

Shakespeare's second tetralogy describes the education of Hal, the Prince of Wales, during his ascent to the throne as King Henry V. By learning the intricacies and value of language, Hal becomes a leader who effectively unites varying social groups for a common cause. Thus, through Hal's education, Shakespeare identifies an important leadership skill that remains applicable in contemporary society. The in-depth literary analysis in this article yields an original insight into the intersection of literature and politics.

The Education of Harry le Roy

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*"The prince but studies his companions
Like a strange tongue, wherein to gain the language,
'Tis needful that the most immodest word
Be look'd upon and learnt."*

II Henry IV, 4.4.68-71

Shakespeare's second tetralogy presents a period in history when England moved from civil unrest to internal unity and international victory. Because Henry V—originally Hal, the Prince of Wales and son of Henry IV—brought about this unity, Shakespeare's plays contain a study of this legendary king's effectiveness as a ruler. However, Hal's future success is not clear from the beginning of the tetralogy. Until he assumes the throne, Hal frequents the tavern rather than the court. Although this preference seems morally dubious at best, Hal's choice of companions and pastimes becomes intelligible and even praiseworthy when understood in light of the education he receives in the tavern. Hal's tavern education consists of training in language: not simply combining words for the expression of thought, or studying foreign words, but complete communication which involves understanding the expressions and outlooks of others, especially those within one's own society.

This study of language enables Hal to become a leader who effectively unites varying social groups for a common cause; thus, through Hal's education, Shakespeare identifies an important leadership skill that remains applicable in current society.

In *I Henry IV*, Prince Hal becomes a thoroughgoing vagabond. Lounging in an Eastcheap tavern with his friend Poins, the prince muses that he has "sounded the very bass-string of humility," being able to call a "sworn brother to a leash of drawers . . . by their christen names, as Tom, Dick, and Francis" (*Henry IV.1*, 2.4.5-8). Indeed, by this scene in the play Hal has already become acclimated to the tavern environment, participating in the schemes of Sir Jack Falstaff. Whereas the play opens with Henry IV at court "so shaken . . . so wan with care" over years of civil war that he now searches for "a time for frighted peace to pant" (*Henry IV.1*, 1.1.1-2), the tavern scene begins with Falstaff casually asking the time of day, and Hal incredulously remarking: "What a devil hast thou to do with the time of the day?" (*Henry IV.1*, 1.2.6). In this bantering exchange, Hal marvels at Falstaff's boisterous nights of chasing prostitutes and his immeasurable consumption of old sack. Falstaff lives for pleasure, and Hal joins the fun.

Early in the play, though, Hal reassures us that he does not plan to skirt his royal responsibilities forever. Sitting alone at the end of the first tavern scene, the prince remarks that he "will *awhile* uphold/The unyoked humor of [their] idleness," yet inevitably, he promises, he will break away and assume the throne (*Henry IV.1*, 1.2.195-6, emphasis added). In this soliloquy, Hal shows that he is not naïve about the depraved nature of the tavern lifestyle, for he describes it as "base," "contagious," "foul," and "ugly" (*Henry IV.1*, 1.2.198-202). He considers his eventual abandonment of the life of pleasure an act of reformation, understanding the shift from tavern to court as a transformation from sinfulness to redemption. With foresight, then, Hal plans both to enter and to leave the tavern world. But if Hal believes this tavern lifestyle is beneath his character, why does he frequent the tavern, even temporarily?

The first motivation Hal reveals for his tavern life seems to be neither his own moral education nor a real regard for the common people, but a desire to launch a political ploy—a clever strategy "to so offend to make offense a skill" (*Henry IV.1*, 1.2.216).

Through a metaphor of the sun and clouds, Hal muses that if he stays smothered behind the foul clouds of the tavern world for some time, and then is missed, his re-emergence in the court will be “more wondered at,” and he will seem to shine brighter through the contrast (*Henry IV.1*, 1.2.195-217). In this light, the prince appears to be using his tavern companions less to educate himself in the ways of the common people than to provide a foil for his future role as king. Hal seems to be disingenuous in this plan: he superficially assimilates into the tavern culture while maintaining a belief in his moral superiority to that culture, all in an effort to accomplish a mere publicity stunt.

