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Teaching the Lady's Museum and Sophia: Imperialism, Early Feminism, and Beyond

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Teaching the Lady's Museum and Sophia: Imperialism, Early Feminism, and Beyond

Abstract

This essay argues for the value of teaching Charlotte Lennox's periodical *The Lady's Museum* (1760-61) in undergraduate literature, history, media studies, postcolonial, and gender studies classrooms. Lennox's magazine, which includes one of the first serialized novels "Harriot and Sophia" (later published as the stand-alone novel *Sophia* (1762)) encouraged debate of the proto-discipline topics of history, geography, literary criticism, astronomy, botany, and zoology. This essay offers a flexible teaching module, which can be taught in one to five days, that focuses on the themes of early female education and imperialism using full or excerpted portions of essays from the eidolon, "Of the Studies Proper for Women," "Of the Importance of the Education of Daughters," "Philosophy for the Ladies," "The Metamorphoses of Animals, and the Several Changes Observable in Animal Life," "The Natural History of the Formica-Leo, or Lion Pismire," "Some Reflections and Deductions Drawn from the Works of Nature in General," "The Lady's Geography," "The Original Inhabitants of Great Britain," "The History of the Princess Padmani," and as well as Lennox's serialized novel *Sophia* (1762). It also inaugurates a new resource, the [Lady's Museum Project](#), which is an open-access edition designed by Kelley Plante and Karenza Sutton-Bennett and includes full text and redacted versions for teaching and a variety of other pedagogical materials.

Keywords

feminism, Lennox, Sophia, periodical, proto-discipline, pedagogy, imperialism, HSI

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Cover Page Footnote

We would like to thank Kelly Plante for her work on The Lady's Museum Project. The site would not be possible without her!

*The verb that has been enforced on girls is to please. Girls are trained to please...I want us all to change the verb.
I want the verb to be educate, or activate, or engage, or confront, or defy, or create. Eve Ensler, 2009¹*

Charlotte Lennox's two-volume periodical, *Lady's Museum* (1760-61), echoes the problem Eve Ensler highlights nearly two-hundred and fifty years later. Lennox's magazine begins with an essay that highlights the serious problem for a society when women are expected first and foremost "to please." Lennox's periodical is a particularly ideal text to teach in an undergraduate classroom to address eighteenth-century British imperialism and early feminist discussions about women's education (or lack thereof). However, due to its limited availability (behind the paywall of ECCO or deep in the archives of select libraries) the *Lady's Museum*, which includes one of the first serialized novels "The History of Harriot and Sophia" (later republished as the stand-alone novel *Sophia*), has rarely entered the classroom. To remedy this gap, we propose a flexible teaching module that focuses on imperialism and early feminist ideas about women's education using a new resource: an open-access edition called the [Lady's Museum Project](#) that has been created by Karenza Sutton-Bennett and Kelly Plante and includes a variety of pedagogical materials. It is our hope that this article and the new digital edition will give instructors and students the tools to give Lennox the textual authority she deserves and to provide a basis for more of her work to be included in the canon of English literature.

This curriculum on Lennox draws on recent scholarly work that has begun to give a voice to female periodicalists. In 2018, Jennie Batchelor and Manushag N. Powell published a book of scholarly essays, *Women's Periodicals and Print Culture in Britain, 1690-1820s*, and in the same year Susan Carlile published a biography of Charlotte Lennox, *Charlotte Lennox: An Independent Mind*. Both publications shine a light on the significance of Lennox and her fellow female periodicalists. Authors such as Lennox, Eliza Haywood, and Frances Brooke represent a cohort of intellectual upper- and middle-class women who challenged pre-conceived notions of class- and gender-based knowledge. Their periodicals, which we know were also read by men, especially supported female readers' unprecedented access to knowledge in natural philosophy, ancient and modern history, and English literature.² Lennox's activist writing anticipated a society where women were equal creators and disseminators of intellectual knowledge.

