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Religious and Emotional Communities in John Heywood and John Bale's Interludes

Abstract

The paper examines emotional communities in early modern English drama, specifically interludes by John Heywood and John Bale. It explores the connections between emotion and religion, and seeks to uncover whether and how emotionality changes according to the politically acceptable religious doctrine – particularly in the time of Protestant reformation under Henry VIII Tudor – and how these changes are expressed in the early sixteenth century English interludes by a Catholic (Heywood) and a Protestant (Bale) author. This paper considers early modern texts of culture which have not been researched as broadly as the drama of the later English Renaissance period (such as works by William Shakespeare or Christopher Marlowe), and, drawing upon the concept of "emotional communities" introduced by Barbara Rosenwein, additionally offers insights into an ongoing discussion on emotions in history.

Keywords: John Keywood, John Bale, inderludes, emotional communities, religion

As shown by scholars of emotions, such as, for instance, Erin Sullivan,[1] emotions in the early modern period (but other periods as well) – the way they were viewed, understood, and expressed – were influenced and shaped by religion. Barbara H. Rosenwein, a medievalist and one of the most prominent scholars of history of emotions, notes in her works that clergymen often were "experts" on emotionality, such as, for instance, Augustine of Hippo, Thomas Aquinas, or Timothie Bright (though the last one began his career as a physician). However, a variety recent studies exploring connections between religion and emotion in England in the early modern period focus primarily on the late sixteenth and the early seventeenth century, when religious thought was influenced by the Calvinist reformation movement.[2] This paper intends to complement the study

[1] In her book *Beyond Melancholy and Selfhood in Renaissance England*, Erin Sullivan studies melancholy in the early modern period and argues that "new Protestant ideas about the nature of devotion and salvation suggested that sadness could in fact be a useful and even transformative experience, helping to humble believers' souls and bring them closer to God." See Sullivan 2016.

[2] Alec Ryrie devotes a chapter to "Calvinist" emotions in his book *Being Protestant in Reformation Britain*. He argues that it was precisely because of Calvinism, and the concept of predestination, that early modern English Protestants

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on emotionality in Renaissance England by researching drama in the first half of the sixteenth century – a period of religious and political unrest caused by Henry VIII's break with the Roman Catholic Church – and aims to show that emotionality presented on stage changes along with the politically accepted religious doctrine. As primary objects of research, this paper focuses on Tudor interludes[3] by John Heywood and John Bale (a Catholic and a Lutheran Protestant, respectively) and intends to show that early sixteenth-century playwrights use drama as a tool for religious propaganda attempting to unite their audience under their own faith. In order to do so, the paper argues, the dramatists form "emotional communities" between themselves, their characters, and their audience.

In her seminal article "Worrying about Emotions in History," Rosenwein defines emotional communities as:

> precisely the same as social communities … but the researcher looking at them seeks above all to uncover systems of feeling: what these communities (and the individuals within them) define and assess as valuable or harmful to them; the evaluations that they make about others' emotions; the nature of the affective bonds between people that they recognize; and the modes of emotional expression that they expect, encourage, tolerate, and deplore. (842)

Her approach originally stood out as an argument against Norbert Elias's "civilising process" which saw the Middle Ages as emotionally untamed and lacking the emotional moderation with which the early modern period would be associated. According to Elias, and other modernists who followed up on his theory, it was only modernity that introduced emotional self-restraint, which Rosenwein disproved by carrying out research on early medieval emotional communities, for example on Pope Gregory I's writings, in which he paid particular attention to his own emotions, especially the "bad" ones, such as unhappiness or fear, and pondered how he could control them better (*Emotional Communities*). However, in more recent discussion on the history of emotions, her approach has been criticized for being too static and theoretical. Andrea Marculescu, for example, notes that emotions in Rosenwein's research "seem to be rather static discursive practices of hegemonic character. Subjects, on the other hand, have a certain mobility in appropriating such practices dependant on their own stakes and goals" (2). Communities and emotional norms which govern them are not pre-established, as Rosenwein's study suggests, "but are impacted by different discursive ruptures, negotiations, and practices" (Marculescu 2–3). As Katie Barclay points out in her overview in the field of history of emotions, "emotional communities" have been criticized for being too descriptive, rather than analytical. To put it in simpler terms, Rosenwein's study implies that emotional communities simply *exist* – which means that they are identified and then described in terms of how they understand and express emotions in a particular historical context – but it does not suggest *why* they exist, or what determines their understanding and expression of emotions (Barclay 55–56).