Understood as merely a political or self-seeking scheme, Hal’s plan to associate with the lower classes is unethical in two ways. First, in associating with the regulars of the tavern, Hal involves himself in unlawful and dishonorable acts. The prince’s closest friend and father figure in the tavern is Falstaff, a man who perpetually chases women, carouses, steals, and fails to pay his debts. In the first tavern scene, Hal mentions that Falstaff robs a purse of gold on Monday and spends the entire sum by Tuesday (*Henry IV.1*, 1.2.34-5). Poins enters by the end of that conversation and introduces a new scheme: robbing pilgrims who are on their way to Canterbury. Although Hal does not agree to participate in robbing the pilgrims with Falstaff—“Who, I rob? I a thief? Not I, by my faith” (*Henry IV.1*, 1.2.138)—he enters a secret agreement with Poins to rob the robbers. This alternate, comic plan is successful, and Hal and Poins bask in the embarrassment of Falstaff and the others who return empty-handed. After the joke, however, Hal does not punish Falstaff for his theft, but instead allows him to use the stolen money to pay for everyone to get drunk. The prince also helps Falstaff and the others escape the law by lying to the sheriff who arrives at the Boar’s Head Tavern to investigate the crime. After hiding Falstaff behind the arras, Hal explains to the sheriff: “The man [Falstaff], I do assure you, is not here,/For I myself at this time have employed him” (*Henry IV.1*, 2.4.512-3). Hal later refunds the money to the sheriff on Falstaff’s behalf (*Henry IV.1*, 3.3.177-8).

Hal’s political scheme is also unethical because the prince eventually abandons and betrays his tavern friends once he becomes king. In light of the first ethical problem—an association

with dishonest and unlawful actions—one could argue that Hal's abandonment of Falstaff and the tavern crowd is justified, necessary, and in the end, a moral choice: should not Hal cast off his bad influences? Yet, if Hal was befriending Falstaff *only* for political reasons, to help Hal's public image and to bide the time before becoming king, then presenting himself as a true friend of Falstaff and later disowning Falstaff would be a cruel and manipulative action, with Hal using Falstaff as a means to a selfish end. Indeed, Hal's dismissal of Falstaff is cold and seemingly heartless. When Hal (newly crowned as Henry V) is paraded through the streets, Falstaff rushes to the procession and calls: "my royal Hal . . . my sweet boy . . . My king! My Jove! I speak to thee, my heart!" (*Henry IV.2*, 5.5.41-6). Falstaff beckons Hal with all the pride and love of a friend, father, and brother. The crowned Henry V callously replies, "I know thee not, old man. Fall to thy prayers./How ill white hairs become a fool and jester!" (*Henry IV.2*, 5.5.47-8). Hal does not simply break his association with Falstaff; he breaks Falstaff's spirit. In *Henry V*, we are given the news that Falstaff falls ill and dies because "the king has killed his heart" (2.1.88). Hal's political ploy, then, includes unethical consequences, for it supports a utilitarian plan at the expense of a friendship.

Perhaps, though, an ethical defense can be made for the actions of Prince Hal. Whereas Hal's original explanation of his involvement in the tavern life seems more self-seeking, in the end we find that Hal's interaction with the common people results in an education rather than merely a stepladder to fame. Hal shows a real concern for the commoners, and instead of abandoning them for the crown, he asks for them to be educated in return. Hal derives his later political success largely from his time in the tavern, time he spends learning from and appreciating people. His actions demonstrate that this tavern education not only redeems his own double life of deception, but it also leads to a possible redemption for his friends, family, and subjects when he reigns as king.

By the end of *Henry V*, Hal has effectively led—and, in many cases, befriended—people from four different social groups: the English commoners, the English court of royals and nobles, England as a whole (including Wales, Scotland, and Ireland), and foreign nations. Although the results of Hal's education are clear, it remains unclear how the tavern education converts Hal into a

thriving leader. What kind of education can the uneducated commoners give him?

