

# The Mythological Archetypal Analysis of Victor Frankenstein in Frankenstein

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## Abstract

**Marry Shelly, a female writer of the 19th century, is known as the mother of science fiction. Her composition, Frankenstein, is considered as significant science fiction, which paves the road for the development of science fiction. The mythological archetypes could be found in Victor Frankenstein, the hero of Frankenstein, such as Doctor Faustus, Prometheus, and Adam. The figure of Victor Frankenstein is to be read based on the Mythological Archetypal Criticism.**

## Keywords

**Marry Shelly; Victor Frankenstein; Mythological Archetypal Criticism.**

## 1. Introduction

Frankenstein written by Marry Shelly was a significant science fiction in the history of literature. Because of Frankenstein, Marry Shelly established her status in the field of science fiction and she was reputed as the mother of science fiction. Born in a middle-class family, Marry Shelly had displayed intelligence in writing, because she was influenced by her father William Godwin, a writer and politician. Her mother was Mary Wollstonecraft, a pioneer of feminism. However, her mother died 10 days later after giving birth to Marry, which made Marry think that she killed her mother. When Marry grew into a beautiful girl with stunning intelligence, she made acquaintance with Percy Bysshe Shelley, one of her father's close friends, who was an outstanding poet of Romanticism. Then, they both fell in love, though Shelly was a married man. Thanks to the prohibition of ethics, Marry and Shelly had no choice but to elope. During those years, Marry experienced ups and downs, which provided her inspiration to create one of her most famous works, Frankenstein. It was sketched at a party where thoughtful writers and poets gathered together to make fun from making up interesting stories and then they chose the best one to appreciate. Completed in epistolary style, the book applies triple narratives. The first narrator is Walton, the second narrator Victor Frankenstein, the third, the monster. It is easy to find the close relationship between Victor Frankenstein and myth prototypes.

## 2. Introduction to Frankenstein and Mythological Archetype Criticism

### 2.1. A Brief Introduction to Frankenstein

Frankenstein was based on Walton's three letters, telling accidents on his journey to the north pole. Through his letters, Victor Frankenstein showed up. Victor Frankenstein began telling his whole life to Walton to persuade Walton to stop his adventure and back home. Victor Frankenstein, the hero in the book, was born in a well-to-do family. His father was a respectable official, mother, a beautiful lady from middle-class. As the eldest son of such a happy family, Victor Frankenstein grew up with his parents' love. When he was 5-year-old, his parents adopted a girl named Elizabeth. Because of Elizabeth's kindness and beauty, Victor Frankenstein thought Elizabeth was a gift bestowed by God. Victor Frankenstein did not have too much enthusiasm to establish friendships with others. His only passion was exploring nature and science. However, Elizabeth was good at making friends. Though they are different

in personalities, they had a harmonious relationship. Accompanied by Elizabeth and his parents, Victor Frankenstein had a peaceful and happy childhood. However, that happiness did not last for a long time. When Victor Frankenstein became a 17-year-old teenager, his parents wanted him to continue his study at Ingolstadt University. This plan had been delayed until his mother's death. His mother's death brought the whole family into huge sadness.

On his arrival at Ingolstadt University, Victor Frankenstein met M.Waldman whose speech inspired Victor Frankenstein's ambition of making breakthroughs in the field of chemistry. Then, with support from M.Waldman, Victor Frankenstein engaged himself in his study and made progress in a short time. As time flew by, Victor Frankenstein gradually established his reputation at this university. When he was planning to go back home, he was caught up by a question: where did humans derive from? Driven by this question, he started his research on making man-made man. In order to reach his goal of making man-made man, he spent days and nights in vaults and charnel houses to see how bodies were corrupting. After that, he got the idea of making man-made man by using parts of bodies. Victor Frankenstein held an undying zest to create the creature. However, when the creature became alive, Victor Frankenstein discarded the creature and even called the creature "monster", because of the creature's ugliness. Then the "monster" went out to struggle for life. Although the creature was kind enough to help those in need, he suffered from discrimination and loneliness, for everyone viewed him as "monster". Then, the creature felt depressed and he wanted to take revenge on Victor Frankenstein, because the creature thought it was Victor Frankenstein who made him, abandoned him and made him suffer. Thus, the creature killed Victor Frankenstein's brother and the creature demanded Victor Frankenstein to create a female partner for him. Victor Frankenstein promised that he would create a partner for the creature at first. However, Victor Frankenstein did not put this idea into action, for he was afraid that if he created a partner for the creature, he would bring disaster for the human world. Then, the "monster" took revenge by killing Victor Frankenstein's fiance. In order to stop that, Victor Frankenstein was running after the creature, because he wanted to kill the "monster". However, because of Victor Frankenstein's poor health, he was unable to kill the creature and he died finally.

