

Examiners' Report Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2019

Pearson Edexcel International GCSE In English Literature (4ET1) Paper 01R: Poetry and Modern Prose

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Centres are thanked for choosing Pearson Edexcel for their International GCSE English Literature provider. This has been a very successful examination. There were no errors on the examination paper and no erratum notices. Centres should be congratulated in preparing their candidates so well and we hope that both our candidates and centres are pleased with their results.

Standard Introduction

There are three sections in this examination paper. In Section A, candidates are presented with an unseen poem and answer a question based on it (20 marks). In Section B, Anthology Poetry, candidates can choose either Question 2, which has two named poems or Question 3, in which one poem is named and the candidate chooses a suitable poem to discuss with it (30 marks). For Section C, Modern Prose, candidates choose to respond to one of two questions based on the prose text that they have studied (40 marks). The total marks for this paper is 90.

Principal Examiner's introduction

This report will provide feedback on all questions for the Summer 2019 4ET1 01R paper.

The feedback received from examiners has, once again, been very positive and the full range of marks has been awarded. Many responses gained marks in Level 3 or above and several candidates were awarded marks in Level 5.

The most popular Anthology question was Question 2 with almost double the number of responses than Q3, possibly due to two popular poems being named in Question 2.

The most popular prose text was *Of Mice and Men*. The second most popular was *To Kill a Mockingbird*. There were no responses for *Joy Luck Club* and just a small number for *The Whale Rider*. The responses to *Things Fall Apart* were mostly Level 4 or 5, with a large number of candidates gaining full marks.

There have been a range of responses in terms of levels from candidates across all the questions. These are rarely at Level 1 with most candidates achieving at least Level 3, many at Level 4 and a good number of full mark responses at Level 5. The candidates have offered wide interpretations of the texts and have engaged with these texts in positive and fruitful ways offering, at times, surprising alternative responses as well as the more predictable ones. One thing they all share is a serious endeavour to do their best and this is what makes this paper so enjoyable to mark.

The quality of teaching and preparation by centres is obvious by the ability candidates demonstrate in their approaches to the Unseen Poem. In some responses it was difficult not to believe it was not a prescribed text. At times, well-known quotations are overused and repeated in prose responses and centres could encourage candidates to choose some less well-known examples (that can be paraphrased).

The Anthology Poetry Section was generally well answered with candidates knowing both poems in some depth and mostly giving an equal weight to each. The relevant choice of a second poem in Q3 led to a range in levels being awarded, where some clearly struggled to answer the question with their chosen poem.

The Prose Section continues to demonstrate the importance of teaching these iconic and valued texts with candidates showing empathy and strength of feeling as well as a sense of justice and humanity. Context is usually addressed, though with varying degrees of success. At times it is a bolt on paragraph and sometimes it is not particularly accurate.

Examiners did see responses where handwriting was very poor and almost illegible. Of course, examiners are encouraged to award marks positively, but if a response cannot be read, this creates additional problems. Centres are reminded that they can apply for access arrangements for candidates with very weak handwriting skills, who could be given permission to word-process their answers. Sometimes the size of writing, in some cases almost microscopic, made responses difficult to read. Centres are asked to remind candidates to write in black ink as during the scanning process the use of blue pens often result in scripts appearing very pale and thus making it harder to read. The amount of crossed out work is also a concern in some cases indicating a panicked and unplanned response by the candidate. From the evidence seen, some centres encourage their candidates to write a plan before they commence their response and this may help those who end up crossing out a whole page or numerous sentences within their response and then running out of time. Of course, candidates should also be warned not to spend too much time on planning either.

A number of very positive general comments were received about the marking of this paper. One examiner commented: 'It has been an absolute pleasure and a privilege to have been a part of this summer's marking.'

Q1 My Box by Gillian Clarke

Question: Explore how the writer presents the box and its contents in this poem.

There were many very good responses to this question. One examiner commented that, 'It was a well-chosen poem which candidates found accessible and enjoyable to write about.'

There were very few misunderstandings and many perceptive and excellent responses were seen. At times, some responses were a little clinical or forensic where candidates tried to demonstrate their knowledge of poetic devices rather than offer an interpretation of what the poem is about. It seems good practice to offer a holistic idea about what the poem means first before going into detail. Candidates who did this were, on the whole, much more successful in explaining their ideas and also covering the whole poem.