To view Hal's time in the tavern as an education rather than a political ploy, it is necessary to identify what it is that Hal studies. The tavern is a community of camaraderie, and under the humorous and life-loving leadership of Falstaff, Hal learns how to temper seriousness with play. Falstaff and Poins both appreciate using language in a clever or humorous way while participating in serious conversation, and they accomplish this through witty puns and clever speaking. For instance, Falstaff and Hal discuss the idea of good government through the metaphor of the moon and the sea's tide, describing the ebb and flow of government as controlled by nature (*Henry IV.1*, 1.2.23-38). It is likewise this reasoning that they apply to their stealing and later punishment. Falstaff also has the ability to turn rhetorically any disadvantage into a seeming advantage, such as when Hal claims: "I see a good amendment of life in thee—from praying to purse-taking"; Falstaff quickly replies, "Why, Hal, 'tis my vocation, Hal, 'tis no sin for a man to labor in his vocation" (*Henry IV.1*, 1.2.102-5).

In addition, the tavern world teaches Hal the benefits of role-playing. Throughout *I Henry IV*, we witness the prince and the tavern crowd symbolically acting out serious conflicts through bantering and comical renditions. The common folk seem both to entertain themselves and to contemplate serious issues through their use of acting and satire. For instance, Hal imitates the rebel Hotspur, humorously suggesting that Hotspur kills "six or seven dozen of Scots at a breakfast," complains about his boring, quiet life, then is greeted by his adoring wife who earnestly inquires, "O my sweet Harry...how many hast thou kill'd today?" (*Henry IV.1*, 2.4.98-106). Hal must later face Hotspur in defense of his father's throne, but he first encounters the rebel in the lighthearted medium of play. Likewise, Hal and Falstaff burlesque Henry IV's scolding Hal for his life in the tavern. In this exchange Hal eventually plays the role of his father, foreshadowing his rise to the throne, and he sets Falstaff, his ruffian father figure, on a sort of trial before him. Falstaff pleads for his true, valiant, and sweet self not to be banished from Hal's company, for he says, to "banish plump Jack" is to "banish all the world!" (*Henry IV.1*, 2.4.479-80). In this moment, Hal

turns the playful bantering into a serious reply, “I do, I will” (*Henry IV.1*, 2.4.481). When the sheriff interrupts the acting, Falstaff begs for the play to continue in order to afford an opportunity for his defense. Yet the role-play ends with Hal’s spoken judgment, just as the relationship of Falstaff and Hal later ends once Hal is crowned king. In the form of Eastcheap poetry, this vehicle of play-acting provides a helpful and palatable medium by which characters can apprehend and stomach serious matters. Through learning in role-play how to preside as king over the tavern, Hal can confidently claim, “When I am King of England I shall command all the good lads in Eastcheap” (*Henry IV.1*, 2.4.13-15).

Even with the positive lessons of clever language and role-playing, Hal’s education in crime still seems problematic. Hal evades the law and conceals the wrongdoing of Falstaff, yet his education in these vices is not markedly different from the education which he would have received in the court. While it would seem that life in the pub and life in the court should differ significantly in this matter, the nobles in court wallow in many of the same vices as the commoners in the tavern. Shakespeare presents a parallel plot in *Richard II* of robbers robbing robbers when Henry IV usurps the throne from Richard II. Although banished, Henry IV raises an army and returns to the country to steal the crown. Northumberland and the other courtly rebels originally aid Henry in the overthrow of Richard II, but in the end, they try to rob Henry of that very crown. Thus, individuals in both the court and tavern show signs of greed and selfishness, and Hal must learn how to guard against this vice in order to reign as king. Warwick, a friend of Henry IV, draws this conclusion and defends Hal’s association with the commoners:

The prince but studies his companions
Like a strange tongue, wherein, to gain the language,
’Tis needful that the most immodest word
Be look’d upon and learnt, which once attain’d,
Your highness knows, comes to no further use
But to be known and hated.

(*Henry IV.2*, 4.4.68-73)

Hal does aid Falstaff in his greedy ploys, but he conceives no such ploys after being crowned as king. We see this commitment to faithfully and impartially administering justice in several instances. In *II Henry IV*, Hal allows the arrest of Falstaff and lauds the chief justice, his former enemy. In *Henry V*, Hal stops the noblemen Richard, earl of Cambridge, Henry Lord Scrope of Masham, and Sir Thomas Grey of Northumberland from clandestinely usurping the throne. Finally, Hal punishes the commoners Bardolf and Nim for looting conquered towns against the king's orders.

