

Emergence of Historical Satire Through Patterns of Dream in Ahmed Yerima's *Aetu*

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Abstract

There is an emergence of history, exposure of social failings and attempt to correct them in Ahmed Yerima's *Aetu*. Previous scholarly engagements on satire have explored the tenets and attributes of either Horatian or Juvenalian satire or both. However, this paper examines the nature of Yerima's handling of history to make satirical drama through the use of patterns of dream to showcase his imaginative idiosyncrasy. In this work, Yerima's artistry is anchored vividly on his fusion of conformity to the traditional features of satire and his departure from them. The textual analysis is premised on psychoanalysis especially Carl Jung's model of dream theory. Psychoanalysis allows for the investigation of character's unconscious motives and collective archetypes. It is discovered that the patterns of dream serve as techniques of foreshadowing and flashback to the physical and psychological conflicts in the text. Significantly, the patterns of dream are used as signifiers of the protagonist's traumas, which are precipitated by her naive behaviours. The psychic and sarcastic exposition of the bigotry, crudity and exploitation that are aspects of Nigerian socio-political atmosphere are portrayed through the patterns of dream.

Keywords: Patterns of dream, Feminism, Psychic contexts, Satire, History.

Introduction

Functionally, satire has two prominent roles, which can be categorised as social and psychological functions. Socially, it is an effective source to understand a society and as such, it is the oldest form of social study (Rosenberg, 1960). As social study has to do with leading figures and values in the society, satire has satisfied the popular need to debunk and ridicule the leading figures in politics, economy, religion and other prominent realms of power and it confronts in general public discourse

(Knight, 2004). Psychologically, it provides the keenest insights into a group's collective psyche to reveal its deepest values and tastes. Psychologically, satire provides a satiric impulse and its ritualised expressions to carry out the function of resolving social tension. This is achievable by giving expression to the anti-social tendencies, representing a safety valve which re-establishes equilibrium and health in the collective imaginary, which are jeopardised by the repressive aspects of society (Szabari, 2009). Yerima has cauterised and galvanised social and psychological functions of satire as highlighted by Knight, Szabari and Rosenberg above into an effective stimulants that synergise the success of his historical satires in the play under examination in this paper.

Though, a concise function of satire has been observed above, it will be complementary to explain the different types of satire to afford this study the opportunity to identify the type on which side the playwright is leaning and the source of his fascination and artistic talents. Satirical drama can be categorised as either Horatian or Juvenalian, though, the two are not entirely mutually exclusive. Horatian satire is named after a Roman satirist, Horace (65-8BCE) who playfully criticises some social vices through gentle, mild and light-hearted humour. It directs wit, exaggeration and self-deprecating humour toward what it identifies as folly, rather than evil. Horatian satire's sympathetic tone is common in modern society. The basic element in Horatian satire is humour no matter the gravity or density of it. Juvenalian satire on the other hand, is named after the Roman satirist, Juvenal who lived between late 1st century and early 2nd century. It is more contemptuous and abrasive than the Horatian. Juvenalian satire addresses social ills through scorn, outrage and savage ridicule. This form is often pessimistic and characterised by irony, sarcasm, moral indignation and personal invective with less emphasis on humour. The glaring distinction between Horatian and Juvenalian is the degree of their hilarity. Horatian is more hilarious while Juvenalian is less. Having seen the basis of satire in drama, it will be scholarly rewarding to examine the nature of Yerima's handling of history to make satirical drama, whether it conforms with the basis of satire as exists in both Horatian and Juvenalian satires or there is a departure from them or there is a fusion or mixture of conformity and departure.

Before textual engagement, it will be expedient to look at what other literary critics say on Yerima's style. Abdullahi (2013) comments:

Of particular interest is the range of subject matters, cultural backgrounds and aesthetic approaches employed in the over 35 published plays of Ahmed Yerima. From his shifting cultural focus from play to play, mostly on cultures other than his own, one cannot but be interested in taking another look at Ahmed Yerima's multicultural imagination by

attempting to unravel what inspired his peculiar creative attitude, the objectives behind the plays and the impacts of such plays on the reading audience or the intended audience (p. 104)

It seems that Abdullahi has been grossly fascinated with the eclectic imagination and style of Yerima's plays. He also sees Yerima as a dynamic literary scholar and dramatist. Similarly, Adeoti (2007) has noted the eclectic magnitude of Yerima's dramaturgy and he reflects thus:

Yerima's plays in terms of literary and theatrical devices are intriguingly eclectic. He derives artistic influences from a variety of dramatic traditions and tendencies from classical Greece to Renaissance tragedy to naturalism; from Irish drama to Brechtian epic theatre; from the theatre of the absurd to the cockroach theatre traditions, etc (p.51).

