REVIEWS

An introduction to Old English. (Edinburgh Textbooks on the English Language) By Richard Hogg. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002. Pp. ix, 163.

Reviewed by Marcin Krygier, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań, Poland.

A mere half a century ago knowledge of the history of English was considered one of the basic requirements for someone graduating in English studies. Karl Brunner's two-volume *Die Englische Sprache* (1960-1962) was intended as a standard university textbook, and Alistair Campbell in the preface to his *Old English Grammar* (1959) pointed out with almost palpable regret that the scope of his book is clearly limited. Since that day historical linguistics in its classical, philological form has been ever on the defense (cf. Frank 1997 on the more general issue of the fate of philology as such), and its revival in the 1980s was in fact birth of a new historical linguistics, variationist, sociolinguistic, speaker-oriented. Campbell and Brunner would probably be appalled at the very thought of a textbook on the history of English, even an introductory one, with virtually no phonological content. Today such an idea not so much as raises an eye-brow; in fact, it is looked upon as a most welcome development. Such is *signum temporis* in an age when not just historical linguistics but linguistics itself fights for curricular survival at many universities.

Richard Hogg's *An introduction to Old English* (Edinburgh University Press, 2002), consists of ten chapters, followed by an Old English glossary, a glossary of linguistic terms used in the book, and an index. However, despite this traditionally-looking table of contents the layout of the book is all but traditional. It is determined by its intended readership, "students for whom this is the first experience of the language of the earliest period of English" (Hogg 2002: viii). To this specification one may safely add "and for whom linguistics is to a large extent an uncharted territory". Hogg's idea is to equip the reader with just enough information to start him on his way, and to do this in a relatively short time (the book is designed to serve a one-semester introductory course).

The first chapter of the book (pp. 1-12) introduces basic facts about the history of the Anglo-Saxons, as well as a very brief discussion of the pronunciation of Old English. The next two chapters (pp. 13-38) deal with the inflection of noun phrase constituents, while Chapters Four and Five (pp. 39-67) discuss verbal conjugations together with a short phonological aside. Syntactical issues are covered in Chapters Six and Seven (pp. 68-101), vocabulary – which includes word-formation – constitutes Chapter Eight (pp. 102-114), while in Chapter Nine (pp. 115-127) the aspects of linguistic variation in Old English are presented. The main body of the book closes with Chapter Ten (pp. 128-137), where Hogg points out developments which were to change the structure of Old English in the Middle English period.

To a traditionalist such a layout may seem outrageous, however, if the principal objective of the book is understanding written Old English at the lower-intermediate level, detailed phonological analyses are not necessary, unlike issues of word order or affixation, usually ignored or glossed over in standard textbooks. Reading Hogg's *Introduction...* Alcuin would probably mutter approvingly, "Quid fractura cum Christo...?" Nevertheless, as it is intended as a starting point for a more detailed study of Old English, at least in some places the author seems to have gone a bit too far in his attempts at making it as user-friendly as possible. The discussion of Old English

pronunciation gives the impression of being somewhat hasty and disorganised. From personal experience I have repeatedly seen that students do appreciate, and indeed demand, straightforward, precise lists of graphophonemic correspondences, and Chapter One would definitely benefit largely from such a summary, even if in the form of an optional appendix.

Similarly, the closing chapter seems a little out of synch with the rest of the book. Its main focus is on the evolution of inflectional systems in the post-Old English period. It is necessarily rather succinct, compressing onto a few pages a lot of information, and may therefore be confusing for a beginner. Moreover, the discussion of Middle English developments falls beyond the scope of this book. A welcome replacement would be a chapter on the survival of Old English forms and constructions in Modern English, both standard and dialectal. Emphasis on such items as *whilom* or *always*, on one hand, and northern *thou* or southwestern *en* on the other, on dialectal and obscure words of Old English origin, would help underline the essential continuity of development between such seemingly alien language states as Old and Modern English respectively.

