

THE PROBLEM OF SAVING NATIONAL IDENTITY IN ANTI-TOTALITARIAN DISCOURSE IN THE UKRAINIAN EMIGRATION SHORT STORY

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The article tells about the creative achievements of the Diaspora's Ukrainian writers Petro Volynjak, Olena Zvyčajna, Zosym Dončuk and Vasyl' Čaplenko who were unfairly forgotten. Special attention is paid to the art of representing the national identity in their short stories. The authors created a powerful anti-totalitarian discourse, wrote about the problem of keeping the Ukrainian language and reactualized elements of the Ukrainian folklore.

Key words: short story, emigrant literature, anti-totalitarian discourse, national identity.

ПРОБЛЕМА ЗБЕРЕЖЕННЯ НАЦІОНАЛЬНОЇ ІДЕНТИЧНОСТІ В АНТИТОТАЛІТАРНОМУ ДИСКУРСІ УКРАЇНСЬКОЇ ЕМІГРАЦІЙНОЇ НОВЕЛІСТИКИ

Світлана Ленська

У статті йдеться про творчі здобутки несправедливо забутих українських письменників у діаспорі Петра Волиняка, Олени Звичайної, Зосима Дончука та Василя Чапленка. Особливу увагу автор звертає на художню реалізацію проблеми національної ідентичності в їхніх оповіданнях. Ця проблема презентована шляхом створення потужного антитоталітарного дискурсу, а також через порушення проблеми збереження української мови та актуалізації елементів українського фольклору.

Ключові слова: мала проза, еміграційна література, анти-тоталітарний дискурс, національна ідентичність.

The problem of understanding the phenomenon of national identity in terms of culture and civilization has acquired a particular actualization since Ukraine gained its independence. Now the problem of the ethnic mentality and national identity is the subject of vivid debates and reflections in the Humanities and Social Sciences (such as philosophy, history, psychology, folklore, literature, linguistics, sociology and cultural studies). In particular, a great contribution to the development of this issue is made by the Ukrainian and international scholars Viktor Andruščenko, Jurij Barabaš, Leonid Hubers'kyj, Lev Gumilev, Dmytro Nalyvajko, Mark Pavlyšyn, Myroslav Popovyc and many others.

Markers of national identity are typically language, culture, history, and statehood. It is the national culture that creates a special semantic field where, in the words by Karl Jaspers, the “close spiritual connection between people on the basis of a ‘substantial meaning in life’, which is called communication” can happen (Skrynnyk 2008, 14).

The problem of national identity became particularly important in the 20th century, which was marked by numerous local and two World Wars, revolutionary upheavals and social disasters. The history of Ukraine is an integral part of the world historical development. One of the most significant factors and a sign of national identity is the formation of the nation state, which remained a dream and goal for the Ukrainian people up to 1991.

During the twentieth century, there were several waves of emigration from Ukraine, which in different historical periods was part of various empires – the Russian, Austro-Hungarian and Soviet ones. The first (labour) wave of emigration took place before and during the First World War. Unlike the second (political) wave associated with the national liberation movement of 1917–1921, the third post-war wave of emigration united fugitives from the “Bolshevik paradise”. It was formed by people from different social groups and with different political beliefs. In the “D.P.” /Displaced Persons/ camps there were peasants who had fled from forced collectivization, those whose relatives were killed by the famine of 1932–1933, and intellectuals, representatives of scientific and creative artistic circles, who suffered during the Stalinist repressions in the 1930s.

Hence, the Ukrainian cultural environment in exile in the second half of the 1940s was formed by the representatives of literary and artistic circles who survived represalia and persecution by the Stalinist totalitarian regime. So, in 1945 the Ukrainian artistic movement “MUR” was established, as Hryhorij Kostjuk describes in detail in his memoirs (Kostjuk 2008, 227-244). Among the members of MUR, headed by U. Samčuk, the most remarkable representatives were I. Bahrjanyj, V. Petrov (Domontovyč), Ju. Kosač, E. Kostec’kyj, I. Majstrenko, Ju. Šerech (Ševelov), D. Humenna, H. Kostjuk and others.

