



# Christ-Figure Technique in J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: A Case Study

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The current study tackles the image of Jesus Christ as a literary technique in J. K. Rowling's novel Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows. The novelist deliberately draws allusions between the fictional young protagonist Harry Potter, and Jesus Christ in several aspects including death and resurrection. Despite all that might be said about children's literature, it reflects a very important social aspect in our life, and floats into a prominent horizon nowadays. The novel Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows concentrates on prominent virtues such as sacrificing oneself for the sake of others. Actually, none misses the fact that children have so vital role in building and developing any society. Children are the target of any developmental system at all times and in all communities. Building and developing any society cannot be obtained without granting children their freedom to think and innovate. Such issues are reflected in many literary works and masterpieces. The article falls into several viewpoints explicated profoundly to manifest such an entity.

**Key words:** *Image of Jesus Christ, Harry Potter, children's literature, resurrection and sacrifice.*

## Introduction

Over all the periods and centuries, children are considered as a cornerstone in the growth and development of any society. Due to many factors such as power, strength, vitality and production, children play very important roles in all aspects of life and cannot be neglected. These roles are not limited to specific fields, as they are involved in all fields of life like sports, art, politics, economics, etc. Based upon this notion, the society cannot deal with the children carelessly. They are not machines or servants that assume the hard works without any outlet. It is clear that all governments work hard to provide a better educational and developmental systems for children. Since they are not mature enough, the freedom of



children is considered as a controversial issue. We have to understand them well in order to fulfill their needs and pacify their inquiries. Children throughout the world contribute significantly to the economy and labour market through their paid and unpaid works, both in public and private spheres. However, it's common for some people to have biases when it comes to children. On a large scale, children face discrimination and inequality. Their subordination makes them more vulnerable to violence, in particular, exploitation and other forms of abuse. Apart from the general perspective, protection of children from violence, exploitation, abuse and neglect has increasingly attracted the attention of the international community over the past few decades. This has given rise to many organisations such as the UNICEF to call for the protection of children. No doubt that children are the most ambitious category of people in all communities and they are the base of change and progress in all times. The exploitation of children's capacities should be the main target of all social groups who seek improvement. Certain literary works investigate children's issues such as the image of Jesus Christ that was highlighted in some novels and short stories; the most famous example of which is *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, a novel written by the English author J. K. Rowling.

Rowling's novel depicts the young fictional protagonist Harry Potter as a Christ figure, sacrificing himself for the sake of others. The author J. K. Rowling uses the Christ-figure as a literary technique by drawing allusions between the central character Harry Potter, and that of figure of Jesus Christ. The realisation of the great contribution of children in all aspects of life draws the attention of community to uplift the status of children at all levels, whether socially, economically, culturally, politically, etc. New trends in social and cultural life should seek to cultivate children to great extent to create of them real leaders who are qualified enough for the foreseeable future. Despite all that might be said about children's issues in the context of human rights, the presence of all children's rights have become more evident - the recognition that all human rights for children would be achieved only by providing a better life for them. J. K. Rowling is very careful to lay out her aims and principles as far as her novels are concerned.

It is clear that advocates from all over the world have become increasingly aware of a connection between such issues as: discrimination against children, subordination of children, violence against children, exploitation of children and other forms of abuse. Such issues are dispensable in children's daily lives as they have a negative impact in their life, and underlines the status of children within their communities and society. Away from the literary aspect, some specialists and authors named the novels that focus on the children and adolescents in children's literature.

The novelist J. K. Rowling employs the young character Harry Potter as a protagonist in her series of novels. She is aiming at addressing young people, mainly children who may struggle



with complicated issues in their daily lives. She makes use of the Christ-figure as a literary technique through the depiction of Harry Potter, to make her message clear.

