

## Shakespeare's Country Opposition: *Titus Andronicus* in the Early Eighteenth Century

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Since the play's first performance in the early 1590s, *Titus Andronicus* has enjoyed a rather uneven performance history. William Shakespeare's first revenge tragedy achieved some considerable popularity in the playwright's lifetime, with regular performances until his death in 1616 and, as a further mark of the play's popularity, the appearance of quarto editions in 1594, 1600 and 1611. Subsequently, however, the play appears to have been largely ignored in England and, although the theatres reopened in 1660, the next recorded performance did not come until 1678, when Edward Ravenscroft's adaptation, *Titus Andronicus, or, The Rape of Lavinia* (not published until 1687), once again brought Shakespeare's tragedy to the London stage. Ravenscroft's version, which, according to the adapter, was "confirm'd a Stock-Play" (Preface), was then revived briefly in the two seasons of 1685-87 and again in the 1704-05 season (Avery 73, 76). The most sustained revival of *Titus Andronicus*, however, occurred between 1717 and 1724. In the course of these seven seasons the play was performed ten times, before it once again disappeared from the theatres until the mid-nineteenth century (Avery 80).<sup>1</sup>

Critics have unanimously attributed the first revival of *Titus Andronicus* to the political events of the late 1670s. Thus, Michael Dobson points out that Ravenscroft's moderately revised *Titus* was the "first of the Popish Plot's wave of Shakespeare adaptations," a group of plays which were invariably characterised by a strongly royalist stance (72). Jean I. Marsden similarly suggests that Ravenscroft's adaptation "thrived because of the *frisson* created by its parallels with Titus Oates and his accusations" (42), while the perhaps strongest

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statement with regard to the play's politics comes from J. Douglas Canfield, who has described the Restoration adaptations of Shakespeare, including *Titus*, as "royalism's last dramatic stand" (235). That the play's resurrection did indeed represent a political act is a notion supported by the adapter himself. In those "distracted times," when "neither Wit nor Honesty had Encouragement," when rogues aimed to "deceive and destroy both the Honest and the Wise," wrote Ravenscroft in the preface to his version of *Titus Andronicus*, a selfless playwright had to "expose to the World the Picture of such Knaves and Rascals" and awaken the nation to the "Treachery of Villains, and the Mischiefs carry'd on by Perjury, and False Evidence." Of course, these words were written retrospectively in 1687—*Titus* was revived shortly after Monmouth's failed rebellion in 1685—and, having replaced the original *apolitical* prologue with one which emphasised his steadfast royalist-conservative principles, Ravenscroft, by explicitly re-fashioning his adaptation as a direct satire on Titus Oates and the early Whigs, may well have wanted to find favour with the court of James II. Whatever Ravenscroft's exact motives were for publishing the play text in 1687, one thing is clear: the adapter wanted his version of *Titus Andronicus* to be interpreted politically, identifying as he did the play's main themes as perjury, corruption and self-interest, and, by implication, their binary opposites of virtue and honesty. In this sense, Ravenscroft's adaptation was certainly offering topical commentary on the events of 1678 and the political climate of the years 1685-87, a period of steadily increasing agitation against James II.

Even the play's revival during the 1704-05 season may plausibly be considered a response to the contemporary political climate. Anne Stuart's accession to the English throne in 1702 sparked a resurgence of royalist, High Tory political sentiments. High Church Tories not only began to restate in a highly vocal fashion conservative political theories, especially the doctrines of divine right and non-resistance, but also became preoccupied with the republican threat to Church and state apparently posed by the Puritans. In an effort to seriously weaken, if not extinguish, religious dissent, High Church Tories em-

barked on an aggressive campaign to outlaw the practice of occasional conformity (the Dissenters' annual taking of communion in an Anglican Church to satisfy the requirements of the Test Act), which had allowed Nonconformists to hold municipal and national office. The so-called Occasional Conformity Controversy reached a temporary climax in 1704, when, after the passage into law of a bill against the practice had already failed twice, High Tory MPs made the desperate and ultimately unsuccessful attempt of tacking a third bill onto an unrelated piece of proposed legislation. With its central themes of hypocrisy, deception and the destruction of the Church and the monarchy by republican Dissenters, the highly vocal High Church campaign against occasional conformity closely echoed at least some of the rhetoric associated with the Popish Plot. Ravenscroft's adaptation of *Titus Andronicus* was thus not out of place in the context of the politics of the early years of Anne's reign.

The possible motives for the extended revival of *Titus Andronicus* between 1717 and 1724 are rather less clear, however. After the turbulences of the Jacobite Rebellion in 1715, England appeared set for a period of relative quiet in high politics. The Jacobite threat had been all but defeated, the Tories, permanently tarred with the brush of Jacobitism, found themselves pushed to the political margins, while the Whigs represented a united and powerful force with a firm grip on the ministry. There was, moreover, no reason why this political calm should not last for the foreseeable future, since the passage into law of the Septennial Bill in 1716, which extended the life of Parliament from three to seven years, meant that the next election and its associated campaign—a period which usually saw an increase in riotous behaviour—was unlikely to take place much before 1722. Thus, the revival of *Titus* in 1717 occurred in a political climate that was markedly different from those of the earlier instances: the monarchy appeared no longer at risk from the attacks of Stuart sympathisers and conspirators, the succession had been settled, and the nature of the English constitution had ceased to be the focus of political debate.

Bearing in mind this seemingly 'uneventful' historical context, it is perhaps not surprising that several commentators have attributed the revival of *Titus Andronicus* around 1720 to the desire of a young actor, James Quin, to use the part of Aaron to demonstrate his theatrical powers. Thus, in his introduction to the Oxford Shakespeare edition of the play, Eugene M. Waith suggests that the play's lengthy run was largely due to its strong characterisation rather than any political lessons it might have to teach. Aaron, we are told, "was considered to be the starring part in these years" (46). Jonathan Bate, editor of the Arden edition, agrees—*Titus* was "such a favourite" in Quin's repertoire due to the part of the arch-villain—and adds that it was in fact Quin's theatrical ability which made Ravenscroft's adaptation a popular success (54). Thus, it appears that the underlying reason for the seven-year revival of *Titus Andronicus* was not, as previously, the topicality of the political subplot of the play, but the "grand opportunities" (Dessen 7) offered by the role of Ravenscroft's Aaron to Quin and other actors.

