobiological understanding of trauma, but that it needs to reflect such an understanding, we can see how the narration places the reader in a space where the traumatic event occurs, even though the narrating character does not realize their traumatized state. Malabou's research emphasizes how the brain is malleable or soft and how trauma may change a person's identity through neural configurations.

These theoretical perspectives provide an understanding of how Ishiguro's characters experience trauma as a neurological transformation as well as a psychological condition within the context of his works. Memory loss and identity disintegration are common themes in Ishiguro's narratives, which reflect the disturbances that Damasio, Whitehead, and Malabou have described. In *The New Wounded*, Catherine Malabou transforms trauma by stressing the neurological effects of injury. According to Malabou, trauma is a fundamental change in identity at the level of brain plasticity, rather than simply a psychological break. Malabou contends that severe trauma can cause an absolute rupture in subjectivity, disconnecting the person from the past self, in contrast to Freudian models that emphasize repression and restoration. Whitehead's interpretation of trauma fiction as a place where identity is broken and rebuilt via memory, stillness, and haunting is consistent with this idea of a permanent transformation.

Malabou's assertion that trauma fundamentally reshapes the cognitive and emotional structures of the brain can be seen in the past's partial re-emergence as a fragmented yet invasive presence (Van der Kolk, B. A., 1998). In contrast, Ishiguro considers trauma as more muted, yet no less damaging, as repressed wounds create identity fragmentation rather than violent rupture. Stevens, in *The Remains of the Day* (1989), experiences the impending disintegration of the self when Stevens's trauma presents as a selective memory and avoidance of breakdown. Damasio's idea of a retrospective self and the need to think back to be integrated with prior experiences to recreate oneself corresponds to his characters' continued struggles to rethink their pasts. Ishiguro's unwillingness to provide characters with unreliable narrators and fractured timelines in *Never Let Me Go* (2005) and *The Remains of the Day* (1989) supports Whitehead's (2004) recent contention that trauma narratives render and manage structural dissonance to portray trauma's psychological consequences. Malabou's (2012) notion of cerebral woundedness deepens this analysis by offering a medical account of his characters' psychological traumas.

Objectives

1. Analyze the psychological and neuronal configurations of trauma in the narratives of Ishiguro.
2. Utilize theoretical ideas from:
 - a. *Antonio Damasio's Self Comes to Mind*,
 - b. *Anne Whitehead's Trauma Fiction*
 - c. *Catherine Malabou's The New Wounded: From Neurosis to Brain Damage*
3. Investigate trauma's role in memory, identity, and power.
4. Examine the personal and sociocultural aspects of woundedness.

5. Engage in an interdisciplinary dialogue that enriches the conversation in the field of Ishiguro's work through a trauma-neuroscience lens.

Methods

The study ties its goals, methods, and research design into an integrated qualitative methodology examining how trauma disrupts memory, identity, and power in the fiction of Kazuo Ishiguro. This study uses a qualitative approach to analyze Kazuo Ishiguro's handling of trauma, memory, and identity. Focusing exclusively on *The Remains of the Day* (1989) and *Never Let Me Go* (2005), the researchers utilize three primary frameworks to explore how narrative techniques enact actual disruption of the neural representation of self: a neurobiological representation of self by Antonio Damasio; a philosophical representation of rehabilitation and "Cerebral Woundedness" by Catherine Malabou; and a theoretical exploration of fictional representations of trauma by Anne Whitehead. Close literary readings are used alongside Freudian repression and Lacanian divided-self frameworks to reveal repressed traumas, and a narratological analysis of unreliable narration, non-linear temporality, and narrative silences is then utilized to expose the trajectory of the structural embodiment of memory fragmentation. Through a cultural and comparative lens based on Morrison and Coetzee, Ishiguro's thematic repetitions are explored in relation to collective trauma. The exploratory interpretative approach and the thematic synthesis of primary texts and interdisciplinary scholarship demonstrate that fragmented narrative form, omissions, loops, and silences construct an experiential proxy for trauma's cognitive and emotive rupture.

Research Design

The study proposes a qualitative research design with an interdisciplinary approach, combining literary analysis, psychoanalytic criticism, narratology, and cultural studies. Because this study focuses on the literary representation of trauma and memory in selected novels by Kazuo Ishiguro, a textual analysis method will be identified as a means through which to investigate narrative structures, thematic developments, and psychological dimensions in his works.