### **The Problem of Study**

The problem of study is represented in the fact that Children's Literature should be given its importance as a prominent entity beside other genres of literature. It should be taken seriously by sociologists and specialists for it touches the will be future generations, i.e. children. Such factors motivated several authors to discuss in their works and literary masterpieces certain concepts and virtues which appeal to the interests of children such as the virtue of sacrifice. 'Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows' includes a lot of Christian values. As an instrumental tool, children's literature should aim at instilling and growing general goodness in the minds of children, including sacrifice for the sake of others. Such concept has become apparent as one dives deeply in the events of the novel. Although the previous ages were considered to be the exercise of all kinds of rights without encroachment on the rights of others, children's rights and protections entered into infringement of the social right under the pretext of protecting individual rights. Despite all that might be said about children's literature, there are no precise rules to follow in composing this kind of literature. It's creativity and construction relies mainly on the part and mentality of the literary figure. Just like other groups of society such as adults, children's problems are not limited to certain individuals but to the society as a whole. Children's literature is regarded as a controversial issue in the present time, due to the large number of its discussions at various levels, and its great effects not only on the level of children's reality, but also on the global reality level of the current era. Despite the controversy related to this genre of literature, it has close links to reality, which affects the role of children, their existence and interaction with the surrounding world whether positively or negatively.

The novel *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, written by J.K. Rowling reflects certain Christian values such as love, friendship, sacrifice etc. The novelist draws a comparison between the protagonist Harry Potter and Jesus Christ in their death, resurrection and readiness to sacrifice themselves for the sake of goodness. Such notions are generated in what is named in 'the Children's Literature'. Questions of Study: 1- What is the definition of Children's Literature? 2- How does J.K. Rowling represent certain Christian values in her novel *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*? 3- How does J.K. Rowling use Christ-figure as a literary technique in her novel.

### **The Aims of the Study**

The current study aims to:

- Identify children's literature.

- Shed light on Christ-figure technique in the *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* novel, written by J.K. Rowling.

### **Methodology**

- The usage of the historical method has been followed in identifying children's literature, and shedding light on Christ-image technique in J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*.

### **Children's Literature: Definitions**

Authors, critics and literary specialists have made several attempts to give a precise definition of children's literature, yet they have not been able to give an accurate definition by for instance, simply saying that it is a literature written for children. This is related to the fact that no one is sure whether certain books like the Harry Potter fantasy novels (Rowling, 2007) which attract children and adults alike, are to be considered as children's books loved by adults, or adult books taken over by children. Tomlinson and Lynch-Brown (2002) have given a somewhat useful definition, yet vague in its details. They define children's literature by age range: infancy to adolescence. They suggest that it includes "good quality trade books" that "cover topics of relevance and interest to children of those ages, through prose and poetry, fiction and nonfiction". On (p. 2) Karln Lesnik-Oberstein (1999), in the book *Understanding Children's Literature*, says: "The definition of children's literature lies at the heart of its endeavor: it is a category of books the existence of which absolutely depends on supposed relationships with a particular reading audience: children." (p.15)

Clifton Fadiman (1984) in his *The World Treasury of Children's Literature*, writes: Children's Literature is the body of written works and accompanying illustrations produced in order to entertain or instruct young people. The genre encompasses a wide range of works, including acknowledged classics of world literature, picture books and easy-to-read stories written exclusively for children, and fairy tales, lullabies, fables, folk songs, and other primarily orally transmitted materials (p.12).

The Library of Congress has a separate section for children's literature which is considered as material written and produced for information or entertainment of children and young adults. This section includes all non-fiction, literary and artistic genres as well as physical formats. Accordingly, children's books should be interesting and have relevance for the intended audience. Most recently, there are so many more books published for children than ever before, and authors and illustrators are pushing creativity beyond what has been comfortable in form and content. Today, there are many adults including parents, teachers, district



administrators, librarians, the general public, and publishers who try to keep children away from the perceived inappropriate content of some books.

In libraries, there are areas which include books for children to explore. Librarians assume responsibility by isolating them from the rest of the books that might be dedicated for adults. Children's literature might include a wide variety of writing from the simplest books for babies to complex texts belonging to adults' literature. It contains a variety of subjects such as legends, riddles, fables, folktales, fairy tales, and myths, which preserve some of the oldest stories of a nation's literary heritage. It also consists of depictions of picture books, fiction, and sometimes paintings. Although it is primarily used as a source of entertainment, children's literature is often considered serious and sometimes it deals with controversial issues. It is totally different from other books of entertainment such as romances and horror stories. People probably think of children's literature today as a means of entertainment, rather than as a tool for moral instruction and education. It includes books, poems and plays meant for children. Even though the genre is defined by its audience, children and adults alike enjoy stories intended for children.