Germany (Munich, Neu Ulm and Augsburg) became a shelter for immigrants, but soon (from 1948 to the 1950s) they went to search for destiny on other continents: North and South America or Australia, or sought shelter in various Western European countries. In New York, in 1954, the literary association “The Word” /‘Slovo’/ was established. It united such leading representatives of the Diaspora as V. Barka, I. Bahrjanyj, B. Bojčuk, S. Hordyns’kyj, I. Koščelivec, T. Os’mačka, U. Samčuk, A. Tarnavs’kyj, Ju. Ševelov, and other well-known writers and critics. Organizational documents were made and constituent assemblies were held on the initiative of H. Kostjuk, D. Humenna and Ju. Lavrinenko.

Thousands of Ukrainian emigrants scattered in different countries and continents faced the problem of adaptation in an alien world. “In terms of stress,” S. Pavlyčko noted, “all the MUR members, some more, some less, tried to understand both their personal and the collective historical past and to answer the

question: what will happen next? What will happen to me? What will happen to Ukraine? To literature? And moreover, for whom and how to write?" (Pavlyčko 1999, 284).

However, integrating into an international social and cultural environment, in order to preserve their own national culture, traditions and language, the Ukrainians established dozens of periodicals, founded charitable funds and awards, which supported artistic force in the Diaspora; The Ukrainian Free University in Munich, the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies in Edmonton and the Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute worked successfully as well.

The desire to preserve national identity was reflected in art, too. In fiction preserving national identity has become a particularly important subject. Over the years, this theme was considered by Ju. Šerech (Ševelov), O. Astaf'ev, M. Il'nyč'kyj, N. Kolesničenko-Bratun', V. Macko, V. Prosalova, A. Fasolja and many other scholars, but they paid attention primarily to the development of the lyric genre forms. So, the purpose of this article is to analyze the semantic aspects of implementing national identity in short stories and novellas by writers in the Diaspora, such as Petro Volynjak, Olena Zvyčajna, Zosym Dončuk and Vasyľ Čaplenko, whose works are representative in this sense.

Cultural identification involves the person's understanding of his or her belonging to a particular ethnic group. In the literature of the Ukrainian Diaspora the national self-consciousness is represented in two ways. The first way was used by a number of Ukrainian writers (for example, Dokia Humenna, Vasyľ Čaplenko, Olena Zvyčajna, Zosym Dončuk, Petro Volynjak, etc.) who showed terrifying pictures of repression and exploitation in the post-revolutionary days (the activities of the Cheka /All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution and Sabotage/, forced collectivization, persecution after the Ukrainization was stopped, the Holodomor 1932–1933 /Great Famine/) in order to turn their countrymen against the government representatives who brought ideas of Russian chauvinism. And the other way of the artistic modeling is using the symbols and folk sources as ethnic cultural codes and approaching the ancient foundations of the national outlook as presented in "Grandfather Jacob" by F. Dudko, "On the Watermelon Plantation" by Z. Dončuk, etc.

One of the most talented writers in exile was Petro Volynjak (his real family name is Čečet; 1907–1969). In 1933 he was arrested and forced to work on the construction of the White Sea-Baltic Channel for three years. That is why it is not surprising that in 1945 the writer emigrated to Austria, opened the publishing house "The New Days", which issued his collections of short stories "The Land Is Calling" (1946) and "Near Kyzhurt" (1947), and an essay based on the observations during his stay in Kuban in 1932 "Kuban Is the Land of Ukrainians, of the Cossacks" (1948). In 1948 Petro Volynjak moved to Canada where for many years he worked successfully as a teacher and compiled five collections of books for children's reading. His collection of short stories and articles "Let's Talk Frankly" (1975) was published posthumously.

Volynjak's essay "Kuban Is the Land of Ukrainians, of the Cossacks" was written on the basis of the author's experiences in 1932 when he, in order to flee from persecution for his Ukrainian national position, was forced to leave Ukraine for Kuban where he worked as a teacher in the seven-year school in the village of Novo-Malorossijskaja.

P. Volynjak begins his "reportage", as he defined the genre of his work, with an overview of the historical development of this territory: "But I hoped in vain to hear about the resettlement of the Cossacks to the Kuban. <...> I heard how in the days of Queen Catherine the Second Moscow had to settle the Kuban steppes not in order to protect itself from the Caucasus, but in order to win it. So, the army came to the Poltava Region, surrounded the village, took away all the residents, young and old, and under guard drove them to the Kuban. <...> It took them a long time to get there on foot. <...> Many people died on the way, and when they came to the place, they camped in the wild steppes and started digging dugouts and building huts in order to protect their children and old people from the bad weather" (Volynjak 1948, 5–6).

