

THE IMAGE OF A PERSON WITH DISABILITY IN FAIRY TALES AND FINE ART AS A REFLECTION OF THE ATTITUDE OF THE SOCIETY

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Abstract. *The article, referring to the analysis of 36 fairy tales and fine art reproductions, attempts to decode the attitude of the society towards people with disabilities, their social status and potential opportunities. This topic has not been analysed from this aspect neither by philologists nor by the authors of special psychology. In fairy tales and examples of fine art the variety of attitudes towards people with disabilities has been encountered. A wide range of attitudes – from empathy to undisguised negative attitude – has been encountered.*

Keywords: *people with disabilities, attitude, fairy tales, fine art.*

Introduction

From the psychological point of view a fairy tale, according to G. Gudaitė, is a symbolic expression of personal search. Fairy tales help to understand one's negative emotions and positively solve psychological problems, evoke human's ability to act, activate his/her inner powers, stimulate new experiences and creative impulses, evoke subconsciousness, help to form a sense of independence, give purposefulness to one's life. Fairy tale is one of the most important forms of symbolic expression that, according to the analysts, has a typical structure reflecting a certain psychical process. The analysis of fairy tale leads to the distinction, identification and analysis of archetypal motives. These archetypal motives are the basis for individuation, thus while analysing fairy tales we analyse the process of individuation (Gudaitė, 2001). According to N. Bražienė, fairy tale is perceived as the expression of the unity of the development of spirit, soul and body forming human's understanding that only together with spiritual education thinking stimulates harmonious development of personality, helps a personality to appropriately orient in the world of one's feelings and thoughts and feel spiritually safe. By symbolical language every fairy tale teaches a person how to deal with his/her desires, fears and attractions. Fairy tale is a reflection of physical processes: the stories of this kind help both a child and an adult unconsciously perceive their negative emotions and their origins, help positively solve psychological problems, give hope, let them feel

safe, because fairy tale images lift from unconsciousness what one usually does not succeed to perceive consciously (Bražienė, 2004). However, apart from the reflection of the expression of personality transformation fairy tales, like other forms of folklore, have another impact as well. Both a child and an adult would feel sympathy or antipathy to a character of a fairy tale. If a fairy tale character is little familiar or completely unfamiliar, its image and psychological characteristics are forming. It is especially relevant when people that are less frequently seen, for example, people with disabilities, are depicted in fairy tales. If a child had not seen a person with one or another disability, a fairy tale would be a primary source of his/her knowledge. Depending on how this person is depicted in a fairy tale, it is possible for a respective attitude to be formed. Therefore, educating children with and without developmental disorders together, when a child has a possibility to directly communicate with different peers, is positively evaluated. If there is no such possibility, a child and an adult get information about people with disabilities from other sources, including fairy tales and works of fine art. In case of the lack of knowledge in human consciousness often negative and incorrect stereotypes are formed, that in one or another way can be corrected by works of art as well, for example, by fairy tales or works of fine art.

The object of the research – moral aspect of evaluation of human disability recorded in fairy tales and works of fine art revealing the attitudes of the author.

The aim of the research – to reveal the attitude towards disability and people with disabilities in fairy tales and works of fine art.

The methods of the research: content analysis, historical narrative, interpretation.

Folklore is a specific reflection of the attitudes of society towards people with disabilities. It conveys knowledge about the situation of people with disabilities in the society, about their activity, abilities, opportunities. Fairy tales, as one of the genres of folklore, may have influence on the formation of the attitudes of the society towards people with disabilities.

Having analysed 31 fairy tales of various nations and 5 fairy tales by particular authors, the characters of which are people with disabilities, according to predominant attitudes towards people with disabilities, fairy tales have been relatively divided into the following groups:

- a) fairy tales revealing a positive attitude towards disability and people with disabilities;
- b) fairy tales revealing a negative attitude;
- c) fairy tales reflecting a neutral attitude;

- d) fairy tales reflecting both negative and positive attitude towards disability and people with disabilities.

In seventeen fairy tales (**47,2 per cent**) a **positive attitude** towards disability and people with disabilities has been expressed. In these fairy tales it is attempted to positively depict a blind person, his/her abilities and a wish to prove them.