Children's literature is more expansive and diverse now than at any other time throughout history. Children's books are clearly different from adult ones in the sense that they are written for a specific audience, children, by adults. They should appeal to the needs of children and pacify their inquiries. Children are usually influenced by what cultures believe about them and this belief keeps on changing with the passage of time. No doubt that certain types of books may not be appropriate for children, especially those dealing with serious subjects like sex or those containing offensive language. Hunt (2005) writes: "Children's books are different from adults' books: They are written for a different audience, with different skills, different needs, and different ways of reading: Equally, children experience texts in ways which are often unknowable, but which many of us strongly suspect to be very rich and complex." (p. 3).

Whatever the meaning of children's literature, the criticism that it focuses on is how it appeals to the needs and satisfactions of its young readers. It usually refers to works written by adults and intended for children. Such works are characterised by description of identification with the book. The idea of identification suggests that children's literature attracts a child reader because he/she readily recognises him/herself in this kind of book. Adir Cohen (1988), a literary critic, explains that "... for a child, a book is a source of satisfaction that derives from identification and participation and an expansion of his own experience." (p. 31).

Ray (2004) explains that when books were first printed there were few targeted to children. Children basically read adult books. Gradually, more stories were written for children and the



topics expanded. Children's books, therefore, are written with the current view of childhood in mind and include topics that authors perceive as relevant to them. Concerning their relations with their adult authors, children's books have been characterised by being driven by a strong relation between adult writers and child readers. Hunt (2009) clarifies that "unlike other forms of literature, children's literature is at root about power - about a power struggle." (p. 14).

Accordingly, every children's literature writer has his/her own ideological position, a way of envisioning the world, a view of what is right and what is wrong, and it is impossible that all these do not find a way through his/her writings to be imposed on the innocent children.

### **Into Explication: J. K. Rowling 's *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows***

Born in Yate, England, in 1965, J.K. Rowling gained her fame as a prominent novelist for publishing her Harry Potter fantasy series, between 1997 and 2007. More than 450 million copies of her series have been sold worldwide and spread in about 200 countries. They are translated into more than 79 languages and have been adapted into eight blockbuster films. Rowling encountered a lot of financial problems before composing her first fantasy novel, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. The work was a great success at its appearance all around the globe and she proceeded to write another six books in the series which got turned into blockbuster films, franchised and sold in their hundreds of millions. Then she published *The Casual Vacancy*, a non-Potter novel in 2012. While living in Edinburgh, Scotland as a single mother, Rowling became a very famous literary figure in 1999, for achieving a great success in the United Kingdom, and then when the first three instalments of her children's book series Harry Potter were reported to be the top three slots of the best-seller list according to *The New York Times*. As a result Rowling received an international response, culminated in July 2000, when *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, the fourth volume became the fastest selling book in history (Cassy, 2003).

After she left school, Rowling attended Exeter University to study Greek, German, and French languages. In 1990, Rowling travelled to Portugal to teach English where she met and married Jorge Arantes who worked there as a journalist. In 1993, she gave birth to her daughter, Jessica. When the couples' marriage ended in divorce, Rowling returned back to Edinburgh, Scotland, with her daughter to live near her younger sister, Di. She suffered a lot while trying to support herself and her daughter on welfare. In the summer of 1990, she thought of a book, the idea for which had reportedly been planned in her way, heading from Manchester to London on a train. Although rejected several times, Rowling ultimately sold her novel, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (later on the name was changed in America into *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*), for about \$4,000. The novel and its



subsequent series narrated the life of a young wizard, Harry Potter, and his diverse band of cohorts, gathering at the Hogwarts School of Wizardry and Witchcraft (Smith, 2003).

After finishing the *Harry Potter* series, J.K. Rowling proceeded to produce other written works including a number of fables mentioned in the series of *Harry Potter*, namely *The Tales of Beedle the Bard* which was announced in November 2008 in Edinburgh, at a tea party held at the National Library of Scotland for 200 schoolchildren. Rowling dedicated all the financial benefits of the book to a charity that she established to help institutionalised children in many regions in Europe, namely Children's High Level Group which was later renamed Lumos (Ibid).