The essay describes life and economy in the Kuban region: villages and fields are overgrown with weeds, "wormwood and orach are so thick and high that you have never seen" (Volynjak 1948, 13). "The Kuban steppes had a really strange look. Instead of golden wheat, sweet clover and orach grew as tall as a human; instead of millet, bristle-grass as sawdust in the desert moves like a wave; instead of corn, barilla and tumbleweed grow" (Volynjak 1948, 22). "The population of the village is almost entirely Ukrainian; except for a few strangers ... <...> The language in the village is Ukrainian as well, with the clear characteristics of the Poltava dialect. Quite clear are surnames that fully reveal the origin of their owners: Kirjačok, Tarasenko, Demidenko, Velyčko, Šapoval, Poltavec', Handžula and others" (Volynjak 1948, 14–15).

In the essay P. Volynjak describes the work of the Kuban collective farm, truthfully depicts the hate of ordinary farmers to their authorities. The pages, which describe how during one night 500 families were arrested, how the children lost their parents and were forced to gather wheat spikelets in the weediest fields, are terrible. The total seizure of the food from the population, the organized and deliberate extermination of the people by hunger form the main part of the work. Violence against the Ukrainians ended in massive forced displacement of the population; even portraits of Ukrainian writers at school could be a cause for arrest. The images of "Comrade Šor", Komsomolec Judin, who found more than 300 caches of bread, and Chvostikov reveal the inhumane nature of the authorities. The author puts the rhetorical question: "Where are they, those brave and vigorous, uncompromising characters of Kosynka who 'will protect the steppe with pitchforks'? They went away... They disappeared together with the steppe whose soul was depersonalized by Moscow and whose body was crippled by the commune like iron rust. There is nothing to defend, and no heroes are alive" (Volynjak 1948, 59).

The physical destruction of the Ukrainians in the Kuban as a result of the deliberately organized famine of 1932–1933 led to moral destruction as well: Poltava village was renamed to Krasnoarmejskaja, all the people were taken away by force, and their huts were occupied by families from Russian Novgorod and Pskov (Volynjak 1948, 66).

One of the main features of the Ukrainian short stories written in the Diaspora is the creation of a powerful anti-totalitarian discourse and presenting the people's resistance against the Stalinist totalitarian regime.

The short story "Near Kyzhurt" (1947) by P. Volynjak tells us about the rivalry between two young men who have fallen in love with the same girl. However, the rivalry between Pavlo Najda and Vladimir Korol'kov for the love of the beautiful girl Oksana goes beyond the personal relationship and demonstrates the two opposing outlooks – Ukrainian and Russian.

Oksana is a daughter of immigrants from Ukraine, she was born in the steppes of Kazakhstan and has never seen her native land, but as she says, "some inexplicable and unfathomable force binds me to my people and my land" (Volynjak 1947, 43). Her former childhood friend and current fiancé Vladimir was born in the Vologda region, he is a representative of the titular nation of the Soviet Union. In their dialogues she repeatedly tries to explain logically to him and to herself why the Ukrainian songs fascinate her and why she wants to see her native steppes.

Pavlo's work in the steppes of Kazakhstan, his communication with representatives of different nations shows the deep social crisis in the relations between the peoples of the USSR: most of his colleagues were convinced that "Ukraine – it is only the outskirts of Russia" (Volynjak 1947, 14). But the young man feels the national identity of his compatriots, internally resistant to Russification, "...he was more inclined towards indigenous inhabitants – to the Kazakhs and Uzbeks" (Volynjak 1947, 15), and tried to learn their customs and way of life.

The climax of the work is the dialogue between Oksana and Korol'kov during a demonstration on the 1st of May. The festive crowd of people shows the greatness and unity of the Soviet people, as mentioned in all official media: "Here the Uzbeks are going in striped dressing gowns and skullcaps, and from the second street the Russians are coming out to meet them, and from the third street the Kazakhs and Kirghiz are marching" (Volynjak 1947, 44).