Hal's education in the tavern seems even more advantageous when compared with the use of music and poetry in the courts. In *I Henry IV*, poetry is employed in the court of the rebels by Mortimer's new wife who tries to woo Mortimer through song. This scene has a comic element: Lady Mortimer can only speak Welsh, and Mortimer can only speak English. The couple turns to music as one of the only media of actual conversation, for Mortimer and his wife need a translator in order to say much else. This exchange between Mortimer and his new bride provides a contrast to the use of poetry and the arts to communicate in the taverns. Whereas the bantering language of Falstaff and Hal reveals deeper meaning and truth, Mortimer and the Welsh lady cannot achieve the truth engendered by role-play since their exchanges are necessarily limited to songs, looks, and gestures (*Henry IV.1*, 3.1.198, 211-9). Falstaff and Hal have an honest exchange through role-play, but music must translate the foreign language for Mortimer, and it ultimately fails to make the language more intelligible than a simple embrace would.

During this song Hotspur and his wife Kate sit nearby and playfully converse about the Welsh language. Hotspur beckons his wife to sing, but she refuses him twice in a strong manner. They communicate only through straightforward language and reject the use of poetry or song. Thus, throughout both of these courtly exchanges, art assumes a different role from its role in the tavern. Instead of providing a means to explore serious issues, it is used to cover the necessary silence of a mismatched couple, or it is left out of a relationship altogether. Indeed, poetry, theatre, and music are absent in the court of Henry IV as well.

Because of this absence of meaningful art in the court, Hal learns many lessons in the tavern that he could never learn in the

world of politics. Both worlds share unethical actions, but the tavern fosters camaraderie and an appreciation for language and the arts. These lessons are often lost in the political realm. Thus, through educating his mind in the language of the tavern, Hal effectively communicates with and learns from the commoners, finding a community of individuals for which he deeply cares. Just as Hal has crossed the line from the court to the common life, as king, he extends his hand to his common comrades and asks them to cross back with him in return. The court does not serve as the flawless herald of the law, but for the tavern folk, the military and political world Hal offers could serve as an education in the noble, honorable, and lawful life.

Hal tries to educate Falstaff through including him in the activity of courtly life and military leadership. When Hal pledges to fight against the rebels on his father's behalf, he assigns Falstaff a war commission and puts him in charge of a brigade of foot soldiers. Hal quickly departs on his military errand with Peto after this announcement, while Falstaff does not allow the war effort to come between him and a good breakfast. Later, Falstaff's venality causes him to compromise the strength of the army. On the road to Coventry the next day, Falstaff admits that he has "misus'd the King's press damnably" (*Henry IV.1*, 4.2.12-13). Instead of raising an army of capable soldiers, he accepts bribes from the men able to provide them and assembles an army from those who cannot, men he calls "slaves as ragged as Lazarus in the painted cloth...a hundred and fifty totter'd prodigals lately come from swine-keeping," having found most of them in prison (*Henry IV.1*, 4.2.25-42). Unsurprisingly, not three of these one hundred and fifty starved beggars are left alive after the battle (*Henry IV.1*, 5.3.36-7). In this episode we see Falstaff's unwillingness to embrace honor and nobility. Instead, he denounces honor as nothing more than a word (*Henry IV.1*, 5.1.133-4). Valuing his own life above the cause of the kingdom or his fellow soldier, Falstaff decides that the "better part of valor is discretion, in which better part I have sav'd my life" (*Henry IV.1*, 5.4.119-21). Here we discover the limitation to Falstaff's character: when an action does not include his personal happiness or pleasure, when duty for a greater cause beckons, Falstaff abandons his responsibility. In this way, he abandons the courtly Hal.

It is Falstaff's inability to learn noble lessons that leads to his destruction. Falstaff is a foil to Hal; unlike the prince, he is unwilling to give up his harmful habits. In the end, Hal has no choice but to give up his old friend Falstaff until Falstaff has reformed. Falstaff does truly love Hal, but he plans to use the political advantage of knowing the king to continue in a dishonest lifestyle interminably. Before rushing to Henry V's procession, Falstaff exclaims: "[T]he laws of England are at my commandment. Blessed are they that have been my friends, and woe to my Lord Chief Justice!" (*Henry IV.2*, 5.3.136-8). When Hal rejects Falstaff, he banishes him on the pain of death, not in order to betray his friend, but to provide a chance for Falstaff to be educated in the ways of the law. Toward this education, Henry V offers Falstaff a modest pension and pledges to give him advancement if the old man reforms himself (*Henry IV.2*, 5.5.66-70). Unlike Hal, Falstaff never learns to speak the language of the opposing culture.

