Thomas Lodge and Elizabethan Republicanism

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Lodge the Republican

Thomas Lodge (1557?–1625) deserves to be much better known than he is. He does have a certain reputation as the author of the prose romance Rosalynde (1590), the principal source for As You Like It (Gillespie 2001:285-90). But he was also the author of a play of major importance, The Wounds of Civil War, published in 1594, but possibly acted as early as 1586, which undoubtedly had a significant influence on the development of the early English stage, opening up possibilities for other dramatists to exploit. It is, I would suggest, a rather good play: representing human and political drama in a nuanced, affecting and sophisticated manner. However, it has largely been dismissed by critics. Stephen Greenblatt claims that ‘Neither [The Wounds of Civil War] nor the other plays in which Lodge had a hand showed much talent’, although he does at least acknowledge Lodge’s role as a literary pioneer eager to take risks (Greenblatt 2004: 201). Even if we agree with Greenblatt’s judgement we need to acknowledge that Lodge expanded the range of political possibilities available for English dramatists, enabling them to explore the vital subject of republicanism, a key aspect of William Shakespeare’s early career.

English republicanism, especially before the advent of the English republic in the mid-seventeenth century, is hard to define because it consisted of a number of inter-related themes, ideas and affiliations and there was no republican pressure group at or outside court that could easily be identified. Nevertheless, English republicanism might be described as a faith in the power of institutions to circumscribe the authority of the monarch, allied to a belief that such institutions—parliament, the law courts, local and national government—had the means to make individuals more virtuous and so better able to govern. Interest in republicanism developed during the ‘second’ reign of

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1 On Lodge, see also Sisson 1966.
2 Lodge 1970. All subsequent references to this edition in parentheses in the text.
Elizabeth, after 1580 when it was clear that she would not bear a child who would keep the Tudor dynasty alive (Guy 1995). A variety of candidates emerged, most of them unacceptable to large sections of the English population whose opinions counted. The most likely successor was James VI of Scotland, who had the best hereditary claim. However, James was the son of Mary Queen of Scots who had been executed for treason in 1587, around the time that The Wounds of Civil War was probably first performed. This event, more than the defeat of the Spanish Armada, defined the political character of Elizabeth’s later years. Not only had the bold step of executing a monarch been taken, but the English were now faced with the prospect of her son becoming their king. What if he turned out to be a treacherous murderer whose life was ruled by lust like his mother? Furthermore, what if he brought with him the vicious sectarian divisions, ongoing civil war, and dangerous political ideologies that the English associated with Scotland? Given these circumstances it is hardly surprising that many not only made the effort to find out what complicated political beliefs other people had, but were also tempted to take some of them seriously. Republicanism did not necessarily involve the creation of a state without a monarchy, but it did enable subjects to control how a king or queen behaved and acted and it did encourage citizens to help ensure that the succession was passed to a suitable successor who was not necessarily the next in line to the throne in straightforward terms of the bloodline (Collinson 1994).

Of course, it is often difficult to separate republicanism from a native ‘commonwealth’ tradition which had similar aims, but did not always place as much emphasis on the institutions as on the limiting of the monarch’s prerogative (Worden 2002). And we should also bear in mind that republicanism was not necessarily—indeed, was often far from—a coherent political belief system. Rather, republicanism consisted of a cluster of images, symbols and types of precedent that were cited to make a case. Accordingly, we need to remember that republicanism was as much a literary as a political phenomenon, originating principally in the historical and poetic works surviving from the Roman Republic—Livy, Polybius, Ovid, Cicero, Lucan, and so on—studied by all boys at grammar school. It makes little sense, I would suggest, to study the history of republicanism without examining the history of the

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4 For an excellent discussion of the possible candidates, see Doran 2000.
representations of the rape of Lucrece, the banishment of the Tarquins and the protracted civil wars which ended the republic, and which included the deaths of Julius Caesar, Mark Antony, and Cicero. Republicanism as a tradition was a fund of images, stories and motifs, as much as it was a history of a series of ideas. *The Wounds of Civil War*, a forceful and intelligent play about the protracted civil wars that eventually destroyed the Roman Republic, was probably intended to inspire an English audience to make connections between the history of Rome and their own relatively recent past: most importantly, the dynastic struggles that tore the country apart in the fifteenth century when there was no obvious and secure succession. There is not necessarily an easy (republican) moral to the story: but the political parallels are impossible to miss.