## **2.2. A Brief Introduction to Mythological Archetypal Criticism**

As a form of literary criticism, mythological archetypal criticism is significant. Mythological Archetypal Criticism derived in Britain at the beginning of the 20th century and flourished in the 20th century, then becoming a new school that substitutes New Criticism which had dominated the literary world for a long time.

Two representatives of mythological archetypal criticism are Carl Gustav Jung and Northrop Frye. Carl Gustav Jung, a Swiss psychiatrist, puts forward the concept of archetype and collective unconsciousness. Jung believes that verifying the existence in unconsciousness through "primordial images" or "dominants" is essential, for "primordial images" or "dominants" always appear as symbols in religion, dreams or in literary works. Then, "primordial" is named as archetype. From Jung's view, archetype functions as a medium, which helps to build collection between collective unconsciousness and specific things to make humans understand the world and nature better. Later he applies archetypal theories into literature and art. From Jung's archetype theory, archetypes are usually in form of primordial images, while they appear as potential literary creations in unconsciousness.

North Frye's contribution lies in archetypal theory. Frye believes that literature is a displacement of mythology, the principle of which is that "what can be metaphorically identified in myth can only be linked in romance by some form of simile: analogy, significant association, incidental accompanying imagery, and the like" (North Frye, 1957, 137) From Frye's view, literature is a displaced myth rather than a writer's radon creation. Frye emphasizes that literary criticism should be independent. He also advocates to apply the archetype to literature.

Mythological archetypal criticism provides a unique view for literature study. Not only does mythological archetypal criticism demand to underline the significance of literary traditions, but also emphasizes “standing” to read structures, genres, themes, and the characters of literary works

### **3. The Archetype of Victor Frankenstein—Doctor Faustus**

#### **3.1. The Man Controlled by Crazy Passion**

Victor Frankenstein, the hero of Frankenstein, was a scientist who was born in a distinguished family. Growing up with company and love from his parents, Frankenstein should have those qualities, such as mercy, kindness and enthusiasm. However, he was indifferent. Victor Frankenstein stated that he was indifferent to his school-fellows in general. There was nothing but the science which could invoke his passion. “I have described myself as always having been imbued with a fervent longing to penetrate the secrets of nature.” (Marry Shelly, 1818, 7) Science had the power to catch Victor Frankenstein since he was young. Later, contingencies that occurred in Victor Frankenstein’s life led to his predilection for science. When he grew into a 13-year-old teenager, he chanced to meet the Cornelius Agrippa’s composition, which made him curious about the field of the philosopher’s stone and the elixir of life. However, his father held a mixed attitude. “Ah! Cornelius Agrippa! My dear Victor, do not waste your time upon this; it is sad trash.” (Marry Shelly, 1818, 8) Those words stirred Victor Frankenstein’s stronger curiosity toward the field of the philosopher’s stone and the elixir of life. Because of lacking proper instruction and support from his father, he was left to struggle in blindness. When Victor Frankenstein was a 15-year-old boy, he witnessed an extremely violent and horrible thunderstorm that brutally split and burnt a tree. At that time, he was astonished by the great power. An accompanied scholar, whose study field focused on electricity, gave a detailed explanation of the natural phenomena. Victor Frankenstein became suspicious of Cornelius Agrippa’s researching field. As time went by, Victor Frankenstein had to go to university to further his study. His parents chose Ingolstadt University for Frankenstein to continue his study, because they wanted Victor Frankenstein to experience a different style of life. However, the plan of going to university had been delayed until after the death of his mother. Upon being a student of Ingolstadt University, Victor Frankenstein attended a lecture where M.Waldman was delivering a speech which exerted such huge influence on Victor Frankenstein that indirectly caused his determination to devote himself into a horrible research field of making man-made man. Then, he visited M.Waldman and became M.Waldman’s student. With encouragement and support from M.Waldman, Victor Frankenstein spared no effort to delve into the field of chemistry and then got professor’s recognition because of his marvelous progress. Controlled by the passion for science, Victor Frankenstein achieved a prominent breakthrough in a short time. When he was about to go back hometown, he was attracted by one of the phenomena, the structure of the human frame. The question, where did life derive from, haunted in his mind. In order to find out the answer, he thought that he should know how did human body decay. Through seeing the decaying process, Victor Frankenstein thought that he knew the answer and stated “I succeeded in discovering the cause of generation and life; nay, more, I became myself capable of bestowing animation upon lifeless matter.” (Marry Shelly, 1818, 25) This discovery induced Frankenstein to follow his desire of creating a man-made man crazily and blindly. Then, he attempted to resurrect the dead by combining organs getting from different dead bodies. “I collected bones from charnel houses; and disturbed, with profane fingers, the tremendous secrets of the human frame.” (ibid) Driven by his passion, Victor Frankenstein engaged himself in making man-made man. Before the completion of making man-made man, he held love toward his work and he regarded the creature as his treasure. However, when he finally succeeded in making man-made man, Victor Frankenstein