Namely this attitude is reflected in the fairy tale “The Blind Man and the Lame Man”, “The Tale on How a Lame Barang (European) and a Blind Khmer Frightened a Yak” (Cambodian fairy tales); “The Blind Strong Man”, “The Legless Hero and the Blind Hero”, “Matyusha Ashy” (Russian fairy tales); “The Blind Man, the Deaf Man and the Legless Man” (Tatar fairy tale); “The Blind Man and the Hunter” (fairy tale of West African countries); “The Blind Crow” (Turkmenian fairy tale), where a crow to thank for his life awards a shepherd, in the fairy tale of the Brothers Grimm “The King’s Son Who Did Not Fear Anything”, etc.

Positive attitude towards a person with disabilities and his/her skills is usually reflected in fairy tales, the character of which is a blind musician, for example, the Irish fairy tale “The Piper’s Song” (the lady of the sea and the blind piper Paddy Connor), “The Merchant’s Son” – the Bashkir tale about how music heals a blind man.

In some fairy tales a person with disability is presented if not as a full member of the society but at least as a person who needs other people’s empathy and help. In fairy tales revealing positive attitude towards people with disabilities sympathy and willingness to give them help is expressed, for example, the Russian fairy tale “The Blind Old Man”: *A blind old man was sitting on the stairs of the theatre and begging... The sum gathered in the hat during the day was very small, it was hardly enough for a piece of bread for the blind man... One day a middle-aged man was passing by. He came up to the old man, put some coins, listened to his thanks and stepped aside. But then he returned, took a cardboard and wrote something on it. In the evening the blind man’s hat was full of money. A new note on the cardboard was like this: It is spring on the street and I cannot see it.*

In eleven (**30,5 per cent**) fairy tales **negative attitude** towards a person with disabilities was revealed. Negativity is conditioned by insufficient knowledge or complete ignorance of this person’s abilities.

The implication of these texts is clear: blindness is a synonym of stupidity, foolishness, ignorance. In the Russian fairy tale “Blind Puppy” a blind man is compared with a blind puppy that does not know or understand anything, does not have any aim; the sighted people do not trust such blind puppies. In the Latvian fairy tale “The Blind Ash Tree” the one with disabilities is treated like a fool, becomes the object of mockery and bullying. In the Russian fairy tale “The

Blind Man” a blind man is depicted as a cheater. In the Bulgarian fairy tale “The Blind Snake” he is identified with a human eating snake. In the Cambodian fairy tale “The Blind Man and the Lame Man” people with disabilities are being cheated on: *Well, this man who was scooping honey cheated on us. He gave us some manure instead of honey.* In the Indian fairy tale “The Shrewd Shingpo” the blind man and the deaf man are depicted as cowards: *The blind man having heard the noise got enormously scared and ran away. When the deaf man saw that his fellow was running, he also fled away having left the purse with money.*

Negative attitude towards people with disabilities is reflected by comparing blindness to other complaints in the tales of lies. Thus in the Austrian tale of lies “The Blind Man, the Lame Man and the Naked Man” that does not have a plot and is meant to amuse and puzzle the listeners, the statements evidently contradicting each other are presented: *I was climbing up the hill, I met a shoemaker and a man. When I was going farther I came to a big village, there three small huts were standing. In the first one they were splitting wood blocks, in the second one they were splitting firewood, and out of the third one, completely empty, the three men came out: one was blind, the second one was lame, and the third one was naked. The blind man saw a hare in my hands. The lame man caught him up, and the naked man slipped him into under his bosom.*

In some fairy tales negative attitude towards blind people highlights the stereotype that when people lose their sight human physiology changes: *And she wanted to get married although she was blind* (the Russian tale “The Blind Bride”). In this fairy tale a blind girl is depicted as rather stupid and it is rather because of this reason and not because of her blindness she becomes a victim of deception – the assumed bridegroom robs her: *<...> they came into the house – it was empty everywhere.* A blind girl who is easy to be misled is even more foolish because she does not even recognize her home: *Well now, – he said, – dress up. I am going to take you for a ride. They were going round and round the village and he brought her back. “Go, I will unharness the horses”. She came in and said: “Everything is like in our house”. She locked herself up and sat down.* How insightful the creators of the texts of the Bible were who announced the curses in the Book of Deuteronomy, one of which said: *Cursed be he that maketh the blind to wander out of the way* (De 27, 18; English translation from the King James Bible). Many people cannot imagine the marriage between a blind woman and a sighted man. This presupposition is illustrated by the picture by M. Beringov “The Wedding of the Blind People”, where the blind bridegroom of the blind bride is shown, the musicians and the guests all are blind (see Fig. 1).