There is indeed some evidence for this account of the early eighteenth-century revival of Shakespeare's tragedy. The fact that *Titus* disappeared from the London stage in 1724 is of particular significance here, for the final eighteenth-century performance of the play on 19 March of that year was Quin's benefit. There were no financial reasons for choosing *Titus Andronicus* for the occasion. Judging by the available information on takings, the play was not a major success: the receipts listed for three performances in 1720 and 1721 range from a moderate £35 to a very modest £16 (Avery 605, 606, 613). To put this into perspective, the receipts for *Whig and Tory* were £82, £64 for *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and £22 for *The Emperor of the Moon*, all of which were acted within a week of *Titus*. At least the final eighteenth-century performance of *Titus* fulfilled the purpose of the occasion: receipts on benefit night came to £64 for tickets, plus £80 in cash donations (Avery 766).

Yet, while the play apparently failed to draw large audiences, there was a small group of patrons, identified only as "several Persons of

Quality,” who requested the play to be performed on at least two occasions (13 August 1717 and 8 July 1718; see Avery 459, 499). It should be noted, however, that these well-off theatre-goers did not necessarily attend performances of *Titus* to take pleasure in Quin’s interpretation of Aaron—Quin had no part in the 1718 production. Here, we do well to remember that the eighteenth century’s was “an *actors’* theatre in which many members of the core audience went again and again to see the same small group of favourite performers in an ever-rotating series of showcase roles” (Hume 45-46). It appears, then, that Quin’s choice of *Titus* for the benefit performance was based on a personal preference he had developed for the play, and that this predilection was shared by a small group of wealthy patrons; this common interest in *Titus* may well have had its roots in Ravenscroft’s revised and extended role of Aaron.

However, in the context of the play’s history as a piece of topical political commentary and the theatres’ heightened sensitivity to political currents in the early eighteenth century (Loftis 1), this explanation remains unsatisfactory, not least because it unduly limits the play’s appeal to the realm of actorly grandstanding. More particularly, it fails to do justice to the way in which *Titus* did, in fact, engage with the period’s dominant political discourses, as well as party politics. The play, I purport, can be shown to reflect Country Whig, or Patriot, concerns and, as a result, should be regarded as belonging to the group of Patriot adaptations of Shakespeare’s Roman plays which include *Julius Caesar* and *Coriolanus*. In this sense, the play represents an element of the cultural current which, in the 1730s, was to make Shakespeare “an Opposition playwright rather than an Establishment one” (Dobson 136-37) and the antithesis to the Grubstreet hacks employed by Walpole. *Titus* may plausibly be regarded as an expression of Country Whig ideas and, by extension, as a highly topical reflection on the divisions within the Whig government, the so-called ‘Whig Schism,’ which commenced with the move into opposition of Robert Walpole and Charles Townshend in 1717. In large measure, my argument will rely on evidence gleaned through historical contextuali-

sation, biographical information on James Quin and, of course, by attending to the text of Ravenscroft's adaptation itself.

By his own admission, Quin was not a Tory royalist of, say, Ravenscroft's kind. Indeed, by all accounts quite the opposite was the case. According to Horace Walpole, Quin, in a debate concerning the royal prerogative, made the declaration: "I am a republican, and perhaps I even think that the execution of Charles I might have been justified." (cited in *DNB* 553). We do, of course, need to bear in mind that the actor was said to be "vain, obstinate, and quarrelsome" and that his "wit was apt to degenerate into extreme coarseness and his manner into arrogance" (*DNB* 553), so that the above statement is probably coloured by hyperbole and designed to antagonise his royalist interlocutor. We also need to remember that early eighteenth-century 'republicans' did not usually want to see a repeat of the events of the civil war years. Rather, eighteenth-century republicanism sought to protect Britain's Polybian constitution from the transgressive actions of one or more of its three estates, especially those of the monarch's. The powers of the king had to be checked as far as possible, but the monarchy itself remained an integral part of the constitutional set-up. Even a well-known eighteenth-century commonwealth man like John Toland, who had been the major force behind publications of a strongly republican hue around the turn of the century, was asserting in 1717 that the monarchy represented the "very first of our three Estates" and was therefore "essential to our Constitution" (8-9). It is likely that Quin shared this Country—later Patriot—view of the English constitution, with its emphasis on the notion of a "Government of Laws enacted for the common good of all the people [...] as they are represented in Parliament" (Toland 12-13). Quin's qualifying statement that "the execution of Charles I might have been justified," moreover, strongly indicates that he did not harbour anti-monarchical sentiments *per se*, but that he subscribed to the notion of a contractual, elective monarchy based on a legislative which provided for the punishment of kings, should they engage in unlawful and tyrannical actions. In other words, Quin's statement suggests that he held 'Old'

or 'Commonwealth' Whig sentiments which shaped the political philosophy of the Country and Patriot oppositions.

That Quin's words were not merely a disingenuous retort in a heated political debate becomes apparent in his acting preferences and, perhaps surprisingly, also in his theatrical abilities. Quin, it seems, had something of a penchant for Patriot parts; two of his favourite roles were the famous republican hero Cato and *Julius Caesar's* Brutus, as depicted in the eighteenth-century adaptation of Shakespeare's original (*DNB* 552; Ripley 24). Significantly, these two plays and their exemplars of Roman civic virtue accompanied Quin throughout his stage life. While he had to wait until 1734 for the opportunity to act Cato—Barton Booth, the actor who had monopolised the part, died in the previous year—Quin became directly involved in Addison's play in the early years of his career. The exact year of Quin's first appearance on the London stage is uncertain—the *DNB* suggests 1714, while the anonymous author of *The Life of James Quin* claims that he was first employed by the Theatre Royal in August 1717—but we do know that one of the first plays in which he performed was *Cato*. During the summer of 1717, Quin, we are told, was "assiduously employed in studying several parts" (*Life* 9) in preparation for the following season. Importantly, one of these roles was Syphax, a Numidian admirer of Cato, which Quin performed for the first time in 1718 (*DNB* 551). Thus, if not immediately, then at least within three seasons of his arrival in London, Quin had secured a part in what has been described as the "climax" of the "dramatic celebration of political liberty in Anne's reign" (Loftis 44).