was frightened by the creature's ghastly physical appearance, then he abandoned the creature and he even called the creature "monster". This creature was not treated equally as human, though he was conferred with human intelligence. Because of his physical appearance, the creature suffered from loneliness and bias for a long time. Thus, the creature wanted to know who made him undergo such pain. After deliberate thinking, he realized that it was Frankenstein who created him, abandoned him and let him suffer a lot. Thus, he started seeking revenge on Victor Frankenstein by killing Victor Frankenstein's youngest brother and fiance. Finally, Victor Frankenstein's life ended up in tragedy. Charged with the passion for science, Victor Frankenstein could not enjoy the happiness brought by making man-made man, instead of paying a high price. Doctor Faustus was also the one who was governed by the passion for science and he ended up in tragedy.

In the early 20th century, a German historian Spengler divided the development of Western history into three periods. The first period was the ancient times represented by ancient Greek civilization. The second period was the middle ages, showing medieval Christian civilization. The third period was the modern times. The spirit of this time was called "the Faustian soul". Spengler's so-called "Faust spirit" was named after the protagonist Doctor Faust in a German folk story. Doctor Faustus was a scholar with a huge ambition to secure unprecedented achievement in his research field. After hardworking, he got all kinds of knowledge but he still wanted to achieve more. Thus, facing the lure of Mephistopheles, the incarnation of the devil, who acclaimed that she could help Doctor Faust get infinite pleasure and obtain all kinds of knowledge in the world, he gave in and signed a treaty with Mephistopheles. However, the cost Doctor Faust had to pay was to let Mephistopheles take control of his soul, when the deadline of the treaty came. The image of Doctor Faust was not only a "blasphemer" who constantly pursued knowledge, but also a hedonist who got punished for being governed by the pleasure of pursuing knowledge.

Ruled by the same passion and desire, Doctor Faustus and Victor Frankenstein started their frenzy pursuits in the field of science. Holding the same thirst for knowledge, Victor Frankenstein is similar to Doctor Faustus. Thus, the archetype of Doctor Faustus could be found in the creation of Victor Frankenstein.

### **3.2. The Man Whose Tragedy Came from Arrogance**

Aristotle defined that a qualified tragedy should represent the character's transition from the realm of conformity to the realm of defeat to show his or her tragedy. The tragedy was not caused by evil but by mistakes made by the character which would cause serious consequences. Doctor Faustus was such a tragic figure, because Doctor Faust's tragedy was not from his evil nature but his arrogance.

Doctor Faustus wanted to put himself in a higher statue which is similar to God's statue. According to Christianity, pride was listed as one of the Seven Deadly Sins. Doctor Faustus was the one who committed the crime of being proud, because he was never satisfied with the knowledge he had achieved and he even considered himself as the most erudite man in the world. Thus, he held no respect for God. In his solitude, he expressed his belittling toward divinity.

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and

There's no truth in us. Why, then, be like we must sin, and so consequently die:

Ay, we must die an everlasting death.

