

Exhibition of the world of exemplification as well as the world of reality influenced by the contemporary Iranian painting (case study: the artworks of Mahmoud Farshchian, Iran Darroudi and Mehdi Hosseini)

Abstract

Problem Definition: Iranian painting totally represents the world of exemplification. This is mainly due to the desire of past painters to discover and display this heavenly world through imagination and themes such as stories and narratives. The display of the world of exemplification has not been limited to the past, and contemporary artists has also sought to exhibit this world in their works, and this has been an appropriate context for their creativity. The present study addresses the way to create the world of exemplification in the past and contemporary artworks and also the difference between its representations in the works of contemporary artists such as Farshchian, Darroudi and Hosseini in comparison with the past of Iranian painting.

Objective: The purpose of the current study is to examine and analyze how to display the world of exemplification in the past painting and to know how it emerges in the artworks of some contemporary Iranian painters.

Research Method: The present findings are qualitative and are presented in a descriptive-analytical manner. The required information has been also collected through library resources.

Results: The results of this study indicated that in the past, artists paid attention to the imagination to draw the world of exemplification and the contemporary artists have also benefited from this ability. The difference is that today every artist uses his own way of expression to demonstrate the power of imagination, while in the past, artists usually followed a certain style. For example, Farshchian by eliminating the reality and paying attention to the stories and narratives, Darroudi by disrupting the reality and imagination and creating unknown spaces, and finally Hosseini by displaying the reality but in the way that the artist imagines, have illustrated their powers of imagination.

Keywords: Contemporary Painting, World of exemplification, Mahmoud Farshchian, Iran Darroudi, Mehdi Hosseini.

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Introduction

Iranian paintings have been usually studied historically and in terms of their visual elements. However, their internal aspects have never been addressed. With a little care in these artworks, one can understand the meanings and philosophy hidden in them, as if they are a reflection of the artists' ideas of a world other than the material world, and it is not true if we consider only their external and historical aspects. The world under discussion has been introduced in Suhrawardi's philosophy as the ontology of the world of example or imagination, and he was the first to mention it (Corban, 1994, 300). However, "this mention did not directly cover the category of art, but it is possible to explore the traditional Iranian art based on the discussions he has presented about metaphysics (Hakimi; Afshar & Shabani, 2015, 3). The painters of the past were successful in observing the world imagination through austerity and avoiding sensualism, and expressed their observations in their works via mysterious word. According to the above statements, an attempt has been made here to study the world of exemplification or imagination in Iranian painting and its effect on the contemporary Iranian painting. The present research seeks to answer the following questions: 1. How has the world of imagination been created in the past and contemporary works? 2. What is the difference between reviewing the world of exemplification in the works of artists such as Farshchian, Darroudi and Hosseini in the present era and paintings in the past?

Research Method

The present research has been conducted based on a descriptive-analytical method and its information has been collected through library resources. First, a brief description of the world of imagination has been given and then the display of this world has been described and analyzed in the works of artists of the past and contemporary era, along with mentioning a few artwork examples of selected artists.

Research Background

According to the information collected by the author about the world of imagination and Sheikh Suhrawardi's view in this field, several articles and texts have been published that will be reviewed in the following. Among the published articles about the world of imagination, one can point out to "Persian painting: emanation of imagination kingdom (with emphasis on ideas of Sheikh Shahab al-din Suhrawardi, imagitional world (mundus imaginalis))" by Eskandarpourkhorami and Shafiei (2011). One can also refer to articles entitled "The world of imagination and the concept of space in Iranian miniature" by Nasr (1994) and "Iranians' philosophical insight about light and its embodiment in the art of painting" (2019) by Ebrahimipour. Regarding the artists whose names have been mentioned in this

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article, one can refer to the book entitled "In the distance between two points" by Darroudi (2019) and an article entitled "An introduction to Mahmoud Farshchian's style and works (theoretical and practical foundations)" written by Rezaei nabrad (2016), in which the theoretical and practical foundations of Farshchian's style have been examined. Limited articles have been published about the works of Mehdi Hosseini, including "Woman and plant in the works of Mehdi Hosseini" by Moareknejad (2005). However, no research has been so far conducted on the effects of the world of imagination and painting of the past on the contemporary Iranian painting.