The general excitement created by *Cato* following its first performance in April 1713 is well known. Anecdotes abound of Whigs and Tories contending with one another in the vigour of their applause for lines which celebrated Cato's civic virtue and Roman liberty, and of substantial presents to the actors involved in the play, for their services in the cause of liberty (Loftis 57-58). The play evidently had an impact on the emotions of those who saw it, inculcating in the audience a patriotic hatred of tyranny and corruption, and a love of liberty

and selfless, stoic virtue—all of which apparently went beyond party affiliation. There is, of course, no reason why Quin should not have been affected by the Patriot sentiments of *Cato* as deeply as the audience. If we also bear in mind that the actor had only

an indifferent education, and was no wise given to what is technically named study, ridiculing those who sought knowledge in books, while the world and its inhabitants were open to them (*DNB* 553),

it is not unreasonable to assume that Quin's ideas of Roman civic virtue and republicanism were shaped to a considerable extent by Addison's play, which, as the editors of the play's most recent edition point out, provided "many of the words and images that informed republican sensibilities during this period" (Henderson and Yellin xi). Like so many theatre-goers, especially those who could not afford to buy expensive books on the subject, Quin probably received a substantial part of his 'Patriot education' from *Cato*.

*Cato* became Quin's favourite part soon after he made it his own in 1734. His admiration for the classical republican hero may be gleaned from an on-stage incident. During one of the play's performances at Drury Lane, a young actor who was playing the small part of a messenger, "in saying 'Caesar sends health to Cato,' [...] pronounced the last word *Keeto*; which so struck Quin that he replied, with his usual coolness, 'Would he had sent a better messenger'" (*Life* 24). The young man felt highly insulted by Quin's quip and later that night challenged Quin with knife-in-hand, only to be killed by the older actor in an apparent act of self-defence. Undoubtedly, Quin's dismissive treatment of the young actor has its roots in some considerable professional arrogance, but, given the relative insignificance of the young man's pronunciation error, we can also fairly assume that it derived at least partly from Quin's heightened sense of Roman dignity and reverence for *Cato*.

Additional evidence for Quin's Patriot inclinations comes from another one of his preferred parts, as well as contemporary assessments of his acting talent. Besides *Cato*, Quin also inherited from Booth the



part of Brutus, which he acted from 1733 until his retirement in 1751. Eighteenth-century audiences recognised the Dryden/Davenant edition of *Julius Caesar* as another theatrical expression of Roman *amor patriae*. While “Caesar was presented as the villain who suppressed liberty,” Brutus was “the ideal patriot with whom English lovers of liberty identified themselves and their causes” (Ripley 28). Particularly the revised final lines of the play unambiguously presented Brutus as a “magnanimous patriot and martyr to the cause of freedom” (Ripley 30). The significant extent to which Quin identified with the figures of Cato and Brutus becomes apparent in contemporary assessments of his acting ability. Quin, we need to remember, was judged to be only “almost a great actor” (*DNB* 553), and besides his celebrated strengths, he also displayed some weaknesses in his interpretations of certain parts. Most significantly in the context of this article, he was apparently unable to suppress his own personal beliefs and inclinations on stage. After having praised his voice, Charles Churchill, in his satirical commentary on contemporary actors, *The Rosciad* (1761), summarised Quin’s style of performance thus:

In fancied scenes, as in life’s real plan,  
He could not, for a moment, sink the Man.  
In whate’er cast his character was laid,  
Self still, like oil, upon the surface play’d.  
Nature, in spite of all his skill, crept in:  
Horatio, Dorx, Falstaff, still ‘twas Q[ui]n. (cited in Resnick 31)

Churchill’s observation is telling. On some occasions, Quin evidently struggled to make his characters believable, because too much of his own personality shone through in his interpretation. The reverse of this is, of course, that Quin produced his best performances when he was acting a part that closely reflected his own inclinations, that is, when he was able fully to empathise and identify with the character. According to contemporary commentators, this was usually the case when he acted Patriot parts: “His Brutus and Cato will be remembered with pleasure by the surviving spectators of them, when their candour would wish to forget his Lear and Richard,” wrote Thomas

Davies (cited in Resnick 31). Given his predilection for Patriot heroes, it is not surprising that, after Booth's death, it was Quin who "contrived to preserve [*Julius Caesar*] from desuetude" (Ripley 24).

Why, then, should someone like Quin, whose political beliefs echoed those of the Country Whigs, and who openly confessed his republicanism, find pleasure in a play that was closely associated with Stuart royalism? Ravenscroft's *Titus*, as we have seen, was traditionally revived when the monarchy was threatened by conspiracy and rebellion, or when the English constitution had to be defended against the subversive machinations of republican Puritans. Indeed, the adapter himself acknowledged the play to be a piece of royalist propaganda by identifying, in his new preface of 1687, Titus Oates and the early Whigs as the target of the play's criticism. The additional, alternative prologues and epilogues, moreover, offered unequivocal support to hereditary monarchy and Tory political philosophy. The "Prologue, Spoken in Lent," for example, exhorted the audience to "learn all due Allegiance [sic] to the King" and to "Leave Crossing Birth-Rights and disposing Crowns." The answer to the above question is simply that Ravenscroft's comments concerning the supposed political stance of *Titus* are misleading.

Dobson suggests that, in the volatile atmosphere generated by the Popish Plot, Shakespeare adapters, including Ravenscroft, tended to "blur the political issues of the plays they adapt[ed] by further distracting attention from the issues of loyalty and kingship onto the sheer pathos offered by the spectacle of their suffering heroines" (75-76). While the sufferings of Titus remain largely unchanged, Dobson's suggestion may plausibly be maintained with regard to Aaron, whose part is significantly expanded, and who, being tortured on a rack, is forced to witness the murder of his beloved offspring in a significantly modified final scene; this scene, moreover, sees the Moor betraying some quasi-heroic features (Bate 53). However, the notion that the politics of *Titus* are obscured and clothed in ambiguity by Ravenscroft's modifications is debatable. The impact and the extent of the changes made by Ravenscroft have, in fact, generated some disagree-

ment among critics. Dessen, for example, recognises “several substantive changes in the plot and motivation” (7), while Bate considers the adaptation to be “remarkably true to the original” (49). Through its chief departure from Shakespeare’s text—the foregrounding of the role of Aaron—Ravenscroft’s version, concludes Bate, “is an activation of potential that is latent in the [original] text, and in this respect it may be described as ‘faithful’ despite all its innovations” (54). Matthew Wikander similarly comments on the adaptation’s fidelity to the plot of the original and notes that Ravenscroft chose not to “offer up specific instances” of anti-republican and anti-Whig sentiments, but instead recognised that “the play as a whole serves as a speaking picture, an image of the bloody rapine of civil war” (343). Moreover, “by emphasising familial disruptions at the end of the play, Ravenscroft is not merely sensationalizing *Titus Andronicus*: he is in fact interpreting it, offering in his adaptation of the play a reading heavily influenced by divine right political theorists” (Wikander 343).

