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Muslims and Political Allegory in Elkanah Settle's *The Heir of Morocco*

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Abstract

In this article, I argue that Elkanah Settle's strong engagement in the political debates of the Restoration period resulted in a tendency to implement more allegories and symbolism in his works. His early successes as a talented playwright enticed him to become more involved in pamphleteering and playwriting to support his political views. The article clarifies that the representations of Muslim characters in *The Heir of Morocco* were heavily influenced by the contemporary politics of Restoration England. Remarkably, the image of the Muslim character operated in the contemporary political scene, as it was employed by a Whig propagandist like Settle, to convey and code certain political sympathies. The article shows how this strategy enabled Settle to reach a wider range of spectators, evade government censorship, and even to be adopted by major royalist theatre companies like The King's Company.

Keywords: *The Heir of Morocco*, Elkanah Settle, Muslims, Restoration, Allegory

1. Introduction and Review of Related Literature

The succession question had a great impact on the English political sphere during the reigns of Charles II (1660-1685) and his brother James II (1685-88). One reason behind this was that fact that the "restored" monarchy did not succeed in managing the complex relationship between the King and Parliament. The Parliament developed new political bodies in order to confront Charles II's ambitions of establishing an absolute rule similar to that of Louis XIV of France.

To make things worse between the King and the Parliament, Charles II's brother and heir to the throne, James, was openly Catholic. The Parliament took action and tried to exclude James from succession. Parliament leaders attempted to ensure the exclusion of James from succession to the throne. They issued the Exclusion Bill in 1679 to exclude James from the succession (De Krey, 2007, p. 156). The King's reaction was devastating as he dissolved the Parliament to prevent the passing of the Bill. The Exclusion Crisis and the great debate around it resulted in the emergence of

two new political factions – the Tories, who were loyal to the King, and the Whigs, who opposed him.

The political debate over the succession haunted London's coffee-houses, Parliament meetings, and theater alike. As early as 1665, Alnwairan explains, Restoration playwrights like, Roger Boyle, used their dramatic talents to comment on major domestic political concerns like the succession question. For instant, Boyle's *The Tragedy of Mustapha* (1665) "warned of the dangerous consequences of the unresolved succession issue in England" (Alnwairan, 2018, p. 92). This debate continued to the later years of Charles II's reign and was once again the source of discussion in theatres.

One of the popular plays that tackled this issue is Elkanah Settle's *The Heir of Morocco* (1682). In fact, Settle was one of the major Whig propagandists who utilized allegorical characters and plots as an indirect way of expressing his views on the complex issue of royal succession. Settle was best known for his two plays *The Conquest of China* and *The Empress of Morocco*, the latter play was selected to be acted at Whitehall in the presence of the King and the aristocracy. The great success that Settle achieved inflamed the jealousy of the first-class playwrights like Dryden, Shadwell, and Crowne. Undoubtedly, Settle engaged in a long quarrel with John Dryden in particular. Dryden saw him a rival and attacked him in a pamphlet entitled "Notes and Observations on *The Empress of Morocco*." Settle fired back in "Notes and Observations on *The Empress of Morocco* Revised," (Zimbaro, 1986, pp. 96-7). The attacks of Dryden resulted only in increasing the popularity of the young writer who proved to be no less talented than the masters of the contemporary theatre.

Settle found more opportunities in opposition than in writing for the royalist side. Although his shift to the opposition side deprived him of royal patronage, Settle found new powerful patrons who saw in him a potential ally. During the late 1670s, he moved away from the court to support the Whig party openly. Settle's first tragedy, *Cambyses, King of Persia* (1667) was dedicated to Anne, Duchess of Monmouth, the wife of James Scott, First Duke of Monmouth. The playwright supported Whig polemics that preferred the Protestant Monmouth as a potential substitute for the Catholic Duke of York. His political sympathies were expressed a decade later in *The Female Prelate* (1680) with a dedication to Shaftesbury, one of the leading figure in the Whig party (Nicoll, 1921, p. 232). Shaftesbury knew how to employ Settle's talent to support the opposition campaign during the Exclusion Crisis. In 1681, he urged Settle to write "Character of a Popish Successor and What England May Expect from Such a One" which warned of the consequences of having a Catholic monarch on the English throne. Settle speculates,