**The Play**

*The Wounds of Civil War* tells the story of the conflict between Sulla and Marius which wrought havoc in Rome between 88 and 78 BCE. Lodge adapted the story from Appian’s *Roman History*, translated in 1578 as *An Auncient Historie and Exquisite Chronicle of the Romanes Warres*, a translation that was probably also consulted by Shakespeare when he wrote *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra*. There are a number of resemblances between *The Wounds of Civil War* and *Tamburlaine*, which was first performed in c.1587, but it is not clear which play came first, given the uncertainty of dating Lodge’s work. Lodge has often been seen as a minor writer so that his importance as an innovative figure has usually been underrated and his play dated later so that it is assumed to be the derivative work. If *The Wounds of Civil War* does predate *Tamburlaine*, then it has to be recognised as one of the most important plays in English literary history. Even if it was written in the wake of Marlowe’s iconoclastic, shocking and popular play, then it should still be

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5 On the habit of making parallels between Roman and English history, see Donaldson 2000.
8 For corrective views, see Whitworth 1977; Maslen 1997: 54-5, *passim*. 
given its due. Marlowe attacks what he saw as conservative notions of rank which can be undercut by the powerful and irreverent merit of *Tamburlaine*, and his writing is replete with republican themes and images (Riggs 2004). But it was Lodge who first made the direct link between contemporary English life and the politics and history of the Roman Republic, clearly realising that literary works that represented the history and intrigues of the republic were likely to find a large audience.

*The Wounds of Civil War* contains a number of key republican features. It represents the destructive struggle between Sulla (Scilla) and Marius as closely resembling that of the *Pharsalia*, Lucan’s anti-epic poem of the cost and brutality of civil war⁹; a large number of consuls constitute the body politic and discuss the conflict in terms of its effect on Rome in general; there are severe warnings against tyranny and the evils that are corrupting the body politic; there is a discussion of the responsibilities of those who undertake important state offices; and, most obviously, the play not only anticipates the rise of Caesar and imperial Rome, but looks back to the banishment of the Tarquins. The opening scene takes place in the Capitol, the meeting place of the senate, thus establishing the play’s political focus.¹⁰ The assembled senators and tribunes debate what they should do about the ruthless rise of Sulla, who, as the opening speech by Sulpitius notes, has ‘forced murders in a quiet state’ (1.1.10), to achieve his goal of being general in Asia to oppose the threat of Mithridates. Sulpitius’s support for his rival, Marius, is met scornfully by one of Sulla’s chief allies, Pompey, later to be the opponent of Julius Caesar in the later civil war which ended with the battle of Pharsalia. Pompey’s objection marks him out, at this stage, as an opponent of the republic and a supporter of imperial Rome, something of an irony given his later role as champion of the people and defender of the republic:

Believe me noble Romans and grave Senators,
This strange election and this new-made law
Will witness our unstable government
And dispossess Rome of her empery...
Yet may the sunshine of his [Marius’s] former deeds
Nothing eclipse our Scilla’s dignity.

⁹ For Lucan, see Lucan 1992.
¹⁰ Lodge is actually mistaken: the Senate met in the Curia Forum (Lodge 1970: 5).
By lot and by election he was made
Chief General against Mithridates,
And shall we then abridge him of that rule?
(44-54)

Pompey sees the contested election of Marius as a sign of a deteriorating
body politic, one which chops and changes its loyalty to its leaders when
it needs to support the right person in power, the classic Aristotelian
defence of monarchical government.\textsuperscript{11}

However, Pompey’s argument is then undercut by Junius Brutus,
who counter-argues:

Why Pompey, as if the Senate had not power
To appoint, dispose, and change their generals;
Rome shall belike be bound to Scilla’s rule,
Whose haughty pride and swelling thoughts puff’d up
Foreshows the reaching to proud Tarquin’s state.
(58-62)