Hogg in his book adopts a purely synchronic perspective on Old English, which is very commendable. After all, a beginner will have enough trouble mastering the intricacies of Old English inflections (not to mention the concept of an inflectional system in the first place, if his native tongue is English). He will not need information about Proto-Germanic, let alone Proto-Indo-European origin of the constructions he is being introduced to. Yet Hogg makes one departure from this principle, and this departure clashes visibly with the rest of the book. It concerns Old English strong verbs, where Hogg felt it necessary to go back all the way to Proto-Indo-European ablaut, introducing concepts such as quantitative and qualitative gradation in an attempt to show the reader the underlying – and diachronic – unity of the strong verb group. One may wonder if going to such lengths is really necessary. Do students really need the knowledge of Proto-Indo-European ablaut series to understand Old English strong verbs? Would not the appeal to diachronic systemicity confuse readers in the face of the obviously non-systemic nature of strong verbs in Old English? I am certain that for a beginner it would be more than enough to draw his attention to the most frequent recurring patterns and explain the general underlying mechanism, perhaps with a few examples from the area of word-formation (*sing* vs. *song*, etc.). If phonology can wait, so can Proto-Indo-European ablaut.

Unfortunately, for a textbook of introductory character the number of misprints and errors is probably slightly too high. Thus one could mention "declensions" instead of "genders" (p. 17), *ridenra* instead of *ridendra* (p. 31), §4.2 instead of §4.3 (p. 57), *þearfan* instead of *þearf* (p. 64), a missing "is" (p. 99), or "1a" instead of "1b" (p. 120). One can also wonder whether the claim that *wita* "wise man" is based on the present tense of *witan* "know" (p. 103) is perhaps not too general, or if the statement that "[i]n comparing Old English and present-day English there is not much difference in the amount of affixation used, but only in the actual affixes involved" (p. 107) is really accurate, bearing in mind for instance the demise of nominal prefixation after the Old English period. There is also an apparent contradiction on page 104, where *lufu* "love" is said to be derived from *lufian* "love", while three paragraphs later *lufian* is claimed to be derived from *lufu*.

Notwithstanding all that, Richard Hogg's *An introduction to Old English* is a welcome publication, by far surpassing the *Teach yourself Old English*-style textbooks offered to beginners with little linguistic background, and as such it can be a very useful book in an introductory Old English course.

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English from Cædmon to Chaucer: The literary development of English. By S. Terrie Curran. Prospect Heights, Illinois: Waveland Press, 2002. Pp. xiii, 290.

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One of the doubts which are likely to befall a potential reader of the publication under review is whether "the world needs another history of the English language" (p. ix). Firstly, many publications on the subject already rest on the shelves of libraries. Secondly, as the author of the book herself observes in the "Preface" (pp. ix-xi), the study of the history of English has steadily been falling into decline. Given the above, a new history of English should take "a new approach" (p. ix) towards its subject matter. The new approach would consist in offering something more than or something different from the books already in circulation. With this view in mind, the author presents the reader with *English from Cædmon to Chaucer*, a book delineating the history of English through the prism of its culture, particularly its literary legacy. The underlying thought of the book is to show how the literature found itself under the influence of the language and, on the other hand, how the language itself came to be affected by the cultural vicissitudes of the day. In such a light, literature is seen as being directly moulded by the available linguistic resources and indirectly influenced by its cultural context. It is thus the intention of the author to explore the samples of literature "not merely as linguistic specimens, but as products of speakers who marshaled their talents to record something of their lives and times in chronicle, story, and song" (p. x).

Curran's discussion of the literary development of English covers a stretch of approximately 1000 years, from the 5th to the 15th century, thus embracing two of the so-called "periods" in the history of the English language, i.e. Old English and Middle English. The main body of the book, introduced by the "Preface" (pp. ix-xi), consists of a total of twelve chapters, each ending with suggestions for further reading, a series of questions/exercises and, occasionally, an appendix. Chapters 1-6 discuss the relevant aspects of Old English whereas chapters 7-12 focus on Middle English. The volume is supplemented with the "List of Primary/Original Language Works Cited" (pp. 275-277), the "Selected Bibliography" (including print sources as well as URLs; pp. 279-286) and the alphabetical "Index" (pp. 287-290).