Can it be the duty of either Englishmen or Christians, to have that zeal for a corrupted leprous branch of royalty, that we must ruin both religion, government, and Majesty itself, to support him? How much more consistent would it be with the honest, prudent and lawful means of a nation's preservation, to take out one link of the whole chain of succession, than by preserving that, to break the whole to pieces? (qtd. in Furley, 1957, p. 30)

A "Popish King," Settle claimed, would be the worst enemy of England. Interestingly, Settle found other means to express his political beliefs. In addition to playwriting and pamphleteering, Settle was encouraged by Shaftesbury to prepare the ceremonies for the huge pope-burning

demonstrations in London (Brown, 1910, pp. 21-2). Such activities participated in shaping Settle's distinctive political character.

Whig leaders were very satisfied with Settle's performance. Brown points out that they urged Settle to respond to the satire in Dryden's *Absalom and Achitophel* that was directed against their activities. Whig leaders' interest in having a professional reply shows that Dryden's work must have aroused great anger among Whigs. Settle's poem *Absalom Senior or Achitophel Transposed*, made several political charges against Tory leaders, focusing his hatred on those Catholic activists in the party in particular. After the end of the Exclusion Crisis and the fall of his chief supporter, Shaftesbury, Settle decided to leave the sinking boat of the Whigs and join the Tories again. He published his "A Narrative of the Popish Plot" in 1683, exposing the lies of Oates (Brown, 1910, pp. 22-3). Eventually, Settle proved to be resourceful again when he changed his political allegiance for the third time as he abandoned the Tory party and welcomed William and Mary in 1688.

2. Discussion

Settle's deep engagement in writing political pamphlets and organizing pageants in the streets of London did not prevent him from writing new plays. His *The Heir of Morocco* was acted by the King's Company in 1682. The play must have been appealing to the Whig party as it was intended to ridicule the Tories. Settle's play is set at the court of Albuzeiden, King of Algiers. His daughter Artemira loves Altomar, a noble general in the King's army. The villain Meroin, tries to destroy the couple because Artemira rejected his earlier proposal to marry her. The play gets more complicated when King Gayland, the usurper of Morocco throne, falls in love with Artemira, too. The actions of the play reveal the true identity of Altomar who turns out to be the true heir to the Moroccan throne. Meroin tries to murder King Albuzeiden but Altomar saves the king and kills the traitor. This does not change anything as the stubborn Albuzeiden plans to marry his daughter to Gayland. Altomar kills Gayland in a combat and is sentenced to be tortured to death as a result. After his death, Altomar's true heritage is revealed to everyone as his true name is Muly-Mesude, the son of Muly Labas king of Morocco. Artemira stabs herself in mourning for Altomar. Unable to bear his great loss and guilt, Albuzeiden stabs himself, too.

The play is loaded with bitter criticism about Tories and court corruption. The complicated issue of succession is strongly felt in the play's emphasis on usurpers and legitimacy of kingship. Early in the play, Settle presents some hints about the ideal heir. Artemira is presented as the only legitimate heir to Algier's throne. She is portrayed as the perfection of nobility, chastity, and beauty. Albuzeiden promises to marry her to the courageous and noble general of his army, Altomar. Obviously, this couple would form an exemplary model of monarchical rule. Artemira narrates her father's words as she meets Altomar,

Daughter, says he, so much this gallant Souldier
 Deserves from Heaven and me, that tho' I ne'r
 Intended less than a Crown'd Head for you,
 Yet my Ambition now shall yield to Justice.
 Daughter, I am resolv'd I will reward

My Kingdom's Champion with my Kingdoms Heir:
At his Return prepare to make him yours. (I.i 4)¹

On the other hand, Settle presents a usurper king, Gayland, who ascends to the throne of Morocco by force. Artemira explains to Altomar the reason behind her father's inability to welcome the victorious general,

And if there's any thing that can detain him,
It is the Ceremony that he pays
To an Imperial Stranger. The Usurper Gayland,
That great Subverter of the Africk Empire
Is now my Father's Guest. (I.i 5)