The play that is examined in this work is referred to as historical satire, in which the playwright dwells artistically on the disillusionment and disenchantment that permeated African society. One remarkable thing about the play is the playwright's attempt to bring to the fore the ineptitude and shortcomings of individuals, groups, classes, and the Nigerian society in general to public scrutiny and to solicit improvement. The author achieves this purpose by deviating a bit from the traditional humour or dense invectives of both Horatian and Juvenalian satires. He places his satirical instrument on the characters' psyches. He places more premiums on the psychological personality of his hero than the contextual situations in the play. He (Yerima) sees human minds or the mindsets of dramatic characters as latent and catalyst responsible for any action, change and impact of the situation or predicament that may arise in the play and by extension, in reality.

Aetu is a play that blends factual realities of the common people, the downtrodden and the people that are negatively affected by the past societal traditions which are still creeping into the contemporary world. With dramatic aesthetics and dexterity, Yerima portrays the pathetic and helpless state of womanhood under the firm grip of patriarchal hegemony and neurosis of tradition of inheritance in African culture.

The play places its satirical content within the real history of the common people. It re-presents the life story of the author's grandmother. However, it is not based on the entire profile of the playwright's grandmother but only on the bitter and unpleasant experience and dehumanising treatment society metes out to her as a result of men's strong adherence to the debasing tradition of inheritance and widowhood. In the author's note he observes:

Aetu....my paternal grandmother, a woman tough to the bones, inspired this play. I never knew her as an adult. But she loved me Or so I was told by my mother, Sadaatu, who dreads the memory of her to this day. But my father loved her, as he had first shortened the longer name Ayishatu, and replaced it with Aetu. And then deified her before her death, in his soul.... The real Aetu's life is slightly different from the one in this play But in a sad way, they were both victims of women as subject of inheritance within one family (p.7).

From this note, the play presents Yerima as an erudite artist, a mediator of some sort who is equipped with the hermeneutics of historical facts available to him, either written or oral, to blend fiction with fact. The available records of his grandmother, he transfers to a historical play, *Aetu*. To him, there is something lucid, lustrous, unusual and remarkable about Aetu, his grandmother that he wants to make known to the public. It is pertinent to note that the play identifies with the proletariat. This idea of blending the factual, history and the experience of the common people proves that Yerima artistic writings and talents are eclectic and commendable because it will afford the audience and society at large to note and know the plights of the common people and at the same time, instil the spirit and sense of belonging in the entire society.

As a satirical play, it portrays the callousness and wickedness of some men in the society, especially when issues of personal or individual interests are at stake. It also decries and bemoans some obnoxious inherited traditions that are dehumanising in the society. In this wise, the neurosis of patriarchal hegemony in the play negatively affects an innocent young girl whose innocence is bitterly transformed into a perpetual anger, pain and hermitic life of sorrow and revenge.

The synopsis of the plot structure exposes the young Aetu in her teen to the intrigue and callousness in human world. She is denied her heartfelt love, Atiba. Atiba is murdered by Oke, a man of about seventy years who wants to marry Aetu by force because he has money and influence. Having killed Atiba, Aetu is helplessly raped by this wicked man. Surprisingly, Oke tries to exonerate himself after committing two heinous crimes – murder and rape. The product of the bitter experience of the rape and forced marriage is Obajimi, son of Aetu. Aetu never knows comfort psychologically. Her mind is always full of turbulence and restiveness since her real love, Atiba has been gruesomely murdered. Consequently, she goes to seek revenge from Esu, a fiery god of revenge and evil. At the Esu shrine, she pronounces curses on her husband, Oke, their son and generations after them. With the pronounced curse, Oke dies mysteriously. After his death, the inheritance rite

gives Aetu to another husband, a brother of Oke who also dies of the spell of the curse. She is later inherited by the next younger sibling of the dead husband who also suffers similar fate of death. Aetu, not yet satisfied with the result of the curse, decides to be indifferent to the sons she has by the three dead husbands and she finally commits suicide by stabbing herself with a knife.