Bate’s assertion concerning Ravenscroft’s foregrounding of arch-villain Aaron is entirely valid. The basic characteristics of Aaron are there “in embryo” in Shakespeare’s original and, via “a degree of reordering and rewriting” (54), Ravenscroft simply emphasised the contending elements of the character in order to increase the villain’s appeal to the audience. However, what appears to have escaped critical notice is that Ravenscroft’s *Titus* also remained faithful to Shakespeare’s original in a different, and—in the context of the play’s polemical message—more important way, namely its politics. The political subtext of the play is established in lines 1-66 and 181-261 of Act 1, Scene 1 and, significantly, Ravenscroft decided to leave these sections virtually unchanged. These passages are, as Andrew Hadfield has remarked, “carefully written and staged as a balanced exploration of opposing political languages and assumptions” (472). Indeed, by creating new scene divisions, Ravenscroft provided a visible demarcation of the two overtly political sections from the episode concerned with the sacrifice of Alarbus, thus drawing our attention to the political issues, rather than blurring them. In Ravenscroft’s adaptation,

Saturninus and Bassianus's initial quarrel forms a significantly shortened Scene 1, which is continued and brought to a conclusion in a new third scene that commences with the speech in which Marcus asks Titus to "set a head on headless Rome." Titus's return from battle and the sacrificial dismemberment and burning of Alarbus now appear in a self-contained second scene and it is here where Ravenscroft made some substantive changes, which, as we shall see, offered an alternative inflection on the politics of the play.

The political languages and assumptions evident in the opening act of *Titus* do not suggest that the play supports a Tory-royalist stance, nor does its conclusion. The early passages in question describe the process of determining a new head of state, and outline, more or less clearly, the nature of the existing constitutional system and political institutions which govern *Titus's* fictional Rome; this nature, as several critics have asserted, is of a republican kind. T. J. B. Spencer, for example, has remarked that, either side of Saturninus's tyrannical rule, the Rome of *Titus* "seems to be, at times, a free commonwealth" (32). Hadfield offers more specific commentary and points out that the "lesson of the electoral game of the opening scene [...] is that Bassianus is the most suitable candidate" for the empery. Importantly, Bassianus's suitability is anchored in his invocation of "republican principles" in support of his claim (475). In a similar vein, and in contrast to Wikander, Quentin Taylor draws our attention to the fact that, in the concluding act of the play, Rome's constitution is given a "republican cast" through an emphasis on the "elective and merit-based" character of its executive authority (144). Thus, the politics of *Titus* may be said to be presented within a general framework of republicanism. In this light, James Quin's fondness of the play begins to appear more plausible. However, in order to establish which specific elements of the play might have appealed to an actor or audience who held Patriot sympathies, and to demonstrate the play's topicality, it is necessary to explore *Titus's* political subtext and contemporary politics in greater detail.

While there is a general consensus with regard to *Titus's* overall republican tendency, there appears to be some disagreement with regard to the exact point of departure of the constitutional decline charted by the play. In other words, of which constitutional system do we witness the decline? Spencer considers *Titus's* Rome a "commonwealth that only partly takes it [the hereditary monarchical principle] into account" (32). In contrast, Taylor comments that, while the play is characterised by "a degree of institutional ambiguity," there is a suggestion that the Rome of *Titus* is a "hereditary monarchy" based either on primogeniture (if we accept Saturninus's claim) or on merit (if we believe Bassianus) (133-34). Barbara Parker states, somewhat vaguely, that the "rulerless interregnum" at the start of the play is the result of the "collapse of the monarchy" (121). Hadfield is even less clear in his assessment of the constitutional system depicted, stating that the play offers a "condensed snapshot of Roman history, its cyclical movement back and forth between empire and republic" (470). At the beginning of the play, Rome, suggests Hadfield, has reached a point at which "a workable and popular constitution under a leader who has the backing of the people" (471) may be established. Shakespeare thus chose the transformation of the Roman constitution from a hereditary to a representative system as a backdrop for the revenge plot of the play. The opening scene apparently generates an "anticipation of imminent political change" in the audience and presents us with a protagonist, Titus, who "has the ability to rule Rome and direct it towards a better and fairer state" (Hadfield 471). Disagreements thus exist with regard to the exact nature of Rome's constitution, and the trajectory of the political decline depicted in the play. A close reading of the opening sections of the play will shed some light on the issue.

The first two speeches of *Titus* instantly signal that the play will concern itself with different constitutional models. Saturninus and Bassianus establish their respective claims for the empery, and in the process the two brothers emerge as binary opposites: while Saturninus insists on a "successive title" and demands the empery on the basis of his being the first-born son, the younger sibling speaks of his

right to be crowned emperor in “pure Election.” In other words, *Titus* immediately draws the audience into a contemplation of two fundamentally different forms of government: first, hereditary monarchy based on primogeniture and, second, an elective, representative system in which *vox populi* determines the new head of government. This immediate juxtaposition of two diametrically opposed constitutional models generates the initial impression that Rome has reached a crossroads at which it has to decide between a hereditary or representative monarchy. That no such decision has to be made, however, becomes apparent in the announcement made by Marcus immediately after the brothers have stated their respective cases:

[...] the People of Rome for whom we stand  
 A Party Interest'd, have by common voice  
 In Election for the Roman Empire,  
 Chosen *Andronicus* surnam'd *Pius*,  
 For many good and great deserts to Rome. (1.1)<sup>2</sup>