She also participated in screenwriting debut with two films: *Fantastic Beasts* and also *Where to Find Them*, as an extension of the World of Wizarding, which appeared in November 2016. She later started to write a series of five films which tackles the adventure of Magizoologist Newt Scamander, a version that resembles Harry Potter. In addition to her support in a number of occasions through her charitable trust and services to children's literature, Rowling received several honours and rewards such as the Hans Christian Andersen Award and France's Legion d'Honneur. She is also the establisher and head of the international non-profit children's organisation Lumos, aiming at ending the institutionalisation of children globally and make sure they grow up safely and in a caring environment (Sheila, 1998).

### ***Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: A Novel***

*Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* is a fantasy novel written in 2007 by the well-known novelist J.K. Rowling. It is the seventh novel in the fantasy series of Harry Potter, which are primarily meant for young adult readers rather than adults or middle grade readers. The novels have received critical acclaim, great popularity and commercial success all over the globe. They are categorised within the fantasy literature genre, and identified as kinds of fantasy, namely, "low fantasy", "urban fantasy", or "contemporary fantasy". They have widely attracted younger readers in addition to a wide variety of adult audience, and they are obviously regarded as cornerstones of postmodern young adult literature.

The novel revolves around the young hero "Harry Potter" who grows up as an orphan child and leaves to live with the savage Dursley family of "Muggles", a group of non-magical people. After the death of Albus Dumbledore, Voldemort reinforces his power and support, including his manipulation of the Ministry of Magic, and Harry loses the preservation of his home at the age of seventeen. Before Harry's birthday, The Order of the Phoenix shifts him to a new position, but they are attacked during their leave. In the ensuing battle, Hedwig and "Mad-Eye" Moody are killed and George Weasley is seriously injured; Voldemort himself



wants to murder Harry, but he is saved by his wand. Hermione, Ron and Harry prepare to relinquish Hogwarts and capture Voldemort's remaining Horcruxes, but they have scarce clues to use in their locations and identities (*Rozhon, 2007*).

Harry and Hermione later on proceed their quest, finding out more about the past of Dumbledore, including his relationship with the dark wizard Gellert Grindelwald and the death of his younger sister. Beyond repair, Harry's wand is damaged when they have barely escaped from a snake attack. They eventually seem to be lucky in the Forest of Dean. Harry wants to regain the sword in despite of the dangerous situation especially when the locket Horcrux attempts to murder him. Ron, who suddenly emerges, saves him by taking the sword and using it to demolish the locket. Unfortunately, Snatchers seize and take them to Malfoy Manor, and this is directly caused because of their use of a name that has a taboo placed upon it. (*Ibid.*) Harry intends to protect his remaining horcruxes, after recently becoming aware of their plan in his vision of Voldemort. He also knows that Hogwarts hides the unidentified horcrux, in the vision. Upon entering the school with his friends, by using a secret entrance in Aberforth's bar, Dumbledore's brother, in Hogsmeade beside the Head of Hog, Harry directly informs the teachers about Voldemort's preparation to attack the school. While Voldemort and his army besiege the citadel, Hermione and Ron destroy the cup by the use of basilisk fangs available in the Chamber of Secrets. But Draco Malfoy and his companions Crabbe and Goyle trap them before discovering the diadem. Killing the former owner is crucial to fulfill the full allegiance of the legend.

Voldemort knows very well that he may not dominate the wand's energy, unless he destroys Snape, the killer of Dumbledore. Harry reaches Snape, who is about to die, and Snape offers him memories from the past. Through communication they expose that Snape has a deep love for the mother of Harry Potter, and has become so sad for her death. At the same time, he accepts Dumbledore's request to act against Voldemort as a double agent and to watch over Harry in spite of hating Harry's father. Snape, who is watching over the doe Patronus and Harry the whole time, summons the former who leads the latter to the Sword. After maltreating the ring horcrux, it becomes obvious that Dumbledore is slowly dying, and he decides to kill Snape as a manifestation of Snape's allegiance to Voldemort. It is also manifested according to memories that Harry proves to be a horcrux and his death gives immortality to Voldemort. Harry moves to the Forbidden Forest and agrees to permit Voldemort to kill him. In order to let him unprotected, on his way, Harry tells Neville Longbottom that Nagini, Voldemort's snake, is supposed to be destroyed. In order to get support and courage from his loved ancestors including Sirius Black, Lupin, and his parents, Harry ultimately unlocks the snitch, then moves the Resurrection Stone within. He also decides to drop the stone in the middle of the forest, before arriving at Voldemort's location. Harry does not protect himself against the Killing Curse used by Voldemort (*Harmon, 2008*).



