



**Al-Quds Open University
English Department
Graduation Project**

*Parallel Rebirths, Transformations and the Power
Positive Thinking in
Frances Hodgson Burnett's Novel*



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Abstract

In this project, the researcher studied Frances Hodgson Burnett's novel *The Secret Garden* which is originally a story for children. The work conveys a lot of ideas and lessons. The study focuses on the themes of rebirth and transformation. In the first section, it gives an introduction about the novel and about the author. In the second section, it introduces and analyzes the plot. In the third one, the researcher introduces the major characters. The last part the study focuses on the major themes especially those dealing with rebirth, change and transformation and the power of positive thinking, friendship and the healing power of nature. A conclusion is given at the end of the study.

Part One: Introduction

*“If you look the right way,
you can see that the whole world is a garden”.*

The Secret Garden is a children's novel that consists of twenty seven chapters, it was published in 1911. It talks about the change in Mary's life after she moved to live with her uncle, and how she changed everyone's life there. And it discusses the astonishing effect that nature can have on both body and soul, and that is shown in the healing of Colin's weak body and his father's soul.

It also talks about strong will and determination to do things which at first seemed impossible but then when tried were realized and achieved.

“At first people refuse to believe that a strange new thing can be done, then they begin to hope it can be done, then they see it can be done—then it is done and all the world wonders why it was not done centuries ago.”

The Secret Garden

It also deals with the “magic” of positive thinking and how it could change what we think is never going to change.

“Of course there must be lots of Magic in the world,” he said wisely one day, “but people don't know what it is like or how to make it. Perhaps the beginning is just to say nice things are going to happen until you make them happen. I am going to try and experiment.” *The Secret Garden*

Through the transformation of its characters, the novel shows us that it is us who can shape our lives and future and more importantly our concept of ourselves.

“Much more surprising things can happen to anyone who, when a disagreeable or discouraged thought comes into his mind, just has the sense to remember in time and push it out by putting in an agreeable, determinedly courageous one.

Two things cannot be in one place.” *The Secret Garden*

Mary the protagonist, in her story is paralleled in Colin's. Indeed, one of the book's strangest features is that it is the two most wounded and unlikable characters who do the most to heal one another. The moral guidance of kindly adults doesn't have much to do with it.

The Secret Garden is a very enjoyable work for both children and adults, as it makes the reader think about life and nature differently. "I am sure there is Magic in everything, only we have not sense enough to get hold of it and make it do things for us"

Clark(2011) believes that this unusual story has proved to be the most lasting element of Burnett's literary legacy. Perhaps that shouldn't surprise us, given how ahead of its time it was. In *The Secret Garden*, the orphan Mary's rightful inheritance is ultimately herself and the natural world, the ability to speak truth to others and to have it spoken back to her – to live a full life of both the body and the imagination. The secret garden becomes a catalyst for healing in the characters

The Secret Garden was a best seller novel for a long time . Although this novel was written one hundred years back it remains as a classic work which one can still read and enjoy. It urges every one of us to look for his secret garden within himself. Many critics describe *The Secret Garden* as certainly among the most important children's books written during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It has become a classic work. It is considered one of the most influential and beloved children's books of all times

The Author: Frances Hodgson Burnett

Burnett is an English novelist that was known for writing children's books and fiction. She was born in 1849 in Manchester, England. Her father died when she was only five, after his death her mother decided to move to the United States. Her mother died when Frances was fifteen, so she needed to work to support her family, and as she had a natural love of telling stories, she began to write.

It wasn't an easy task that a woman works to get money and support her family as the Victorian values looked down on a woman who sought independence in a realm dominated by men. Merriman, (2007).

She started working on novels including "The Lass O'Lowries" (1876), "A Fair Barbarian" (1881). And she had her reputation set after she wrote her most popular novel "Little Lord Fountleroy" (1886).

In the late 1890s, Hodgson Burnett returned to England and took up residence in Great Maytham Hall, in the country of Kent. On exploration of the grounds of the property she discovered a walled garden unattended for a number of years. She took upon herself to restore the garden to floral splendor and then used the space as a place to sit and write. It was here that she conjured the idea for her children's novel .



How did Burnett's personal tragedy underpin the creation of her most famous work:

The Secret Garden?