However, Oksana subconsciously feels the falsehood of this action, and she declares it to Korol'kov with passion: "All that is artificial, false and temporary. Look here, they all seem to be equal, the same, but it is only now and here, in the square. And what about tomorrow? Tomorrow you will be a representative of 'the highest cultural and brotherly nation', you are the subject, and all these 'free and equals' are only the objects of your impact and experience ... This is false, Volodja" (Volynjak 1947, 45). The illegality of these words is infused with mortal danger. So Korol'kov's reaction is predictable: he turns pale and hisses angrily at his bride. The gap between them becomes obvious. So, at first it

is the awareness of Ukrainian national identity on the sensory level, and then on the level of individual consciousness that pushes Oksana away from Korol'kov and makes her happy with Pavlo.

P. Volynjak's short story "In the Taiga" (1946) depicts the homesickness of the protagonist Hnat for his native Ukraine. Being in a Stalinist concentration camp in freezing Karelia, he recollects how he has been illegally arrested and jailed in the Luk"janiv's'ka prison in Kyjiv, and then taken away to a foreign northern land. Hnat is a staunch Ukrainian, and that is why he decides to escape from the concentration camp. Being alone in a wild forest, breaking his way through the deep snows, in his dreams and delusions he sees his native Kyjiv, the gold-domed churches of St. Sofija and the Lavra. Christmas symbols permeate the artistic structure of the story that at the end makes the miracle possible when the almost frozen Hnat is found and saved from death by fugitives like him (Volynjak 1947, 56).

Another talented writer in the Diaspora is Olena Zvyčajna (her real family name is Džul; 1902–1985). Her literary works have an open anti-totalitarian direction. The writer grew up in an intellectual family; her husband was a member of the national liberation struggle and therefore was repressed. As wife of an 'enemy of the people' Olena Zvyčajna suffered many hardships. As a result, her works are based on real facts. The creative heritage of the writer consists of the collection of short stories *Having Looked Back ...* (1954), the essay "The Myrhorods'kyj Fair" (1953), several novels, among which the novel *The Fear* (1958) can be distinguished.

In Olena Zvyčajna's short story "With Guns against Sparrows", included in the collection *Having Looked Back ...*, a factory workers' meeting is described, where the complaint of Beba Cackina is considered. She accuses the working girl Oryssja Sosnovyk of anti-Semitism. Actually, Bruch, chairman of the local committee, provokes the Jewish girl's complaint to the authorities because he is trying to fire the poor orphan Oryssja. The essence of Beba Cackina's complaint is that Oryssja Sosnovyk refuses to cut off her dense braids as she has been advised by Beba. But a trifling reason provokes serious consequences: Bruch insists on firing Oryssja, but some people began defending the girl. The case would have been settled if the discussion had not touched upon the question why Oryssja's parents had died. It is found out that it happened in the spring of 1933. But officially it is forbidden to speak about the famine. So, the true story about the death of Oryssja's parents is classified as anti-Soviet propaganda. For this truth the 18-year-old girl in a patched blouse, worn and torn shoes is judged and fired. Bruch delivers a speech about "anti-Semitism, which runs in tandem with Ukrainian chauvinism, about the remnants of Petljurism" (Zvyčajna 1954, 89).

Clear anti-totalitarian orientation is characteristic of the works of Zosym Dončuk (1903–1974). Before World War II and emigration he had not participated in the literary process and he avoided repressions. The artistic talent of the writer awoke in the post-war period when in Canada and in the United States the

collections of his short stories *The Black Days* (1952), *Over the River* (1958), *The Tenth* (1968), four stories and eight novels were published.

Zosym Dončuk's collection *The Black Days* contains the short story "When Will Ukraine Be?". The protagonist of this story is a young engineer from Ukraine, with whom the narrator speaks in Germany. He says, "I thought about the blossom of our nation, about our gold, spiritually crippled young generation that had grown and had been brought up in the era of Russian-chauvinist dictatorship, absorbed the Bolshevik poison, with dead feelings for struggle for freedom of their native Ukraine; I thought that youth deceived by untruthful slogans gave to the USSR their patriotic fervour, and considered bandit Stalin as their father, and my deep grief increased twofold." (Dončuk 1952, 46).