The character of Gayland is more likely to represent the Catholic heir to the English throne, the Duke of York. During the later years of the 1670s, there was an increasing sense of mistrust and hostility against the Duke. The majority of those who opposed a future Catholic monarch looked with suspicion on Charles's inability to act for the good of the nation. In the anonymous *The Earl of Rochester's Verses For Which He Was Banished*, there is a clear reference to the Stuart brothers' political irresponsibility. One verse ridicules Charles who is "little wiser than his brother" (qtd. in Owen, 1996, p. 9). Further, Miller points out that the criticism was not Whiggish all the time. Even some loyal subjects, like Danby and Bishop Compton, looked at James with distrust, blaming him for much of Charles's political difficulties (2000, p. 80). In the play, the interference of Gayland, James's equivalence, in Albuzeiden's court is the source of the upcoming tragedies. Albuzeiden changes his mind and is now ready to marry his only daughter and heir to the usurper.

... The mighty Gayland,
The long-fam'd Terror of our Africk World,
Is Artemira's Slave, has seen, and loves her.
.....
And in his name full of a Fathers Joy,
I come to offer as his Advocate,
The Tribute of a Crown; and call her Empress. (I.i 6)²

Although some critics have made connections between the character of Altomar and Charles I, I believe that the positive qualities attributed to Altomar in Settle's play have much to do with the

¹ This text is taken from Early English Books Online edition of the play. All subsequent references to this text will be cited parenthetically by (act, scene, and page number.)

² This is not the only work in which Settle criticizes the Duke of York. In the same year, Settle's *Absalom Senior: or, Achitophel Transposed* was published anonymously. In the course of mocking Dryden and his heroic poetry, Settle attacks the pope and blames him for major assaults against England like the Spanish Armada, the Gunpowder Plot, and the Popish Plot. Brown points out that after attacking the pope, Settle denounces the Duke of York–Absalom in the poem – for his role in driving the king away from his people. On the other hand, Settle praises the virtues of Shaftesbury and Monmouth – in the characters of Barzillai and Ithream respectively. Brown adds that Settle concludes his attack through a mockery of the glories of James's rule (1910, p. 67).

Whig pro-Monmouth campaign.³ James Scott, 1st Duke of Monmouth, was born in Netherlands as the eldest illegitimate son of Charles and his mistress, Lucy Walter.

Monmouth's service in the army during the Second Anglo-Dutch War and the Third Anglo-Dutch War, as well as his success in subduing the rebellion of 1679 in Scotland, drew the opposition leaders' attention to the Protestant prince as a potential substitute to the Catholic James. Many Whig leaders urged Charles to legitimize the Duke of Monmouth in order to prepare him to ascend to the throne. De Krey points out that some Whigs even claimed that Monmouth was the offspring of an actual marriage between Charles and Lucy Walter (2007, p. 21).

In *The Heir of Morocco* there are references to Altomar's victory in his campaign against the Venetians which may refer to Monmouth's success in defeating the Scots rebels. The conversation between Artemira and Meroin highlights Altomar's prowess.

Artemira: Indeed Sir, our late wonderful Success
Over our proud Venetian Enemies,
Shews us no little Favorites of Heaven.
Meroin: Our wonderful Success! where lies the Wonder?
Could your great Fathers Arms be less victorious,
When led by Altomar, the Valiant Altomar? (Ii 2)

Monmouth's success in Scotland opened new possibilities for the young Duke. Before 1679, the majority of the exclusionists in the House of Commons assumed that the next in the succession line should be Mary, James's eldest daughter who was Protestant by upbringing. But, with Monmouth as a visible Protestant substitute so close to the events, major opposition leaders considered Monmouth as a more reasonable alternative to James. Consequently, Monmouth was hailed as a potential Protestant successor in London in the same year. It was obvious that James considered Monmouth a serious threat to his position as the successor to the English throne. Shaftesbury, on the other hand, sought to establish connections to the ambitious Monmouth in order to strengthen the cause of the Parliamentary opposition (De Krey, 2007, pp. 164-5).

For the Whigs, Monmouth was the savior of Protestantism and the country's liberties against the engulfing danger of Catholicism. Settle portrays Altomar as the savior of the Algiers and its people. When the villain Meroin betrays King Albuzeiden and draws his sword to stab him, Altomar appears on time and rescues his king. Altomar's earlier quarrel with the king does not prevent him from doing his duty. The dialogue highlights the patriotic side and nobility of Altomar,

Altomar. Triumphant Infidel, durst thy black Soul
But think to kill thy King!
What Lunacy inspired thy Frantick Rage,
With the least Hope t' effect the Savage Deed?
.....
But do I talk? Thy Crimes, and this just Arm
Fall on thee, Traytor.

