

A STUDY ON THE CHARACTER OF 'JULIET'

(1)

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Introduction

In the late sixteenth century, a great writer, William Shakespeare (1564-1616) authored a tragedy of two young lover's evanescent love, titled *Romeo and Juliet*. *Romeo and Juliet* has been played on the stage, and cinematized many times. As you may have seen or heard, one of the movies called "Romeo and Juliet" (1968), co-starring with Leonard Whiting and Olivia Hussay is well-known. Even those who never had a chance to hear *Romeo and Juliet* must have heard the name 'Juliet' at least. Juliet must be the most impressive heroine of all the heroines in Shakespeare's works. However, it is also true that many plays or any other critics have said that *Romeo and Juliet* is not a completed tragedy compared with the following four great tragedies such as *Hamlet* (1600-1601), *Othello* (1604-1605), *King Lear* (1605-1606), and *Macbeth* (1605-1606). We can understand their opinions if we take it into consideration that Shakespeare had as yet few experiences insighting human nature when he created this play. It might be safe to say that he was still in his period of growth and this work was just on the way leading to the late four great tragedies. Then we can also say that the four great tragedies must have had different development because we wouldn't have paid so much attention to them as we do now, if Shakespeare had not written *Romeo and Juliet*.

Before Shakespeare wrote this play, he had already written those two comedies such as *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (1594-1595) and *Lover's Labour's Lost* (1594-1595). And then he created one of the great comedies called *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1595-1596), right after this play was completed. When Shakespeare was in his period of growth which was approximately before 1600, it was also the age when the Renaissance had been in progress in England. So Shakespeare himself was not fully attended to, or did not want to be engaged in writing under those collapse of order in the world which appeared in *King Lear*, and antimorality along with ambition of human beings which could be discerned in *Macbeth*. In terms of this

consideration, *Romeo and Juliet* was a new attempt for Shakespeare to touch on love or some comic elements. I do not mean that Shakespeare was not interested in writing tragedies. It is not too much to say that Shakespeare was fated to write tragedies. That Shakespeare wrote the four tragedies as a result of the fated attempt is the absolute proof. So I do not think it an exact idea to compare this play with the other four great tragedies in term of the same condition and scale. If we do so, we may disregard of the character that *Romeo and Juliet* involves. It may be convincing to make an investigation by comparing one of his works with another, but if we say “The play is lacking in some tragical elements, and that it falls short of completeness as a tragedy.”, it seems that we are surely disregarding its implication and influence in which *Romeo and Juliet* has...even though it is in reality not well-completed itself as a tragedy.

Here I would like to cogitate upon *Romeo and Juliet* as a tragedy, especially concentrating upon ‘Juliet’. The reason why I focus on Juliet is because I was totally impressed with ‘Juliet’ in the movie called “*Romeo and Juliet*” as I mentioned before. Since I first heard of *Romeo and Juliet*, and first watched it on a screen, ‘Juliet’ remained in me, in my heart, and made me feel inclined to go on with my investigation about her character. Man or woman, the old or the young, many of us must have had some great impressions when they watched or read *Romeo and Juliet*. The reason why they love this play is that the play tells the youth what ‘love’ is like, along with a kind of romantic love paean for the youth. In *Romeo and Juliet* there are a lot of grandiose happenings, many representations, which impress the audience as well as enforce judgment based on morality. So we may say this play is one of Shakespeare’s brilliant work of art. It is a great work of art which was made up of these components intricately sewn together. In *Romeo and Juliet*, we come on transference of scenes from violent one to fantastic or in another scene from love to hostility. There are a lot of music and dancing,