Admiring the beautiful ceramic products in Mežyhirja near Kyjiv during the German occupation, the narrator meets an old master. The destruction of the foundations of national existence in the times of Stalinism was conscious and purposeful because "for 'comrades' the beauty meant bourgeois prejudices, for them the main purpose was to provide all with plenty of things, and as for beauty, 'they' did not worry about it, the most important for them was fulfilling and surpassing the plan; besides, those workers who understood the beauty disappeared because either were sent to Siberia, or died from starvation, and some of the survivors fled to the city to find jobs on factories" (Dončuk 1952, 49). Striving for beauty as an immanent feature of the Ukrainian mentality is expressed in the words of the old master.

The main political question, about which we can read in the stories by the Ukrainian writers in the Diaspora, is expressed in the question of an 11-year-old rural boy in Dončuk's story: "But tell me: it used to be Russian Ukraine, now (during the German occupation. – S.L.) it is German Ukraine, but when will it be our Ukraine?" (Dončuk 1952, 53). The conclusion of this talk is: "This unforgettable meeting with the population of Eastern Ukraine changed my mind and strengthened my faith that Ukraine was not dead, would not die and would never perish, moreover, that the manifestation of this consciousness I saw not in the scientific world, or even among the Ukrainian intellectuals, but among the thereof forgotten peasantry" (Dončuk 1952, 54).

Very important elements of national identity are the language and folklore of each nation. For example, in P. Volynjak's short story "In the Taiga" (1946) the symbolic code is the prayer "God Great One" that is sung by the kneeling convicts in the Luk"janivs'ka prison as their final farewell to Ukraine. And in Z. Dončuk's short story "When Will Ukraine Be?" "a strong and loud, clear like a crystal, wide, spreading like a sea, full breast Ukrainian song" (Dončuk 1952, 50) brings not only aesthetic pleasure to the listener, but also symbolizes indestructibility of the Ukrainian soul. "The song sounded, flew under the heavens and seemed as if it really reached the Moon" (Dončuk 1952, 51).

Among the substantial structures in the national world one of the top places is given to the people's awareness of the deep connection with their native land, with their ancestors. An example of the embodiment of this motif is

P. Volynjak's short story "The Land Is Calling" (1946), which became the title of the whole collection. The protagonist of the text Demyd, an old peasant, physically feels the approach of his death. Actually, the plot of the story is the last day of his life. The meaning of his existence is working on the land. So, when the Soviets took away his land, he sowed a small plot all the same. And that embodied the eternal peasant's need for feeling the connection with the earth and the universe. "Demyd's soul began to play the ancient and eternal sorrow and joy again. <...> Music of the soul is merging into one chord with the music of existence. And these life-giving mighty chords create the immortal symphony of the eternal field" (Volynjak 1946, 24-25). The death of the man does not mean the end of his earthly existence, but it becomes his merging with the universe: "He fell and did not move anymore. So he lay near the boundary. Only the immortal symphony of being powerfully sounded over fields" (Volynjak 1946, 25).

The problem of realizing national identity through the unity with nature is reflected in Z. Dončuk's short story "The Homesickness", included in the collection *Over the River* (1953). The smell of lilac, brought by a spring wind, evokes the narrator's memories of his native Ukraine. "The smell of the cherry petals gives me a deep homesickness. And then I hear in the boundless ocean of the universe the melancholy gamma of the girls' songs: about her darling who died in the war, about her father who is in the stone quarries in Siberia, about her mother who died from starvation, about her brother in prison and sister in the orphanage. And nostalgia, like an octopus, squeezes my heart. But I love the night very much. It takes me in dreams to the afflicted homeland and then my thoughts are with all those who still live there. I feel the cruel anguish together with them." (Dončuk 1952, 17-18).

Vasyl' Čaplenko (his real name is Čapla; 1900–1990) began his writer's career in the 1920s: he received a philological education, graduated from a post-graduate course, was a member of the literary organization "The Plough", actively worked for numerous journals and published his collection of short stories *The Badly Educated Man* (1927). At the end of the 1920s he was arrested on the charge of membership in the ULU ('Union of Liberation of Ukraine'), yet miraculously remained alive. Thus, it is not surprising that in 1943 he emigrated to the West. While living in Germany, and, since 1949, in the USA, Čaplenko did his best to preserve the memory of thousands of innocents who were killed by the Stalinist system, and as a full member of the Ukrainian Free Academy of Sciences (UVAN) he made great efforts to preserve the heritage of V. Vynnyčenko.