³ See Susan Owen's *Restoration Theatre and Crisis* p. 265.

They fight, Meroin falls. (III.i 27)

In his play, Settle highlighted the deep disagreement between the father and his son, i.e., Charles and Monmouth. One of the sources of the increasing lack of harmony between the father and his eldest natural son was the latter's rashness and irresponsibility. When Charles suddenly fell ill in August 1679, Monmouth turned all his endeavors to gather city supporters in secret meetings to support his cause in case the king died. To Monmouth's misfortune, Charles recovered shortly and poured his anger on the disrespectful son. Charles stripped Monmouth of all offices and military responsibilities in both England and Scotland and exiled him to Netherlands (De Krey, 2007, pp. 165). Monmouth lost everything as a result of his political gamble. His collaboration with James's political enemies aroused the discontent of Charles who saw his son's actions as an offence or even an act of treachery. In *The Heir of Morocco*, King Albuzeiden refers to Altomar's intentions as traitorous in more than one scene. When Altomar kills the arrogant Gayland in an act of self-defense, the king directs his anger against his noble general,

But bold Assassinate, thy impious Fury
 Could lift thy Hand against the Life of Majesty.
 The best of men thou hast traiterously kill'd,
 And like a Traytor thou shalt die.

 T' appease the Blood of this great murder'd Monarch;
 By all my Hopes th' Assassinate shall die,
 With the same solemn Form of Death, our Law
 And Custom dooms a Traytor to our Crown. (IV.i 38)

Shortly, after the great London pope-burning of 1680, Monmouth appeared in London in a plain act of disobedience to his father. De Krey points out that the ambitious Duke was encouraged by Shaftesbury and other Whig leaders to return and assist their endeavors in passing the Exclusion Bill. Crowds on London streets greeted the Duke of Monmouth with great enthusiasm. People hailed as his convoy approached, church bells rung, and bonfires were lit to welcome their Protestant prince. The scene of his arrival reminded people of the enthusiasm of 1660 when Charles returned to London (De Krey, 2007, p. 168). The next year cries like "No Popish Successor, No York, A Monmouth" and "God bless the Earl of Shaftesbury" reflected the rising support among the political nation towards Monmouth as the true heir (McElligott, 2006, p. 161). Similarly, Settle labeled the virtuous Altomar as the "true heir" and "royal heir" in many scenes in the play. This is clear in the scene when the envoy of the Moroccan army arrives, reveals the true identity of Altomar and calls upon him to ascend the throne of Morocco:

Envoy: Great Sir, I come from the Imperial Camp,
 To tell you that the mutinous Souldiers, tired
 With an Usurper's Yoak, demand a Successor
 From the true Royal Line: And by their Threats
 And Clamors to the General Abdalla,
 Have forced him to discover that Prince Altomar,
 A noble Youth residing in your Court,
 But Stranger to his own great Quality,
 Is the true Heir to th' Empire of Morocco.

And in th' united Peoples Voice I come
To call him to a Throne. (V.i 46)

Settle seems to be attacking the image of the king as a father of the people. Opposition writings reversed the analogy of the king as a good father and replaced it with images of the tyrant or irresponsible father. Thus, Restoration playwrights with Whig sympathies, such as Settle, found no difficulties in highlighting the many weaknesses of their monarch that turned him into a model of a bad father to the nation. Susan Owen argues that bad fatherhood on the family level in a play can refer to bad rule and misuse of power on the national level. Further, Owen adds, Charles's inability to produce legitimate offspring was a proof of his incapability as a leader (1996, p. 164). Charles's failure in this regard had caused tremendous political turmoil and controversy during the years of his reign.