Chapter One, entitled "The Historical Context of Old English" (pp. 1-31), introduces the reader to the early stages of the English language, succinctly reporting on the circumstances of its inception. By and large, the presentation of the Anglo-Saxon era revolves around two textual accounts, namely Bede's *History of the English Church and people* (731) and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (c. 890-1154). Both sources recount well-known historical events from two essentially different perspectives: religious and political. Thus, for instance, Bede's *History* depicts the arrival of the Germanic tribes as "part of God's plan" (p. 4) whereas the *Chronicle*, though largely drawing on Bede's account, "reduces [his] central Christian concerns to peripheral status" (p. 17). In order to acquaint the reader with the first-hand account of these events, the relevant passages from both sources (partly in Old English, partly in Modern English translations) are amply provided (pp. 6-29).

The next two chapters focus on early English spelling and phonology. Chapter Two, "The Writing Systems of Old English" (pp. 33-53), after offering a few remarks on the state of literacy among the Anglo-Saxons, proceeds to elaborate on the Germanic runic alphabet as well as its Latin equivalent. As regards the former, the author's examination of runes centres upon the description of the standard Germanic futhorc (c. 300 C.E.) and is illustrated by excerpts from "The husband's message" and, above all, the analysis of inscriptions on the famous Ruthwell Cross. The discussion of the Latin alphabet, on the other hand, revolves around the reasons for its eventual triumph over the runic writing system (e.g., clarity, flexibility, prestige, lack of pagan associations). Finally, a few paragraphs describe the commonest scribal practices observable in the surviving Old English manuscripts.

Since "[t]he written forms of Old English tell only part of the language's story" (p. 55) the closely connected area of phonology is accordingly given attention in Chapter Three, "The Sounds of Old English" (pp. 55-83). Here, the author addresses the question of what the Anglo-Saxon speech sounded like. Two ways of reconstructing Old English sounds are examined, namely the evidence provided by the written record and the evidence from articulation. The former relies on both diachronic and synchronic range of spellings recorded in the extant manuscripts, on the basis of which changes in the sound system can be inferred. The latter, in turn, consists in examining the possible repertoire of distinctive sounds articulated by speakers of a given language. The section on the reconstruction of sounds is followed by concise tables schematically itemising the phonetic values of Old English consonants, vowels and diphthongs. The chapter concludes with an overview of stress patterns, an area of phonology whose role in fully appreciating the language of literature, poetry in particular, can hardly be overestimated. An outline of Old English prosody introduces the crucial terminology (e.g., linguistic stress, metrical stress, alliteration, caesura) and illustrates it with lines of *Cædmon's Hymn* (c. 680) as well as those by Modern English poets, e.g., Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Gerard Manley Hopkins or Richard Wilbur, who showed a leaning towards rediscovering the possibilities of Old English cadence. A better insight into Old English metrical patterns can be gained by consulting the appendix at the end of the chapter (pp. 77-80).

The essentials of Old English morphology and syntax are dealt with in Chapter Four, "The Grammatical Structure of Old English" (pp. 85-109). After a few introductory remarks, the author proceeds to familiarise the reader with basic information about grammatical categories and their functions. Since the book has been tailored to those not necessarily *au fait* with linguistics, the presentation of the data ignores numerous details in favour of presenting a general picture of how Old English grammar was organised and on what principles it functioned. The standard declensions of articles, nouns and pronouns (personal, demonstrative, interrogative) are accordingly set forth and followed by separate sections devoted to inflection of adjectives, adverbs and verbs. The nomenclature used throughout relies on the traditional labels (e.g., the division into "strong" and "weak" paradigms).

The idea underlying Chapter Five, "The Language of the Literature" (pp. 111-138), is twofold. Firstly, it raises the issue of the possible implications that the grammatical structure of Old English may have for the literature composed in this linguistic medium. For instance, "[w]hat difference does it make for literature that OE grammatical function is signified in case endings of words whereas in ModE, word placement is the key to grammar?" (p. 111). Secondly, it ponders upon the question to what extent, if at all, the actual speech used by the Anglo-Saxons found its reflection in the language of literature, be it poetry, prose or poetic prose. Assuming that "the poet's verbal choices ... reveal the creative capacities of the poet's language" (p. 118), the author elaborates on how Old English composers achieve their specific artistic goals by utilising the linguistic means at their disposal. The remainder of the chapter is devoted to the beginnings of Old English prose, which seem to be dominated by King Alfred's instructional style, characterised by clausal equality (parataxis) and a balance between SVO/SOV word order patterns. By contrast, a

somewhat later hortatory style, "aimed toward arousing an aural audience to action" (p. 134), makes use of subordination (hypertaxis) and the SVO order.