It is hard to imagine a more republican speech in a more republican
context. The details are largely Lodge’s invention: Junius Brutus plays a
tiny role in Appian’s History, and makes no speech at all.\textsuperscript{12} The name
Junius Brutus provides a neat link between the legendary champion
against the Tarquins, Lucius Junius Brutus, and the assassin of Caesar,
his son, Marcus Junius Brutus, who was born soon after this scene took
place, and whose story is told later in the history of the Roman civil
wars.\textsuperscript{13} The political debates of the earlier and later events, the two
familiar republican moments, are refigured and revisited here. Pompey
and Sulla are seen as opponents of the republic, keen to overthrow
the power of its central institution, the senate, for their own gain. Sulla is
cast as a potential tyrant, like Tarquinus Superbus. The senators line up
one after another to cast their vote for Marius, who accepts the office on
their authority. When the senate does exercise its authority and appoints
Marius as general, Sulla stages an armed insurrection and seizes power.

\textsuperscript{11} Aristotle 1598: 325-31; 1946: 243-54.
\textsuperscript{12} This Brutus is only mentioned twice in Appian: see Appian 1958: 3: 113, 431;
Appian 1578: 29-64.
\textsuperscript{13} Appian 1958: 3: 517 - 4: 137 (Book 3, ‘The Civil War’).
Marius’s acceptance speech had singled out his own ‘honor’ (117) as a quality that derived from the senate, and reveals himself as the military heir of Scipio Africanus, the great general of the republic who defeated Hannibal. In refusing to accept Marius’s election, Sulla asserts that his own worth and honour count far more than those of his rival:

Marius shall lead them, then, if Scilla said not no,
And I shall be a Consul’s shadow, then?
Trustless Senators and ingrateful Romans,
For all the honors I have done to Rome,
For all the spoils I brought within her walls,
Thereby for to enrich and raise her pride,
Repay you with ingratitude?
(158-64)

While Marius derives his authority from the republican senate, Sulla asserts that they should all be loyal to him. His ‘honour’, in the form of conquest and loot, should gain him military and political authority. Marius looks back to the most famous and successful republican general, who protected Rome from her most terrifying enemy in a dangerous and protracted war that led to the unchecked rise of Rome as the key power in the Mediterranean. Sulla, in contrast, places the military first as the mainspring of imperial Rome, the first step towards tyranny (it was, of course, no coincidence that so many of the Julio-Claudian and Flavian emperors had either had military experience, or came to power as successful generals). When the two factions neatly divide on stage at the end of the scene, the audience knows that civil war has been declared, literally and figuratively, as the senate dissolves and political debate is replaced by military conflict. Mark Antony, father of the ally of Julius Caesar, throughout much of the play a spokesman for peaceful resolution, joins Sulla’s faction but urges his leader to reconsider his actions. Antony tries to persuade him to listen to ‘The pleading plaints of sad declining Rome’ (247), articulating the familiar motif of Rome’s republican decline leading to civil war and eventually tyranny. Antony tries to appeal to Sulla’s understanding of common—republican—values and to suppress his own selfish ambition so that the waste and destruction of civil war can be avoided. He poses a series of questions that he then proceeds to answer himself:

Tell me, my Scilla, what dost thou take in hand?
What wars are these thou stirrest up in Rome?
What fire is this is kindled by thy wrath?
A fire that must be quench’d by Roman’s blood,
A war that will confound our empery,
And, last, an act of foul impiety.

(254-59)

The later conflict between Pompey and Julius Caesar could be represented as a tragic waste, and it was hard to support one over the other, given their equally grand self-regard, causing a civil war when they should have united against Rome’s enemies (Norbrook 1999: 25-6). But here, it is impossible to disagree with Antony’s judgement, one made all the more powerful for being put into the mouth of a supporter of Sulla, a ruler who has already started to refer to the body politic in imperial terms as the ‘empery’, that the rebel general is to blame for all that follows. Sulla has lost sight of the republic he is supposed to serve and his reaction to Antony’s speech shows just how far his political understanding has fallen:

Enough Anthony, for thy honied tongue,
Wash’d in a syrup of weet conservatives,
Driveth confused thoughts through Scilla’s mind.
Therefore, suffice thee; I may nor will not hear.