This context of amplifying underrepresented voices is relevant to students in several ways. Susan teaches at California State University, Long Beach, which is

a Hispanic-serving institution (HSI). Like those at many other universities, her students arrive in British eighteenth-century courses unsure of whether a course about literature written centuries ago and in a cultural context very different from their own, one based on strict hierarchies, will appeal to them. When teaching an undergraduate course on Charlotte Lennox, Susan found that students were especially animated by Lennox's periodical writing for its subversive ability to connect with more readers through early social media; for the way in which it confirms and confronts the daily challenges of curious women whose minds were frequently invalidated and then urges them to action; and for the ways it challenges common British assumptions of its own superiority. We believe new generations of students will value the opportunity to learn about Lennox's ground-breaking texts, their critiques of unjust hierarchies, and their influence on eighteenth-century feminist thinking. Indeed, they become animated to seek out writing, such as Lennox's, which conventional literary history has overlooked.

The goal of this essay is to encourage instructors to teach Lennox's didactically rich periodical. We have created an up to four-day curriculum on Lennox that includes a course reader with material for two days on the *Lady's Museum* that can be paired with two days on Lennox's novel *Sophia* (1762). We chose the novel for its comparative story of two sisters with differing educations, and for its exposure of women's plight in a society that places little value on their minds, which had innovative possibilities of circulation beyond traditional publishing forms.

Our curriculum focuses on imperialism and early feminist ideas on women's education. The reader is part of the pedagogical component to a new open-access edition of the *Lady's Museum*. We hope this article and the new digital edition will provide instructors and students the tools to give Lennox the textual authority she deserves and will provide a basis for more of her work to be included in the canon of English literature.

***Lady's Museum* on early feminism and women's education**

In the eighteenth century, a handful of didactic periodicals offered women readers opportunities to begin or continue their education on a wide variety of subjects. Lennox's periodical built a case for women to learn and create new works of natural philosophy and history. Lennox and her contemporaries helped to form a cohort of intellectual women who were encouraged to debate proto-discipline topics, such as history, geography, literary criticism, astronomy, botany, and zoology with men and thus challenge the pre-conceived notions of masculine and

feminine knowledge. Lennox designed her periodical as a didactic tool for middle-class women to learn beyond their polite educations in amusements such as dance, dress, and painting. She does this by creating a curriculum that blends the fictional with the factual, through a community of real and imagined women to carry out the curriculum, starting with the eidolon.³

On the first page of the *Lady's Museum* the "Author" promises her readers that she "will always be as witty as I can, as humorous as I can, as moral as I can, and upon the whole as entertaining as I can" (Lennox 1). This is followed by the eidolon's introduction, where the Trifler admits that she was once a coquet, but at the age eighteen her "strong passion for intellectual pleasures" drove her to improve her mind through reading her brother's classical literature and history books in Latin (Lennox 1). The first two pages set the premise for the periodical: to entertain and instruct women with a curriculum of subjects that will enable them to avoid coquetry. The Trifler acts as a mentor by directing women in their educational pursuits with a curated collection of articles that feed readers' curiosity and encourage their understanding of the world beyond the domestic and the local. By including the serialized novel "Harriot and Sophia," which details the lives of two sisters: the unthinking Harriot and her reading and reflective sister Sophia, among essays that are grounded in reality, the *Lady's Museum* entertains with fiction and reflects the real challenges that young women faced.

The essays that surround the novel include excerpts from educational treatises which invite women to consider how they can advocate for themselves and a more intellectual education.⁴ In the first book of the periodical, "Of the Studies Proper for Women" builds a case for a curriculum in the liberal arts to deter boredom in women. The essay alludes to Joseph Addison's "The Pleasure of the Imagination" (*Spectator* 1711-12) to describe the benefits of appreciating art that mimics nature, and how doing so will deter women from reading those so-called idle romances. "Of the Importance of the Education of Daughters" makes a case for women to teach disciplinary topics to their daughters. The chapters focus on the early education of children using John Locke's method of repetitive impressions to develop intellect and reason. The treatise establishes that learning should be fun for children, by acting out fables and using illustrations to depict stories from the Bible.

"Philosophy for the Ladies" illustrates how women can obtain an education in natural philosophy by providing readers with zoological and astronomical knowledge. The essay is "conversable rather than scientific" to make it accessible to informal learners, and more importantly prevent the articles from becoming "dry" and "tiresome" to read (Lennox 130). It provides readers with "useful

pieces of knowledge” to fill the “vacancies” of their minds (Lennox 132). Lennox represents how women can become well versed in natural philosophy through reading a series of short entertaining articles on experimental data. She uses the visual and textual outcomes of microscopy with articles on the life cycles of insects to increase a woman’s intellect by giving her a well-rounded education in natural philosophy.