Much like Falstaff, Henry IV remains unrepentant in an approach to the common people that contradicts Hal's approach. In reproaching Hal for gallivanting in the tavern, Henry argues that he would not have received the crown if he had interacted in such a way with the common folk:

Had I so lavish of my presence been,
 So common-hackney'd in the eyes of men,
 So stale and cheap to vulgar company,
 Opinion, that did help me to the crown,
 Had still kept loyal to possession,
 And left me in reputeless banishment
 A fellow of no mark nor likelihood.

(*Henry IV.1*, 3.2.39-45)

Unlike Hal, Henry believes in keeping his image fresh, new, and revered, showing himself to the common people only on rare occasions such as a feast (*Henry IV.1*, 3.2.55-60). Not only does Henry therefore ally himself with a doctrine of avoiding the commoners, he has received and sustained his rule on the basis of political shrewdness instead of virtue. Robert J. Fehrenbach comments in the *Shakespeare Quarterly* that Henry, even as king,

actually “identifies himself with a plotter against the throne” through praising the rebel Hotspur for his leadership and prowess; Fehrenbach continues, “This is the ‘politician’ talking, the man who views ambition for the throne as paramount and as a motive annihilating all other considerations” (46). After nights of sleeplessness and worry, Henry, on his deathbed, admits to this political scheming, confessing that he donned the crown through “by-paths and indirect crook’d ways,” and thus “troublesome it sate upon [his] head” (*Henry IV.2*, 4.5.184-86). Henry’s character and his ability as a ruler remain on unstable ground because of his inability to unite the people to his cause. In the end, Henry usurps not only the throne, but the common good.

When Prince Hal is crowned Henry V, he becomes the educated leader that his father and Falstaff could never be. As a result of his education, Hal upholds the law, unifies England, and effectively communicates with his subjects. Hal’s first action as king is to verify that the Lord Chief Justice will retain his post over the law. Although Hal initially questions the chief justice about the indignities Hal suffered in the tavern world, Hal affirms the justice’s role in bearing the balance and sword. He has reached a maturity in his understanding of the law and no longer allows himself or his friends to be above justice. Yet Hal deems it necessary that a youth should experience an education akin to his own, one that includes both pushing the limits of the law and learning to abide by the law: “I do wish your honors may increase,/Till you do live to see a son of mine/Offend you *and* obey you, as I did” (*Henry IV.2*, 5.2.104-6, emphasis added). Those who participate only in the former part of this education and never learn the latter lack the ethical instruction necessary to function successfully in society. As mentioned previously, Hal shows his commitment to this completed education in his dismissal of Falstaff and his later punishments of Bardolph and Nim. Thus, the king does not permit ignorance but demands that his subjects take responsibility for their actions.

Hal’s education also enables him to unify social classes in England as well as other cultures. The army which travels to France in *Henry V* includes three foreign captains, one of whom is Fluellen, a Welshman. Shakespeare presents Fluellen as an affable individual who tends to defy the scope of his stereotype. Though he is clownish in his beginning scenes, Fluellen proves

to be a competent and brave leader. For instance, he has studied the military history of “true disciplines of the wars,” or the “Roman disciplines” (*Henry V*, 3.2.72-3). In the character of Fluellen we find a mix of play and seriousness, echoing the discussions of Falstaff and Hal in the tavern. As Fluellen and Gower, an English captain, walk together in the night before the battle of Agincourt, Fluellen effectively hushes Gower’s loud speaking through scolding with comic hyperbole: “If the enemy is an ass and a fool, and a prating coxcomb, is it meet, think you, that we should also, look you, be an ass and a fool and a prating coxcomb . . . ?” (*Henry V*, 4.1.77-9). Hal recognizes and admires this virtuous behavior of Fluellen, commenting, “There is much care and valor in this Welshman” (*Henry V*, 4.1.84). In an exchange with Fluellen, Hal acknowledges that the Welsh have performed honorable services for the king and, further, personally praises the Welshman for his loyalty. Hal even aligns himself with Fluellen as a fellow countryman (*Henry V*, 4.7.91-114), and his strong regard for a Welsh captain serves as an indicator of the pluralistic society the prince has created and personally promotes.