Hence, by examining theatrical plays, this paper seeks to find a more analytical application of "emotional communities," and intends to expand on Rosenwein's proposition of a relationship between a playwright and his audiences as an example of an emotional community.[4] As Steven

disciplined their emotions so rigorously, as they treated their emotions as possible "hints" whether they would be saved or not. See Ryrie 2013.

[3] As Sylwia Borowska-Szerszun shows, the precise definition of what exactly a "Tudor interlude" is has been the object of a long-term scholarly debate. This paper uses the term "Tudor interlude" in the same sense that Borowska-Szerszun proposes: an interlude which was written specifically to be received in a "Tudor Hall," where the audience members were not accidental playgoers, but politically interlinked courtiers (see 13–14).

[4] Rosenwein suggests this type of an emotional community, albeit in the case of Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*. See *Generations of Feelings* 254–255.

Mullaney remarks, theatre is "one the most social of the arts [which] is deeply rooted in the peculiar soil of its own historical moment" (5). Studies on theatre and drama, therefore, have a potential to capture political and social changes in history, not only from the "outside" – as historical evidence to confirm that they did happen – but also from the "inside"; from historical people's own perspectives on them. To quote Sylwia Borowska-Szerszun, theatrical plays "do not exist in a social and cultural vacuum but are an integral part of a wider system, whose ideological and moral precepts are both reflected in the plays and disseminated or challenged by them" (24). Furthermore, studying plays which were produced in a similar timespan, albeit by authors of different denominations, can also indicate how emotionality in England was affected by the Lutheran/Evangelical reformation in the early sixteenth century.

At first, I would like to consider *Witty and Witless* and *A Play of Love* by John Heywood, who remained a devout Catholic even during Edward VI's and Elizabeth I's Protestant reigns. While *Witty and Witless* does not revolve around emotionality *per se*, like *A Play of Love*, emotions are nevertheless brought up in the main characters' disputation whether it is more profitable in life to be witty or witless (or, in present-day vocabulary, a fool or a wise man). James and John's discussion – the first one advocating for the witless, and the latter for the witty – eventually ends up tackling the emotional side of this question, as they argue which party has the most joy and pleasure in life, and which party has to endure the most pain and suffering. James ultimately attempts "thys longe debate [to] forthwythe dysolve"[5] (350) by presenting one pleasure of which "the wyttles are sure evyr, / and … wytty are sewre nevyr" (332–333) – namely, the pleasure of salvation.

> *John:* What plesewre ys that?
> *James:* Plesewre of salvashyon.
> I thynke yowr selfe wyll affyrme affyrmashyon
> That from owrr forfathers syn orygynall
> Babtym sealthe us all aquyttans general,
> And faythe of ynfants whyle they infans abyde
> In faythe of parents for the churche ys supplyde.
> Whereby tyll wytt take roote of dyscernynge,
> And between good and yll geve perfyght warnynge,
> Where ever innosents innosensy despewte,
> For thowghts, woorddes or dedes, God dothe none yll ympewte.
> Wher God gyvythe no dyscernyng God takethe none acownte;
> In whyche case of acownt the sott dothe amownt,
> For no more dysernthe the sott at yeres thre score
> Then thynosent borne wythe in yeres thre before. (335–348)

James's reasoning is as follows: since fools are not entirely competent to fully realize the consequences of their actions, God cannot punish them for misdeeds they do not know they commit. The witless, therefore, can have full certainty and pleasure of salvation, while the witty not only have to actively work for their salvation, but they also have to suffer the emotional discomfort of being uncertain whether they will be saved. What is the most crucial here, however, is that, in the spirit of such Renaissance religious thinkers as Desiderius Erasmus, or Thomas More, Heywood presents emotionality and affectivity as a theological – rather than a physiological or medicinal – discourse.[6]

One may ponder here, of course, whether or not pleasure, pain, or suffering are emotions. From a contemporary perspective on emotionality influenced by such disciplines as psychology