Research Approach

The study surveys an exploratory and interpretative approach, as it seeks to map out the deeper psychological, social, and historical implications embedded in Ishiguro's fiction. Using close reading and critical discourse analysis, the research explains how trauma is depicted through narrative strategies, character development, and thematic concerns.

Method of Analysis

This study examines the function of the form of Ishiguro's fiction concerning the memory fragmentation often associated with trauma, and the governing influence of the form on the exploration of repressed memory. The study critiques the use of Freudian repression and Lacanian divided-self theories to lay bare the character's unnamed traumas and conflicts, characterized otherwise as psychoanalytic structural approaches, and explores the narratological features involved with unreliable narration, non-linear temporality, and narrative silence, much like memory is fragmented.

This analysis examines key themes such as repression, nostalgia, guilt, and memory distortion, and does not examine "variables" as determined in a quantitative sense. The secondary

literature encountered consists of peer-reviewed journal articles and books published between 2000 and 2023 (with a special focus on trauma studies, neuroscience, and narratology). In *The Remains of the Day* (1989), Stevens is the embodiment of repression and dissociative amnesia, creating a narrative of duty that suppresses emotional vulnerability. In *Never Let Me Go* (2005), Kathy's fragmented memories represent memory distortion as well as the intentional reconstruction of memories, signalling the emotional burden of trauma. Both novels resonate with neuroscientific interpretations, wherein trauma complicates memory consolidation and memory retrieval, resulting in intrusive memories, dissociation, and emotional dysregulation (Schacter, 2001; Frontera et al., 2022). To ensure rigor, the analysis employs a triangulation of literary criticism, neuroscience, and trauma theory, as well as peer debriefing to clarify the author's interpretations throughout. This method increases both reliability and validity in a qualitative study. For Ishiguro, his narratives suggest how trauma destabilizes memory, selfhood, and ethical consideration, positioning his own work on the crossroads of Literature, Psychology, and Neuroscience.

Variable of the Study

While these independent variables and dependent variables are more qualitative in nature within the framework of literary analysis and psychoanalytic criticism, the study does make an allowance for qualitative variables. The independent variables of the study are Ishiguro's narrative techniques-unreliable narration, fragmented narratives, and non-linear timelines and how they contribute to the representation of trauma and memory. The psychological trauma, which runs through Ishiguro's works-repression, loss, displacement, and identity crises -as another independent variable, encapsulates the challenges his characters face. Another independent parameter is the construction of memory, however twisted, selective, repressed, or unreliable; memory creates the psychological orientation of the character and affects narrative structure. Based on the historical and sociocultural experiences shaping the character's public milieu-factors such as war, colonialism, and social pressures, add a deeper layer of personal dimension generated by their individual trauma histories, such as bereavement, betrayal, or existential sorrow, to the psychological complexity. In contrast to this are the dependent variables, the literary and psychological outcomes that these independent factors work upon. One of the key dependent variables is character development, given that trauma and memory shape and inform how characters understand their development, decision-making, and identity. Moreover, the emotional and psychological effects of trauma-guilt, nostalgia, repression, and emotional detachment take center stage for understanding the character's struggles. Another important dependent variable is narrative reliability, wherein memory distortion due to trauma greatly affects the credibility of the narrator's account, in turn giving rise to ambiguous or subjective narration. Some of the prominent discussions in Ishiguro's novels-even such themes as isolation, regret, and existential despair, and the quest for meaning-are conditioned by how trauma and memory are constructed in the narrative. In the end, an audience's engagement with the text on some emotional level will depend on how trauma and memory are cast, which, in turn, will affect their perception of the work as a whole. This study will thus analyze the interrelated nature of those independent and dependent variables, with a view to providing a structured response for the skill Ishiguro shows in writing the intersection of trauma, memory, and identity as delicate and often painful.

Result and Discussion

This cross-disciplinary examination of trauma studies, memory studies, and neuroscience intersects with Kazuo Ishiguro's novels *The Remains of the Day* (1989) and *Never Let Me Go* (2005) to show how trauma perpetuates a rupture in narrative cohesion and memory, frail and imperfect, actively works towards reconstructing identity. He demonstrates that trauma is not merely a wound, but a force of destabilization that reframes perception, ruptures chronology, and destabilizes the self. At the same time, memory emerges as both a strategy of coping and a mechanism of corruption, as memory is selective in what it brings from the past and evasive in what it eliminates. In *The Remains of the Day* (1989), Stevens embodies emotional suppression and motivated forgetting, as his nostalgia disguises the failures of vocation and intimacy, in a manner that is consistent with neuroscience models of trauma-related amnesia. Conversely, Kathy's fractured narration in *Never Let Me Go* (2005) reveals distortions of memory through concepts of bioethics, as the traumas of existence bleed into the landscape of memory connected to the construction of identity and collective history. In both novels, Ishiguro uses unreliable narration, recursive time, and a restrained prose style to dramatize the disjunction of the lived experience in the past and the recollected past.