Figure 1. M. Beringov. The Wedding of the Blind People

The picture illustrates the isolation of this group of people. In the Indian fairy tale “The Wise Men and the Elephant” it is being tried to impose the idea that blind people are not able to form the images of the surrounding world: *An elephant was brought to a small town of India. The blind wise men wanted to see it. But how ? “I know”, – one wise man said, – we will touch it.* “Good idea”, – the others said, – then we will find out what the elephant is like.” So, the six men went to see the elephant. The first one touched a big flat ear. It was slowly moving forward and back. “The elephant is like a fan!” – the wise man shouted. The second wise man touched the elephant’s legs. “It is like a tree!” – he shouted. “Both of you are wrong – it is like a rope.” This man touched the elephant’s tail. “The elephant is like a spear!” – the fourth one shouted. “No, no! – the fifth one shouted, – the elephant is like a high wall”, – he said touching the side of the elephant. The sixth wise man touched the trunk of the elephant. “You are all wrong, – he said, – the elephant is like a snake.” “No, like a rope!” – “Like a snake!” – “Like a wall!” – “You are wrong!” – “I am right!” The six blind men were shouting at each other for an hour. They never found out what the elephant was like. This topic was especially liked by artists. The aforementioned plot of the fairy tale was depicted in the works by the artists I. Hanabusa, K. Hokusai, R. J. Daae, etc. In some countries it is possible to see sculptures depicting the blind men examining the elephant (see Fig. 2 - 6).



Figure 2. I. Hanabusa. Blind people and elephant



Figure 3. K. Hokusai. Blind people and elephant



Figure 4. Blind people and elephant. Sculpture - Fountain, Germany



Figure 5. Blind people and elephant. Sculpture, Haiti



Figure 6. Blind people and elephant. Sculpture, China

In the Lithuanian fairy tale “The Blind Maid” the girl’s poor eyesight is hidden from the matchmakers and the bridegroom because such a girl will not be able to neither weave nor look after cattle.

Negative attitude towards blindness can be determined historically because earlier blinding was applied as a punishment for crimes. One of the first known remaining documents that prove such physical punishment are the laws of Hammurabi (Latin *Codex Hammurabi* – Code of Hammurabi) – the code of law of the Babylonian king Hammurabi (18th century BC), that is one of the oldest codes in the world and at the same time one of the best preserved written monuments of the culture of Mesopotamia. The laws are written on the stone; the text consists of approximately three thousand verses. The code regulated many fields of the life of the Babylonians. In the paragraph 196 of the chapter “Taking away one’s life and injuring one’s body” of this law it is written “If a man put out the eye of another man, his eye shall be put out” (Tamošaitis & Kairys, 1938; English translation by L. W. King). The historical development confirms that blinding as a punishment was used while solving dynastic quarrels for the throne, during the war in order to threaten or weaken the enemy’s army, it was applied for disobeying God’s will, immorality, money counterfeiting (Gudonis, 1985). The plot of blinding for unpaid debts is encountered in the Lithuanian fairy tale “The Poor Shoemaker”: *The rich man is demanding his money and this poor man does not even know what to do. One day on his way home he met the rich man in the forest. He started demanding his money again, and the shoemaker does not have a penny. He is begging him to wait for some more time, but the rich man got angry and destroyed the shoemaker’s eyes in anger.*

Ignorance of blind people’s abilities creates favourable conditions for the formation of the stereotypical attitude about their inferiority: if you are blind you are destined to live a poor life. The idea is imposed that blind people are not neat and clean: *Soon the boy started meeting people with torn clothes, with snarled hair, with dirty faces, hands and feet ... <...> reached his native town that appeared to be a heap of shabby huts without windows, with dirty walls and leaking roofs ... <...> the blind people could not build anything better* (M. Romanov, “Tale about the Town of Blind People”). A completely helpless blind man is depicted in the Brothers Grimm fairy tale “Rapunzel”: *he was wandering <...> in the woods eating only berries and roots and was not doing anything but moaning and crying.*