Harry lately awakens in a dreamlike station which looks like Kings Cross station. He is greeted by Dumbledore, who reveals that Voldemort's previous Killing Curse has left a segment of Voldemort's soul in Harry Potter. This segment has caused the integration they feel, creating of Harry an unintended Horcrux. Voldemort himself will destroy this segment later on. Voldemort's use of Harry's blood as a means of regaining his full strength, provides Harry with the necessary protection against Voldemort, and permits him either to proceed, or go back to life. Harry chooses to go back to life, yet he feigns to be dead. Harry's body is displayed by Voldemort, who calls a truce and offers safety to the defenders if they surrender. When the battle restarts, Neville uses Gryffindor's Sword to kill Nagini and leave Voldemort vulnerable. This situation enables Harry to flee under his cloak. In a final attack, Molly Weasley kills Bellatrix, and Voldemort finds out that Harry is still alive. Voldemort tries his eventual Killing Curse on Harry, yet the Elder Wand rejects to act against Harry. At the end, Voldemort is hit and destroyed forever by the spell (Ibid.).

### **Use of Christ-Figure as a Literary Technique**

Despite all that may be said about Rowling's creativity in her fantasy series of Harry Potter, she is a novelist conscious of her art. She has left behind her a complete corpus of critical writing that has lived up to the standard of prominent literary figures, and she is very careful to line out her aims and principles as far as her literary works are concerned. Although the Harry Potter fantasy series is primarily considered as entertainment and adventure stories in their style, they contain some deeply Christian themes. J. K. Rowling never fails to include her own ideological position and Christian faith in her storytelling. John Killinger (2008) writes: "she wrote a story that in many ways parallels the death and resurrection of Jesus." (p. 59). The novelist J. K. Rowling uses Christ-Image as a literary technique by deliberately drawing allusions between the young fictional protagonist Harry Potter and Jesus Christ respectively. This becomes apparent in the heart of the series when Harry agrees to offer himself to Voldemort to protect those he loves. Harry suffers a lot and he endures a symbolic death, but returns to defeat his evil nemesis. He plays the role of a Messiah-figure, with a willingness to sacrifice himself for the sake of securing his friends. This self-sacrifice turns to be a protective charm similar to his mother who casts a spell on Harry by giving her life for his sake. It is the essential reason behind defeating Voldemort's deadly attacks against them. Harry displays more than one correspondence with the story of Jesus Christ as depicted in the Bible. For instance, the prophesy of Harry's birth, his enemies' attempts to kill him while he's only a baby, resisting the temptation to greatness that Slytherin—marked by the symbol of the serpent—offers, sacrificing himself for causes larger than himself, his death and resurrection to save everyone, and finally his journey of triumph in J.K. Rowling's novels make of him a definite Christ figure. Although Rowling's novels are not allegorical at all as she has declared, it is apparent that her Christian faith has inspired her storytelling. Playing the role of a Christ figure in the novel *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, Harry Potter's



primary mission is to defeat the world's most evil wizard, Voldemort. He is the only one who could sacrifice himself to free the world from evil. As a Christ figure, Harry Potter resurrects and ultimately triumphs over Voldemort. He plays the role of the Saviour who saves his friends from the evil wizard's power over them. The conflict between Harry and Voldemort resembles the conflict between the representatives of good and evil, which usually ends with the triumph of good over evil as Christians believe. Jonathan Petre (2007) writes: "Sacrifice is the ultimate lynch pin here, upon which this whole saga swings: Lily's sacrifice of herself for Harry, followed by Harry's sacrifice for, um, everyone else. It's all tied up in the question of love – which, as we see in this book, really does hurt sometimes." (p. 34).