As a satire, the play portrays many vices of men, women and the entire society. It reveals such follies and vices as callousness of man, sexual acrimony, patriarchal hegemony, widowhood, obnoxious inheritance rite and lack of forgiveness. The historical or factual accuracy is not the focus of our analysis but the stylistic elements and techniques the playwright employs to make an excellent historical satire from the pathetic story of Aetu in the play. It is a play that dwells on human beings and psychology. The playwright, right from the beginning of the play, artistically dwells on the collective or stream of unconsciousness in the minds of the chief character, Aetu as espoused by Freud and Jung. It is the psychoanalytical elements and techniques that the playwright uses to develop the plot structure, characters and the characterisation that we shall copiously discuss. All the major characters in the play are involved in one pattern of dream or the other. The major device is dream motif, with the following dream patterns: nightmare, day dreaming, and hallucination.

In the making of historical satire in *Aetu*, the playwright begins the exposition of the protagonist and the heroine, Aetu, a young and beautiful lady whose desire is to marry her only love, Atiba. She is introduced as a confused lady because of the nightmare she has which seems to be an impediment to her heart's desire. The playwright presents her psychic context to project the rising action or complication of the play. The nightmare reoccurs severally, Nightmare as "an unpleasant dream can cause fear, horror, despair and great sadness to the dreamer (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). The dream may contain situations of danger, discomfort, psychological or physical terror. Aetu's nightmare causes fear and both psychological and physical terror as regards her desire and love. She narrates her dream to her love, Atiba:

.... This is the third time. Each time, men.... strong bad ones, chase me. I run and I run in circles, until I get to a cliff, and with nowhere to go, I jump hoping I will fall into the Osun river, and swim away. Then I remember that I cannot swim. I become scared again. The only good thing is that I see you there at the bottom of the cliff to break my fall. And we hold each other like now.... ..(p.26)

Another effect of nightmare is that it helps the dreamer to integrate thoughts on the symbolic creation in the nightmare. Aetu, in her wakefulness, goes to Yeye Osun to inquire more about her love, desire and the nightmare but the goddess is too busy with celebration and she is unable to have what she wants. According to Aetu, “the priestess was so noisy, she sang and danced” (p.25). The inability of Yeye Osun to attend to her portends evil because she literally interprets the dream as love. “It is love Yeye Osun believes in love” (p.26). From the mindset of Aetu here, the audience has known that calamity is looming. The playwright in his usual manner has used this nightmare to artistically heighten the plot on one hand and to develop the protagonist, Aetu, and her characterisation, on the other hand. From her account of the dream and self-interpretation, the audience has the opportunity to adjudge her as a young lady that is psychologically insensitive to the wiles and vices of people of the world as suggested or symbolised by the strong and bad men chasing her in her dream. She is engrossed by youthful exuberance and naivety.

The author plays on her naivety about the world she lives in and suffers greatly in by not taking the nightmare seriously. The “strong bad men” in the dream appear in the physical and shatter her desire and love. The wrong and literal interpretation causes her the inability to take a firm and pragmatic action that will accentuate the realisation of her desire and love. It therefore, becomes a belated action when she suggests to Atiba to leave the village in anticipation of an elopement. The conversation between Atiba and Aetu buttresses this:

AETU: The bad men in my dream. It is them. They are after me again. Let us run, Atiba.

ATIBA: To where? I have your father’s herd here. I have the herd belonging to other people too. I cannot go or I will get into trouble with my customers. You hide ...

AETU: *(Aetu runs out to save Atiba)*
leave him alone! You will kill *(But it is too late)* Atiba! *(realising Atiba is dead, she begins to cry)* (p.27)

The psychic context of Aetu’s mind, through the dream, is projected above the social situation in the play. Her father wants her to marry his business partner, Oke, an old man that is above seventy years. She knows that her father will not approve her marriage to Atiba, and there is need for her to take a decisive action like elopement to free herself from the shackle of the ignoble societal culture, that she must succumb to her father’s wish in term of marriage. The dream and the interpretation she gives to it serve as

hindrance to her desire but she delays in taking actions. The repressed, as parts of her life (her father's wish) and mind, suddenly becomes satisfied through fantasy in the latter part of the dream: "the only good thing is that I see you there at the bottom of the cliff to break my fall" (p.26). She gains control over emotions resulting from distressing experience by her naivety and literal interpretation of the nightmare.