The scrutiny of the Old English period comes to an end in Chapter Six, "The Dialects of Old English" (pp. 139-148). Here, the author confines herself to a handful of general remarks about the origins of the four traditionally distinguished dialects. Following are a few representative samples illustrating the distinctive features of the Northumbrian (Bede's *Death Song*, *Cædmon's Hymn*, *Leiden Riddle*), Mercian (*Vespasian Psalter*) and Kentish dialects (*Kentish Psalm*). For ease of reference, a simplified list of the basic Old English dialect characteristics is appended at the end.

Chapter Seven, "The Struggle for Survival: 1066 and Its Aftermath" (pp. 149-166), introduces the reader to the condition of the English tongue at the outset of what is conventionally labelled the Middle English period. As a starting point, the historical background of the Norman Conquest, together with its immediate consequences, are outlined. The inclusion of passages from the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, describing the appalling events of King Stephen's reign (the entry for 1137), serves to exemplify the early written records of Middle English. The new linguistic picture of England is presented as being "rooted in political power" (p. 157). On the whole, however, the author appraises the impact of French, especially its lexicon, as enriching rather than damaging to the English tongue. An account of the linguistic conditions in the post-Conquest England is provided by excerpts from, e.g., Robert of Gloucester's *Chronicle of England* and William of Nassyngton's translation of *Speculum Vitae* (1375).

The contents of Chapter Eight, "The Sounds of Middle English" (pp. 167-186), and Chapter Nine, "The Grammatical Structure of Middle English" (pp. 187-204), align neatly with the corresponding chapters on the sounds and grammar of Old English. That is, the description of Middle English phonology starts with a brief discussion of the possible ways of gaining knowledge about what Middle English or, strictly speaking, Chaucer's London dialect sounded like. Sections devoted to the major characteristics of Middle English vowels and consonants as well as the qualitative/quantitative sound changes follow. Further, an attempt is made to describe the potentials created by the newly emerging stress patterns, in which "rhyme and syllabic meter [were] possible and desirable" (p. 180). The opening lines from *Beowulf* and *The Canterbury Tales*, juxtaposed for comparison, illustrate the most conspicuous differences between the rhythms of Old English and Middle English. Chapter Nine constitutes a general report on the grammatical framework of Middle English, with a focus on its reorganisation against the Old English system. Shifting ground a bit, the chapter ends with a section on Middle English prose, which elucidates its language in terms of form, style and, to a less extent, content. The textual material is adduced to demonstrate, for instance, the manifestations of linguistic conservatism (*Ancrene Wisse*, c. 1230) or the continuation of rhythmic style enhanced by alliteration (*Life of Margaret*, from "The Katherine Group", c. 1200).

Chapter Ten, "The Dialects of Middle English" (pp. 205-217), focuses on a range of Middle English dialectal features. Having acknowledged that the seemingly uniform picture of Old English dialects may result from the paucity of surviving texts, the author presents a short survey of Middle English dialects, which are substantiated by "ample linguistic evidence ... for all regions and centuries from the eleventh to the fifteenth [century]" (p. 205). The division into five dialects (Northern, West Midlands, East Midlands, Southwestern and Southern/Kentish) basically mirrors the traditional accounts (e.g., Fisiak 1996: 11-12; however, cf. Mossé 1952; Baugh and Cable 1993: 190; Pyles and Algeo 1993: 141), yet, a proviso is made that the actual number of dialects depends on how fine a linguistic sieve has been used (p. 206). Another caveat pertains to the restricted utility of literary works for dialect study, which stems from the fact that dialectal variants present in original manuscripts do not always find their way into the edited versions of texts. On the other hand, the evidence derived from local records or place names is not devoid of limitations as well. The author chooses to concentrate on the three broad areas: North, South and Midlands. Additionally, two "sub-dialects" of the Midlands are singled out, on account of their importance in

the sphere of literature: the Southeast Midlands, the dialect of, e.g., *Sir Orfeo* (c. 1330) or John of Trevisa's translation of *Polychronicon* (1385) and the North and West Midlands, the dialect of, e.g., the *Gawain* poet or *Pearl* (c. 1380s). The chapter closes with text samples illustrating the dialects of the North (lyric "Lament", c. 1272) and the South (*The Owl and the Nightingale*, c. 1200 and lyric "Christ's reproach", 14th century).