In the fairy tale by Neringa Dangvydė “On the King’s Son’s Search for Wisdom”, essentially reflecting positive attitude towards blind people, the eldest brother’s turn to swamps symbolizes the meeting with one of the groups that suffer from social exclusion – blind people. A blind girl whom the king’s son meets in the swamps and fog thinks that she is not needed by anyone and she

brightens her loneliness by songs, hearing which travellers sometimes would come to her. The situation of the fairy tale presupposes that the previous passers-by did not care about the girl's fate, therefore, they trying to come back to their world would get lost forever in swamps. In other words, if there is no confidence, there is no communication. The idea is suggested that a blind person is destined to loneliness because the sighted people do not trust him/her.

Often a blind character of a fairy tale is compared with drunkards, liars, fools. Not people themselves are compared but only their abilities. In the Cambodian fairy tale "The Blind Man and the Lame Man", as in other fairy tales where people with sensory and physical disability are depicted, mutual help between people with disabilities is shown: *The blind man got the lame man on his shoulders and they went on a trip*. People with disabilities also help each other in another Cambodian tale on how a lame Barang (European) and a blind Khmer frightened a yak, in the Russian fairy tales "The Legless Hero and the Blind Hero", "Matyusha Ashy", in the Tatar fairy tale "The Blind Man, the Deaf Man and the Legless Man". Painters and sculptors liked to depict the plot of the mutual help of people with disabilities (see Fig. 7-13).

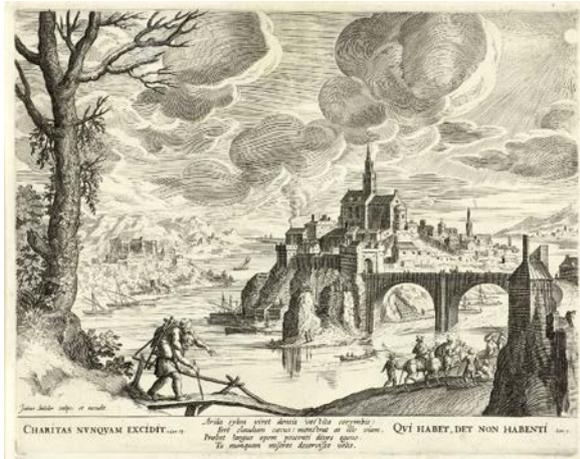


Figure 7. J. Sadeler. Landscape with a lame that is carried by the blind man



Figure 8. J. T. de Bry. The blind man and the lame



Figure 9. **A. Van de Venne. Every gift helps**



Figure 10. **E. Hadreyth. The blind man and the lame**



Figure 11. **J. Buys. The blind man and the lame**



Figure 12. **E. Berlach. The blind man and the lame**



Figure 13. J. Turcan. The blind man and the lame

In several fairy tales analysed **both negative and positive attitude** towards a person with disability has been encountered. The aforementioned author's tale by M. Romanov "Tale about the Town of Blind People", where both negative aspect (blind people are not neat and clean) and negative aspect (desire to help blind people) can serve as an example.

In five fairy tales (14 per cent) a **neutral attitude towards a blind person** is shown, i. e. just a fact of blindness is stated. In several fairy tales both a neutral and positive attitude is expressed: in the Indian fairy tale "The Blind Rajah" the blind person's wish to have a full family is reflected: *Gods decided to send a child to a blind rajah and a blind ranee*. Thus the dreams of a childless family came true.

More than a half of the analysed fairy tales express person's with disability **belief in a miracle** that reflects **the biggest wish of people with disabilities – to regain their health**. Belief in miraculous recovery is encountered in the Armenian fairy tale "The Son of the Blind Czar", the Macedonian fairy tale "Three Mermaids, the Blind Old Man and the Pauper", the Russian fairy tales "Storm, the Cow's Strong Son", "Ivan the Czar's Son in the Kingdom of Underground", "Tale about the Brave Young Man, Rejuvenating Apples and Life Water", in the Bashkir fairy tale "The Merchant's Son": *Malaiko found some hole and went along this hole. He saw: an old man was sitting there, he was blind and holding a violin in his hands. Malaiko took the violin and started*

to play; as soon as he started to play the old man started to see and his eyes got healthy. An atypical way of miraculous recovery is depicted in the Cambodian fairy tale “The Blind Man and the Lame Man”: *The blind man thought that the lame man hit him and shouted in a loud voice:*

– So you are like this! You want to fight!