Definition of the world of exemplification (imagination)

The world of imagination is something between the worlds of pure light and pure material, that is, it is neither pure light nor pure material. It has suspended dark and shining forms. Every being in the world of light and matter has an example and a form in this intermediate world that is inherent and has no place, like the images in the mirror so that the mirror is their manifestation but is not considered as their place. Due to this characteristic, it has been able to be related to the material world and has a manifestation such as imagination for its existing forms (Suhrawardi, 1996, vol. 20, 211-212).

In addition, imagination literally means photo and ghost, and means a face that can be seen in a dream or shown from a distance, and also a photo that falls in the eye, mirror or glass. For this reason, the meanings of thought, illusion and suspicion have been also derived from it (Rikhtegaran, 2007, 10). According to Ishraqi philosophers, the world of imagination does not come from the power of imagination. However, the power of imagination is the traveler of that world and recounts its observations there, and if freed from the affairs of this world, it can create some forms of the world of imagination (Davari Ardakani, 2012, 146). Therefore, it can be stated that the allegorical anecdotes, mystical wisdoms, poetry and art originate from the world of imagination.

The art of painting and the world of imagination

Among the various arts, painting can establish the closest connection between rational and sensible worlds, because this art is not like music being free from the use of objective and material manifestations, nor sculpting which is completely bound by the forms and casts of the sensible world. It is noticeable. The painting has been a mental and spiritual art from the beginning, and has tended towards abstraction (Mohajer, 2012, 13-14). Using concept of the world of imagination, the painter has been able to bring the two-dimensional level of painting to the world other than the material world and a world with a specific time and space and with events that are impossible to occur in the material world (Nasr, 1994, 82).

Now, it should be observed that how the painters of the past, especially the artists whose artworks included imagination as an essential role, portrayed the world of imagination in what way and under which factors.

Influential factors in the artist's attitude to depict the world of imagination

1. The advent of Islam and the philosophy of light and color

The philosophy of light and its presence in the religions and relics from the pre-Islamic period and continuation of this issue in the post-Islamic years indicates the presence of commonalities between the two mentioned periods in terms of the importance and originality. The existence of these commonalities caused the presence of light to remain stable in Iranian thought and art (Ebrahimipour, 2012, 12). In this regard, the views of Suhrawardi, the well-known philosopher of the Islamic world, "is mainly based on the division of the universe into light and non-light, and the belief in the existence of a light hierarchy in it. He calls Noor Al-Anwar the light of the environment, sacred light, supreme and dominant light" (Lajevardi, 2004, 135). The painters of the previous periods, who also used mysticism, philosophy and literature as their exemplar, also created their works through them. The Iranian painter uses color to show the luminous world of the heaven. The artist has used colors such as gold and silver which have brilliance and shine, and was able to bring light into his works and show a space other than physical one" (Hakimi; Afshar & Shabani., 2015, 12-13). "Coloring in Iranian paintings is so glamorous and imaginative that the observer is confronted at first glance with a single whole of a narrative rather than a reality picture of the repeated and innumerable realities of the external world. Such a narrative does not flow in the dimensions of time and space. In other words, colors and lights in Iranian painting are exemplary and elusive, and in a sense, they are not only elements of the work, but the whole work" (Ebrahimipour, 2012, 12).

2. Stories and narratives and the impact of literature

"All kinds of Islamic arts have been related to each other throughout history and have provided the context for the development of each other. One of these arts is painting, which has always been associated with literature and calligraphy, and these connections have left profound effects" (Esmati, 2009, 107). "The painter's task was to draw and visualize the scribe's writings. Since the words of writers were generally mixed with all kinds of metaphors, imaginary and abstract forms, it was difficult to convey these ideas in a visual framework. However, painters were able to turn the mental form into objective one via calligraphy and color" (Mahvan & Yahaghi, 2019, 163). Given the above points, the question arises that since there might be a long time interval between the painter and the scribe, how can the painter turn his mental imagination into objective forms without access to the

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scriber? Ruyin Pakbaz answers this question in his book entitled "Iranian Painting from prehistoric era to the present day": "In fact, the Iranian literature and arts are interconnected in the process of using archetypes. Using similar language, the poets and painters describe the world inherited from their ancestors. This is a world beyond time and space whose beings have existed according to a general and eternal pattern" (Pakbaz, 2013, 9).