Hal fulfills his duty of being king of all the good lads of Eastcheap when, as Henry V, he addresses all of his soldiers, both noble and poor, as dear friends. He turns first to the nobles and charges them to aspire to the reputation of their bloodline and to serve as an example for the commoners (*Henry V*, 3.1.17-23). He then addresses the good yeomen and praises them for their worth, “For there is none of you so mean and base/That hath not noble lustre in your eyes” (*Henry V*, 3.1.29-30). In the tavern Hal had experienced the noble luster in the eyes of the commoners firsthand. Later he beckons the whole army of his troops to take heart in their small numbers, for the “fewer men, the greater share of honor” (*Henry V*, 4.3.22). In this speech, Hal combines the rhetoric he learned in the tavern with the sense of fighting for honor that he learned in defeating the rebels for his father, and he succeeds in encouraging his troops. Whereas Falstaff refused the chance for honor that Hal offered him, the troops in the Battle of Agincourt rise to his call and are victorious.

The night before the Battle of Agincourt, Hal wraps himself in a borrowed cloak and sits anonymously by the common campfire, listening to whomever wanders by and trying to cheer

up the soldiers. When Hal dons this costume, he disguises himself with the name of “Harry le Roy,” thus engaging with the issues of his kingship again through role-play and essentially becoming a pun himself. Hal effectively plays the part of a commoner yet keeps the pun just over the common head. Pistol, for instance, does not understand that Hal is introducing himself as king in a different language, French; instead, he comments, “Le Roy? A Cornish name” (*Henry V*, 4.1.49). As le Roy, Hal is willing to enter a conversation concerning his success as king with three common soldiers and humbly admits his limitations as a human:

I think the King is but a man, as I am. The violet smells to him as it doth to me; the element shows to him as it doth to me; all his senses have but human conditions. His ceremonies laid by, in his nakedness he appears but a man; and though his affections are higher mounted than ours, yet when they stoop, they stoop with the like wing.
(*Henry V*, 4.1.101-7)

From this speech, Hal encourages the troops by suggesting that the king probably fears the Battle of Agincourt as well, but chooses to hide his fear lest he dishearten his army. Although the troops are not entirely convinced at this time of the king’s willingness to join the battle with his subjects, Hal does allow Michael Williams to challenge him to a duel. Later when Williams realizes that he has entered into a fight with the king himself, he backs down, claiming that the king’s disguise made the duel the king’s fault, not Williams’s. Hal grants this claim and repays Williams through a glove of crowns. Through this final bout of role-play, Hal proves his care for the commoners and provides an opportunity for their education.

Hal’s final action in *Henry V* is his wooing of Katherine, the French princess. Although Hal gains her hand through success in battle and political negotiation, he still finds it valuable to woo her and to learn her language. Thus, the king now extends his language beyond the boundaries of his own tongue and proves that cultural education can extend universally. The play closes with Hal swearing his love to Kate and with the Queen of France

urging: “The English may as French, French Englishmen,/Receive each other! God speak this Amen!” (5.2.366-8). Uniting peasantry and royalty and bridging the French and English cultures, the king now entirely embodies the title of Harry le Roy.

Hal owes much of his success as king to his tavern education. He fosters an inclusive government, united under a common cause, by communicating effectively with all levels of society. In this embodiment of both common and foreign languages, Prince Hal’s example provides insight into the process of educating leaders in today’s society. Like Hal, Americans today live in a multicultural country and world. Although the American class structure is not as strictly defined as that of sixteenth-century England, our country does present a large variation of racial, ethnic, economic, and educational cultures throughout communities and neighborhoods. Thus, language-learning, in its fullest sense, is still entirely relevant and necessary for effective leadership. Kurt Sepmeier writes in the *Journal of Higher Education* that the goal of foreign-language study in other countries extends past the “practical usage of a language.” It also incorporates “a knowledge of the most characteristic traits of a foreign people, a study of their literature, and an acquaintance with some of the powerful motives that have influenced their growth in history” (487). It is this type of foreign-language study that creates the best leaders, but as Hal demonstrates, it is also the study of common language, of befriending and learning from fellow countrymen, that benefits a society’s education as a whole.

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