(282-85)

Sulla’s recognition of his confusion means that he will not be able to carry through his plans if he pays attention to the sort of reasoned argument for which Mark Antony was justly famous. Politics has to give way to war, which will now dominate events in Rome, whereas before Sulla’s actions, military might was controlled by the republic’s political institutions.

The Wounds of Civil War shows that tyranny is the appropriate and inevitable political form for an overly militarised culture. Events transform Marius into a cruel tyrant, demanding that his followers dispose of anyone who offends his dignity and able to concentrate only on revenge for the ills done to him (4.1), before he is killed offstage in the final battle for mastery of Rome (5.2). His son, young Marius, rather than yield to Lucretius, Sulla’s envoy, stabs himself on stage. Lucretius had appealed to young Marius to surrender as one who wished him ‘An
humble heart, and then a happy peace’ (5.3.16), because he had come to realise the courage and suffering of Sulla’s enemies and now wanted to heal the breach between the factions and establish peace in Rome. But young Marius refuses to be persuaded as he has already convinced himself of the need for a dramatic, public end:

Now unadvised youth must counsel eld,
For governance is banish’d out of Rome.
Woe to that bough from whence these blooms are sprung;
Woe to that Aetna, vomiting this fire;
Woe to that brand, consuming country’s weal;
Woe to that Scilla, careless and secure,
That gapes with murder for a monarchy.
Go, second Brutus with a Roman mind,
And kill the tyrant, and for Marius’s sake
Pity the guiltless wives of these your friends,
Preserve their weeping infants from the sword,
Whose fathers seal their honors with their bloods.
Farewell, Lucretius, first I press in place,

Stabs himself).

To let thee see a constant Roman die.
(69-82)

The speech and the scene are entirely Lodge’s invention, as Appian merely tells us that he ‘hid himself in an underground tunnel and shortly afterward committed suicide’. Given that his father’s faction is about to lose the civil war it is not clear whether his death is to be taken as a noble gesture, and his desire to see Sulla assassinated, one that we should support. If so, then the death of young Marius is keeping alive the flame of a republican tradition in invoking the spirit of Lucius Junius Brutus, founder of the republic, and acting to vindicate the legitimate authority of the senate which granted his father his official position. Alternatively, the suicide might be read as a futile gesture, one that will only add to the destruction already caused by the civil war, a sign that death and glory have come to mean more than political debate, thought and action when armies rather than elected bodies ruler the state. Cicero, in his De Officis, had pointed out that military success was not desirable without good government, and argued that the achievements of peace were far greater

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than those of war. Either way, I would suggest, The Wounds of Civil War positions itself as a republican play, one that clearly had a major influence on the development of Shakespeare’s early theatrical career. Shakespeare explores the brutal effects of military dominance when political ideas and institutions are cast aside in Titus Andronicus, which may have been written in the early 1590s not long after The Wounds of Civil War. The same issues are discussed in the early history plays (the three Henry VI plays and Richard III), as we watch a powerful ruling class destroy itself until there is no one left to govern and the king is prepared to trade his kingdom for a horse, a potent sign of how far the body politic has shrunk in the hands of a selfish and corrupt elite. Shakespeare went out of his way to let his readers and audience know that he was interested in republican themes and issues. He wrote a poem about the foundation of the Roman Republic, The Rape of Lucrece, and then two plays which covered the history of the end of the republic, Julius Caesar and Antony and Cleopatra, which were probably first conceived as a pair (Bullough 1964). Later plays such as Hamlet explore the problem of political assassination and, in representing Hamlet as playing the role of a madman, draw comparisons to the career of Lucius Junius Brutus, who was also forced to hide under a cloak of lunacy. Shakespeare may not have gravitated towards republican themes and ideas in his works because of Lodge. But Lodge’s example certainly helped to make the trajectory of Shakespeare’s career possible (Hadfield 2005).