In *The Heir of Morocco*, Settle combines bad fatherhood with tyranny in his portrayal of Albuzeiden/ Charles's figure. However, Settle starts the play by providing an ideal image of the father king in order to destroy it later. Altomar and Artemira, pleased with Albuzeiden's initial consent of their marriage, describe the king as "Heav'ns nearest Care" and "God-like Father" (I.i 5). As the actions of the play get more complicated, the audience would realize that Albuzeiden is quite the opposite of this description. Artemira refers to her father as "Tyrannick Father" (III.i 39), "Bloody Tyrant Father" (IV.i 40), and "inhumane Father" (V.i 6). Albuzeiden's tyrannical treatment of his daughter further illustrates his weaknesses as a father,

Prepare, fond Girl, to obey thy Father's Will,
T' extinguish all thy vaprous wandring Fires,
And gild thy Brows with an Imperial Diadem.
Prepare by th' Setting of to morrow's Sun,
To sleep in Gayland's arms, or sleep for ever, (I.i 7)

Albuzeiden's/ Charles's inability to communicate with offspring/subjects threatens the whole royal family/ nation with destruction and civil wars. Morat, while conducting the final moral lesson of the play, warns of the bad consequences of bad fatherhood. The references he makes to destruction and bitter times can hardly be missed by the majority of the Restoration audience who lived through the hard years of the political crisis of succession. Morat concludes the play explaining,

See here the dire Effects of unkind Parents;
Our whole World bleeds for their unhappy Loves.
How calm a Stream is Love when unoppos'd:
But stop'd, the impetuous Torrent does o'erturne
Whole sinking Kingdoms, and makes Empires mourn. (V.i 51)

From a different angle, Settle alludes to the bitter consequences of the loyalty to corrupt fathers at the individual level. As Susan Owen points out, Whig playwrights tended to highlight the destructive consequences of loyalty to a bad father – or to the tyrannical government in the macrocosm– that caused pessimism in or even self-destruction of the subject (1996, p. 234). In his last breath, Altomar advises Morat to stay loyal to his king and fight for the good of the kingdom no matter whether the king will reward his loyal servants or not:

Fight for your Royal Lord; go on till you
 Have won him Trophies numberless as Stars,
 And Glory dazzling as the Sun: And then expect
 The brave Reward of all your Noble Toyls:
 For he's a King so just, a King so generous,
 A King so merciful---he can be cruel
 To nothing but to Altomar; unkind
 To nought but Altomar. (VI.i 41)

In more than one scene in the play, Altomar and Meroin express their disappointment with their king's neglect of their loyal service. In fact, this may refer to similar feelings among Restoration politicians. Owen refers to the play's criticism of Charles's inability to reward his subjects' past loyal service. The play's dedication alludes to the unrewarded service of the family of Henrietta Wentworth, Monmouth's mistress, during the Civil Wars. Criticizing Charles's ingratitude to loyal service, especially those who remained faithful to the Stuarts during the Interregnum, was one of the recurring issues raised by opposition writers. Whigs believed that Charles owed a debt of gratitude to his subjects who had supported his restoration to the throne of England (1996, pp. 260-66). In Settle's play, Altomar expresses his dismay concerning Albuzeiden's ingratitude,

Ungrateful King, is this the black Reward,
 Which you return your Conquering Soldiers Toyls?
 Have I for this, from all the Ports of Fame,
 Past all the Storms of Fate to make you glorious? (I.i 8)

Meroin expresses a similar notion of deep dissatisfaction in the course of his dialogue with Ishmael,

For twelve long years I was the *Algerine*
 Victorious Admiral,
 Till all my Services, my Toyls and Wounds
 Forgotten, my ungrateful barb'rous King
 Could cloud me in the Noon of all my Glories. (II.i 12)

In *The Heir of Morocco*, Settle addresses more issues concerning the meaning and nature of English monarchy. Settle questions the validity of terms like "divine right of kings" which was a recurring royalist theme used to enforce the power of monarchs in the early modern period. The divine right of kings is a political and religious doctrine that asserts that a king derives his right to rule from divinity and, as a result, he cannot be subject to any kind of human authority. The divine right of kings limited the power of other political institutions like parliament. Opportunistically, Settle attacks this doctrine in the play in order to weaken Charles's unpopular decisions related to the succession and further weaken Stuart claims of divine right to rule. When the king's orders are no longer divine, then it is the right of all subjects to examine and reconsider the policies of the king. In various places in his play, Settle tries to strip Charles of his divine rights and question his ability to choose a successor. In the play, the arrogant King Gayland views himself as a divinity, a god-like king who can never be compared with ordinary humans. He addresses the captive Altomar,