Many responses referred to the descriptions and were able to suggest how these linked to the poet's ideas of love, life and the importance of memories. These were systematic approaches that followed the point, evidence and explain format, which reflect good teaching and advice on how to tackle the Unseen poem. Other responses were able to take this to a more sophisticated level and discussed ideas of how love is both cultured and maintained (with the referencing of nature imagery, the 'golden oak', birds and flowers, garden) and cannot be rushed (referencing the time the box took to be made). Some explored the value of the box (the sacrifice the lover had made and the effort put in to it) and the effect on the poet's outlook and the person she was (or 'slowly' became). A number referred to the poet as "he" and at times gave confusing possibilities for the person giving the box.

Not all candidates realised the importance of or commented upon the 'key in the lock' and the box being on a shelf to be opened and the books inside to be read – though many did, with some making the point that it was both sad, possibly referring to her imminent death or simply old age, and joyful and that these memories were to be shared and thus would not end with the poet.

There were some responses which, while offering very reasonable comments, were self -penalising in being either very brief or not covering the entire poem. It was clear that, despite the glossary, some candidates were unsure what 'kites' or 'jays' were and some got the gender of the poet wrong, and others became a little too obsessed with connotations such as 'black' (the 'twelve black books') which led them erroneously down the path of evilness and sinister ideas which were not reflected in the poem at all. Only a few seemed to be able to make something of the possible symbolism of there being twelve and that they were black.

The best responses were by those who read the poem a number of times, demonstrated by their not making an opinion without careful noting of the ideas throughout the poem – the less able candidates seemed to read the poem and then forget all about it whilst they attempted to interpret what it meant, which led to having only a partial understanding.

At the lower levels there were responses which were quite fanciful; it seemed as though candidates picked random words and elaborated on them without having any sense of the whole poem. It could be that these candidates whose English is a second language were guided by the meaning of a word in isolation and applied it too literally.

One memorable and pleasing response was from a candidate who at the end of their essay commented 'at the time the poem was written I was doing my DT work. I know how hard it is to oil, plane and sand a piece of timber and it is very hard', which reflects the importance of literature, for instance, when candidates can relate their own personal experiences to the poems they read.

Examiner comments include:

"Candidates responded well to the poem and the question allowed for a variety of responses - there were few misreadings but only the stronger responses explored the metaphorical possibilities of the box representing the poet's marriage, rather than being a box, so this allowed for a clear distinction between weaker and stronger candidates. Common features picked up on were the work put into making it and the materials it was made of being positive and valuable - only the stronger responses interpreted this is the sturdy trustworthy nature of the relationship. The 'golden tree' motif repetition was picked up on by the stronger students and linked to ideas of reliability."

"Although there were few misreadings, most responses achieved Level 3 or above."

"This was answered really well, especially as unseen. Many students picked up on the deeper meaning and could relate this to language. As evidenced with all of Section A, language and meaning was completed better than structure and form."

"Candidates engaged well with this poem. The majority of responses seen showed clear analytical skills and demonstrated a detailed knowledge of structural techniques and an understanding of form and language. There were a number of candidates at the higher levels who demonstrated original analysis that was supported by ideas in the poem. Overall, candidates were able to select a judicious range of references to support the points they made."

In summary, when responding to the Unseen Poetry, Section A, candidates should try to:

- demonstrate an understanding of the overall meaning of the poem
- focus on the question
- refer to form and structure and try to suggest why this may have been used
- give examples of language and explain their effect on the reader
- comment on all areas of the poem, not just the first few lines
- use short quotations and avoid copying large areas of the poem.

SECTION B Anthology Poetry

Both Anthology questions assess Assessment Objective 2 (AO2: Analyse the Language, form and structure used by a writer to create meanings and effects) and Assessment Objective 3 (AO3: Explore links and connections between texts).

Question 2: Compare the ways the writers present memories in *Search For My Tongue* and *Poem at Thirty-nine*.

This question was generally answered well and from the work seen offered a wide scope for responses through the idea of 'memories'.