The suicide of young Marius casts a shadow over the remainder of the play. Sulla learns of his death just as he is declared dictator by his victorious troops. Lucretius repeats the boy’s own evaluation of himself as a ‘constant Roman’, declaring that he died with ‘more constancy than Cato’ (5.5.57), an anachronistic reference to the suicide of the younger Cato, who supported the interests of the senate in the civil war between Caesar and Pompey, and killed himself rather than surrender to Julius Caesar’s troops. He was one of the best known of classical authors, a key hero of the Pharsalia who became a symbol of Stoicism, the principal philosophy of the Roman republic and later republicans who resisted tyranny, shaming autocratic oppression with their deaths. Sulla’s

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16 Cicero 1583, fols. 32-3. See also Lipsius 1595, chs. 3, 6.
declaration and this subsequent news, transforms him into a cruel
autocrat such as Caligula or, more likely still, Nero, who forced the Stoic
heroes, Seneca and Lucan to commit suicide when they plotted against
him.\footnote{On Seneca, see Seneca 1969. On Seneca’s suicide, see Tacitus 1956: 363-66.}

In Appian’s History Sulla was made dictator for life and ruled over
an exhausted and impoverished Italy for two years, making compromises
with the senate, before he grew weary of political life and retired to his
country estate, dying a year later (Appian 1958: 3: 183-97). Lodge
 telescopes these events, so that Sulla’s disillusionment takes place
immediately after he receives the news of young Marius’s death. His
reflections on life, the world’s vanity, the pointless pursuit of earthly
glory, and preparation for death, transform the would-be military dictator
into another ‘constant Roman’, a Stoic philosopher, who chooses the
contemplative life in a time of tyranny (Aristotle 1980: 261-76).\footnote{The
irony is, of course, that if anyone has been responsible for the destruction
of the republic’s institutions and the onset of tyranny, it is Sulla himself.
He now corrects his errors by simply refusing to govern. When two
Roman burghers seek out his justice by asking him to adjudicate in a
minor civil suit, in which one has accused the other of seducing his
neighbour’s daughter and then abandoning her, Sulla seems astonished at
their presumption: ‘And what of this, my friend? Why seek you me, / Who have resign’d my titles and my state / To live a private life, as you
do now?’ (216-8) and he passes the case over to his consul Flaccus.\footnote{The
scene may well be related to one in Thomas Kyd’s The Spanish Tragedy
(c.1589) (which came first is harder to determine). Hieronimo is so absorbed
in the need to secure justice for the murder of his son, Horatio, that he
fails to administer justice to the citizens who come to him asking that he sort out their
cases, in his role as Knight Marshall (Kyd 1977: 3.13.45-175).}

Fortunately, the republican institutions have not been completely destroyed so a
residual form of government can continue. Sulla’s decision to become a

\footnote{It is hard to accept David Bevington’s judgement that Sulla’s ‘self-reform’ is
‘edifying if belated’ (1968: 236).}

widely read work of contemporary Stoic philosophy in early modern Europe
was Lipsius’ Two booke of constancie. See also Barbour 1998: 192-99, passim;
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Stoic philosopher, desiring ‘To dwell content amidst my country cave, / Where no ambitious humors shall approach / The quiet silence of my happy sleep’ (266-8), only serves to emphasise that Lodge has granted the moral victory to the republicans.

Conclusion

It is hard to read The Wounds of Civil War as a topical allegory of events in the late 1580s, although there have been some rather unconvincing attempts. Nevertheless, the play undoubtedly has a significant political charge, attacking tyranny and the violence it produces, and showing that reasoned argument and the preservation of political institutions that represent the people they were designed to serve, is an infinitely superior course of action to that of achieving success through the use of force. The Wounds of Civil War can be read as a response to the fear of religious war breaking out in England if the succession question was not resolved in a sensible way, a problem that had many anxious English subjects afraid that if the wrong monarch followed Elizabeth then their country could turn into France or Scotland, lands ravaged by brutal conflict (Axton 1977). And, of course, most people were only too aware of their inability to influence the course of events, one reason why republicanism, even in an inchoate or vague form, would have been appealing and why the brutal history of the end of the Roman Republic seemed so relevant.