This research locates Ishiguro's narratives in the connection of literature, psychology, and neuroscience to advance the argument that fiction serves as a laboratory of wounded memory, functioning in the imaginative realm and enacting that which science can only observe. Trauma interrupts memory repairs, but both are implicated as co-constructors of human identity, albeit in a fragile style. Therefore, Ishiguro's work also reflects on the persistent and deep ways in which personal suffering is refracted through cultural, ethical, and historical frames. Thus, it allows a distinctive literary entry into the human work of living with and through memory. In the final analysis, the narratives serve as a reminder that the act of remembering is never neutral, per se; aside from the personal negotiations between loss and survival, fracture and coherence, silence and voice, the act of remembering, by itself, shapes the values of what it means to be human.

The proposed contribution of the study is this very intersectional contribution to trauma, memory, and narrative structure by separating and analyzing their roles in Ishiguro's work using both neuroscientific and literary lenses. The results confirm that Ishiguro's characters are indeed not only and simply unreliable narrators, but complex psychological subjects whose memories are reconstructed by trauma-induced distortions and limitations. In essence, the novels of Ishiguro subsystem the ideas of memory as a trustworthy archive of the past so that readers can think about the porous, malleable, and always-interested spectre of human recollection.

Conclusion

The findings of this research establish that Ishiguro's treatment of trauma and memory aligns with both literary and neuroscientific theories; he appropriately lends confidence to the idea that memory is not a passive record of the past but rather transforms itself under the constraints of emotion and cognition to a more active and changing process. While trauma constitutes an open psychological rupturing point where narrative coherence becomes problematic, memory functions as a reparatory mechanism that reconstructs identity through selective recall and narrative manipulation. *The Remains of the Day* engages with nostalgia and self-deception to

emphasize how deeply suppressed emotions configure memories. The outcome is a life beset by regrets and repressions. In combination with this, *Never Let Me Go* provides existential trauma, that very rare draft. In it, the memories of clones are somehow modulated to sustain a very fragile sense of self, somehow replicating real-world discussions regarding memory plasticity and identity construction.

All along by excising trauma from memory within the confines of Ishiguro's works, the study in this regard represents trauma as devouring, incorporated, involuntary, and difficult for consciousness to fully assimilate into narrative; whereas memory, by contrast, remains active and pliable, susceptible to the whims of psychological needs, context, and critique from the socio-historical perspective. These works are, by Ishiguro, ultimately reframing within their texts the tragic reality of the workings of the human mind in its endeavour to make sense of suffering from the past as somehow distorted from true reality, which signifies the delicate barrier between truth, perception, and identity.

Implications, Recommendations, and Suggestions

This study offers a multidisciplinary approach to trauma, memory, and identity that is informative for scholars of literature and neuroscientists alike. As previously discussed, this work deepens our understanding of trauma as an interruption to cognition by demonstrating how Ishiguro's narrative devices can be compared to psychological theories about memory distortion, dissociation, and PTSD. Ishiguro's fragmented narration and unreliable memories push the boundaries of narration conventions, thus placing his work at the center of trauma fiction. The study also emphasizes the role of sociopolitical and historical contexts, which shape the memories their characters are reconstructing, thereby extending the limits of trauma literature, to contemplate postcolonial and global contexts as stated above. If *Never Let Me Go* shifted discussions beyond ethical questions about trauma to question newly identified issues with cloning for identity and autonomy, it is transferring trauma questions to the contemporary moment.

Further research may connect how memory, neuroplasticity, episodic memory, and the study of trauma's comparison of works by writers such as Morrison and Coetzee, as well as trauma fiction's connection to AI, digital memory, and clinical psychology. Universities can still retain a measure of scientific rigor by introducing contemporary neuroscientific concepts into literary studies.

Additionally, as discussed, Ishiguro may have applied narrative techniques to the realm of therapy and narration. Lastly, Ishiguro's fiction and characters remind us that trauma interrupts consciousness and memory in both a psychological and neurological space, that memory is fragile, that it is reconstructive of something that has occurred, and that it is which is what being human is defined.

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