A number of candidates provided a summary of each poem with a one paragraph comparison at the end. This was rarely sufficient to draw out the differences or similarities adequately. Likewise, the responses which took the sentence-by-sentence comparison approach tended to get in a muddle about which poem they were discussing, and also made forced comparisons that made little sense. In some rare instances, candidates simply made statements about each poem next to each other, which were not really comparing the two poems. Some responses were too brief or unequal in their treatment of each poem. Some candidates also picked a poetic device, e.g. enjambement, and based their entire comparison around that.

In *Search of My Tongue*, the sections in Guajarati and their phonetic versions were ignored by quite a number of candidates, which is ironic considering the ideas of the poem (the importance of her 'mother tongue') and in putting the reader in a similar position of not being able to be understood. Little knowledge of the poet was shown (though context is not assessed some knowledge of the poet is essential for understanding the poem). Many found some of the imagery

'disgusting' and perhaps failed to relate this to the anguish the poet felt by not only 'forgetting' her native tongue but also to the anger she felt perhaps when told to 'spit it out' when she was being misunderstood in using a foreign tongue and also to her wanting to 'spit out' the foreign tongue itself.

A small number of candidates did not relate this poem's ideas in relation to 'memories' particularly well, even those candidates who showed a very reasonable understanding of the ideas.

Poem at Thirty-Nine was better analysed in terms of 'memories'. Candidates were able to discuss the change from rather negative memories to more positive ones as the poem continued and also Walker's journey that as she remembered, she both healed her sadness over the loss of her father and valued the memories more as they became part of who she is at the end of the poem.

At times, some less able candidates struggled to make comparisons between these poems, especially in terms of 'memories' though there were exceptions. These noted that both poems ended positively, both 'lost' something: Bhatt was able to regain the "memory" of her native tongue and Walker was able to regain the memories of her father in a positive light, which may have been temporarily 'lost'. Candidates made a genuine effort to compare in terms of structure, form and language. One idea that many candidates expressed was that memories can be very resilient and survive.

Candidates also expressed empathy about what it must be like to lose something you consider very valuable, especially the means to communicate or your loved one.

Examiner comments include:

"Most candidates picked up on the difficulty of having two languages and the effect of that on personal identity. Stronger responses picked up on tone, such as affection and desperation and confusion."

"Only the stronger responses commented on the dual meaning of 'tongue' or the significance of using her native language, surprisingly."

"There was a lot of feature spotting - imagery of the roots and tongue and flowering in SFMT was the most often picked up on but less often were discussions of the structure."

"The discussions of the second poem tended to be a lot less developed."

"Most students picked up on surface language features but less than half of the responses chose to push this further and explore rather than explain. Most responses achieved Level 3 or above."

"Candidates, on the whole, managed to compare the two poems' meaning and tone. More able students were able to contrast the way in which their memories were expressed and compare the differences between the two poems. Some students did separate the two poems and dealt with them well individually but lacked the comparison."

Question 3: Compare how the writers convey personal thoughts in *Sonnet 116* and one other poem from the anthology.

'Personal thoughts' is a very wide concept and therefore gave candidates scope to explore this in a number of ways. Examiners are encouraged to be open to all interpretations of the question.

The most successful candidates talked about the poets' personal thoughts about love and the nature of love. The choice of second poem was crucial to the quality of the discussion and relevance of the comparisons made. La Belle Dame Sans Merci, Remember, Piano, My Last Duchess were all poems that aided the candidates. Prayer Before Birth, Do Not Go Gentle, The Tyger and If- were less successful as candidates struggled to make connections. They became two separate essays about two poems essentially only linked by the idea that they were about personal thoughts.

The discussion on *Sonnet 116* was very good. Candidates were able to analyse this poem well in terms of the language devices and what Shakespeare is saying about the meaning of 'true' love. It would seem to be a poem that has been taught very well by centres. However, there were a few misunderstandings mostly caused by candidates making an inference from part of a line or not reading the next line in conjunction. For example, 'let me not to the marriage of true minds' led some candidates to conclude Shakespeare was against marriage, it also highlighted a misunderstanding of what the word 'marriage' means. This is similar to the main fault of the analyses offered on this poem, the tendency to pick on a word in isolation and to make too much of it or not see it in the context of the whole meaning.