Marcus's first speech establishes the existing constitutional set-up of *Titus's* fictional Rome in unambiguous terms: Rome is quite obviously a representative, meritocratic monarchy. The fact that Saturninus and Bassianus stand against one another and present their cases to the tribunes and senators suggests that they accept that Rome has to make a choice, that is, elect one of them to assume the empery; there is no automatic successor. Even Saturninus, whose claim to a hereditary title ought to exclude any thoughts of an election, canvasses Rome's representative bodies to curry favour with them. That the constitution of *Titus's* Rome rests on an elective system is, moreover, demonstrated by the fact that Rome intends to make Titus emperor. Importantly, no attention is paid to dynastic connections, which undermines Taylor's suggestion that we are looking at a hereditary monarchy. The fact that, in order to follow due process, a leading tribune, Marcus, urges Titus to act as an official candidate in the electoral process serves as further sign of an established representative system. It is certainly apparent, as Taylor highlights correctly, that “the formal power of

electing the emperor resides with the people via the tribunes" (133), but I cannot find anywhere "a suggestion that in the Rome of *Titus* it was customary to bestow the crown on the eldest son of the late emperor." There appears to be no evidence in the text for Taylor's contention that custom has overridden election in favour of primogeniture. In this context, it should also be noted that Parker's assertion that the audience witness a "rulerless interregnum" after the "collapse of the monarchy" (121) makes little sense. The opening scenes of the play describe the transitional period between the death of one head of state and the accession of the successor which is unavoidable in a purely elective monarchy—when else would an election take place? While Rome does indeed lack a head of state at the beginning of the play, it is not entirely rulerless, as the representative bodies are administering state affairs until a new emperor can be installed. There is, in fact, no collapse of the monarchy in *Titus*, nor does the play concern itself with "the consequences of a 'headless' state" (Parker 121). Rather, the tribunes and the senators are working towards the continuation of Rome's elective monarchy by following due process and allowing an election to take place, while the tragedy of *Titus* rests on the choice of an unsuitable, unelected head of state.

It is true that, as Hadfield suggests, the opening of the play generates in the audience an anticipation of political change—after all, the old emperor is dead and a new head of state must be installed. Beyond this, however, there is no indication that any wide-ranging changes are imminent. It is also not clear why Titus should guide Rome to become a "better and fairer state" (Hadfield 471), and why Romans should desire significant constitutional modifications, as there is no suggestion that the late emperor abused his power to rule the Empire in a tyrannical fashion. Indeed, the long list of military successes referred to in Scene One indicates that the Empire is in a generally prosperous condition, while Titus's assertion that "Upright he held it [the sceptre], lords, that held it last" (1.1) strongly suggests that the late emperor was a fair and lawful ruler. The play offers no evidence for a popular desire to alter the existing Roman constitution.

Consequently, there is no reason to assume that anything other than a system of “pure Election” is and has been the *modus operandi* for the determination of a new head of state in *Titus’s* fictional Rome. The choice of Titus “by common voice in Election”—an event which occurred before the beginning of the play—would have represented a rather pointless undertaking in the primogenital system insisted upon by Saturninus. In itself, Saturninus’s claim to a hereditary title does not constitute reliable evidence with regard to established constitutional practices. In fact, there is no reason why we should believe anything Saturninus says—facing defeat, he falsely claims to be in possession of the “people’s hearts” (1.1.211), even though it has become perfectly clear that the people wish Titus to assume the empery. If anything, the impression one gains is that Saturninus’s claim to hereditary right is his final desperate attempt to win a battle he has been losing from the start.

Similarly, it is difficult to see how Titus’s clearly misguided choice of Saturninus supports the notion that Rome has reached the point of transition from a hereditary to an elective constitution. It is precisely because Titus makes the wrong choice—a choice that destroys the political harmony Rome had hitherto enjoyed and one that essentially disregards *vox populi* (in Act 5, Scene 1, Saturninus admits that Titus ignored the voice of the people by choosing him)—that we have a tragedy on our hands. Given that the tragic cycle moves from order to disorder and back, it would be problematic to assume that Titus’s choice is not somehow disrupting an established system or order. His selection of the hereditary candidate undermines a previously stable governmental system and swiftly leads the state into tyranny. The implication is surely that, had Titus chosen Bassianus, the existing order would not have been disrupted. It is also important to note that Titus’s downfall begins not with the sacrifice of Alarbus, but with his decision to disregard Rome’s existing elective system, and with that to override the voice of the people. Bassianus, in the knowledge that the people will choose him over his older brother, attempts respectfully to intervene one final time by asking Titus to support his claim, but the



request is ignored entirely. In an unwise move, the people's representatives, the tribunes, grant Titus permission to select the emperor himself, but, as Taylor has rightly pointed out, apparently only to "gratify Titus for his great services to Rome, implying that such a delegation of power was highly unusual" (136). Thus, the tribunes certainly "must bear a measure of the blame for abdicating their constitutional responsibility" (Taylor 136), but the choice to disregard popular preferences and, in this sense, to abuse the people's trust, is solely Titus's own. In other words, it is ultimately Titus, who, by following his predisposition towards lineal succession, subverts the established electoral conventions of the play's fictional Rome.

By throwing into relief the particular events and choices that result in the creation of Saturninus as emperor, *Titus Andronicus* not only invites the audience to witness the very moment at which a previously sound governmental system declines into misrule and tyranny, but the play also asks us to explore the underlying reasons which set in motion this decline. As we have seen, the tribunes must be apportioned at least some of the blame for undermining the existing constitution by allowing an individual unilaterally to choose the new emperor, even if this individual is highly esteemed. Yet, while the failure of the tribunes and Titus to choose aright at crucial moments paves the way for a political decline that affects all of Rome, the particular horrors that befall the Andronici have their origins in the sacrificial killing of Tamora's first born son Alarbus. The structural importance of the passage is maintained in Ravenscroft's adaptation; here too it is readily apparent that while the misguided political decisions alone would have sufficed to cause the decline of Rome into tyranny, Alarbus's death is necessary to explain the localised amplification of the cruel tyrannical rule visited upon the entire nation. However, Ravenscroft made an important modification with regard to Titus's motivation for sanctioning the death of Alarbus. In Shakespeare's original, Titus and his surviving sons merely adhere to established Roman customs. The religious context of the event is highlighted by both Lucius and Titus, who state respectively:

Give us the proudest prisoner of the Goths,  
 That we may hew his limbs and on a pile  
*Ad manes fratrum* sacrifice his flesh  
 Before this earthly prison of their bones,  
 That so the shadows be not unappeased,  
 Nor we disturbed with prodigies on earth. (1.1.99-104)

and

Patient yourself, madam, and pardon me.  
 These are their brethren whom your Goths beheld  
 Alive and dead, and for their brethren slain,  
 Religiously they ask a sacrifice.  
 To this your son is marked, and die he must,  
 T'appease their groaning shadows that are gone. (1.1.124-29)

The overarching message of these two speeches is that religious and cultural beliefs demand the sacrifice of Alarbus. Indeed, Titus, with his hands apparently bound by this time-honoured ritual, even apologises to Tamora for his inability to show the mercy she begs. In this sense, the killing of Alarbus is a public, institutionally sanctioned act rather than an example of private revenge. This is not to say that revenge sentiments have no bearing on the action—the passage is clearly informed by the Old Testament notion of *lex talionis*. Nevertheless, the action occurs under the guidance of a higher authority. Thus, Titus is at least partially exonerated once again, as he “acts not as a private citizen, but as a public figure in an official capacity. His actions are those of the Roman state, and, if not fully enlightened, are statesmanlike” (Taylor 133).