fantasy and obscenity. There is a festivity full of energy, vigor and excitement, a masked ball for the Capulets, indoor feast as well as marvelous moonlight outside. Juliet and Romeo wait for an unhappy daybreak, and the both die by their own hands desperately at a graveyard. Juliet and Romeo once were supremely happy, but in another they were in their extreme grief. According to Ronald Wactkins, people do not watch but hear a play. After the Restoration the structure of the theatre became pretty larger in size, though it used to be really small at that time. So a play was wanted some more shades of meaning than great spectacles. It is no wonder that one cannot but feel great sympathy with the fourteen-years-old Juliet. She got something mysterious in her. Juliet had many difficulties or struggles in accomplishing her love. She was distressed at them, and tried to fight against them. Finally she decided to do so. Juliet changes within herself in four or five days. In terms of relationships between Juliet and Romeo, we can see Juliet's love struggling against her destiny. Whenever we hear a tragedy, we find more often than not that the leading role in the tragedy heroine or hero are at the mercy of an unescapable destiny. I could say there is no tragedy which has nothing to do with it. On the other hand, 'love' plays a greatly important role in a tragedy. As you may see in *Romeo and Juliet*, Juliet and Romeo never separate the image of 'love' from that of 'death'. They sensed that they were 'star-cross'd lovers' and their love was a 'death-mark'd love', so they were never able to separate 'love' and 'death'. Their circumstances, positions, happenings, everything gravitated toward misfortune. Whether you may see that *Romeo and Juliet* is a fatal tragedy, not a character tragedy which is mainly caused by his or her character such as the four great tragedies, which have some tragical nature. In the four tragedies, Shakespeare saw to it that Macbeth, Lear, Othello, and Hamlet would be leaders as such; who were independent of their parents except Hamlet who was in a position to decide the fate of a country capable of getting almost all what they wanted in terms of their

fortune, and desire. On the other hand, Shakespeare imagined Juliet totally different from the other, because she was not a leader in Verona and she was postulated to be only fourteen years old. It is safe to assume that we cannot find tragic nature in her character. Shakespeare may have set Juliet's age to be fourteen intentionally at the outset with a view to avoiding her character from causing a tragedy. Presumably Juliet was put under the destiny which nobody and nothing would change in any way.

Then I would like to see how Juliet grew up rapidly through the love toward Romeo, and how Juliet accomplished her love throughout the difficulties. And also I would like to see what love for Juliet, a girl of fourteen years old. In chapter I we will see how Juliet lived under the destiny, and what was the destiny for Juliet and how she went through it. In chapter II you will see how Juliet decided her mind through her inward struggle, and what her concealment brought about. In chapter III why Juliet was destined to die and what love meant to Juliet are to be described compared with Ophelia in *Hamlet*. And chapter IV is a conclusion of this paper.

Outward Conflict

(1) A Trap of Destiny

Romeo and Juliet was based on the long poem, "The Tragical Historye of Romeus and Juliet" (1562) written by Arthur Brook(d.1563). As you may probably know that Shakespeare created many of his works based on some other works that was written by somebody else. In his period it was very common for writers to create a story based on other stories, and also it was their chance to show us their works how they could refine those ancient stories to grandiose ones. Actually, it has been found out that A. Brook wrote 'To the Readers' in "The Tragical Historye of Romeus and Juliet" based on "Histories Tragiques" written by Boalistuav or Bisteau. Shakespeare made some changes in the long poem of A. Brook, and

produced his own story putting his originality in it. There were two main changes that Shakespeare made in *Romeo and Juliet*. One of them was that Shakespeare shortened the time. The sequence in this story written by A. Brook went by about nine months, however Shakespeare made some alternations in changing into four or five days. The other was that he changed Juliet's age from sixteen years old to fourteen years old. Actually Juliet was getting to be fourteen in two weeks. We can see it from the nurse talking to Lady Capulet.

Lady Cap. She's not fourteen.

Nurse. I'll lay fourteen of my teeth-

And yet, to my teeth be it spoken, I have but four-

She's not fourteen. How long is it now
To Lammas-tide?

Lady Cap. A fortnight and odd days.

Nurse. Even or odd, of all days in the year,

Come Lammas Eve at night shall she be
fourteen....(1) (1.3.12-7)

'Juliet' produced by A. Brook was totally different from 'Juliet' created by Shakespeare. A Brook's Juliet smiled in her mind to deceive her mother, and she also received love from Paris when Romeo was to be exiled to Mantua. However Shakespeare's Juliet never did what A. Brook's Juliet did. She had much more chastity than A. Brook's Juliet had. We can see that the former was supposed to be more appealing and chastely than the latter. As a matter of course, many critics mention that Juliet was brought up being kept in cotton wool all her life. On the other hand, Romeo himself, who was a sort of young guy believeing in courtly love, changed into a lofty man being worthy as a true lover for Juliet who gave him a true love. As for the nurse or Mercutio, they ware imagined to be a character who customarily had a lot of wits, and some comic elements. To set