“The Metamorphoses of Animals, and the several Changes observable in Animal Life” is a descriptive account of how many animals change one or more aspects of their form. The essay classifies the differing types of transformations, leading up to complete metamorphoses. The essay establishes three types of metamorphosing animals, “tenants of earth, air, and water” (Lennox 306). It gives examples from each of the three categories as a primer to the subsequent detailed case studies on insect life cycles.

“The Natural History of the Formica-Leo, or Lion Pismire” builds on the previous essay to detail the complete life cycle of the Formica-Leo. It describes how the insect viciously catches its prey, as well discussing the dormant state the insect goes into before transforming into a dragonfly. The inclusion of the piece is notable because it uses a mimetic device of a diagram to depict the various stages of the insect’s life.

The concluding essay in the series, “Some Reflections and Deductions Drawn from the Works of Nature in General,” contemplates man’s place within the animal kingdom. It depicts how despite being at the top of the food chain, man does not have sharp teeth or horns to defend itself from predators. The essay emphasizes how man should respect and work in cooperation with all the animals in God’s kingdom.

These essays contribute to an ongoing Enlightenment conversation about the value of women’s minds, what and how middle-class women should be taught, and how magazine articles can informally teach women beyond familial concerns to appreciate the natural and political world.

Lady’s Museum on imperialism

The *Lady’s Museum* is keenly interested in giving its readers a wider perspective, one that takes them outside their daily lives and concerns and asks them to think about history and the wider world, including female “empire” (Lennox 82). In

fact, it encourages women to question the values of their own country. The Trifler's second essay begins by critiquing England as a nation that does not value women: while many might be proud that English women are thought to be freer than they are in many other countries, they are not in reality free in the truest sense. The Trifler complains of men's "depraved manners" and uses the romance trope to illustrate that freedom exists when women are valued and have authority. This essay urges women to instead "improve...[their] minds" by reading about English history and other lands.⁵

The activism in the *Lady's Museum* extends from English women's education to their participation on an international scale. Three more essays provide particularly fruitful ground for classroom discussion of women's engagement with British imperialism. The selections below are associated with trade and purported civilizing attempts; they suggest that the English, rather than taking and oppressing, could learn from history and the inhabitants of other parts of the world. These selections are rich ground for discussions about how some British authors encouraged critiques of nationalism, as England was beginning to form its own identity on a global scale.

The second issue features the first installment of a fifty-two-page series of essays titled "The Lady's Geography," which is the third longest installment in the periodical. It includes essays on Ceylon and on Amboin Island, which was reported to have seventy to eighty thousand people and was a well-known site of contested empire in the spice trade. "A Description of Amboyna and the Other Islands Dependent on It" can be seen as a response to Dryden's popular play *Amboyna: Or the Cruelties to the English of the Dutch Merchants* (1673). After noting the history of the European occupation of the Portuguese, Dutch, and British, the Dutch are critiqued for their harsh treatment of the original inhabitants who are primarily Muslim. The essays respectfully describe—sometimes in fine detail—the inhabitants' defense, government, transportation, social structure, food, dress, beliefs, forms of entertainment and honoring ancestors, topography, weather, wild and plant life, and other natural resources.

"The Original Inhabitants of Great Britain," which begins in the third issue of the magazine and is the second longest installment after "Harriot and Sophia," serves as a comparison of England with other peoples and cultures around the world.⁶ This history illustrates England's own early peoples, whose "native" "barbarity" (Lennox 441) and virtues are detailed from early Druid beliefs and laws—highlighted with a bullet-pointed list—through the Angles and the Saxons, and with special mention of female heroines Boadicea and Rowena, to the reign of King Egbert in the ninth century. While the "Original Inhabitants" celebrates the

notion of human “liberty”⁷ and describes a progression toward “civil government and order,” “compassion,” and “humanity” (sometimes referred to as “whig history”), this chronicle of early England criticizes English character and Christian practitioners (Lennox 522 & 600).