[5] This and all subsequent citations from Heywood's play are from: Axton and Happe, eds. 1991.
[6] For further discussion on Erasmus's or More's ideas on emotionality, see Essary 2021.

and neurology – perhaps not. Yet in a historical sense, pleasure and suffering often were regarded in an emotional sense. Desiderius Erasmus, for example, enumerates hunger, thirst, drowsiness, weariness, and suffering as emotional states.[7] For More, Heywood's relative and an influence on his thought, pleasure is "every motion and state of the body or mind wherein man hath naturally delectation" (78). Therefore, should pleasure not be considered as an emotion proper, this "delectation" which More writes about is nevertheless an affective sensation which may cause other, positive emotions, such as, for instance, joy.

Thus, Heywood's emotional community is also a religious community. By forming an emotional community with his audience, Heywood can assume the role of a religious preacher and educate the courtiers on religion by discussing emotions to which they can relate. For Heywood, emotions are bound to spirituality, rather than physiology, as was the case in the Galenic system, which was one of the ways of understanding emotions in the Middle Ages and the early modern period. According to Heywood, positive emotions can soothe and the negative ones can afflict one's soul (rather than the heart which was thought to be a centre of emotionality by Martin Luther and John Bale, as will be shown later in this paper) and even determine one's fate in the afterlife. Thus, when the characters speak about pleasure, Heywood makes it the ultimate pleasure – the pleasure of salvation. Or, when the characters speak about fear, Heywood makes it the ultimate fear – the fear of damnation, with which John struggles, in fact. He confesses his fear to Jerome (named after the Bible's translator), who overhears the dispute, joins in, and turns its tide in John's favour.

> *John:* In wurks commandyd who faythe walkthe not
> By Gods justice he hathe damnatyon in lott;
> And what other folks fele I can not tell
> But suche frayle falls fele I in my selfe to dwell
> And by them to lees hevyn I am so adrad. (587–591)

Then Jerome assumes the role not only of an educator and a catechist, as Greg Walker remarks (16), but also of an emotional consoler. He is able to uplift John's fear with insights on theology:

> *Jerome:* But now to remove thys blocke, yowr grett drede,
> We have a lever that removethe drede wythe spede.
> God sofereth but not wylthe ony man to syne,
> Nor God wylthe no synners dethe but he be yn
> Such endless males that hys fynall estate
> In lack of penytens make hym selfe reprobate.
> In tyme of this lyfe at eche penitent call
> Owrr marcyfull maker remytthe synns all
> From the perpetewall torment infernall,
> What ever they be from least to most carnall.
> By whyche goodness of God we are set in hopes chayer,
> Not to brede presumpsyon but to banyshe dyspayre. (609–620)

As seen in the passage above, the method of purging of negative emotions, such as dread, does not lie within medicine, but in faith. Thus, the aim of Heywood's emotional community with his audience is to, first and foremost, produce good Christians – good Catholics in particular – as Heywood repeatedly includes anti-Lutheran messages in his works. As Walker observes, Jerome

[7] See Essary 2017. Later, in the seventeenth century, Robert Burton also considers pain and suffering as emotions in *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (Rosenwein *Generations of Feelings,* 261).

is "[t]aking a resolutely orthodox position, [and] argues that, while Christ's sacrifice on the Cross is the basis of salvation for all believers, good works are nonetheless also a necessary part of the salvific economy," which is "an issue that had divided orthodox Catholics and evangelicals through the 1520s" (15–16). The courtiers in the audience who, naturally, would identify with the wise, rather than fools, are reassured that they can be easily released from the fear of "perpetewall torment infernall" (617), from the dread of not doing enough to be saved, or the anxiety that they will never experience the pleasure of salvation. By being good Catholics, the wise courtiers can be free of emotional discomfort in life, but also, as Jerome instructs, they can be sure to be "in hyer [than fools] joyes" in the afterlife.