John Killinger (2008) in his *Love, Death, and Friendship in the Harry Potter Novels*, writes: I had suspected from the first novel that Harry was actually a Christ-figure. He was marked in an early encounter with the evil Lord Voldemort by a lightning-shaped scar on his forehead, and the name for God vouchsafed to Moses, *I Am Who I Am*, is believed by some to have been derived from a primitive description of a lightning bolt (pp. 59-60).

Accordingly, the depiction of Harry Potter's character manifests more than one resemblance with the story of Jesus Christ as depicted in the Bible. He obviously embodies the manifestation of many divine qualities such as; fighting for justice, displaying kindness and forgiveness, healing others, and the character's own death and resurrection.

John Killinger continues: I suggested, therefore, in a book called *God, the Devil, and Harry Potter*, written after the fourth novel had appeared, that Harry would eventually die like Christ. And indeed, in the final novel, he does. He dies voluntarily, as Christ did, literally presenting himself to Voldemort for execution. And then, as Christ did, he returns from death, this time to deal a mortal blow to the prince of darkness himself. If there was any doubt about Harry's character being created in the image of Christ, it is surely dispelled in *The Deathly Hallows* volume, where he is repeatedly called "the Chosen One" (Ibid.).

Although her books are not allegorical at all, this doesn't mean that her faith hasn't influenced her storytelling. In this respect, Christianity has been one of Rowling's major inspirations. Several occasions indicate that Harry manifests Saviour qualities, especially when he defends the wizard and Muggle world against the wicked Lord Voldemort. Themes of resurrection, and life after death are apparent references to Christianity. For instance, after defeating Voldemort for the second time, Harry ultimately dies, as Christ does on the cross. At one point Harry visits his parents' graves and finds two biblical passages inscribed on their tombstones. Harry and his friend Ginny get married, and they have three little children, James, Albus, and Lily. The other characters, Ron and Hermione also married and have two children, Rose and Hugo. They all run into one another at the famous track where Rose,



James, and Albus take the train to Hogwarts. In the end, however, as Christ has resurrected so does Harry Potter, returning to ultimately destroy Voldemort.

From the beginning of the novel *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, J. K. Rowling presents a number of concepts in her novel including, as John Killinger (2008) claims, “sacrifice, and eventually life. For it is life that springs out of Harry’s gift of himself: the life of self-sacrifice, the life that defeats death, the life of ongoing friendship.” (p. 44). While Harry’s life is founded on his love for others, Voldemort’s life is based on hatred. Love repeatedly motivates acts of self-sacrifice on the parts of the main characters. The main characters are willing to suffer unbelievable loss for one another, even giving up their lives in order to do the right thing. The love between family members is celebrated as beautiful and noble, never something to be mocked and sneered at.

Another important point is the danger of desiring immortality. The obsession with the concept of living forever whatever the cost leads Voldemort down the path of wickedness, and transforming him from a disturbed orphan boy into the living incarnation of evil. He attains a sort of pseudo-immortality by constructing the aforementioned Horcruxes – but in order to do so, he must take a human life for every Horcrux he creates. On the other side, Harry and his friends consider death as a beginning rather than an end. They are not afraid of their own mortality. Harry completes the Christ metaphor when he resurrects from death, defeats Voldemort once and for all, and saves the magical world. His death leads to the salvation of countless others.

## **Conclusion**

To sum up the findings, children’s literature is often used to teach children about society’s beliefs, customs, and traditions. As an educational tool, it is also used to expose children to the world, about far-off places, people and events. Children’s literature provides young readers with entertainment, pacifies their inquiries, and expands their imagination. Reading novels, such as the Harry Potter series, enable children to establish their own pattern of values and their respect for others. They find literature as a solace to express their issues and ambitions, this is why it prevails throughout ages.

J.K. Rowling uses Christ-figure technique in her novel *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* by drawing allusions between Harry Potter and Jesus Christ. Just like Christ, the young fictional protagonist Harry Potter sacrifices himself for the sake of general goodness.



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