The playwright uses dream motif as a stylistic device to develop the internal structure of the play, to create and develop characters and to expose the vices and follies in the society in order to correct them. As a satire, the play decries the debasing and ignoble aspects of African culture of patriarchal hegemony. It ridicules the neurosis of patriarchal hegemony that portrays women as toys and tools of their male counterpart. *Aetu* cannot marry her choice of man because of this social menace. As she wants to free herself to become an independent woman, Oke, another man with unchecked effrontery shatters her dream.

The placement of the psychic context of the character above the historical and textual content is fully realised when Aetu's mind loses all traces of naivety and becomes devoid of youthful exuberance. She has been shattered and destroyed by men. Her beauty has turned sour. Life has become miserable and unbearable to her because Oke, her unwanted husband, has died and she becomes an exchangeable gift from one husband to another due to unpleasant inheritance rite. At this point, she returns to her nightmare with mature mind and she decides to commit murder in order to join Atiba at the bottom of the sea (the world beyond). An old woman intimates us:

When she found that she could not continue to swallow the stones life was forcing down on her throat. When she found out that it was better to fall from the cliff into the river of Yeye Osun, and deeper into the hands of Atiba, six feet below, than walk the interred streets jeered by her peers (p.35).

The nightmare eventually becomes a device for foreshadow whose manifestation surfaces at the end when Aetu commits suicide to afford her the opportunity to re-unite with Atiba in the other world that is free of worries, patriarchal hegemony, pains and unrealistic hope. Dream, especially nightmare, as a stylistic device has helped the play to spread its thematic message as a historical satire. It obviously creates the characters and develops them. It has to develop the plot through foreshadowing. Thus, dream is used as part of history to unfold the social and cultural realities in the play, *Aetu* and by extension, the human world.

Another aspect or pattern of day dream in *Aetu* is wishful thinking. This is a psychological state of mind or belief that a person's desire is

happening or will happen, though this is actually not true or very unlikely. It is a stage in one's life when one's obsession or over-ambition seems to come to pass. The point to be borne in mind is that it is an occurrence that happens when the mind is lost in thought and restive. The wishful thinking or desire may eventually become manifest but not willingly or naturally. Draaisma (2004) sees wishful thinking as an innate obsessive and abrasive egocentrism that often characterises the life of a sadist. Yerima employs this to buttress Draaisma's view. In the character of Gbade in the play, as a brother of late Oke, Aetu's husband, his duty is to ensure even sharing of his late brother's property. Though, the patriarchal hegemony and existing inheritance rite put him in a better position to choose what he wants or desires than the wives. Yet, he wishfully takes almost everything that is good as a result of greed and uncontrollable desires.

Yerima artistically places premium on the unconscious mind of Gbade, one of his characters through a wishful pattern of dream. His state of mind is to acquire what his brother has, either lawfully or not. His thinking does not have human feeling concerning the children and the widows. Gbade exclaims hilariously and greedily that all his brother's properties are here. "His clothes, his shoes, his cups, his landed properties and his wives, all three of them All his children do not matter here" (p.3). This greedy statement is a product of wishful thinking, it has been on his mind even before the death of Oke. The playwright x-rays the mind of Gbade to heighten the plot structure in a way to reveal further the calamity of Aetu. As a widow who is entitled to her husband's wealth, Gbade denies her and she later becomes an unwilling wife to Gbade who has no iota of passion for her. His level of wishful thinking and greed is shown in the selfish and greedy manner he shares his brother's wealth as revealed in the following conversation between him and Aetu:

AETU: Nothing, my lord. Let me return to my father. I had only one child for your later brother. Let me go, my lord. My brother and mother just died, and my father's sight is going bad. I am the only child left, let me return home. I beg you.