“The History of the Princess Padmani” is another installment that points readers’ thinking outside national boundaries. This extremely popular Indian heroic romance celebrates the Rajput queen’s extraordinary courageous and cunning victory—albeit sobering—over Akbar, who himself was thought to have unprecedented daring and judgment. The *Lady’s Museum* was published just as the East India Company was establishing power and could be understood as a celebration of India’s ignored strength--its women. This feminocentric legend was reprinted in succeeding eighteenth-century magazines,⁸ and, students might note, remains a part of literary conversation in modern day India.⁹

In essays such as these, the *Lady’s Museum* not only encourages readers to appreciate women’s minds: it also challenges them to expand their understanding beyond English culture and British superiority. Lennox’s periodical is an ideal text to teach in an undergraduate classroom, where instructors seek to help students see the relevance of studying a once-dominant imperialist culture at a distance of over two-hundred years, and in which students are increasingly interested in the distribution and circulation of knowledge within oppressive cultures.

Suggested class structures and activities

The *Lady’s Museum*’s essays, written specifically to their moment, yet speaking across time, are lively additions to existing course designs. Lennox’s magazine could be taught in a wide range of disciplines, from those focused on eighteenth-century literature or history to gender studies to post colonialism or the history of media studies. Teaching the genre of periodicals has its own unique challenges. For example, it is not feasible for students to read all 867 pages of the magazine. Ideally, students can get a fuller sense of the periodical with four course meetings; however, it might be more feasible for instructors to include only a few installments in an already established course. To accommodate this range of teaching situations, we have grouped our selections around two topics: women’s education and imperialism. For a three-day commitment, we suggest the pairing of the magazine’s articles on education with *Sophia*. For a two-day commitment, teach *Sophia* and the first two Trifler essays, as a way of thinking about the novel within the context of the personae that begins each issue. Alternately, a two-day

study might forgo the novel entirely to focus on the magazine and how it advocates for women's education and draws attention to British imperialism.

In each scenario, beginning with at least two of the Trifler essays helps students see the magazine's framing structure with an eidolon who at the start of each issue reminds readers that this information is offered in the context of a woman's lived experience. The preface and Trifler 1 introduce the magazine and the eidolon persona whose essay or letter from a reader directed to her will introduce every issue. Trifler 2 asserts that English women are not valued in their own country. Trifler 3 is a letter to the Trifler from Penelope Spindle, which describes — sometimes humorously—the matrilineage and responsibilities of the Trifler. Trifler 5 argues for the practical importance of study, with a story by Perdita, a reader, about a friend's betrayal. The conclusion, an extract from the last installment “Philosophy for the Ladies Concluded,” provides summarizing remarks both for this installment and for the magazine as a whole.¹⁰

Curriculum options¹¹

	4 Day	3 Day	2 Day (option 1)	2 Day (option 2)	1 Day (option 1)	1 Day (option 2)
Day 1	Women's Education: Preface ; Trifler no. 1-3 [no. 5 optional]; Of the Studies Proper for Women ; Philosophy for the Ladies	Women's Education: Preface Trifler no. 1-3 ; Of the Studies Proper for Women ; Education of Daughters	<i>Sophia</i> : Preface Trifler no. 1-2 ; Sophia vol. 1 OR History of Harriot and Sophia no. 1-5	Women's Education: Trifler no. 1-3 [no. 5 optional]; Of the Studies Proper for Women ; Philosophy for the Ladies	Women's Education: Trifler no. 1-3 ; Of the Studies Proper for Women ; Philosophy for the Ladies & Lady's Museum Conclusion	Imperialism: Trifler no. 1-2 ; Original Inhabitants of GB ; Lady's Geography ; History of the Princess Padmani ; Philosophy for the Ladies & Lady's Museum Conclusion

Day 2	Sophia vol. 1 OR History of Harriot and Sophia no. 1-5	Sophia vol. 1 OR History of Harriot and Sophia no. 1-5	Sophia vol. 2 OR History of Harriot & Sophia 6-11; Philosophy for the Ladies & Lady's Museum Conclusion	Imperialism: Original Inhabitants of GB; Lady's Geography; History of the Princess Padmani; Philosophy for the Ladies & Lady's Museum Conclusion		
Day 3	Sophia vol. 2 OR History of Harriot & Sophia 6-11	Sophia vol. 2 OR History of Harriot & Sophia 6-11				
Day 4	Imperialism: Original Inhabitants of GB; Lady's Geography; History of the Princess Padmani; Philosophy for the Ladies & Lady's Museum Conclusion					

Examples of assignments and discussion prompts

Our goal in offering the above structure and the prompts and assignments below is not to be prescriptive, but instead to inspire creative pedagogical approaches that foster opportunities for active learning.