Remember was one of the most popular choices and was dealt with from very well to adequately. There were some who possibly having been taught from a Feminist perspective or had read about Rossetti's life, decided that she was in an abusive relationship. While it is good to adopt alternative readings of texts,

candidates must be able to show evidence from the text itself in terms of language or imagery to back up these ideas. This was done with varying success. *La Belle* was a good choice in being able to discuss 'true' love and the 'false' love as described by Keats. Candidates seem to positively enjoy comparing *My Last Duchess* and offered robust comparisons.

Examiner comments include:

"Nearly all responses compared *Sonnet 116* to *Prayer Before Birth* or *La Belle Dame sans Merci* (in terms of constancy and trust in love) - very few other poems were chosen. Nearly all interpretations of *Blessing* were accurate with few misreadings. Most language discussion concentrated on vocabulary choices, images and similes."

"Only the more able candidates commented on the sonnet form and its significance. Some students mentioned the volta without seeming to understand it. Most candidates discussed the idea of constancy of love and that it acts as a guide, but fewer picked up on the idea of age and death."

"Comparisons to LBDSM were done confidently with the dominant theme of the contrast in ideas about love - guide / trap; constant / fickle. Any other poems were contrasted less confidently."

"Some students made more obvious poems to compare e.g. *Remember*, which made it then easier for them to deal with the question. Students made some impressive comments about the meaning of *Sonnet 116* and how language and structure are used."

"A range of poems was selected for comparison with *Sonnet 116* – these included *If*–, *Remember* and *Prayer Before Birth* – all of which were effectively discussed and compared. Candidates demonstrated confidence in handling all poems and even in some more brief responses there was a clear indication that students understood and remembered the poems well."

In summary, when responding to Section B Anthology questions, candidates should try to:

- focus on the question
- refer to form and structure
- give examples of language and explain their effect on the reader
- provide a balanced response giving each poem equal treatment
- compare meanings and examples of language and structure.

Remember, context is not assessed in this part of the paper.

SECTION C Modern Prose

This has, once again, been a particularly successful section of the paper. Again, candidates had been prepared extremely well and it is always a joy to discover something new about a text when we thought we knew it already! As last year, some comments and observations were individual, enlightening and perceptive.

The full range of marks was awarded and some examiners felt that this section was handled better than the poetry.

All questions afforded candidates of all abilities the opportunity to engage. There were some weaker responses in *Of Mice and Men* and *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Often, when responding to either of these texts, context was often added as a separate paragraph and was not linked to the points being made; however, context is being included more successfully than in the past. Less able candidates tend to lapse into narrative instead of answering the question.

The small number of responses were seen for Ihimaera's *The Whale Rider* and Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, but those that did attempt these questions were mostly very successful when applying both AO3 (knowledge and understanding of the text) and AO4 (context). There were some very perceptive and skilful responses with a range of quotations. Responses to *Things Fall Apart* were often above and beyond expectations at this level and were more in keeping with A-Level, as candidates referred to literary criticism and wider reading. The responses were a pleasure to read.

One examiner commented: "Questions were effectively constructed to measure students' knowledge and understanding and where students did not effectively engage with the questions this was because students veered away from the focus – for example a few students discussed the relationship between George and Lennie instead of using their relationship to explore what it showed about Lennie. The questions allowed students to demonstrate not only what they had learned but at the higher levels their own perceptiveness and critical style."

Q4 To Kill a Mockingbird

Question: Explore the significance of racism in this novel.

The responses to this question were very good. Nearly all candidates demonstrated a good level of knowledge and understanding of the text. Mostly,

context was integrated and informed the discussion, though in weaker responses it was bolted on and at times overly simplistic or inaccurate.

Many candidates used quotations accurately or pertinent paraphrases, which enhanced the quality of their discussion and showed detailed knowledge of characters and events and how they are linked to the idea of 'racism'. There were some instances of wrongly ascribed quotations and also the overused list of popular quotations. Centres need to advise candidates to seek out less obvious quotes and episodes as such responses tend to become somewhat formulaic and do not have the force the candidate intended. Surprisingly, very few candidates referred to Mayella in any way.

It is always very gratifying to see the impact this novel still has on candidates and their sense of injustice. They are genuinely horrified by the treatment of Black Americans during the time of the novel and respectful of Atticus Finch and everything he stands for. The trial was an obvious example that many candidates discussed, but others also included the almost casual racism of the school teacher and Mr Cunningham (which turns into a mob like attitude) and Atticus's sister, Aunt Alexander. A very few also saw the same attitudes alive and well in society today though they were the exception to the majority who thought racism was 'done and dusted'.