It is believed that “two life-changing events contributed to the genesis of *The Secret Garden*, which was written late in her life. The first was the death of her sixteen-year-old son Lionel, who became increasingly ill in Washington while she was living away. Her husband, Dr. Swan Burnett, wrote her urgent letters about their son's failing health, but it was not until the diagnosis turned out to be tuberculosis that she rushed home to take Lionel on a desperate circuit of European spas. When he died in her arms in Paris at the end of 1890, she was completely devastated. For years she threw herself into starting and supporting a clubhouse for boys in London, and in spoiling her remaining son, Vivian. The second loss was that of her beloved home Maytham Hall in Kent, in southern England, which she had leased for ten years. In 1908 the leaseholder decided to sell the grand house, and Burnett was forced to leave the home where she had spent the happiest months of each year, after shedding her abusive second husband. There she cultivated extensive gardens, held parties, and tamed a robin as she wrote outdoors at a table in a sheltered garden. Both the robin and the gardens made their way into *The Secret Garden*. (The Public Domain Review).

Burnett loved the combination of the gothic and the natural worlds, and the ability of children to understand and appreciate them in everyday life. In *The Secret Garden*, she was able, whether she recognized it or not, to recover from her two enormous losses.

Unlike her son Lionel, Colin Craven is restored to health at the end of the novel. And unlike Maytham Hall,(her previous home) the gardens at Misselthwaite Manor continually bloomed. When Burnett died in 1924, her friends helped erect a memorial to her in Central Park, consisting of a fountain surrounded by gardens and reading benches. Their prescient choice of *The Secret Garden* for the fountain sculpture surprised the public, for it was, at the time, one of her lesser known and appreciated books, but they knew these were things that were close to the author's heart.

Part Two

Plot Summary and Analysis

***“Mistress Mary, quite contrary,
How does your garden grow?
With silver bells, and cockle shells,
And marigolds all in a row.”***

Mary Lennox is an English little girl who lived with her parents in India. She was a very spoiled girl who did not like anyone and no one has ever liked, even her own parents. When Mary was ten-year-old, her parents and all the servants who lived in their bungalow died of cholera. And so, she was sent to live with her uncle Mr. Archibald Craven in Misselthwaite Manor in England.

Mr. Craven's house was a huge, queer place with lots of rooms, most of them were closed, and it had gardens all around it. Mary spent her first days there feeling so lonely, but that changed after Martha, the housemaid that looked after Mary, gave her a skipping-rope to play outside.

Martha once told Mary about the locked garden. “One of th' gardens is locked up. No one has been in it for ten years”. *The Secret Garden* (2013, p.27) And when Mary asked “why?” Martha told her that: “Mr. Craven had it shut when his wife died so sudden. He won't let no one go inside. It was her garden. He locked the door an' dug a whole and buried th' key”. *The Secret Garden* (2013, p.27). That kept Mary curious, she wanted so much to know how the garden looked like and whether it was dead or not.

After Mary began to play outdoors, she met Ben Weatherstaff, a gardener, who showed her the robin, a small bird with redbreast, that was nearly as a friend to Ben. The old gardener used to talk to the robin as if he was a human, and the bird seemed to understand what Weatherstaff said.

One day Mary was playing outside with her skipping-rope when she saw the robin, she tried to get closer to it, and she was surprised that it let her come close. And that was when

she found a hole in the ground and found a key inside it, it was the key of the garden. "Perhaps it has been buried for ten years, she said in a whisper. Perhaps it is the key to the garden" *The Secret Garden* it was really soon after that when the precious bird showed her the door of the garden.

The garden had a great positive impact on Mary's health, she was getting healthier everyday as she dug and weeded and enjoyed her time in the garden. She wanted to keep the garden as a secret and she believed that she could bring it back to life. So, Mistress Mary asked Martha where she could get tools and seeds. Martha wrote a letter and sent it to her little brother Dickon, who lived in the moor, asking him to buy them for her.

Dickon was a ten-year-old boy who adored nature and animals. Mary liked Dickon when she saw him the first time, and felt that he would keep her secret. And so she showed him the garden and they both started working on bringing life to it.