Juliet's age to be before fourteen was the basic theme of this story. As I referred to in introduction, many critics says that *Romeo and Juliet* is not well-completed as a tragedy. H.B.Charlton said as follows "Fate' is solely the motor in *Romeo and Juliet*...Fate did not have power as tragical motive in the 16th century, so this play is a failure as a type of tragical ideology, on the other hand he recognizes Shakespeare's original fascination, and his magic of poetic genius"....(2). Certainly, something which transcended human power exists in the world of *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, apart from whether they are a providence of destiny or not. We can recognize his originality that destiny occupies most part of *Romeo and Juliet*, compared with other tragedies. As you can hear, the prologue sings at the very beginning of this play, "A pair of star-cross'd lovers take their strife" (plg.6), we can understand that both Juliet and Romeo are star-cross'd lovers from the beginning. This meaning of 'star-cross'd' is 'destined by the stars to be thwarted'. It doesn't mean the life which will develop from the present is not a misfortune, but that the actuality that Juliet and Romeo were born of the families which are both old enemies is the beginning of their misfortune. So the prologue tells us that both Juliet and Romeo are enforced directions toward misfortune. At the Elizabethan period astrology continued to exist since ancient times. People believed that it was the heavenly body, the stars that had influence upon what they did and their destiny, and that they could prophesy their future by observing the movements of stars. E.M.W.Tillyard says that stars control capricious destiny of this world which follows the eternal order of God....(3). We cannot take and see our destiny in our hands. So people in those days depended on astrology to see their destiny in advance.

There appeared some fortunetellers in other tragedies. In *Julius Caesar*, there was a soothsayer, who said to Caesar, "Beware the Ides of March." (1,2,23) or in *Macbeth* there were three witches, who prophesied that Macbeth would become a feudal lord of Corder and

in *Hamlet*, there was a spirit of deceased father, who told Hamlet to take revenge for his death, and told him of his destiny. Actually, the prologue tells the audience the lover's destiny, so the prologue would be a fortuneteller in *Romeo and Juliet*. However, the prologue never tells their destiny directly through the play. The prologue only plays a role to tell the audience ironies and paradox of this story and keep us conscious of them throughout the play. In the movie "Romeo and Juliet", one young boy sings a sorrowful love song at the masked ball for the Capulets after Juliet, Romeo and other main characters leave there. Therefore, neither the prologue in the play nor the boy in the movie tell Juliet and Romeo their destiny in front of them. As you may see, there is no fortuneteller to tell them their destiny directly in *Romeo and Juliet*. Bartland Evans says as follows, "Destiny always influences people through their ignorance, and controls matters positively in *Romeo and Juliet*"(4.) What he says means, more than what it sounds. That is to say, the character act against their will and are destined to a misfortune because they don't know some facts. Let me show you one of Juliet's line.

Juliet. Go ask his name. If he be married,
My grave is like to be my wedding bed.
(1.5.133-4)

Juliet said this when she first met Romeo and fell in love even though she had not even talked to him. This is the first word which she connected 'love' and 'death'. There is no fortuneteller who tells Juliet her destiny or what she has to do. And Juliet herself does not observe stars to predict her own destiny. However this is not all. She repeatedly says something predictive throughout the play. As the nurse told Juliet that the youth was the son of the enemies, the Montagues, Juliet uttered as follows.

Juliet. My only love sprung from my only hate.
Too early seen unknown, and known too late.
Prodigious birth of love it is to me
That I must love a loathed enemy. (1.5.137-40)

Since Juliet first met Romeo, she predicted that she was going to be married to him, and she latently knew it was her destiny that she would never be separated from him, even though he was the son of the Montagues, the enemy of the Capulets for many years. Juliet knew latently that she herself was the star-cross'd lover. Juliet associated wedding bed with a grave, wedding with death, and love with hate. What she said sounded distressing to those she had been already told that their love was what he called, 'death-mark'd love' (plg.9) . We can be sure that Juliet's grave is going to be her wedding bed simultaneously when we hear Juliet's words. And the sense of tension which the hastiness of the youth brings about must also be the critical point in this play. Anyway it is no doubt that some clue to the destiny of this tragedy which the prologue already sang haunts their love and some dark shadow skulks behind them. And on Act3 Scene4, Juliet spent the night with Romeo for the first time, and also the last. They waited for an unhappy daybreak. Again Juliet said some predictive words to Romeo, who was about to escape under the cover of darkness.