In Heywood's *A Play of Love*, similarly, the argument over emotions stirs towards religion and is, in fact, eventually resolved with a lesson in theology. The main characters carry a debate on pains and pleasures of being in various types of love, such as unreciprocated love or being unhappily married.[8] Ultimately, however, they conclude that the only passion that matters in human life is the Passion of Christ, and the only love worth seeking and experiencing is the love of the Lord for humankind:

> *Lover Not Loved:* Syns such contencion may hardly acorde
> In such kynde of love as here hath ben ment,
> Let us seke the love of that loving Lorde
> Who to suffer passion for love was content,
> Whereby his lovers that love for love assent
> Shall have in fine above contentacyon
> The felyng pleasure of eternall salvacyon. (1564–1570)[9]

Heywood's emotions, then, transcend flesh and earthly life; negative emotions, if not purged on earth, can be eternally suffered in hell, and the positive ones, if strengthened by faith and committing good deeds, can be eternally felt in heaven. Heywood intends to form an emotional community which perpetuates orthodox Christian values – he ties emotions to spirituality, rather than the bodily sphere, to make the audience actively think and work for their salvation. Heywood's role as not only a playwright, but also as a tutor and a preacher, becomes extremely pronounced, and his attempt at forming an emotional community seems all the stronger, given the fact that he was, possibly, present on stage himself by performing the role of Jerome in *Witty and Witless*, as Greg Walker points out (17–18).

As this paper will show, Heywood's views on emotionality are radically different than those of John Bale (a Lutheran Protestant) whose interludes' primary purpose was to promote Protestant ideas.[10] I would like to now consider John Bale's *King Johan* which was written and first performed in 1534 – the same year in which Heywood's *A Play of Love* was composed. The play revolves around King Johan (John of England – here presented as a precursor of later church reformers) and his struggle against the Roman Catholic Church (led by Pope Innocent III – here named Usurpid Powre – and his minions) and its quest to claim power over England. The country is here personified and presented as a widow who lost her husband, God, to the Papacy. At the beginning of the play, the widow England requests an audience with the King for she is overcome with grief:

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[8] The characters, who are named after the type of love they experience, also embody different emotional states. Lover Not Loved and Loved not Loving are both melancholic; Lover Loved is overly cheerful, while No Lover Nor Loved is proud, boastful, and resembles a Vice figure, reminiscent of medieval morality plays.

[9] Axton and Happe, eds. 1991.

[10] As Jeanne H. McCarthy observes, early Henrician reformers, such as Thomas Cromwell or Archbishop Cranmer, encouraged the production of reformist religious drama which would expose the Papacy's wickedness (257).

Englande: Than I trust yowre grace wyll waye a poore wedowes cause
Ungodly usyd as ye shall know in short clause.
Johan: Yea, that wyll I swer, yf yt be trew and just.
Englande: Lyke as yt beryth trewth so lett yt be dyscust.
Johan: Than, gentyll wydowe, tell me what the mater ys.
Englande: Alas, yowre clargy hath done very sore amys
In mysusyng me ageynst all ryght and justyce;
And for my more greffe therto they other intyce.
…
Johan: Now, Ynglond, to the: go thow forth with thy tale
And showe the cawse why thow lokyst so wan and pale. (22–57)[11]

Bale presents emotions in a more physical, bodily manner than Heywood. The widow England is overcome with grief after the loss of her husband to such a degree that she becomes slender and pale, as if she contracted a disease. While it is not, with all likelihood, a conscious attempt by Bale to draw a difference between his bodily emotions and Heywood's spiritual emotions, the idea of emotions being placed somewhere in the body, and reacting in and on that body, is taken still further, as Bale pays particular attention to the human heart. For example, Nobylyte says that it "petyeth [his] harte" to see the conflict which has arisen between King Johan and the Pope. When Johan exposes the Catholic Church's morally ambiguous practices, such as selling pardons or relics, Clergy replies that Johan "wold have no churche" then (428). The King retaliates by stating that he "wolde have a churche / But of faythfull hartes" (429–430). In other pieces by Bale, for example in *Johan Baptystes Preachynge*, Joannes Baptista (John the Baptist) claims that "[w]yth no sacrifice is God more hyghly pleased / Than with that good hart whereby the poore is eased / For that he accepteth as thought hymselfe it had" (129–131). Turba Vulgaris (The Common Folk) admits that "thys helthsome counsell maketh [his] hart joyfull and glad" (132).[12]