Discussion prompts:

We envision that discussion prompts will help facilitate class participation. Whether in-person or online, they can be part of a class discussion or small group discussion using the think-pair-share strategy. These prompts are geared toward encouraging students' critical thinking by engaging in close readings of the primary texts (*The Lady's Museum* and *Sophia*). They could alternately be assigned as reading responses or discussion board posts in which students write an

original response/post and reply to their classmate posts (i.e. reply to at least two classmates' posts for full points) in preparation for in-person or online discussion.

- 1) What do we gather about the Trifler persona and what is the function of this idolon?
- 2) How do the Trifler essays portray women's circumstances in mid-eighteenth-century London?
- 3) What can we learn from the contrary educations of Sophia and Harriot?
- 4) How does the periodical argue that natural philosophy and history as necessary topics for women to study?
- 5) How do "Original Inhabitants," "Lady's Geography," and "The Princess Padmani" speak to each other about the English and their relationship to/ideas about the people and cultures of other countries?
- 6) How do the images in the *Lady's Museum* enhance the lessons in the articles?

Active Learning Strategies:

We envision these assignments as mid-term or end-of-term research assignments. The assignments can be assigned as solo or group projects. They will take more preparation for the students to complete than the discussion posts. The close reading topics are prompts for students to come up with a more detailed research question. The goal is for students to demonstrate their ability to analyze literature, critical sources, and write an original argument.

1) The *Lady's Museum* Scavenger Hunt: Individually or in teams, students scan the entire *Lady's Museum* to find a document about (or reference to) the solar system, scented paste, the biography of a woman, reference to the supernatural, an animal, spices of any kind, a translation from another language, a poem, or a philosophical discussion, and write a report on what they learn about this period, readers, and the function of magazines in the eighteenth-century and how it differs from present day.¹²

2) Eighteenth-century Magazine Comparison: If an instructor has access to *British Newspapers 1600-1950*, *British Periodicals, Collections I & II*, or *Eighteenth Century Journals: A Portal to Newspapers and Periodicals, c1685-1815* (which contains the *Lady's Magazine (1770-1818)*, or *Eighteenth-Century Collections Online* students can compare layout, content, and audience.¹³ Students will then write an argument-based essay that compares specific aspects of the *Lady's Museum* to another eighteenth-century periodical.

3) Letter to the Trifler: Have students write a letter (1-2 pages) from the viewpoint of a reader of the *Lady's Museum*. Students will then write a companion essay (3-4 pages) what they learn about the research the motivations, needs, and values of the *Lady's Museum*, its editor, and its readers; and cite evidence in the magazine as support.

4) Visualizing Literature Project: students will practice the skill of close reading by analyzing how 1 of the 11 images from the *Lady's Museum* enhances the corresponding article. Students will create an infographic that demonstrates how the literary work is represented by the image. Students are encouraged to do research for this assignment. Suggested research topics include techniques used to create the image, research the artist of the image, and whether other periodicals in the same period used images. Students should include a debatable thesis that argues the effectiveness/ineffectiveness of the illustration and write a reflection that will describe their own rhetorical decision-making process while drafting their infographic.

5) Glossing an Article: In groups, students will pick an article from *Lady's Museum* to annotate. They will use the *Oxford English Dictionary* and *Samuel Johnson's Dictionary* to create glosses for words and/or phrases that are unfamiliar to them or have interesting analogies. The intent of this assignment is for students to practice their close reading skills and encourage them to look up any words they are unfamiliar with to gain a deeper understanding of the literature. For specific instructions and details on how to gloss an article for the website go to the *Lady's Museum Project* [glossing activity page](#).

6) Comparing “The History of Harriot and Sophia” to *Sophia*: Have students pick an installment of the serialized novel and compare it to the relevant chapter in *Sophia*. Students will form a debatable argument on whether there are significant or minor changes, how the changes change the intent of the chapter and/or the novel as a whole.