There is no such institutional framework for the sacrifice of Alarbus in Ravenscroft’s adaptation. Here, Lucius and Titus’s motivation is simply to revenge the death of an Andronicus, who—and this is Ravenscroft’s invention—had not died in battle, but as a sacrifice to Gothic gods. Tamora’s plea for mercy precedes the following revised passage:

*Titus* My Son, whom Chance of War your Captive made,  
 Was Born in Glory too, and for great deeds,

Adopted was the Eldest Son of Fame;  
Yet fell a Victim to *Plebean* Rage.

*Lucius* Deaf like the Gods when Thunder fills the Air,  
Were you to all our suppliant *Romans* then;  
Unmov'd beheld him made a Sacrifice  
T'appease your Angry Gods; What Gods are they  
Are pleas'd with Humane Blood and Cruelty?

*Titus* Then did his sorrowful Brethren here,  
These other Sons of mine, from me Extract  
A Vow, This was the Tenor which it bore,  
If any of the Cruel *Tamora's* Race  
Should fall in *Roman* hands, him I wou'd give  
To their Revenging Piety.  
To this Your Eldest is doom'd, and dye he must.  
Not to revenge their Bloods we now bring home,  
Or theirs who formerly were slain in Arms:  
For shew me now those Valiant Fighting *Goths*,  
I'll kiss their Noble hands that gave the Wounds,  
'Cause bravely they perform'd. This was no Cause  
But a Sons groaning Shadow to appease,  
By Priestly Butchers Murder'd on your Altars. (1.2)

There are several observations to be made about these lines. Inverting Shakespeare's original plot line, Ravenscroft has the Goths execute their Roman prisoner as part of a religious ceremony. Here, it is Tamora and her sons who commit sacrificial murders in the larger context of time-honoured Gothic rituals. Again, vengeance appears to play some role in the killings—both Titus and Lucius seem to suggest that the Goths' refusal to show mercy was due, in part at least, to their overpowering anger—but Titus's son was clearly not executed in an act of private revenge. Thus, where Shakespeare partially exonerated Titus by placing the murder of Alarbus in the framework of Roman religious conventions, Ravenscroft's inversion of the original achieves the same for the Goths.

Ravenscroft's alterations have important implications for our perception of the Andronici. Titus and Lucius attempt to claim the moral high ground by making a series of value judgements about Gothic religious practices and, by implication, Gothic culture as a whole. Lucius's rhetorical questioning of human sacrifice in the name of

religion strongly points to a view of the Goths as a barbaric and primitive people. Titus confirms this notion directly by referring to “Cruel *Tamora’s* Race,” and indirectly by implying that his son’s sacrificial killing was dishonourable and cowardly. The two men, it is apparent, consider the Goths to be culturally and morally inferior to Rome. Yet, it soon becomes clear that the Andronici’s words are not followed by any appropriate action that might suggest that these sentiments of Roman superiority are in any way justified. In contrast to the Goths, who sacrificed a Roman soldier according to their established cultural and religious conventions, and apparently soon after the conclusion of battle, the Romans merely seek to fulfil a long-standing vow of private vengeance. Alarbus is not killed in adherence to common Roman rituals, but, firstly, to satisfy the Andronici’s lust for revenge and, secondly, as Quintus points out, to teach the Goths a lesson in religion and morality: “Learn *Goths* hence, and after keep’t in mind, / That Cruelty is not the Worship of the Gods” (1.2). This moral lesson is, of course, a highly questionable one. The Andronici’s intention of righting a wrong by inflicting the same horrors on their enemies purely for personal satisfaction teaches one thing only, namely that cruelty is the worship of Rome. Indeed, Tamora says as much when she exclaims that “Intention made it [human sacrifice] Piety in us: / But in you this Act is Cruelty” (1.2). If, in Shakespeare’s text, Alarbus’s sacrificial killing and Titus’s failure to show mercy

blur the distinction between the supposedly civilized Rome and the barbarian Goths, showing the former to be as superstitious and pagan as the latter in their beliefs (Hadfield 471),

then Ravenscroft’s adaptation recasts this blurred distinction in a much clearer light. It is not Tamora and her Goths but Rome’s leading family, the Andronici, who appear morally reprehensible, at least at this early point in the play.

Ravenscroft’s new second scene thus offers a much clearer explanation for the subsequent decline of Rome into tyranny. While the high esteem in which Titus is initially held by Rome indicates his status as

a (formerly) outstanding public servant, on his return from the most recent battle Titus no longer acts the part of a public figure. His actions are clearly not those of an official of the Roman state, and his behaviour is not statesmanlike. Titus's personal desire to be revenged upon Tamora has obscured his view of Roman cultural and moral values to the extent that he fails to recognise that the sacrifice of Alarbus undermines the very civilisation he has sought to defend for forty years. Having witnessed the moral failure of the Andronici in Scene Two, it comes as no surprise to the audience that Titus fails to make the right political choice in the following scene. Here, he once again allows himself to be guided by his personal disposition toward hereditary government, instead of considering what is best for the nation.