Juliet. O God, I have an ill-divining soul!
Methinks I see thee, now thou art so low,
As one dead in the bottom of a tomb.
Either my eyesight fails, or thou look'st pale.
(3.5.54-7)

When we hear these lines Juliet said, we cannot let go at this

matter that there is no fortuneteller in this play, for what she said actually came true later. However Juliet did not take them predictions but only feelings, because she didn't even know what she would have to struggle against at the time she uttered. On the other hand, Juliet herself seems to be nothing but a fortuneteller to us. Juliet was not aware that she was a fortuneteller, so she was led to a misfortunate destiny. In short, she fell into the trap of a destiny. At this point, it reminds us of the medieval thought that human beings lack in power to struggle against power of destiny....(5). However Juliet surely tries to struggle against her destiny. There are a lot of difficulties and struggles to accomplish their love. One of the difficulties to Juliet is her destiny. On Act2 Scene2, in the famous and glittering balcony scene, Juliet assumed a defiant attitude consciously. Let me illustrate some important parts of her lines.

Juliet. O Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo?
Deny thy father and refuse thy name.
Or if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love
And I'll no longer be a Capulet. (2.2.33-6)

She continues,

Juliet. 'Tis but thy name that is my enemy:
Thou art thyself, though not a Montague.
What's Montague?... (38-40)
Romeo, doff thy name,
And for thy name, which is no part of thee,
Take all myself. (47-9)

Juliet is saying that she finds nothing valuable in 'name', and she entreated Romeo to throw away his name for her love. On the night when stars that controls the destiny of the world shined, Juliet declared as if she decided to struggle against the destiny which was

given to her, and would accomplish her love toward Romeo. However for those who already told that their love was 'death-mark'd love', what Juliet said sounded as if she would rush the way to tragedy by herself. As I mentioned before, this balcony scene of Juliet and Romeo presented coexistence of borders: life and dark death. So I can imagine that stars are accurately a destiny, and the night metaphorizes the dark shadow which covers the lovers in a black coat who talk together about how much they love each other. We can see the contrast of light and darkness on the stage. The voice of an oath made by Juliet and Romeo, along with the sudden change by a passion of love which sprouted between them reverberated through the stars. That shows us love with a full of spirit, life, and youthful enthusiasm, for Juliet and Romeo themselves are specific symbol of them all. However, what the prologue sang in the scenes preceding that is the word of expressing death, not that of life. On this balcony scene Juliet was aware of some peril, though it was only the peril about Romeo. Juliet was only anxious about whether he would be safe at the Capulet's garden. She was never aware of their destiny behind them; says B. Evans....(6). I am in favor of what he said.

Destiny revolves the wheel blindly whether he or she is good or wicked, and puts him or her into a misfortune. It is needless to say that people in those days loved a sort of story that a man was controlled by destiny and ruined.

Therefore, it seems to the audience that the childishness of Juliet, who sensed only peril in front of her (in this case, related to Romeo's own safety) caused Juliet to be fallen into the trap of the destiny. She was assumed to be a girl separated from the courtly love. That was why she asked Romeo to love her for ever and marry her. However love and wedding for Juliet who thought that the grave would be her wedding bed is never separated from 'death'. 'Death' must be an obsession for both Juliet and Romeo. On the other hand, when we hear these words, we may consider that they are only exaggeration

as is generally made by the youth. They never expected that they would like to die seriously. When we remember the image of 'wedding bed' and 'grave', we cannot let the matter go at this as it happens to the young so often notwithstanding. The reason is that Juliet is never separated from the obsession of 'death', and she actually dies at the end as she just says. What she predicted when she first met Romeo led her to 'suspended animation' and then to 'death' subsequently. These 'suspended animation' and 'death' are to be shown in chapter II and chapter III. Juliet knows that love and death are never separated, but she does not take it her destiny and has not realized what the real troubles that impeded her was at this moment. But she has been aware of her destiny latently, and the difficulties that she had been talking about was nothing but the reality which existed in front of her. She considered that her destiny derived from the fact that she was a daughter of the Capulets and that her family was an enemy to the Montagues at the present moment. Her feelings changed into predictions, and came true while Juliet and nobody else realized. And then she somehow began to fight against the destiny to accomplish her love toward Romeo.