*And he jumped on his feet and started to kick the lame man. He was kicking and hitting him until the lame man’s legs got straight. The lame man jumped up completely straight and started to hit the blind man’s face and eyes. He was beating and hitting so strongly that the blind man regained his sight. In the Russian fairy tale “Matyusha Ashy” traditional search for life water characteristic to fairy tales of many nations is shown: *The blind man put Matyusha Ashy into his basket: “I have heard from the old people that there is life water somewhere. If only we can find it! You would heal your legs with this water and I would anoint my eyes and see the light.” – “I know where the healing potion is. Carry me, I will show you the way.”* In the legend of Moa Island “Seven Blind Brothers” the disability is treated with the turtle’s eggs: *At night the youngest brother waited until the other brothers fell asleep, got up, took their dead father’s skull, which they were preserving with care, rubbed it with fragrant leaves and asked to send him a prophetic dream.**

– Tell me, father, if you can, why can’t we with the brothers see like all the other people? Every day we fill the boat with fish, and when we come back home, the boat seems to be empty. What is happening?

At night he saw his father in a dream.

*– Don’ t sail tomorrow to the reef,– he said. – Let your brothers go to the sea and you will be guided by the magic feather to a sandy path, by which turtles go on the shore to lay eggs. Go along this path and you will find a nest with turtles’ eggs. Set a fire and cook a couple of eggs, then smash them, rub your eyes and you will see. The youngest brother did everything what his father had told and indeed he regained his eyesight. It is curious that in this fairy tale the dream of yet undiscovered instruments that help blind people to orient in the surrounding space is expressed: *Before sailing to the sea they would put bonds on their heads and they had magic feathers in their bonds. The feathers would take the brothers to the boat and show the direction to them. If the brothers were going the right way, the feathers were fluttering to the wind, if they went wrong, the feathers would unexpectedly get stiffened. The feathers would indicate when to drop the sail and take up the poles, when to keep a spear prepared, when and where to throw the spear.* In the Lithuanian fairy tale “The Poor Shoemaker” forest animals know the ways of miraculous healing: *– It is so, – the hare continued, – but nobody who lost the eyesight can regain it. He will stay blind forever.**

– *Don't tell nonsense! – the bear held him back. – If he washed his eyes with dew before the sunrise he would regain his eyesight... The shoemaker climbed down from the tree, touched where the grass was thicker, gathered the dew into his hand and rubbed his eyes until he regained the eyesight...*

The miraculous recovery is described in another Lithuanian folk tale “The Hero King”, in the Austrian fairy tale “The Songbird Healer”, in the Brazilian fairy tale “The Queen and Her Sisters”, in the Russian fairy tale “The Legless Hero and the Blind Hero”, in the Brothers Grimm fairy tales “Rapunzel”, “The King's Son Who Did Not Fear Anything”, in the fairy tale of West African countries “The Blind Man and the Hunter”, in the Tatar fairy tale “The Blind Man, the Deaf Man and the Legless Man”, in the Armenian fairy tale “The Son of the Blind Czar”: *Some time passed. The czar got ill and got blind. Then he invited all the wise men and astrologists, but they were only shaking their heads. And one very clever and old wise man said:*

– *Wash your eyes with the blood of the king of fish, then you will regain your eyesight...* The czar's son got the miraculous blood, anointed his father's eyes with it and the czar regained his eyesight. The medicine to heal the blindness made of fish is also mentioned in the Azerbaijani fairy tale “The Golden Candlestick”.

It is likely that the origins of these fairy tales can be related with similar healing of blindness in the Book of Tobit (Tob 11, 9-16). The topic of miraculous recovery is also discussed in the Macedonian fairy tale “Three Mermaids, the Blind Old Man and the Pauper”: *The three hags who tore my eyes out live on this mountain... <...> The princess brought some elephant's milk, put its drop to her father's both eyes, and the king regained his eyesight.*

The ideas of miraculous recovery find their origin in the stories about Jesus Christ's miraculous healing of people with sensory and physical disability (Mt 8, 9). The life water overcoming all the disabilities is associated with the Biblical Siloam Pool.