For Bale, the centre of emotionality is the heart which is referred to as if it possessed some particle of personhood; the heart can be pitied, it can be faithful, or it can be joyful. In that sense, Bale's ideas on emotionality and the human heart seem to align with those of Martin Luther who "stressed the importance of affectivity in devotion" (Philippa Maddern, Joanne McEwan, and Anne M. Scott xxii). According to Luther, "the power of emotion [was] experienced not only within his own heart, but stimulated within the hearts of his hearers" (xxii). As Susan C. Karant-Nunn notes, for Luther the "heart" was an entire concept, according to which the heart was not only a physical place in the body, wherein all emotions were felt, but it was also "the essence of each person" (246). As she writes:

> To Luther, the heart is not mere metaphor, however. It describes that tangible, individual, personhood that even as an abstraction is real. … There are bad hearts and good hearts, with Satan and his minions and the Holy Spirit and its angels ever engaged in contest over their possession (247).

In *King Johan*, it is Johan himself (representing the forces of good) and the Papists (standing for the forces of evil) who fight over the influence on people's hearts. But while Johan wants to win people's hearts by performing noble actions, such as reforming the corrupt clergy, the Papists seem to have a very physical, almost visceral, way of affecting people emotionally. For example, Sedicyon – the Vice character and the Pope's primary ringleader – orders Clergye to "grope" people's conscience, or wishes Cyvyle Order to "tyckle" people's hearts, to influence them into

[11] This and all subsequent citations from Bale's play are from: Happe, ed. 1985.
[12] Happe, ed. 1986, 40.

rebelling against King Johan. The bodily language used here almost evokes the image of rape – the Papal minions conspire on a physical penetration of the human body which happens without the victims' consent.

Hence, Papacy, as Bale shows, is not only morally and doctrinally inferior, but is also emotionally corrupt. The Church of Rome spreads negative emotions and causes their surge in people's hearts; when Sedicyon introduces himself, he says: "As I sayd afore, I am Sedicyon playne: / In every relygyon and munkysh secte I rayne, / Havyng yowr prynces in scorne, hate and dysdayne" (186–188). He admits that he causes negative emotions, such as hatred and disdain, particularly in the ruling classes, such as "prynces." Johan remarks, however, that princes' "hartes the Lord doth move" (1344). In that sense, the Papacy's corruption of princes' hearts and emotions is a direct offence against God.

John Bale's emotional community, then, is supposed to be, first and foremost, Protestant, and, secondly, to be conscious of their emotions. Not necessarily in order to be constantly reminded about attaining salvation, like in Heywood, but in order to protect one's emotionality from Catholics' manipulation. Bale wishes the audience's heart, their emotionality and the essence of their lives, to remain "pure" and free of Rome's toxic influence. Just as King Johan tries to win the hearts of his subjects, so does Bale by forming his emotional community which would condition the audience's hearts to be full of positive emotions. Also, by stating that princes' hearts are moved by God, he wants the ruling class to especially pay attention to their emotionality and make sure it is not affected by the Church of Rome.

King Johan is not only aware of his emotions (to the point, in fact, that Sedicyon mocks the king's affectivity[13]), but he also shows compassion – one of the central and most valued emotions for Christianity. Compassion, as Damien Boquet and Piroska Nagy write, was often associated directly with Christ. Both in terms of the compassion which Christ felt towards others, for example towards the despairing Mary Magdalene, and the compassion which was felt towards Christ upon his agony on the cross (Boquet and Nagy 140–141). Here, Johan shows compassion when he is presented with a choice to either keep fighting the Pope's minions, which will ultimately lead to a bloody rebellion, or to simply give up his power and the crown of England to secure peace. He chooses the latter, even against the widow England's wishes:

> *Cardynall:* Ye are at a poynt wherto ye intende to stande?
> *Sedicyon:* Yea, hardely sir: gyve up the crowne of Englande.
> *Johan:* I have cast in mynde the great displeasures of warre,
> The daungers, the losses, the decayes both nere and farre,
> The burnynge of townes, the throwynge downe of byldynges,
> Destruction of corne and cattel, with other thynges,
> Defylynge of maydes, and shedynge of Christen blood,
> With suche lyke outrages, neyther honest, true nor good.
> These thynges consydered, I am compelled thys houre
> To resigne up here both crowne and regall poure.
> ...
> *Englande:* If you love me, sir, for Gods sake do never so.
> *Johan:* O Englande, Englande, shewe now thyselfe a mother;
> Thy people wyll els be slayne here without nomber.
> As God shall judge me I do not thys of cowardnesse,
> But of compassion in thys extreme heavynesse. (1703–1717)

[13] "Becawse that ye are a man so full of mercye, / Namely to women that wepe with a hevy harte / Whan they in the churche hath let but a lytyll farte" (164–166).