There are two main issues presented in Chapter Eleven, "Middle English Prosodies" (pp. 219-248). First of all, there is a question of the native alliterative tradition in Middle English, which may be construed as continuing and at the same time breaking away from typical procedures employed by Old English scops. Thus, although alliterative prosodies undoubtedly appear in Middle English texts, a highly consistent regularity of Old English cadence is almost entirely gone. Instead, a variety of alliterative patterns other than the standard three alliterations per line can be observed. The employment of such "aural unifiers" (p. 222) as assonance or end rhyme, in turn, serves as a means of compensating for the loosened verse integrity. Another shift away from a typically Old English poetic line consists in a Middle English line no longer being neatly divided into two semantically equal and syntactically independent units separated by a caesura. Rather, a general tendency is that "the a-verse needs the b-verse for metrical fulfilment, and the b-verse needs the a-verse on metrical and semantic grounds. The dependency is such that we can no longer discuss the Middle English verse apart from the whole line" (p. 226). The second issue discussed in the chapter, albeit less extensively, concerns the syllabic rhyme tradition. Notwithstanding the sporadic use of rhymes in Old English (see, e.g., "The riming poem", p. 59) it is only in the Middle English period that the rhyme form, accompanied by the adoption of French stress patterns, came to the fore. Thus, for instance, the French form of octosyllabic couplets was introduced but, as Curran implies, it was not always skilfully handled by those writing in the vernacular. On the other hand, however, "English poets had to begin somewhere, and ... they could do no better than to look to the literary leaders in French" (p. 245). In the course of time the initially foreign syllabic pattern underwent gradual assimilation and was naturalised onto the English ground.

Finally, Chapter Twelve, "Chaucer and the London Standard" (pp. 249-274), is entirely devoted to the language used by Geoffrey Chaucer. On a preliminary note, the author comments on Chaucer's most significant linguistic contributions to the development of the English tongue. Then, she broadly examines the most crucial grammatical features of the poet's language, such as the problematic value of the final *-e* (in grammatical as well as syllabic terms), the use of pronouns with (and without) regard to gender or various ways of expressing negation. This is followed by a section on Chaucer's literary and linguistic models, connected with the three periods of influence in the poet's career. That both the matter and manner of his writing owe a great deal to French and Italian is far from disputable. Yet, what is emphasised is that the crux of Chaucer's genius seems to rest on his exquisite flair for transforming the foreign models into "poetry that captures the natural rhythms of English that chickens, priests, cooks, knights, and churls spoke" (p. 260). The prosody of Chaucer's poetic line, stretching from octosyllabic rhythms of his early works (e.g., *The Book of the Duchess*, c. 1368-1369) to the eventually prevailing decasyllabic verse (e.g., *The Canterbury Tales*, c. 1387-1400) is brought under scrutiny. The final part of the chapter discusses Chaucer's social registers, which were connected not only with a wide spectrum of his characters but, equally so, with the breadth of his audience.

The literary approach of the book counts as an unquestionable merit, allowing the reader to trace the development of the language on the basis of the texts preserving the spirit of the past. Throughout the volume, the author provides fragments of literary works (in original and, where relevant, accompanied by glosses) but at the same time encourages the reader to refer to complete texts, either in printed form or available on the Internet. What seems significant, however, is that, in accordance with the author's intentions, the literary material is not meant to be merely read and admired. Rather, the texts are to serve as a basis for miscellaneous linguistic explorations. To this end, each of the twelve chapters is followed by a series of questions and exercises whose nature

ranges from typically descriptive (e.g., Exercise 5, p. 217, in which one is asked to describe William Caxton's prose style) through comparative (e.g., Exercise 5, p. 204: "Compare the prose of *Ancrene Wisse* with the selection from the *Life of Margaret*...") to those requiring more creativity on the part of the reader (e.g. Exercise 14, p. 138: "Write a polished translation of the OE excerpt of Wulfstan's 'Sermon of the Wolf to the English' staying as close to his language as possible").