What doctrine call you this, Che sera, sera,<sup>19</sup>

(Christopher Marlowe, 1616, 5)

From these words, Doctor Faustus showed his defiance toward God and his desire of achieving immortality through magic. Then, Doctor Faustus determined to conjure Mephistopheles who

could help him to obtain all the knowledge in the world. Mephistopheles told Doctor Faustus that she would be his slave and she would give him all he wanted. Then, he signed a contract with Mephistopheles without hesitation even at the cost of letting Mephistopheles control his soul.

After getting assistance from Mephistopheles, Doctor Faustus completely realized his every ridiculous idea, such as playing tricks on Pope in the palace, getting all knowledge of magic from books, binging with scholars day and night, and having love affair with Helen. However, when 24 years flew away, Faustus had to pay his price for the pleasure he enjoyed for 24 years.

Similar to the tragedy of Doctor Faustus, Victor Frankenstein's tragedy also came from his arrogance. After studying hard at Ingolstadt University, Victor Frankenstein had made huge breakthroughs and he held that he could not get advanced knowledge from his teacher. Then, he thought of returning to his hometown. When he planned to go back home, he became curious about where did human derive from. While he was searching for the origin of human, he got the crazy idea of creating new species. He planned to make man-made man by resurrecting the dead. "A new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me." Mary Shelley (1818, 24) When Victor Frankenstein was caught up by his frenzy idea to become a "father" of a new species, he overlooked God's authority. "No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve theirs." Mary Shelley (ibid) The reason that impelled Victor Frankenstein to start his research was his arrogance, which made him believe that he could surpass the boundary between life and death. When he was making the man-made man, he had great joy. However, when Victor Frankenstein finally achieved his goal, the creature that he made brought nothing but disaster. Because of his ghastly physical appearance, the creature was abandoned by Victor Frankenstein. He could not be accepted by man too, so he suffered from loneliness and discrimination. The creature held that it was Victor Frankenstein who made him suffer. Thus, the creature took revenge by killing Victor Frankenstein's brother and fiance, which made Victor Frankenstein suffer from unbearable sorrow.

Because both Victor Frankenstein and Doctor Faustus suffer from the way that they pursue knowledge and the arrogance that they show, Doctor Faustus and Victor Frankenstein are quite similar.

## **4. The Archetype of Victor Frankenstein-Prometheus**

### **4.1. The Modern Fire-stealer**

The story of Prometheus originated from ancient Greek mythology. Prometheus appeared as the "Creator", who created man in the form of god by mixing water with mud. After creating mankind, Prometheus stole the "fire of life" by which he breathed life into the model. Prometheus also appeared as a "fire thief" who defied Zeus and stole fire from heaven to help mankind to live a civilized life. Because he stole the fire, Prometheus was punished severely by Zeus. He was confined in the Caucasus Mountains and tied to a cliff with a chain that would never break. Prometheus could never fall asleep, because his tired knees could not be bent. In addition, everyday a vulture eagle sent by Zeus would peck Prometheus's liver. For a long time, the image of Prometheus was complicated. On the one hand, he was praised for his devotion for human. On the other hand, he was denounced for his disobeying.

The subtitle of Frankenstein was "modern Prometheus", which implied there are similarities between the figure Victor Frankenstein and Prometheus.

When Victor Frankenstein was 15 years old, he witnessed a violent thunderstorm which burst with frightful loudness. When Victor Frankenstein stood at door, he observed a stream of fire issue from an old and beautiful oak which stood about 20 yards from his house and so soon as the dazzling light vanished, the oak had disappeared, and nothing remained but a blasted stump. Before seeing this phenomenon, Victor Frankenstein knew little knowledge of electricity. At

that time, a man accompanying Victor Frankenstein also observed this natural phenomenon, so he explained this phenomenon in detail, which arouse Victor Frankenstein's passion for creating the man-made man by resurrecting the dead. According to Frankenstein, it was the fire stolen by Prometheus that resurrected the dead into new species. Moreover, the aim of creating the new species was to satisfy Victor Frankenstein's sense of achievement. "A new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me." (Marry Shelly, 1818, 24) Driven by this vanity, Victor Frankenstein started his research of resurrecting the lifeless model by combining parts of different bodies, which finally incurred forever punishments. Therefore, from the subhead to the similar feature between Victor Frankenstein and Prometheus in the book, the archetype of Victor Frankenstein can be in Prometheus.