In this sense, Ravenscroft's Titus is less of a tragic figure than he is in Shakespeare's original. The tragic focus has been shifted further towards the national political level: the aristocratic Titus, who is renowned for his ability as a general and celebrated for his unwavering loyalty to the state of Rome, has reached a point in his career as a military leader and political figure at which his ability to judge in the best interests of the state has diminished significantly. At the beginning of the play, Titus is shown to be a tired old soldier, who has become weary of military service. This is paralleled in his refusal to stand for election as emperor. Titus, of course, reasons that his relative old age would result in a further election in the near future, which could be avoided if a younger leader was selected. In other words, Titus declines office because he considers frequent elections to be undesirable. Given that the Rome of the play is based on an elective system, this seems a curious attitude to display for a 'senior official,' since infrequent elections effectively minimise, and thus undermine, the representative nature of the established system. Thus, what becomes apparent is that Titus's personal beliefs stand in contrast to established Roman values and systems. He is no longer able to act in a detached manner, to reach impartial and balanced decisions which are guided only by the national good. The Roman people, however, can-

not know this, as the misguided sacrifice of Alarbus does not occur in public. Ravenscroft thus enhances the dramatic irony of the early sections: while we realise that Titus is no longer fit for office, Rome remains oblivious to this and consequently continues to place its trust in the old general. Our knowledge that Titus is “absolutely lacking in political sense” (Hadfield 472) becomes obvious to Rome only after the dice have been cast. And herein lies the political tragedy of Ravenscroft’s *Titus*.

In her effort to demonstrate the thematic unity of Shakespeare’s Roman works, Parker highlights that “*Titus* encapsulates a political decline similar to that encompassed by the other four works, a decline likewise emanating from destabilized rule” (122). That *Titus* does chart the political decline of a previously functioning constitutional system is readily apparent, but, as we have seen, this decline is not triggered by destabilised rule; following the death of the old emperor, the senate and tribunal are in full control of the affairs of state, and there is no popular desire to overthrow the established constitutional system. The political decline emanates from Titus’s misguided and unrepresentative elevation to emperor of Saturninus, or, in other words, the decision to install an absolute, arbitrary and hereditary monarch to head an elective, limited monarchy. Moreover, in Shakespeare’s other Roman works, destabilised rule is a consequence of the abolition of monarchy in favour of eventual mob supremacy, which is clearly not the case in *Titus*; in this sense, the political decline charted in the play is nothing like the one depicted in the other Roman plays. The focus of *Titus* is not on the destruction of monarchy, but on the notion—and fact—of a state governed by statesmen whose private passions and inclinations determine the course of the nation. Nowhere is this more apparent than in Ravenscroft’s adaptation, which, by means of the altered Alarbus passage, emphasises as a central preoccupation of the play the corruption, political and moral, of the individual politician.

*Titus*’s central preoccupation may be readily related to the politics of the years around the play’s revival. Events such as the passage into

law of the Septennial Bill in 1716, the Whig Schism of 1717-20 and the subsequent emergence of a Country/Patriot Opposition in- and outside of parliament represent contexts which variously influenced an audience's perception of Ravenscroft's adaptation; after all, plays were not performed in a political vacuum. The issue which emerged over and over again in the debates concerning the above events was that of corruption. Thus, while the government's propagandists naturally praised the Septennial Act for reducing the frequency of disruptive election campaigns and the political corruption associated with these events, opponents of the legislation, which included both Whigs and Tories, "objected because the present parliament was to be lengthened without the mandate from the electorate" (Lease 43). Opposition politicians typically complained that "the voice of the people had been muted, and that since power came from the populace a basic principle of the constitution had been violated" (Speck 21). In other words, the Septennial Act represented a more fundamental form of corruption than, for example, offering and accepting bribes, as it had damaged the very foundation of the state; it was, as Hatton has pointed out, a piece of party political expediency, "passed for the convenience of a ministry which did not want to risk the election due in 1718" (211), since a Whig majority had seemed unlikely.

Late in 1716 news of another important development began to emerge, the so-called Whig Schism. A combination of the lack of a clear leader of the Whig ministry and disagreements concerning George I's foreign policy resulted in a split among the leading Whigs and of the party as a whole; Lords Stanhope and Sunderland supported the king's plans of pursuing an aggressive, expansionist foreign policy in the Baltic designed to curb the threat Russia posed to Hanover, while brothers-in-law Viscount Townshend and Walpole regarded these plans as not representative of British interests and opposed the policy. George finally ran out of patience and dismissed Townshend from government in April 1717, four months before the start of the *Titus* revival. Townshend was followed into opposition by Walpole as well as a number of other Whigs, and the two men made it

their business to inconvenience the ministry at every turn. Significantly, “although they had left office largely on a point of principle, they were not going to let party principle stand in the way of their return” (Speck 191) and, in a highly aggressive and opportunistic manner, blocked several policies which they had previously supported.

Those contemporary commentators who did not sympathise with the opposition naturally took a dim view of Townshend and Walpole’s actions. Matthew Tindal, for example, accused the two politicians of acting “a Part so inconsistent with all former Pretences” and of preventing the “doing of those very Things, they themselves declar’d to be necessary for the publick Safety” (5). The brothers-in-law, lamented Tindal, were “ready to sacrifice every Thing, Civil and Sacred” to their “Interest, Ambition, and Revenge” (29). Commentators who chose not to take sides highlighted the decline into corruption of the entire Whig party. Daniel Defoe, for example, reminded the Whigs of how they had previously “Upbraided the *Tories* with their corrupt Administration, their gratifying their Avarice, their Ambition, their Revenge” (37), and pointed out to them that they themselves were now pursuing the path of self-interested politics.

Soon after Townshend and Walpole returned to the fold of the administration in 1720, a new opposition led by William, 1st Earl Cowper, began to emerge in the Lords (Jones 310). These discontented Whigs and Tories collaborated in an organised fashion until 1723 and were held together by their

disgust at Sunderland’s handling of the South Sea Crisis, and the injustices subsequently perpetrated by the Townshend/Walpole ministry in response to the Jacobite conspiracy (316);

the banner under which they united was that of the long continuum of Country Whiggery, which emphasised an incorrupt pursuit of public interest. The tone employed by Cowper and his followers echoed the sentiments of seventeenth-century thinkers such as Algernon Sidney, James Harrington and Henry “Old Plato” Neville, highlighting the



threat posed to the realm's balanced constitution by corrupt ministers, who no longer possessed "the public spirit and civic virtue needed to lead the resistance to arbitrary power" (Dickinson 109). It is important to remember that the Country Whig notion of corruption did not merely refer to the crown's use of patronage in order to influence Members of Parliament, but in addition encompassed "the substitution of private for public authority, of dependence for independence" (Pocock 407). Unlike the rather more mercenary opposition of Townshend and Walpole of the preceding years, Cowper's opposition in the Lords once again revived the ideology of Old Whiggery in a highly vocal fashion. The well-known opposition group around Viscount Bolingbroke and William Pultney which emerged in the Commons in the mid-1720s was, of course, to continue Cowper's legacy of a Patriot opposition to Walpole.