GBADE: Did you hear the voice and the concern of a good woman? Young in age but tender in everything else. Otedola, today I make my choice of my brother's properties. First is the land at the riverside, good for the planting of rice. The cocoa farm at the centre of the village to the left, the two houses at Ije, the kolanut farm at Oke-oko and of course for

the sake of my impending old age, I shall take this Tapa woman to enrich my bed. If I die with her by my side caring to my needs, let no one blame the gods for loving me. I am not a greedy man. Otedola take your desires and let the children have what is left. Our brother lived well, it is our right to enjoy his wealth after him ... (p.34).

It is wishful thinking and greed that make him to choose almost every substantial parts of the property of Oke, his late brother and husband of Aetu. The dream motif in form of wishful thinking is employed to wheel the tragic vehicle of the play. But for his uncontrollable and egocentric psyche, Aetu would have returned to her father and her subsequent tragedy in the play would have been averted. Hence, the unconscious mind of Gbade as a character adds immensely to the plot development, development of characters and it depicts the thematic qualities. As a satire, the play attempts to ridicule and correct the patriarchal hegemony that has reduced the entire womanhood to lacklustre entity in the society. Also, the act of selfishness, egocentrism and greed the society should attempt to expunge are satirised.

Another pattern of dream as a stylistic technique in *Aetu* is hallucination. Hallucination is an example of unconscious state of the mind when a person sees or hears things that are not physically seen or heard by others around him. Ffytche (2012) sees hallucination as “illusory symbolic creation or perception in human psyche” (p.27). Thompson (2006) further classifies hallucination into visual and auditory hallucinations. Yerima uses both visual and auditory hallucinations to show the plot structure and direction of the play. Hallucination is further used to develop the character of Obajimi as a victim of human acrimony and ignoble inheritance rite. His (Obajimi) hallucinatory state of mind is used to present the conflict in the play. It is the negative effect of the curse Aetu pronounces on those who deprive her the actualization of her dreams and desires. Consequently, the hallucination brings or produces actions which help to identify the owner of the voices he hears and the faces or images that appear in the hallucination. However, the hallucinated person (Obajimi) is innocent of this but he is presented as the sacrificial lamb that will put an end to the epidemic effect of Aetu’s curse. In his ailment, Obajimi often sees images and he speaks to them, to the consternation of Kande, his son. When this becomes unbearable, Kande takes his father to a priest of Esu, Suara, in anticipation of a cure. And this brings about the exposition of the conflict in the plot structure. Let us see the reaction of Kande to his father’s hallucination:

Another sign of his ailment, Mama. Like his uncles, his father, and his brothers who also suffered from this sickness

before their deaths. Often he goes into a state of trance and talks of goats, a boy being strangled One night he called out a name

.... Atiba! Sometimes Atiba would appear to haunt him, and he would be asking and pleading that he did not have a hand in his death (p.22).

Unfortunately, Obajimi had not even been born before the gruesome murder of Atiba. This hallucination sparks off action that contributes to the development of the plot and the character of the heroine, Aetu. Artistically, Yerima employs hallucination to unknot the complication and the climax of the plot in the play. Obajimi, one of the sons of Aetu, hallucinates:

Go, son. Hurry. My mother is happy now. There she smiles at me. Hurry out, son, my mother accompanied by death comes for me. Everything is now so perfect. Thank you, son. Go. Hurry! (p.55)

Obajimi is happy in this hallucination. He gives order to his son who has been so helpful and caring. The hallucination shows an end to an epidemic curse and, artistically, it shows the resolution of the play, which means the return of peace, comfort and normalcy to Aetu's grandchildren. No more death and revenge for a crime they are innocent of. Beck-Sander, Birchwood and Chadwick (1997) call this type of hallucination a command hallucination. According to them, command hallucination is used in defence of a crime, and as a proclamation of victory. It is essentially a voice one hears and it tells one what to do, as it is seen in Kande and Obajimi in the play.

There is also an aesthetic of daydreaming as a pattern of dream motif in *Aetu*. This daydreaming also contributes in great magnitude to the arrangement and development of the plot and in the development of the characters. Barret (2010) posits that daydreaming is a visionary fantasy, especially one of happy, pleasant thoughts, hopes or ambitions imagined as coming to pass and experienced while awake. From Barret's definition, day dreaming is a product of minds reflection or human psychic imagination about a positive solution to a current conflict, it also means an optimistic viewing of a bleak situation. There is a similitude of daydreaming in the play. Kande, the troubled son of Obajimi, daydreams by envisaging a possible solution to his father's health predicament. He psychologically and philosophically imagines a hopeful remedy to his father's conflict which, of course, is the major conflict in the play. He sees a silver lining in the cloudy atmosphere of the plot. In Kande's daydream, other characters around him, like old woman and Saura, see him as an impetuous man. But he reiterates his point and view that the mysterious situation must be unravelled:

... Excitement took over my senses. These are questions my children will ask. I want answers for them. This is all I have always prayed for. To hear someone tell me about my grandmother. All I got for answers, to this moment, were lies in coded forbidden whispers.... I am overwhelmed with excitement... Hear the stories that can untangle ...mystery of pain (p.35-36).