Examiner comments include:

"There were plenty of basic points to make about racism, allowing most candidates to get into Level 3 at least. Nearly all candidates, with very few exceptions, brought in some level of context about racism and most responses mentioned the Jim Crow laws and recent trials. Stronger responses explored the context beyond this to include segregation and a wider context. Only the stronger responses linked the trial and growing awareness of racism and injustice to the growing consciences and awareness of the children, particularly Jem. Nearly all responses stuck to the main characters of Tom, Atticus and the Ewells, rather than a wider range of examples of peripheral characters. Most responses discussed the trial itself, the shooting, the unfairness of the jury but few responses explored this beyond the surface level. The stronger responses referred to small advances and 'baby steps' and to the contextual information about Harper Lee's own youth."

Q5 To Kill a Mockingbird

Question: In what ways is Mrs Dubose important in To Kill a Mockingbird?

There were very few responses to this question, but a full range of marks was awarded. Some responses were a little narrative, whereas others included more detail, such as Jem destroying Mrs Dubose's camellias and Atticus teaching the children about the meaning of bravery or courage.

Examiner comments include:

"Far fewer candidates chose this response. Some responses tended towards the narrative and, as a result, gained marks in Level 2. On the whole, when candidates did choose this question, responses tended to be stronger since, presumably, only the stronger candidates had a good knowledge of examples from the more peripheral characters."

Q6 Of Mice and Men

Question: Explore the character of Lennie in the novel.

This continues to be a text well taught. Candidates are empathetic and sympathetic to Lennie's character. While many tend to go down a well- trodden path of popular quotations and episodes, there were some responses which offered very different approaches and reflected critical writings on the novel at a deeper level than the mainstream.

Many of the quotes tended to be the popular ones, but even so they were usually employed to further a point the candidate was making in an effective way. Thus Lennie's physical power, the animalistic descriptions, his love of the rituals of the dream telling, his attraction to petting soft things and his reliance on George were all discussed in detail.

Most candidates felt he was an example put into the novel by Steinbeck to represent disabled people and how they were treated in the 1930s which is possibly an over-simplification of the author's intent. Some candidates found it hard to separate George and Lennie and wrote about them both.

Context tended to be as an introduction and at times rather simplistic. Some candidates tended to write overlong passages about context (over one page or more) which then left them less time to respond to the question. The best responses tended to integrate context within the discussion as they went.

Examiner comments include:

"This was the more popular question of the two. Most responses had sturdy enough knowledge to get Level 3 at least. Nearly all mentioned Lennie's dependent role with George and his disability. Common examples were the work card, the frequent needing to hear the dream, the killing of Curley's wife, the dream of home ownership, his animal qualities, the shooting and themes of loneliness and friendship. Most responses pointed out the cyclical nature of the novella with the beginning and end in the same place and George's accurate knowledge of Lennie in knowing he'd go to the pond. There were very few erroneous views. Many responses seemed like stock prepared answers - particularly those levering in the American Dream and loneliness on the ranch and often phrases such as 'American Dream' was mentioned without explaining or seeming convincing in their understanding. Most responses mentioned the lack of awareness of or support for disability but few explored this beyond the surface level."

"Regarding Lennie's character, candidates covered and linked context very well on the whole in terms of American Dream and disability and his relationship with George. At times, for this question, the context was covered more than the novel itself. Even the lower-level descriptive answers included some context."

Q7 Of Mice and Men

Question: Examine the theme of authority in Of Mice and Men.

There were some excellent responses on this question where the candidates had sourced different approaches and readings of the text, which were refreshing to read. These incorporated relevant theories and unusual character analyses. However, the majority went down a more familiar path discussing each character in the light of their level of authority or lack of. Very few candidates defined what 'authority' means other than power at times meaning 'unfair treatment', which is not the same although can be a product of it. Candidates were almost unanimous in their views that the best authority was Slim's and the worst was Curley's. Slim was, at times, over eulogised and given traits not evident in the text. Those who went beyond a character study demonstrated the ability to explore the relationship between the character traits and the overall themes of the text e.g. the 'dog eat dog' environment which pitted characters against each other and prevented trust and even compassion.