The parallels between Ravenscroft's *Titus* and contemporary politics are readily apparent. Echoing the Whig ministry of 1716, Titus regards frequent elections to be undesirable. In an effort to avoid what he considers unnecessary elections, the old general disregards the voice of the people and thus sets in motion Rome's constitutional decline into tyranny. As we have seen, opponents of the Septennial Act described the ministry's act of political expediency in very similar terms. Similarly, contemporary assessments of Townshend and Walpole's actions during their time in opposition may comfortably be applied to the failings of Titus. The duo's strategy of continuously blocking governmental policies was motivated purely and explicitly by self-interest and a desire to establish themselves as the undisputed power brokers of their time. It is important to recall that contemporary commentators considered the brothers-in-law's move into opposition as an act of (private) revenge. In their efforts to assert their authority in the power struggle with Stanhope and Sunderland, Townshend and Walpole, Tindal tells us, were prepared to risk "every Thing, Civil and Sacred." Of course, Titus does exactly that, and more: he destroys everything civil and sacred by sanctioning an act of private and rather barbaric revenge, while his misguided political decisions, which are

strongly influenced by personal rather than public considerations, allow a tyrant to assume the empery. *Titus* thus mirrored, and brought to a logical conclusion, what opposition politicians and contemporary commentators identified as the shortcomings of the nation's political leadership. In this respect, Ravenscroft's adaptation may plausibly be described as a topical cautionary tale.

Country Whiggery did not exclusively deal in negatives, of course, and it is in the context of the most celebrated concept of country ideology, "virtue," that *Titus's* status as an anti-hero becomes most apparent. It was the republican hero Cato who represented the ideal personification of virtue. It is to Cato, Addison tells us, that we need to lift our eyes if we want to

[...] see to what godlike height  
 The Roman virtues lift up mortal man.  
 While good, and just, and anxious for his friends,  
 He's still severely bent against himself;  
 Renouncing sleep, and rest, and food, and ease,  
 He strives with thirst and hunger, toil and heat;  
 And when his fortune sets before him all  
 The poms and pleasures that his soul can wish,  
 His rigid virtue will accept of none. (1.1.50-58)

The contrast with the tired old Roman general could not be greater. Although Cato's benevolence makes him sympathetic to those closest to him, he never loses sight of his role of servant to the Republic. Neither personal allegiances and bribes nor physical and mental exhaustion can sway Cato, as he stoically resists the temptation to substitute public with private authority. His "rigid virtue" protects his political independence, while his "steadiness of mind" gives him the necessary detachment to triumph "in the midst of all his sufferings" (1.1.79-80). A definition of "virtue" by two of the foremost country writers of the period, John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon, highlights *Titus's* failings in a yet clearer light. The following passage appeared in Issue 39 of the highly influential periodical *Cato's Letters* in 1721:

There is scarce any one of the passions but what is truly laudable when it centers in the publick, and makes that its object. Ambition, avarice, revenge,

are all so many virtues, when they aim at the general welfare. I know that it is exceeding hard and rare, for any man to separate his passions from his own person and interest; but it is certain that there have been such men. Brutus, Cato, Regulus, Timoleon, Dion, and Epaminondas, were such, as were many more ancient Greeks and Romans; and, I hope, England has still some such. And though, in pursuing publick views, men regard themselves and their own advantages; yet if they regard the publick more, or their own in subserviency to the publick, they may justly be esteemed virtuous and good. (Vol. 1, 276-77)

Titus fails to adhere to this definition of the country ideal at a very fundamental level. Lacking Cato's stoicism and "steadiness of mind," the old general's revenge against the Goths is clearly motivated by his personal passions and interest; the sacrifice of Alarbus does not "centre in the public" nor does it "aim at the general welfare." If private interest and corruption represent the antithesis of civic virtue, then Ravenscroft's Titus is the antithesis of Cato. It is perhaps for this reason, in addition to dramatic considerations, that "republican" James Quin chose to act the part of Aaron rather than that of the protagonist. Despite Aaron's status as the play's obvious villain, it is actually the Moor who eventually "points the moral" (Bate 51) in Ravenscroft's adaptation, emerging as the unexpectedly humane counterpart to vengeful and infanticidal Titus and Tamora (Bate 53).

The textual and contextual evidence that has been presented in this article suggests that the seven-season revival of *Titus Andronicus* which began in 1717 had a political dimension. The available information concerning James Quin, the man responsible for the revival of the play, indicates strongly that he held Country Whig sentiments and that he had a special interest in Patriot plays. A careful reading of the text demonstrates that Ravenscroft's adaptation of Shakespeare's revenge tragedy represents a cautionary tale that was informed by Country Whig ideas and ideals, and it is likely that it was for this reason that Quin kept the play in the public domain for seven years. Moreover, the political and moral failings of Titus could be readily applied to contemporary Court politics and politicians, which suggests that the play held more than a merely aesthetic appeal for its audiences. Indeed, the oppositional character of the play and Quin's

own beliefs may also be reflected in the fact that the actor moved from the theatre in Drury Lane to Lincoln's Inn Fields in 1720, taking the play with him (*Titus* was performed for the first time at Lincoln's Inn Fields on 21 December of that year, see Avery 605). Interestingly, it is around this time that Drury Lane became associated with the "Walpole against the anti-Walpole Whigs, and Lincoln's Inn Fields [...] to some degree identified with the opposing groups" (Loftis 84). It might also be noted that Ravenscroft's adaptation was initially advertised as "Written by Shakespear. Revis'd with Alterations," thus deviating from the dominant trend of disassociating the play from the original author's name. Shakespeare's work, it seems, was being used in the services of Patriot politics somewhat earlier than has hitherto been assumed.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>See also Avery 458-59, 499, 544, 605-06, 613, 634, 683, 766.

<sup>2</sup>References to Ravenscroft's adaptation will offer act and scene numbers only, as the text contains no line numbers. References to Shakespeare's original text are to the Arden 3rd series edition.

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