This expression by Kande accentuates his readiness to make the sacrifice that will atone and pacify the spirit of vendetta in Aetu, his grandmother. After the provision of the items of the ritual, Kande's daydream suddenly comes to manifestation. At this juncture, the song of sorrow or mysterious atmosphere suddenly changes to a happy one. Kande now sees himself as the pillar of the house. He joyfully exclaims:

It will never happen again. Not within the walls of our house.

I am the Olori ebi, the oldest child alive and the head of the family after my father. I give my word Never! (p.54)

The daydream has been portrayed by the playwright as psychotherapy that brings solace and satisfaction to the inner mind of Kande who represents all the family or the offspring of Aetu. It is therefore, pertinent to say that the author presents Kande's psychological reflection to resolve issues that heat up the plot structure. The daydream also describes the characterisation of Kande as a caring and optimistic character who is not deterred by unfavourable and mysterious occurrences. One thing that is remarkable with Kande's state of mind after the atonement has been made is that his sad mood over the deteriorating health condition of his father suddenly changes to a happy one.

Yerima's engagement of the characters' mindset, as in Kande's example, is to regulate mood and control emotions from distressing experiences. Yerima, through Kande's daydream, has shown that dream is not simply a collection of unconsciousness permanently fixed to a particular time and place in history, but an on-going social practice within every society. And the multifaceted nature of dreams makes them easy to find connections between dramatic events, characters and realities. If one compares the gloomy expression of Kande at the beginning of *Aetu* with the excitement shown in the triumphant expression above, one will see the link between daydream and envisioning on one hand, and optimism and manifestation on the other. At the beginning, Kande is disturbed, worried and inquisitive but he never gives up. His words and pleas attest to this:

Baba, I beg you, save my family from shame. Save my father from death. We have been everywhere, we were told that only you and the god you serve can save my father. I have money. (p.10)

He has the fantasy and vision that the social and dehumanising imbroglia in Aetu's descendants will give way and this comes to stay at the end. Thus, Kande's frame of mind in the play has helped to ridicule follies in the society and also helped ameliorate the unstraightened ways and hedges. The author employs daydreaming in the play for three dramatic purposes; to portray the themes, to develop the plot structure and to comment on the characters and their roles. *Aetu* is a play that artistically fits into psychoanalytical appraisal of Freud and Jung's collective unconsciousness with the various patterns of dream like nightmare, daydream, hallucination and wishful thinking that Yerima has put in place.

Conclusion

This paper has explored Yerima's eclecticism and multiculturalism in form and content respectively. We have seen areas of his adherence to Horatian and Juvenalian satires and his areas of artistic departures from the traditional forms and nature of satires, which have really proven his dramatic uniqueness and idiosyncrasy. His artistic talent in the play examined in this work lies largely in the penetration into human psyche through dream motif to show the distinction between socio-political realities and illusions. The exploration of dream motif as device has afforded Yerima the opportunity to use the various patterns of dream to unfold the realistic events in a typical African feminine environment.

In the play examined in this paper, there is artistic fusion of history and drama with high tempo of hilarity and provocative poignancy to check and correct the excesses of the members of contemporary societies in the area of culture. In *Aetu*, the actual happenings in the life of Aetu, the playwright's paternal grandmother, are ridiculed in order to improve societal shortcomings like patriarchal hegemony and inheritance rite. Artistically, the playwright explores dream patterns to unfold unpleasant societal injunctions that subject women to socio-psychological traumas. Hence, the playwright produces sato-feministic drama, a marriage of satire and feminism in drama. Thus, the exploration of dream patterns in the play, as analysed, succinctly makes Yerima also a psycho-historical dramatist.

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