(2) Outward Conflict

The trouble Juliet was faced with in the course of accomplishing her love is the feud between the Capulets and the Montagues as A.C. Bradley puts 'outward conflict'. As the prologue sang "the fatal loins of these two foes" (plg.5), Juliet's love surely sprang from both old enemies. It is ironical that Juliet and Romeo were doomed to be the atonement for both their family feud. It is clear at a glance that the feud between both families brought about the difficulties and troubles for her love. It is needless to mention that they were given to Juliet as her destiny. This is only one of the background context which Shakespeare gave to *Romeo and Juliet*. So the feud of the Capulets and the Montagues in Verona was nothing but an incident

happenings in the background in terms of beholding her love. Actually, the feud was only the strife of 'names', the Capulets and the Montagues for Juliet. So it must have been easy to reject her name which was worthless to her. As a matter of fact, we are never told the reason why both families were enemies for many years throughout this play. The 'name' had no significance to the fourteen years old Juliet. So Juliet was unaffected with the feud. However, it is unquestionable that the feud between both families belongs to 'grownups'.

That is to say, the adults themselves were difficulties and troubles to Juliet. It is no doubt that those who were close to Juliet had some influence upon her love, wedding, or death. The Capulets who brought up their daughter to a docile and gentle girl of a good family, are imagined to be typical parents in a system of a society where the male head of the family had nearly absolute authority. On Act1 Scene2 a noble young kinsman to the Prince, Paris and Capulet talked about the marriage. At first Capulet did not feel like accepting his offer, but he decided to accept it and persuaded Juliet to marry Paris.

Kyoko Matsubara said about this image of Capulet as follows, "Capulet was not trying to make Juliet marry Paris under the influence his authority, or he was not blinded with Paris's status or wealth. He only hoped that Juliet would marry Paris who was noble and of a good family, and had got wealth and dignity. It is natural of a father."...(7). I can accept her opinions in terms of Capulet's attitude. In the Elizabethan period, marriage was nothing but to continue to maintain the family. That is to say, it was only a political marriage.

Marriage with mutual consent scarcely happened in this aristocratical society. Therefore it was natural of the Capulet to go ahead with her marriage without her opinion or consent, and it was also natural of him to have become angry with Juliet, who said, "Now by Saint Peter's Church, and Peter too, He shall not make me there a joyful bride."(3.5.116-7) to Lady Capulet, and then "Not proud

you have, but thankful that you have. Proud can I never be of what I hate, But thankful even for hate that is meant love.” (3.5.146-9) to Capulet, who thought all for his sweet daughter Juliet. Capulet brought up Juliet as a gentle daughter of a good family with much love, and this time he thought Juliet grieved over Tybolt's death. So he took compassion on Juliet, and moved up her wedding :nevertheless Juliet turned down her father's offer. Juliet was disobedient to Capulet. The same thing that caused a gap between a father and a daughter happens so often in our society. Capulet had imagined that Juliet was a same gentle and obedient child, who said “Yes” to everything her father ordered, as she used to be. Therefore his frenzy, when Juliet rejected his order to marry Paris , returned to himself as an irony of his, who finally realized a deep gap which had come into being between himself and Juliet on Act5 Scene3, and grieved over her death. However, it was impossible for Juliet to perceive how much her father loved her, for she is just getting to be fourteen years old in two weeks. Nobody and nothing could hold Juliet, who then decided to accomplish her love with Romeo, for she could not hold herself who had been brought up to be a girl with a good sense. And the most influential person to Juliet is her nurse. This lady who actually took care of Juliet remembered the old days, and talked about the baby Juliet four times over and over again on Act1 Scene3.