Across all levels there were some detailed and interesting analyses of Crook's and the complexity of authority as it applies to him – when he has none, how quickly he is reduced by Curley's wife, seen as the character only above him in status, and how Crooks momentarily gains some authority over Lennie when he 'tortures' him by suggesting that George will not return. Those excellent

responses mentioned previously were able to link this to notions of human behaviour as a complex and ambiguous endeavour. Candidates were outraged at the terrible treatment of Crooks and often referred to his education and 'mauled copy' of the Californian Civil Code, which he appeared to take some bitter solace in.

Quoting was generally accurate and skilfully employed, though occasionally characters' names were confused and some candidates referred to a poem or play rather than a novel; some persistently referred to another author. The vast majority of candidates know the plot of this novel very well and have been taught thoroughly.

Context was usually a bolt on paragraph and over simplified, though some candidates were able to integrate their knowledge of the times in an intelligent way. Very few have much idea what the 'American Dream' is or what caused the Great Depression and other historical aspects that inform the text in any detail. There were some odd contextual comments where the candidates referred to a number of modern day equivalents e.g. 'This also applies to the modern day CEOs of companies have more security and better pay' or 'Police in America have a greater chance of shooting black kids".

Examiner comments include:

"Considering this was the less popular question, it was answered well in the most part, with demonstration of sound knowledge of a range of characters with relations to authority."

"Stronger answers developed and explored and weaker answers simply mentioned the characters and described their authority or lack of it. Nearly all answers linked authority to the nature of 'dog eat dog' on the ranch and to the futility of the American Dream for anyone with a lack of authority. Nearly all candidates discussed George's authority over Lennie, Curley's over the ranchmen and over his wife, Slim's natural authority and Crooks' lack of authority. Most responses discussed the hierarchy of the ranch with the black man at the bottom and the woman just above that. Only the stronger responses explored this in terms of how a harsh environment makes this so. Nearly all responses mentioned the difficult conditions of the ranch workers. Most responses reached Level 3 or above."

"Again, a range of characters were thoughtfully examined and used. The context was often integrated well. The analysis of specific characters such as Curley, Slim, George, etc., was explored thoughtfully. Some students, at times, strayed from

the question and went into character descriptions generally as opposed to linking them to authority."

Questions 8 and 9, The Whale Rider

There were very few responses for this text. Please refer to the ERA centre report produced for the main paper, 4ET1 01, for examples of responses to this text.

Questions 10 and 11, The Joy Luck Club

There were no responses for this novel. Please refer to the ERA centre report produced for the main paper, 4ET1 01, for examples of responses to this text.

Questions 12 and 13, Things Fall Apart

Although there were very few responses, those that were seen were mostly very impressive and gained marks in the top two levels. Please refer to the ERA centre report produced for the main paper, 4ET1 01, for examples of responses to this text.

In summary, when responding to Section C, Prose, candidates should:

- focus on the question
- avoid narrative retelling of the events in the novel
- provide a range of examples from their chosen text remember that as this is a closed book examination, examples need not be quotations but examples of events or episodes within the novel
- prove to the examiner their knowledge of the text do not assume the examiner knows everything
- comment on contextual points and try to relate these to the points being made
- avoid dealing with context separately. Do not write a page of historical background, but link all contextual points with an example from the novel and in relation to the question being answered.

Conclusion

Once again, this paper has been a pleasure to mark and the responses have been very enjoyable to read.

Centres should be congratulated on preparing their candidates so well. We very much hope that you will continue to deliver this specification and you are delighted with results.

More exemplar materials for the new specification are continually being added to our website and more sample responses are being uploaded in the Autumn. This year, we have produced a detailed report for the main paper, which includes exemplars of candidates' responses. Please attend a feedback meeting in the Autumn term or go onto our website in order to obtain a copy.

For those candidates looking to continue their English Literature studies, the Pearson Edexcel International AS and A Level (Specification references: YET01 and XET01) is an ideal option. This qualification is becoming very popular and successful and has received positive feedback from centres. Full details are available on our website.

Again, thank you for choosing Pearson Edexcel as your International GCSE provider. We should like to wish you all every success for the future.

Thank you.

Chief / Principal Examiner

International GCSE English Literature

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