The writer published several collections of short stories: *Love* (1946), *The Muse* (1946), *The Holler* (1957), eight novels, a historical novel *Čornomorci* (*Residents of the Black Sea Coast*) (1948–1957), several dramas, research works on literature and linguistics (*History of the Modern Ukrainian Literary Language* (1955; 1970).

One of the most important factors of national identity is the national language. In this sense, Vasyľ Čaplenko's short story "Something More for the Bread" (1946) is of special interest. The main hero of the text is a student of the University with the Cossack surname Džura. In the 16th–18th centuries it was the name of an armour-bearer or a young Cossack. 'Džura' means "friend" in the Turkic language. Presenting a situation in which the young student finds himself, the author describes the psychological types of his countrymen during the hungry year of 1932 and raises serious issues of national life: "Not everyone can believe that during the terrible famine throughout the country <...> such a 19-year-old young man thought not about something that can be baked or eaten, but about some kind of Ukraine" (Čaplenko 1946, 18).

In the hungry hallucinations the young man imagines meeting with God. And God's appearance is that of an old Cossack, and when the boy wonders why, God explains that each nation has its own God. After talking with God, Džura identifies the priority of his activities: "But first and foremost, in his opinion, the matter was a struggle with the constant danger in the cities of Ukraine – using Russian in everyday life" (Čaplenko 1946, 19). Standing in a long queue for bread, he is despised by neighbours because of his pure Ukrainian literary language: "But only that 'chochol', or, as it is decreed to say now, 'Ukrainian' language is so unpleasant that causes disgust. 'Honestly', a grandfather swore, 'a dog barks better than the chochols talk'" (Čaplenko 1946, 20). Džura is full of deep resentment: "Having interrupted the old man, he starts proving that the Ukrainian language comes second only to Italian for beauty and is spoken not only by farmers, but also by educated people ... He says that he is a student ..." (Čaplenko 1946, 21).

However, further events are even more dramatic: very little bread has been brought, and the crowd goes mad. People almost trample the young man, drop his hat off his head and tear buttons from his clothing. But he manages to grab a life-saving loaf. Going back to the hostel, the student meets a beautifully dressed, but long-unshaven man who asks for bread in the refined Ukrainian language. The unknown man tells him that his children are dying from starvation. The language of the stranger impresses Džura: "A man is threatened with death, but he, knowing that his request in the Russian language would be responded to more quickly (because the majority in the city speaks Russian), addresses in Ukrainian anyway" (Čaplenko 1946, 25). Neighbours in the hostel do not understand the action of the young man and laughed at Džura, but he does not regret giving the whole loaf to the stranger, and then Džura sees God again, who praises his actions and blesses him. So, the native language becomes a unifying link between the souls of two strangers and preserves humanity in their hearts.

Thus, the problem of national identity occupies an important place in the space of Ukrainian literature in the Diaspora. It is deepened by the situation of crisis and threats which the Ukrainians faced after the Second World War. According to one of the creators of the theory of nationalism, the British researcher

Anthony D. Smith, among the most important factors of national identity are the following factors: common area of residence, presence of historical memory, a common economy and culture.

Thus, the Ukrainian writers who were far outside their country because of social and historical circumstances, in fact, were deprived of a common territory, and, moreover, they were scattered in different countries and continents. But they were united with the sense of belonging to a large ethnic community which had a grand and dramatic history with outstanding heroes who gave their lives for national freedom and statehood. The Ukrainian writers in the Diaspora made great efforts to preserve their native language by organizing schools, public libraries and conducting various activities to promote language and culture. All this helped to keep the continuity of traditions, the inextricable link between generations and created a unique branch of Ukrainian culture.

In conclusion I would like to say that the perspective of my work is to study other works by Ukrainian exile writers, such as Ivanna Čornobryvec', Oleksij Sačjuk, Anatol' Halan, Anatol' Hak and others. The question of national identity again sharply arose before the Ukrainians after the beginning of Russia's aggression in the east. We strive for peace and the preservation of our national sovereignty in the political and spiritual spheres. Therefore, the study of the artistic space that our predecessors have created is necessary and important.

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