Arrogant Slave!
 Now by my Imperial Honor,
 I could grow angry with this crawling Insect,

And crush the hissing feeble stingless Worm;
 But Kings are Gods, and I will calm my Thunder:
 My Lightning is too proud to blast a Shrub. (IV.i 35)

This citation indicates how Settle refuses the Tory model of the king's divine rights. Settle alludes to the fact that divine right doctrine results in tyranny as in the case of Gayland. In fact, Settle touches on this issue more than once in the play. He mocks Albuzeiden's failure to act as a god. The king of Algiers admits his inability to control his own daughter and denies the power of divinity. He explains to Meroin that his daughter's,

... hidden Thoughts, her Heart's all Altomar's.
 Kings are not Gods: Our Pow'r extends o'r all but Souls.
 They like unbridled unsubjected Devils,
 Soar in that Air of which themselves are Princes. (III.i 22)

In a similar fashion to Boyle's *The Tragedy of Mustapha* and Whitaker's *The Conspiracy*, the general conspiracy against the succession in *The Heir of Morocco* arises from the ambitions of councilors and courtiers. In Settle's play, Albuzeiden seems to have full confidence in the loyalty of the wicked councilor Meroin. The king seeks the advice of Meroin on how to persuade Artemira to accept Gayland's marriage proposal. The king describes Meroin as, "My friend and Councillor" (II.i 14). But later on, Meroin turns out to be a traitor who only cares for himself. Meroin expresses his plans to interrupt the natural succession process by murdering Artemira,

No, Ishmael, there's a Spark in all great Souls
 Men call Revenge, supplies the dying Fire
 Of injured Love. To gratifie that last
 Dear pleasure, know this Sorceress must die (II.i 11)

In his tragedy, Settle presents a king who is unable to differentiate friends from foes. This was among the prominent defects of Charles II according to the Whig political discourse. Whigs believed that Charles was favoring the enemies of England over patriotic subjects. Charles's pro-Catholic diplomacy was concluded in the secret clauses of the Treaty of Dover in 1670. According to the treaty, Charles agreed to participate in any future French attack upon the Dutch. Further, Charles pledged that at a certain moment in the future he would publicly convert to Catholicism in return to Louis's militarily and fanatically assistance (De Krey, 2007, pp. 95-6). Whig political leaders believed that England was threatened by James, the Catholic successor, and Louis XIV of France with whom Charles had good relations. In contrast, during the years of the Exclusion Crisis, the majority of the political nation considered Monmouth and William III of the Netherlands as better alternatives to the Catholic allies of Charles.

3. Conclusion

Settle's involvement in the political quarrels of the Restoration period resulted in a tendency to implement more allegories and symbolism in his works. *The Heir of Morocco* served as a piece of Whig propaganda that conveyed certain political sympathies. Settle chose exotic settings and characters for his play in order to serve as an allegory for relevant internal crises. The discourse the play presents reflects the increasing partisanship in the Restoration political sphere.

From a different perspective, the intense involvement of the play in political negotiations resulted in considerable changes in the way in which Muslim characters and Islam were represented on the English stage. While the literary productions of earlier periods had discussed a variety of cultural and religious aspects of the Islamic world such as apostasy, Christian captivity in Muslim lands, and Oriental sexuality, Restoration drama showed little interest in dramatizing such topics. As a result, the play under consideration expressed no great interest in highlighting the distinctions between the different Muslim peoples represented – Moors, Ottomans, and Persians. Interestingly enough, unlike Renaissance drama, Settle's does not show great interest in commenting on the traditional notion of the superiority of Christianity over Islam spiritually and militarily. Muslim characters occupy natural or common roles that used to be occupied by Christian characters. Undoubtedly, the hostility against Islam is less obvious in the play as the plot the playwright created formed a unique sense of assimilation of Islam into English audiences. Consequently, one of the direct outcomes of the tendency to assimilate Muslim figures was eliminating much of the cultural and historical specificity of Islamic civilization. The Muslim heroes in the play under study act in a very similar manner to heroic Christian figures. As a consequence, among the main concerns of *The Heir of Morocco* are good political systems, honest monarchs, and a better practice of politics and religion. Settle presented Muslim characters to provide a kind of gauge by which domestic controversy over the succession could be measured.

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