Lodge was the son of a Lord Mayor of London, the grocer, Sir Thomas Lodge, who was imprisoned in the Fleet for debts of £2500 at the end of his term of office, having to borrow the money from London companies in order to be released (Archer 1991: 122; Sisson 1966: 7-53). It is probable that, like many Londoners, Lodge had great faith in the value of the customs, regulations and institutions of the city, seeing these as vital for the preservation of the public and personal liberty of its citizens, a confidence Shakespeare may well have shared. The anonymous treatise, A breefe discourse, declaring and approving the necessarie and inviolable customes of London (1584), praises London for

22 See, for example, Ryan 1958: 54.
its laudable customs, which have developed alongside the common law of the land, and which preserve the ancient liberties of Londoners (1584: 9-10). The author concludes that, like Rome, it is the duty of the city to spread its good practices far and wide (1584: 16). Lodge later co-wrote two ferocious warnings that London was in danger of losing all that it had slowly built up over the previous centuries if its citizens did not try and unite, cease rioting and prevent corruption spreading throughout the land. The first, a morality play written with Robert Greene, A Looking Glass for London and England (1594), uses the story of Jonah and compares London to Ninevah in order to persuade their fellow citizens to repent of their numerous sins (Lodge and Greene 1932). It also, tellingly enough, contains a number of serious criticisms of ‘Princes plagu’d because they are unjust’. The second, A larum for London, or The siedge of Antwerpe With the vertrous actes and valorous deeds of the lame soldier, was based on George Gascoigne’s eyewitness account, The spayle of Antwerpe. Faithfully reported, by a true Englishman, who was present at the same (1576), reproduced to warn Londoners that if they failed in moral and political terms, their city could be over-run and destroyed as Antwerp was by the Spanish in 1576 (Lodge and Gascoigne 1913). Clearly, the timing of this work has an eye on the impending succession.

The point to be made is that Lodge characteristically saw political upheavals through the eyes of the citizens of London and it is likely that The Wounds of Civil War is no exception. Perhaps, given Lodge’s eventual conversion to Catholicism in the early 1600s, his desire for republican reason rather than military action is a response to the laws passed against recusants and Jesuits in the 1580s, and the wave of executions in that decade. Lodge was called before the privy council for an unnamed offence in 1591 and later had to go into exile for two periods because of his religious convictions. Rosalynde can also be read as a plea for toleration and the acceptance of differences, as the usurper

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24 For comment, see Bevington 1968: 236; Ryan 1958: 54-60; Sisson 1966: 151-56.
25 Lodge and Greene 1932, line 944. See also lines 1271-92 and 1360-69.
26 On Gascoigne’s military career in the Netherlands, see Gascoigne 2000: xxviii-xxxviii.
27 See also Allen 1584.
28 DNB entry; Sissons, ‘Thomas Lodge’.
Saladyne’s banishment of his brother Rosader to the forest of Arden solves nothing and the right and better ruler returns at the end (Lodge 1995).  

Whatever the truth of these speculations it is clear that Lodge, a talented man on the make who did not enjoy the benefits of aristocratic status, helped to define the increasingly successful Elizabethan commercial theatre in the late 1580s, as a place where republican ideas could flourish. Lodge’s work contains many of the characteristics of republicanism: concern for the establishment and maintenance of a civic culture; hatred of tyrannical rule; suspicion of hereditary succession; belief that the ruler is really a servant of the people, whatever he or she might think; interest in political assassination; an awareness of the key features of the history of the Roman republic and a desire to show that they have widespread significance and application. In short, the Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre that came in his wake was often intensely political, frequently much more so than work that entered the public sphere through straightforward political channels. Lodge helped to establish the early modern theatre in England as a place of political debate, where complicated and topical issues of government could be explored. His pioneering work and the freedom it gave to working dramatists was not lost on other playwrights such as Shakespeare, who not only learned from Lodge in the late 1580s and early 1590s, but who clearly kept an eye on what Lodge was doing throughout his writing career.

29 Lodge also wrote a verse romance, *Scyllas Metamorphosis* (1589), which may have influenced Shakespeare’s *Venus and Adonis*: see Reese 1968: 58-88; Seymour-Smith 2000: 21. For discussion of exile, see Kingsley-Smith 2003, ch. 4.

30 A similar case has been made for prose fiction: see Relihan 1994. See also James 1988, chs. 8-9.

31 For a recent overview, see Patterson 2002.
References


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