3. Sign

Sign is another factor that artists have employed in the creation of their works, both in the past and in the contemporary era. According to Peirce's theory, a sign is of three types, including the icon¹, index² and symbol³. "A sign is a sensible and observable phenomenon which, due to its relation to an absent phenomenon, replaces and indicates it, and must necessarily have a material appearance in order to be perceived by one of the human senses" (Ahmadi, 2009, 57).

Now, the painters must present their works in a way that does not indicate the physical and material world, and Pakbaz says in his book entitled "Iranian Painting from prehistoric era to the present day": "Except in the periods of influence from Western traditions, no sign of naturalism can be found in Iranian painting. Instead, the stylization, symbolism, and embellishment were common from the earliest times in the visual arts of this region. The aesthetic foundations of Iranian painting were formed and evolved based on this abstract perception of the world" (Pakbaz, 2013, 8-9).

In this regard, Mohajer writes in his book entitled "The world of imagination in Iranian painting": "The painter employs the cryptic word and allegory to show the world of exemplification, because it is not possible to show a space other than that of the material world with the forms of this world. On the contrary, in order to understand these cryptic themes, it is necessary to have heartfelt and inner beliefs about the issues of the world of imagination, otherwise it will be difficult to analyze these contents" (Mohajer, 2012, 75-76).

4. Time and space

In addition to the discussion of signs in the painting, there is another discussion called 'time and space'. "In most paintings, time and space are not emphasized. It is not clear whether the artist depicted the day or the night, although there are signs such as the moon and sun in the sky because the elements are displayed in the same way as they are depicted during the day and at night. Also, the places illustrated in these artworks are unknown and strange places with extraterrestrial mansions. According to these points, the artist has been able to embody no time and space in his works" (Khalaj Amir Hosseini, 2008, 42).

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Figure 1.

The Ascension of the Prophet (PBUH), by Sultan Mohammad.

Source: www.wikipedia.org

5. Establishment of royal workshops

Pakbaz says in his book about the establishment of royal workshops: “After the Mongol invasion of Iran in the seventh century AH, the art of painting underwent changes. It was at this time that the royal workshops for book illustrations were set up (the first royal workshops were established by order of Khawaja Rashid al-Din Fazlullahi) and the art of painting experienced a significant growth. This art became a court art and lost some of its social functions. However, due to the connection of this art with Persian poetry, the artistic themes and expression became more extensive and this continued until the tenth century AH (Pakbaz, 2013, 9). Besides, it can be said that the painter who illustrated the books under the supervision of the royal workshops was somewhat influenced by them. This is mainly due to the fact that in these workshops, people called Naghashbashi were in charge of supervising the artists working there. The mystic artists such as Sultan Mohammad, because of their sincerity, were able to observe the images of the world of imagination. For this reason, this famous artist attempted to present his observations of the world of imagination in the artworks. Here, as an example, one can refer to the image of the “Ascension of the holy Prophet (PBUH)” by Sultan Mohammad (See Figure 1).

Based on the above statements, it seems that Figure 1 exhibits an extraterrestrial space, and the artist has benefited from a narration in the Qur'an to show this scene and all the components of this artwork are based on the descriptions given in the narration of this story. The artist has also been able to use the surface to illustrate a two-dimensional space and distance himself from the three-

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dimensional space of this world. The other case is symbolism in the creation of such works. The artists whose imagination plays an important role in their creation, necessarily and deliberately move towards the symbolic performances, because it is impossible to objectively display the subject of the work and have no choice but to choose symbols, although having an idealistic and religious vision.