Nurse. 'Yea' quoth he, 'dost thou fall upon thy face?
Thou wilt fall backward when thou hast more wit,
Wilt thou not, Jule? 'And by my holidame,
The pretty wrethch left crying and said 'Ay'. (1.3.41-4)

The nurse , who usually had a lot of wit, was deprived of her real daughter Susan about same age as Juliet. So she loved Juliet with as much love as her real daughter. When Juliet met Romeo at the

masked ball at the Capulet's, she asked his name for Juliet. She also worked on the arrangement of their secret wedding and arranged for her to spend the night with Romeo. The nurse was the only adult who knew those secrets. It is no doubt that she was the person who could understand how Juliet felt inside, and whom Juliet placed most confidence in. Juliet, who married to Romeo already and decided to accomplish her love toward Romeo, was put in a great quandary as Capulet pressed her to marry Paris. Juliet asked the nurse to say something to comfort her feeling, but she gave pieces of advice to Juliet as follows.

Nurse. I think it best you married with the County.

O, he's a lovely gentleman. (3.5.217-8)

What the nurse said must have sounded to be nothing but disloyalty to Juliet. And this was the very point for Juliet to part from the nurse, whom Juliet put confidence in and loved more than Lady Capulet. However, it seemed to the nurse what she had said to Juliet was all for the best. The nurse loved Juliet from the bottom of her heart, and she did not want Juliet to be punished or disowned by Capulet. She was well aware that it was unjustifiable to disobey a father in the society where the male head of the family had absolute authority. If that was the case, it must have been expedient for Juliet to marry Paris, concealing the marriage with Romeo as the nurse said. Anyhow Juliet did not follow her advice. Here we can see a deep gap between the nurse and Juliet as we saw between Capulet and Juliet before. It was worthless and meaningless for the fourteen-year-old Juliet to live in accordance with the order of the society. Honor and authority did not have any worth to Juliet compared with her love. Juliet must have been conscious that it was her destiny to accomplish her love toward Romeo since she met him. The outward conflict against which Juliet fought was not only the family feud but also 'adults'; the Capulets and the nurse. On the beautiful balcony

scene, it seemed that she was a new-typed girl, who got out of the courtly love, and asked Romeo to throw away his name to marry her. At first glance, what she said and did at the balcony remind us of heroines in romantic comedies. However we have to remember what the prologue said; 'the fatal loins of these two foes'/'A pair of star-cross'd lovers'/'death-mark'd love', and that Juliet thought her wedding bed was going to be her grave. This outward conflict Juliet was faced with was only the first step toward the accomplishment of her love in the true sense of the word.

Juliet was destined to be accomplished with death to the last in accomplishing her love as a heroine of a romantic tragedy. Her love can never be parted from death throughout this play.

(to be concluded)

NOTES

1. William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, ed. Brian Gibbons (London: Methuen, 1980), 1.3.12-7. Other quotations of *Romeo and Juliet* are shown based on *The Arden Shakespeare*.
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5. E.B.Knobel, "Astronomy and Astrology" *Shakespeare's England*, Vol.1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1916; rpt.1970), p.455.
6. Bertrand, p.12.
7. Kyoko Matsubara, "Juliet Zo", *Kobe Jogakuin Daigaku Kiyo* , Vol.22 No.11989, p.2.
8. Yushi Odashima, *Odashima Yushi no Sheikusupia Yugaku*, (Hokusui Bukkus 1992),p.150.
9. Akiko Sano, "'Romio to Julietto'ni okeru Shi no Kannen", *Ochanomizu Joshi Daigaku Kiyo* , Vol.29 No.1, 1976, p.23.
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12. Soji Iwasaki, "Ken to Seppun No.1 - 'Romio to Julietto'no Butai to Zuzo-", *Eigo Seinen*, Vol.119, 1973, p.260.
13. Masuo Umeda, "'Romeo and Juliet' Ron - Ai to Shi no Shudai -", *Aichi Kyoiku Daigaku Kenkyu Hokoku*, Vol.35, 1986, p.44.
14. Sano, p.28.
15. Kei Ebihara, "Julietto ni okeru Erosu no Kansei - 'Romeo and Juliet' ni okeru Ai to Shi no Imoji", *Eigo Seinen*, Vol.126, No. 9, 1980, p.17.
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