## 4.2. The Betrayer

According to Prometheus, on the one hand, Prometheus favored humans. When distributing beef, Prometheus cheated Zeus, leaving the best part to human, which made Zeus angry. Thus, Zeus was not willing to bestow the fire on human. However, Prometheus secretly stole fire, hiding it in the stem of fennel and bringing it to human, which further infuriated Zeus. Then, Zeus punished Prometheus by locking him to the Caucasus mountain with an eagle pecking his liver. Prometheus was regarded as a hero, because he was highly evaluated by his fearless spirit, while he was also considered as the one who had brought endless disasters for human, because the reason why Prometheus stole the holy fire was just to satisfy his vanity to enjoy complacency from mankind.

Moreover, it was Prometheus who annoyed Zeus and begot all disasters for mankind through Pandora's magical box. In ancient Greek, Pandora meant "all gifts", because all gods exerted efforts in her creation. Thus, Pandora owned a stunning appearance. The reason why Zeus create Pandora was to let Pandora seduce and marry Epimetheus who was the brother of Prometheus and then incurred horrible disasters to mankind by opening Pandora's magical box.

In Frankenstein, Victor Frankenstein, the protagonist, had incurred disaster to himself and the ones loved by him because of his vanity. When Victor Frankenstein started his research of making man-made man, his purpose was not only from bestowing life to a new species but also to satisfy his vanity. "No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve theirs." (ibid) Impelled by his vanity, Victor Frankenstein started creating man-made man by combining organs of the dead, which betrayed natural law.

In order to create man-made man, Victor Frankenstein spared no effort. "I had worked hard for nearly two years, for the sole purpose of infusing life into an inanimate body." Marry Shelly (1818, 24) Though, he finally succeeded in creating man-made man, he could not accept the creature. Despite the man-made man's physical appearance, he was kind enough to help others in need. However, suffering from loneliness and discrimination, the creature began to take revenge to Victor Frankenstein by killing Victor Frankenstein's fiance and brother.

Victor Frankenstein succeeded in creating a man-made man, which betrayed the natural law. Finally, Victor Frankenstein and the person he loved were punished. Prometheus created mankind and stole fire for them, which betrayed the king of Gods, because of which he was punished. Thus, Prometheus was similar to Victor Frankenstein.

## 5. The Archetype of Frankenstein-Adam

### 5.1. The Man from the Garden of Eden

In the story of the Garden of Eden, after creating Adam, God used Adam's rib to create Eve as Adam's partner. God let them live a comfortable and peaceful life in the garden of Eden. If Adam and Eve had not eaten the fruit from the tree of wisdom, which could let Adam and Eve

distinguish good from evil, they would not be expelled from the garden of Eden. However, because of the seduction from the serpent, the incarnation of Lucifer, Eve picked the fruit from the wisdom tree and she persuaded Adam to eat it. After that, they gained wisdom at the cost of being expelled from the garden of Eden.

Victor Frankenstein was born in a well-to-do family. Living with kind and caring parents, Victor Frankenstein's life was peaceful. Besides, when Victor Frankenstein was 5-year-old, his parents adopted a docile and beautiful girl named Elizabeth. When they brought this little girl home, Victor Frankenstein's mother told him "I have a pretty present for my Victor." Marry Shelly (1818, 6) Then, she showed Elizabeth as a present to Victor Frankenstein. Seeing the beautiful girl, Victor Frankenstein with childish seriousness, interpreted his mother's words literally and looks upon Elizabeth as his belonging, his duty to protect, love, and cherish. "No word, no expression could body forth the kind of relation in which she stood to me — my more than sister, since till death she was to be mine only." Marry Shelly (1818, 5) With Elizabeth and his parents' company, Victor Frankenstein had a carefree childhood.

However, those peaceful days had gone since Victor Frankenstein's mother died. His mother died from being infected with Elizabeth's scarlet fever. Without Elizabeth's scarlet fever, Victor Frankenstein's mother would not die so early and he would not have a strong interest in researching the derivation of life, which finally ruined his carefree life.