The beginning of modernity in Iranian painting

Pakbaz in his book entitled "Iranian Painting from prehistoric era to the present day" briefly says about modernity in the contemporary painting: The modernity that is growing today in contemporary painting owes to the modernist movements that started from the Qajar era and especially from the time of Kamal-ol-Molk and had also influenced the Iranian painting. In this movement, the artists were looking for a way to change, both in terms of the implementation and the themes of their works. However, this change, which was influenced by Western art, had a long way to go, beginning with the establishment of the School of Fine Arts by Kamal al-Molk and continuing with the Academy of Fine Arts, and several years later turning into the Academy of Decorative Arts. However, today, four parallel flows can be named in the contemporary Iranian painting, including the academic painting, new painting, coffee house painting and modernist painting (Pakbaz, 2013, 185). Numerous factors and events have led to the prosperity of modern art in the contemporary era, which are referred to as the bases of modern painting in Iran. These bases are: School of Fine Arts, exhibitions and biennials, Tehran biennials, art associations, Khorous Jangi magazine and galleries (Moqbeli and Golchin, 2014, 45-48). In the following, the artworks of three contemporary Iranian artists (Mahmoud Farshchian, Iran Darroudi and Mehdi Hosseini), each of which has its own approach, are examined in terms of the representation of the world of imagination.

Mahmoud Farshchian

"The subject of imagination has been presented in such a novel way in Farshchian's works so that some of the elements in his works seem to have forms of this world, yet they lack matter, and vice versa, one can observe imaginary elements that are designed in the form of this world for a better perception (Rezaeinabard, 2016, 27). Farshchian has never restricted his freedom of thought in the world of Iranian painting, which means that "these artists, although being committed to the traditional arts of their climate, consider their thoughts and tastes" (Kumaraswamy, 2010, 65). Before proving this fact, looking at the paintings belonging to centuries ago, it can be found that many painters, despite their glorious illustrations, are still trapped in words. In the beginning, the painter was completely at the disposal of the poet and even the calligrapher's mind and narrated the essence of story and theme, like the paintings of "Shirin and Farhad" and "Ascension of the Prophet (PBUH)". However, Farshchian, in addition to paying

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attention to Iranian poetry, literature and emotions, has freed himself from the stereotypes and has also paid attention to his inner worlds” (Vazl, 1977, 10; Kayhan newspaper, 1977, 11).

Due to the separation from literary texts, novel structure and different functions, Farshchian’s works have unity both in form and content, and are the narrators of the artist’s soul world rather than the metaphysical one. In short, Farshchian has generally and relatively based his personal style on the original principles of traditional Iranian painting, but he has had innovations in all components of traditional painting (Rezaeinabard, 2016, 29-34).

Figure 2 depicts an example of Farshchian’s works called “Tazkiyah”, whose formal features are described in the following. This artwork is one of the magnificent and beautiful works of Farshchian illustrated in 1989. The story of the work is completely imaginative and arises from the mind and imagination of the artist. Some of its features are including the use of predatory animals, swords and two wings of a bird as a symbol and representation of extraterrestrial space, as well as the use of strong lines and volumes. This artwork is one of the philosophical works of Farshchian. “In this scope of the works, the philosophical literature in general dominates the form and content, and the main topic and pivot of this group of works are the existence and nature (existence and quiddity), causal relations and the issue of life and death (creation and destruction)” (Rezaei nabard, 2015, 72).



Figure 2.
Tazkiyah, by Mahmoud Farshchian.
Source: www.sadmu.ir.



Figure 3.
The last passage, by Iran Darroudi.
Source: www.gramho.com.