As Marjorje Garber notes, "in early modern English, compassion can mean to suffer with *or* to feel on behalf of the sufferer" (23), so one could say that Johan *feels* with his subjects – he feels the suffering and misery which an open conflict with Rome would bring upon his land. It is also worth noting that compassion is a central concept in Lutheran teachings. As David van der Linden writes, Luther taught that

> by focussing on the agony of Christ, believers missed a crucial point: God's compassion in offering up his only son to atone for the sins of man. Yet Lutheran preachers never eliminated the emotions from their sermons; rather than preach on the agonies of Christ, they stressed God's love, mercy, and comfort (47).

In this case, similarly, the crucial emotion is not Johan's pain of losing the battle and giving up the crown, but the compassion which he shows in saving his subjects from the impending destruction and decay. Thus, even though Johan loses his political power, he still reigns as the emotionally and morally superior one – he does, ultimately, win the contest for the human heart. And since it is the Lord, as Bale writes, who moves princes' hearts, it implies that Johan's compassion is, in fact, God-given. Johan mimics Christ and his Passion in the sense that he shows compassion towards others and inspires others to feel compassion towards him.

This cruel and complex representation of Passion, however, does not carry the same emotional baggage as the Passion spoken about by Heywood. In Heywood's interludes, the Passion of Christ serves as a reminder that the audience may rejoice because, thanks to Christ's sacrifice, they will experience eternal pleasure. Bale's Passion, of both Christ and King Johan, revolves around suffering, distress, and fear, and thus becomes the type of Passion which Patricia A. DeMarco links to the notion of "cultural trauma" (281).[14] Bale focuses on the more traumatic rendition of Passion in order to reflect the cultural trauma to which England had been subjugated due to Rome's oppression. But, because of King Johan's "sacrifice" and his compassion, the trauma may be lifted and turned into triumph.

To summarize, John Bale aims at forming an emotional community with his audience in order to unite them under one faith as Lutheran Protestants, as opposed to John Heywood who creates an emotional community which promotes orthodox Christian values. The two playwrights also present different ideas regarding emotions themselves: Heywood, inspired by other Catholic thinkers, such as Erasmus or More, links emotionality to spirituality in order to teach his audience that they can find the cure – or the "lever," to use Heywood's own terms – for negative emotions in faith, thanks to the Passion of Christ and God's infinite love for humankind. Bale, on the other hand, tears emotions away from the spirit and places them in the human heart: in the anatomical heart, as the part of the body, but also in Martin Luther's conceptual heart which denotes the "essence" of each individual's personhood. This paper, naturally, does not intend to speculate what emotions the playwrights or the audiences felt, or to argue that the actors actually felt the emotions they played out and then the audiences shared them, for that is rather impossible to determine. Instead, my work has examined emotional communities which, in the case of this paper, work as a link between the playwright and his audiences in common understanding of how emotions work, what they mean, what causes their surge, and which ones are appreciated or which ones are condemned. Emotional

[14] The high and late medieval tradition, DeMarco observes, produced two dominant representations of Christ's Passion: a more peaceful one which was supposed to "stimulate feelings of love, sweetness and joy," and a violent one which centred on Christ's suffering on the cross and "invited readers to imagine and sympathetically feel Jesus's pain and suffering in the most intense way." Readers' exposure to the latter, she claims, was "becoming what we might understand as a 'cultural trauma'" (280–281).

communities can be influenced and shaped by many external factors, such as religion, which this paper shows by juxtaposing early sixteenth-century interludes composed by the playwrights who represent different denominations of Christianity. Moreover, an emotional community between the playwright and his audiences does not prove to be a "static" experience, by which the dramatist merely wishes to establish a common way of understanding and expressing emotions. As shown in the case of Heywood and Bale, emotional communities can offer a dynamic exchange, not only within one emotional community, but also between other emotional communities which may exist simultaneously in a given historical period.

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