Elizabeth for Victor Frankenstein was an irreplaceable partner just as Eve to Adam. In the story of the Garden of Eden, Eve allured Adam to eat the fruit from the tree of wisdom, then they were expelled from the garden of Eden and never had carefree days. In Frankenstein, it was Elizabeth who led Victor Frankenstein to make a man-made man. Then, both never had carefree life again. Thus, Victor Frankenstein is quite similar to Adam in the way that they went away from the right pace and the reason why did they receive punishment.

## 5.2. The Man who Committed the Sin

Adam in the way that they went away from the right pace and the reason why did they receive punishment. The Original sin means the evil that human is born with. Adam and Eve are the first couple who commit sin. That is why it is called the original sin.

Adam and Eve were made by God. Besides, God created the garden of Eden for Adam and Eve to take charge of. In the garden of Eden, there were lots of unique plants, like the tree of life and the tree of wisdom. God told them that they could eat everything except the fruits from the tree of wisdom. Otherwise, they would die, for the fruits from the wisdom tree would let Adam and Eve gain wisdom. Life in the garden of Eden was peaceful and comfortable. However, Adam and Eve secretly ate the fruit from the tree of wisdom on serpent's seduction. Then, they were expelled from the garden of Eden by God, because they committed the original sin. What infuriated God was not from their owing wisdom but a hypothesis that if human owned wisdom, having the power to live forever, they would challenge God's authority.

Before Victor Frankenstein was controlled by his passion for science, he enjoyed a beautiful childhood with his parents and Elizabeth. He stated that he used to live a happy and simple life. However, that happiness was broken by a volume of Conalius Agrippa's work at first, which stirred Victor Frankenstein's strong interest in natural science. From then on, he tirelessly studied alchemy, seeking the secret of immortality. Then, the death of his mother invoked him to resurrect the dead. When Victor Frankenstein went to university, he met Professor Waldman, whose lecture made Victor Frankenstein crazy about science. Later, Victor Frankenstein became a master in chemistry. Then he turned his curiosity toward the origin of mankind, which drove him to hang in tombs, morgues, anatomy rooms and slaughterhouses to see how the corpse decays, because he wanted to make man-made man by combining organs of the dead bodies. Through his efforts, Victor Frankenstein finally managed to create a new life based on the model of man. However, Victor Frankenstein's achievement brought disaster to his

relative. Similar to Adam's stealing forbidden fruit, Victor Frankenstein's trying to be a creator challenged God's authority, which directly incurred the punishment.

In the story of the Garden of Eden, Adam committed the original sin by eating the fruit from the wisdom tree, which made him possess the ability to distinguish good from evil, honor from shame. Thus, God had to exile Adam and Eve to secure the purity in the Garden of Eden. Driven by his desire to gain knowledge, Victor Frankenstein committed the sin and he was severely punished too. Thus, the mythological archetype of Adam can be found in Victor Frankenstein.

## 6. Summary

Mythological archetypal criticism attempts to identify images and characters which repeatedly occur in literary works. The figure of Victor Frankenstein can be interpreted by mythological archetypal criticism. The mythological archetypes could be found in Victor Frankenstein, the hero of Frankenstein, such as Doctor Faustus, Prometheus, and Adam.

Ruled by the same passion and the same thirst for knowledge, Doctor Faustus and Victor Frankenstein devote themselves into frenzy pursuits in the field of science. Victor Frankenstein is similar to Doctor Faustus. Therefore, the archetype of Doctor Faustus can be found in the creation of Victor Frankenstein.

Although Victor Frankenstein manages to create man-made man, he and the person he loved are punished, because he betrays the natural law. Prometheus creates mankind and steals fire for them, which betrays the king of Gods. Then both are punished. Prometheus and Victor Frankenstein are similar. Therefore, the archetype of Prometheus can be found in the creation of Victor Frankenstein.

In the story of the Garden of Eden, after Adam gains wisdom, he possesses the ability to distinguish good from evil, honor from shame. Adam commits the original sin. Thus, God has to exile Adam and Eve to secure the purity of Garden of Eden. Driven by desire toward science, Victor Frankenstein commits sin and he never has carefree days. Thus, the mythological archetype of Adam can be found in Victor Frankenstein.

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