In the tale “The Blind Horse” by K. Ushinsky the sympathy for an animal with disability is emphasized: *People got very surprised to see a poor horse in the middle of the square – blind, hungry, shivering from cold. When the people found out that the rich man chased away a blind horse that had saved his life unanimously decided that Chase the Wind had a right to ring the bell. They called the ungrateful merchant to the square and ordered him to keep the horse and feed him until his death. A man appointed for this purpose had to look after the execution of the punishment, and the sentence itself was chiseled in the stone erected to remember this event in the square of the veche...* The sympathy for a person with disability is also expressed in the Russian fairy tale “The Blind Strong Man”; in the fairy tale of Moa Island “Seven Blind Brothers” where the

pity for a blind man, the victim of deception, is expressed. The episode of regaining the eyesight is also encountered in the Russian fairy tale “The Blind Man’s Wife”, but it is also interesting that an unjustified stereotype is encountered here: it is supposed that if a person does not see, he/she is worse in hearing and smelling as well, and this allows an unfaithful wife to fondle with her lover in the presence of her blind husband. Analogous episode was depicted by the French painter Jean Baptiste Greuze in the picture “The Deceived Blind Man” (see Fig.14).

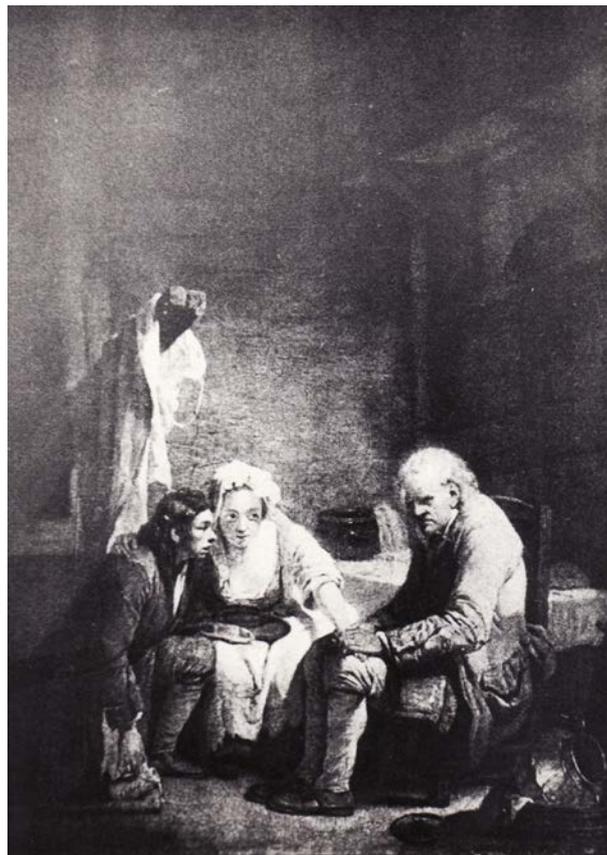


Figure 14. **J. B. Greuze. The Deceived Blind Man**

The employed methods of content analysis and historical narrative established the opportunities to reveal in fairy tales and works of fine art a multifaceted spectrum of the attitude of society towards disabilities and people with disabilities.

Conclusions

Folk fairy tales of various nations and authors’ fairy tales analysed (36), the characters of which are people with disabilities, show a wide scope of predominant attitudes: in 44,4 per cent of the fairy tales a positive attitude

towards people with disabilities is predominant; in 33,3 per cent of the fairy tales – a negative attitude; in 19,4 per cent – a neutral attitude; in 2,8 per cent of the fairy tales – both negative and positive attitude towards people with disabilities.

In the fairy tales where a positive attitude is predominant it is attempted to positively depict a person with disability, show his/her abilities and a wish to demonstrate them. In the fairy tales where a negative attitude towards people with disabilities is predominant insufficient knowledge or complete ignorance of their abilities and mistrust in people with disabilities is reflected.

In a half of the fairy tales analysed the belief in miraculous recovery that reflects the biggest desire of people with disabilities – to get rid of their disability – is encountered. In some fairy tales people with disabilities are presented if not as full members of the society but at least as people who need other people's empathy and help.

Fairy tales and works of fine art depending on the attitude towards people with disabilities they express may reinforce or reduce negative stereotypes in human consciousness related to people with disabilities.

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