Iran Darroudi

Another group of contemporary modern artists made attempts to free themselves completely from the traditional constraints of Iranian painting, which was mainly due to their apprenticeship in European countries. "Antonio Rodriguez, one of the great painters, called Darroudi one of the great painters of the world. The critics refer to different styles for Darroudi's works, but in reality she does not follow a particular style, and in addition to depicting her mental world, she also expresses luminous perspectives and concepts arising from her culture"⁴. Salvador Dali has praised and admired her artworks many times. The light and its philosophy have been one of the main pillars in Iranian painting from the past to the present and artists have always emphasized it. "The sky, which is the center of light distribution, is a landmark in my painting. The sky of my works indicated my belief in the light of mysticism and at the same time my state of mind", Darroudi said in an interview with Minoos Badiei for Azma magazine. "I live beyond my eyes and my senses. When I paint, a feeling like inspiration comes out of nowhere", she says, summarizing how she created her artworks. She continues: "In my opinion, when creating, the artist unconsciously experiences the discovery and intuition" (Badiei, 2016, 66). In his article entitled "Colorful dreams of the painter of light and liberation", Mojabi divides Darroudi's work periods into four ones. The first period is gaining experience in the methods and strategies of the masters. During this period, she was influenced by the works of great artists such as Caravaggio and Turner. In the second period, she adorns her works with motifs which later become the personal brand of her works, and for this reason, her works take on a surrealistic atmosphere. In the third period, due to facing personal catastrophes, her surrealist dream leads to a terrible expressionist awakening, her works seem frozen and light is banished beyond it. In the fourth period, with the transition from the turbulence of life, light and brightness, which is one of the main foundations of Iranian culture, returns to her works" (Mojabi, 2016, 67-68). "The last passage" is one of the artworks of Darroudi, whose main features are briefly mentioned here (See Figure 3). This work has both perspective and unlimited environment. Although the painting has a special subject, it seems that it is the same as the universe. The intersection of heaven and earth indicates two material and immaterial realms, in a sense, finite and infinite ones. In addition, the light is at the center of the artwork. The audience's look at the work is moving from whole to part and from part to whole. Moreover, the colors are a combination of cold and warm, and meet a companion between love and firmness.

Mehdi Hosseini

Hosseini is also one of the modernist artists who entered the field of art several years after pioneers such as Jalil Ziapour and his generation. "The modern artist distances himself from the imitation of nature and engages in his mental

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experiences, which sometimes display absolute abstraction, sometimes mere decoration and sometimes an imaginary and strange world. Also, the modern Iranian painter pays less attention to narration and literary description, and all his efforts in this way are nothing but pure visual expression" (Pakbaz, 2013, 208-209). In Hosseini's modernist artworks, one can also observe the influences of Iranian painting, and in this regard, he emphasized in an interview with Mehr News Agency: "There is not a day that I do not look at Baysonghor Shahnameh"⁵.

"He has stopped time in these works through removing some visual elements such as volume, light and tonality. In other words, the painter has attempted to depict a timeless and spaceless atmosphere" (Mohajer, 2010, 38) which can also be seen in ancient painting. Another outstanding point in Hosseini's artworks is the effective presence of the element of calligraphy. "The precise moving lines of curves, flat surfaces and even the theatrical behavior of people as if pretending to do something rather than actually doing something, are among the features that Hosseini has borrowed from Iranian painting" (Morizi Nejad, 2004, 15). "Woman and plant" is one of the series of works by Hosseini which is depicted in Figure 4. The bold lines and making volumes by the line, use of limited colors, diffused light without shadows and lights as well as the abstraction or stylization are among its features.



Figure 4.

Woman and plant, by
Mehdi Hosseini. Source:
www.moareknejad.com

Comparison of the artworks in terms of the impact of the world of imagination

In this section, in order to better understand the above points, the different artworks are compared in terms of the effect of imagination, light, space, time, place and the signs used in them in Table 1. Also, Table 2 presents the type of artists' attitude and function of their works.

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Table 1 Comparison of the artworks in terms of the influence of the world of imagination .Source: [Authors](#)

Research samples	The Ascension of the Prophet (PBUH), by Sultan Mohammad	Mahmoud Farshchian	Iran Darroudi	Mehdi Hosseini
Research cases				
Imagination	In Imagination plays an essential role in the creation of her works Imagination plays an essential role in the creation of her works such works, imagination has moved forward so far as to eliminate a number of facts, and has a more prominent role than reality	Imagination plays an essential role in the creation of his artworks	Imagination is limited to the elimination of reality	Reality is still present, but it is influenced by the artist's mental intrusions
Light	Without a light source, colors act as a source of light in the works	With localized light against the diffused one in the previous painting	The light is created by the artist.	The light has appeared in a diffused form and the colors themselves have light
Lack of time and space	The atmosphere of the work is completely timeless and spaceless in relation to the subject	It has a timeless and spaceless atmosphere	It has a timeless and spaceless atmosphere	Being timeless and spaceless is important to the artist
Signs	Use of a variety of signs	Use of a variety of signs	Mostly symbolic	Symbolic

In Table 2, the artworks are examined in terms of their type of attitude and function of the artists.