Conclusion

Our goal is to widen the readership of Charlotte Lennox's the *Lady's Museum*. Fortuitously, in discussing plans for this article, the [Lady's Museum Project](#) emerged. The site is intended to be a social edition, representing how users can participate in knowledge-building communities by inviting students to contribute to the site's scholarship by annotating articles and publishing critical essays. Its aim is to provide users with a dynamic platform that offers readers side-by-side

comparisons of the original text and the modernized edition, as well as teaching resources. This article adds summaries, context, critical framing and further details of assignments mentioned above. The course reader we compiled for the four-day curriculum is also available on the site, along with an expanded list of class assignments, supplementary pedagogical tools and a bibliography of scholarly texts on Lennox. The article and website work in tandem to offer a complete package: the website provides the reading material and the article offers the pedagogical framework. We hope this article will encourage instructors and students to consider the important work Lennox did to pave the way for mixed-gender education, to encourage her readers to think more carefully about their society, and to be more participatory citizens.

Note on the texts

We recommend using the 2008 Broadview edition of *Sophia* edited by Norbert Schürer. It includes several appendices that provide students with biographical information on Charlotte Lennox and critical reception of *Sophia*. Alternatively, an excellent no-cost option for students is the serialized version of the novel “The History of Harriot & Sophia” that is included in the digital edition.¹⁴

¹ “Embrace Your Inner Girl,” TED talk, 2009,

https://www.ted.com/talks/eve_ensler_embrace_your_inner_girl/transcript?language=en

² For information on readership and dual gendered readership of periodicals in the eighteenth century, see Jennie Batchelor, and Manushag N. Powell “Introduction” *Women’s Periodicals and Print Culture in Britain, 1690-1820s: The Long Eighteenth Century*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018, 12-30.

³ Manushag N. Powell defines an eidolon as “an artificial projection of authorship that is generated by the author” 24.

⁴ Translated and extracted from Francois Fenelon (The Archbishop of Cambray) book *Traite de l’Education des filles* (1687). The periodical includes eight out of thirteen chapters from Fenelon’s book. *Of the Importance of the Education of Daughters* makes a case for women to teach disciplinary topics to their daughters to supplement the chapters’ focus on the early of education using John Locke’s method of repetitive impressions to develop intellect and reason. The treatise establishes that learning should be fun for children, by acting out fables and using illustrations to depict stories from the Bible.

⁵ The last installment in the first issue is a biography written by Lennox of a seventeenth-century French woman, Gabrielle d’Estrées (Duchess of Beaufort and Verneuil, Marchioness of Monceaux (1573-1599) who convinced King Henry IV to convert to Catholicism to end the religious wars.

⁶ Extracted and expanded from Paul de Rapin Thoyras’s 1727 *History of England*.

⁷ See a further discussion of this in Judith Dorn, , pp. 7–27, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41292836>.

⁸ *The History of Princess Padmani* was printed in *The Orientalist: A Volume of Tales after the Eastern Taste*, by Tobias Smollet, 1764 and in the *Lady's Magazine* in 1779.

⁹ Ramya Sreenivasan, *The Many Lives of a Rajput Queen* (2007), <http://www.jstor.org.csulb.idm.oclc.org/stable/j.ctvcwn22m>.

¹⁰ Please note that the course reader documents are works-in-progress. Karenza and Kelly are working on annotating and formatting these documents to make teaching the magazine even more seamless through ready-to-assign course packs. Those articles that are ready to assign are linked-to below. Visit the [course reader documents](#) page for more information.

¹¹ The course reader selections average out to twenty pages per day, and the novel in its entirety is one hundred and fifty pages. However, Day 2 Option 1 has more reading.

¹² Susan adapted this idea from Manushag N. Powell.

¹³ ECCO is freely accessible to all American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies members. Portions of the *Female Spectator* are available in open access: <https://s.wayne.edu/warriorwomen/haywood-edition/>. Additionally, more eighteenth-century open access texts: <https://anthologydev.lib.virginia.edu/index.html>

¹⁴ There are some text variants between the serialized version and the solo-printed novel. See Appendix A in the Broadview edition for specifics.

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