The book is written in a clear and precise language, thus not running the risk of being unintelligible for readers with no linguistic expertise. Whenever specialist terminology appears, every attempt is made to offer as simple an explanation or definition as possible. Although this definitely counts as an advantage for beginners, more advanced readers may sometimes view the author's strive for simplicity (or humour) as somewhat inapt. Thus, by way of example, while expounding on the styles of writing used by Old English scribes she describes the minim style as "looking more like hung spaghetti than alphabet letters" (p. 44). Similarly, in Chapter Four, the discussion of adjectival inflections starts in the following manner: "Adjectives, unlike nouns and pronouns, are inherently characterless creatures" (p. 94). On yet another occasion, in the passage devoted to the prosody of *Ormulum*, the author ventures on a claim that "[w]hatever Orm's full aims were, not many readers have gotten past a few dozen lines before falling asleep" (p. 244). The appropriateness of flavouring the discourse with such interludes seems rather dubious.

As far as the factual information included in the volume is concerned, some slightly confusing statements in Chapter Four deserve a word of comment. At some point of the discussion of the Old English verbal system the following statement can be found: "Note that in OE, there are *only* two tenses: present and past" (p. 99, italics mine). The statement in itself might perhaps be taken at face value if it were not for the evaluative overtones conveyed by the word "only", suggesting some deficiency of Old English in comparison with Modern English. Indeed, a few pages later it transpires that the author views Modern English as apparently different insofar as Modern English verbs can be conjugated in all tenses, e.g., I will run; I have run; I will have run (p. 105). Surprisingly, the examples cited do not testify to the supposed disparity between the number of tenses in Old English and Modern English, both of which have two tenses (see, e.g., Quirk *et al.* 1972: 84). This issue, although to some extent a matter of interpretation, should perhaps be given more space (for some remarks on the relation between modal auxiliaries and tense see, e.g., Quirk *et al.* 1972: 102-104; Lightfoot 1979: 103-105).

When it comes to strictly formal inaccuracies, a few editorial lapses should be mentioned. Thus, for instance, on page 210 the form of the third person plural personal pronoun for Old English is given as *hīs*, not the correct *hī* or, alternatively, *hīe* or *hēo* (see, e.g., Quirk – Wrenn 1957: 38; Welna 1996: 46). On page 192, the third form of the Old English strong verb *crēopan* (Class II) is erroneously cited as *cron*, instead of the correct *crupon*. Besides, in the present tense conjugation of the weak verb *fremman* the second person singular form is given as *fremmest* in place of the correct *fremest* (p. 101). The comparative form of the adjective *inne* appears as *innera* (p. 96) (*innerra*, see, e.g., Quirk and Wrenn 1957: 35; Welna 1996: 44), while the superlative of *glæd* surfaces without retraction as *glædost* (p. 96) (*gladost*, see, e.g., Mitchell and Robinson 1986: 30; Quirk and Wrenn 1957: 34).

Finally, a number of spelling mistakes ought to be pinpointed. Thus, the bibliographical information contains a few misprints in surnames, e.g., *Betherum* (p. 134) instead of the correct *Bethurum*, *Hadden* (p. 57) instead of *Madden* or *Kokeritz* (p. 283) instead of *Kökeritz*. More trifling inaccuracies involve, e.g., *Chaucer''s Pronunication* (Chaucer's Pronunciation) (p. 283) or *titlepge* (titlepage) (p. 286). Besides, the bibliographical entry for Plummer and Earle's *Two of the Saxon chronicles parallel* appears in an incorrect alphabetical slot (p. 280). In the main body of the book an erroneous date of William of Normandy's death is given (*1187* instead of the proper 1087, p. 157). The technical side of the book could also be improved by consistently employing the letter *æ* ("ash"), instead of haphazardly interchanging it with *æ*.

All in all, *English from Cædmon to Chaucer* by S. Terrie Curran can be treated as an interesting account of the history of English, showing its development not from a purely linguistic angle but taking into account the multi-faceted dimension of culture. Thanks to a marked reliance on literary texts from the past, the book allows the reader to come to know the genuine language, as it was used by early English writers. For novices in the field, for whom it has been designed, the publication stands a chance of becoming a highly readable source of information about the early stages of the English tongue.

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