Table 2. Comparison of the works in terms of the type of attitude and function of artists. Source: [Author](#).

Type of attitude and function	Past Painting	Mahmoud Farshchian	Iran Darroudi	Mehdi Hosseini
Attitude	Idealistic ⁶	Symbolic and sensory ⁷	Sensory ⁸	Objective and sensory ⁹
Function	Advertising and illustration	Illustration and individual expression of the new reality	Pure beauty	Pure beauty

Conclusion

The attitude of the artist is one of the main pillars affecting the creation process of an artwork. This attitude itself can be influenced by factors in different periods and places. As mentioned in the above text, in the past painting, in addition to the artist's imagination, factors have influenced the artist's attitude to display the

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world of exemplification (imagination). In other words, the artist's mind alone was not the main actor in the creation of such artworks, and this applies for all art schools of the past. However, as we approach the contemporary century and the cry for modernity in society, the Iranian painting was also affected by this modernism and went a long way until the emergence of modern works a few decades later. In such works, the artist and his imagination play a major role, although one can still observe the impact of original Iranian art on their works by analyzing them. In general, the main difference in the expression of the world of imagination between the artworks of the past and contemporary era is associated with the mind and imagination power of the artist. In the past, the painter's imagination was influenced by the principles and rules of the time while in the contemporary century, every artist tries to express his/her personal perception of the world of imagination and how to express it with his/her artworks. For this purpose, Farshchian depicted his world of imagination by eliminating the reality and paying attention to the stories and narrations like the painters of the past, Darroudi by distorting the reality and imagination and creating unknown spaces and Hosseini by displaying the reality, but in the way he imagined.

Appendix

1. There is a similarity between the sign and its meaning in terms of the icon, such as the photo. In this type of sign, there is no need for an interpreter.
2. An index is a symbol that depends on the meaning, and if there is no sense or meaning, it is not considered as a sign. In other words, the relation of signifier and signified is necessary and one must find a causal and natural relationship between them, such as the implication of smoke in the fire. In such a sign, an interpreter is not necessary and the relationship between signifier and signified is not contractual. An example Peirce has given for the index is a wall that is punctured by a bullet, but there is no trace of the bullet in. "The effect of the bullet infers its fire", Peirce said.
3. It is a sign that needs an interpreter. In the case of symbol, the signifier-signified relationship is conventional and optional. For example, "cryptogram" is something that is based on a contract and must be interpreted according to a previous agreement in order to be understood.
4. Antonio Rodriguez's comments on the type of Darroudi's views on May 23, 1976, available in the comments section of Iran Darroudi's personal website (www.irandarroudi.com).
5. Conversation between Fatemeh Hamedikhah of Mehr News Agency and Mehdi Hosseini with the title of pop-flavored art, Released on April 3, 2015 (www.mehrnews.com).
6. Idealistic attitude: which pays attention to the idealism beyond the human imagination, which guides all the choices and selections of the artist in the visual structures (elements and qualitative relationships of the element), and are classified as general styles.
7. Symbolic attitude: which cares about an internal cultural or extra-cultural concept which attempts to create the subject or meaning of the artwork within the frameworks of the signs, contracts or symbolic qualitative space in accordance with the structural conditions of the environment and concept. According to this view, all the choices and selections of the artist are formed in conceptual structures and cultural capabilities (elements and their qualitative relationships), which can be categorized into general and specific styles.
8. Sensory attitude: which pays attention to the author's interpretations. The introverted work is the one whose visual and tangible structure results from the artist's will. Hence, all the choices and selections of the artist are formed in the visual (elements and their qualitative relationships) and

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conceptual structures of the work in a time unit, and the element "it" surrounds the work and meaning as well. This can be found in folklore arts in specific styles and similar visual signs.

9. Objective attitude: which pays attention to the visual and tangible structure, in a way that guides all the choices and selections of the artist in the visual structures (elements and their qualitative relationships). This can be seen in general and sometimes specific styles.

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