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Meanwhile, Mr. Craven was away for a long trip to Paris. One night Mary heard a strange cry coming from one of the Manor's closed off rooms, and that was the second time she heard it. Mary searched for the source. She found Colin Craven, Archibald Craven's sickly son, imprisoned in a fancy bedroom. He was born shortly before his mother's death, so Master Craven couldn't stand him because he reminded him of his wife. Colin was bedridden since his birth, and others believed that he would become a hunchback and die early. His servants obeyed his every whim, so he became very spoiled. Colin and Mary became friends, he told her that his back was becoming hunched, but Mary found nothing wrong. She declared that his illness existed only in his mind. Actually she was right about that, and it was the first step into Colin's healing. . Burnett shows here the Christian Scientists' idea which affirms that no disease is caused by the body, but is in fact the result of morbid and negative thinking She shows that" their senses started to waken when they befriended each other. The garden was their source of positive thinking and energy. "

Dickon and Mary started surreptitiously bringing Colin into the secret garden (as Mary called it). The first time, Ben Weatherstaff found them because he was secretly tending the secret garden once a year. Ben called Colin a cripple and asked if he had a crooked back. Colin was furious with this, so he forces himself to stand up for the first time in his life. After this, his health improved tremendously. **Horrible, (2011).**

Colin's body was getting stronger until he finally could walk and run just like other kids. Moreover, Mary's health was improving too and her cheeks turned pink instead of yellow.

In the meantime, Mr. Archibald Craven's soul was healing too especially after he dreamed of his wife telling him to go back to the garden, and he started thinking more about his son who was never given parents' love.

The children kept Colin's improvement as a secret so that he could surprise his father

when he comes back. They spent everyday of summer in the secret garden. The servants and even Colin's doctor were noticing the astonishing change on Colin's looks and attitude. He stopped throwing tantrums and even stopped getting sick.

Susan Sowerby, Dickon and Martha's mother, was informed of all that was happening in the garden as Dickon told her everything. She sent a letter to Mr. Craven telling him to hurry back so that he could see his son, but she did not mention why. So in a few days he was in Misselthwaite Manor. He hurried to the garden at the same time when Mary and Colin were racing and Colin was rushing out of the garden and he almost fell into his father's arms. The father felt grateful and delighted that his son was well and happy. They both walked hand-in-hand to their house.

“Across the lawn came the Master of Misselthwaite, and he looked as many of them had never seen him. And by his side, with his head up in the air and his eyes full of laughter, walked as strongly and steadily as any boy in Yorkshire-Master Colin!”. *The Secret Garden* (2013, p.242)



Part Three

Characterization

3- Mary Lennox:

Mary is one of the two protagonists in the novel. She's a ten-year-old girl who was sent to live with her uncle after her parents' death in India. She was never given love so she never gave it, Mary was uncaring, troubled, rude, spoiled, obstinate, sour, and she was unhealthy and somewhat ugly. However, after she moved to Misselthwaite Manor she

started losing these bad qualities and gaining more positive ones, especially after she discovered the secret garden and became friends with Dickon and Colin. All that had a great impact on her health and attitude. She became a lively, friendly person. Mary was the first positive change for her cousin Colin with her determination on getting him out of his bed and outdoors, and with her belief that his sickness was all in his mind.

“So long as Mistress Mary’s mind was full of disagreeable thoughts about her dislikes and sour opinions of people and her determination not to be pleased by or interested in anything, she was a yellow-faced, sickly, bored, and wretched child... When her mind gradually filled itself with robins ... with springtime and secret gardens coming alive day by day, and also with a moor boy and his “creatures”, there was no room left for disagreeable thoughts”. *The Secret Garden* (2013, p.229)

2- Colin Craven:

Colin is the second protagonist in the novel. He’s Mary’s cousin. Colin is a ten-year-old boy. He was born shortly before his mother’s death. He looked so much like her, so his father never liked to look at him as he reminded him of his dead wife, and he was ashamed of how sickly Colin was, and the servants were not allowed to talk of him.

Master Colin had the same personality as Mary. He was very spoiled, mean, and quite negative. He had always thought that he was going to be a hunchback and die early. However, all that changed after his meeting with Mary. She indeed had a magnificent impact on him and his thinking. After she and Dickon started taking him to the garden, his whole life was changed. He believed that he was a healthy boy and was not going to die early. He gained weight and became healthier, until he eventually could walk “as strongly and steadily as any boy in Yorkshire”.

“So Long as Colin shut himself up in his room and thought only of his fears and the weakness... he was a hysterical half-crazy little hypochondriac who knew nothing of sunshine and the spring and also did not know that he could get well and could stand upon his feet if he tried to do it, when new beautiful thoughts began to push out the hideous ones... Strength poured into him like a flood”. *The Secret Garden*

3- Dickon Sowerby:

“A common moor boy”. He was two years older than Mary and Colin. When Mary first saw him, he was playing on a rough wooden pipe, and animals were gathered around him. He was an animal charmer. Dickon had rosy cheeks, rough curly hair, and blue eyes precisely the same color as the sky over the moor. He had a tremendous impact on both Mary and Colin with the positive power in him.

“Our Dickon goes off on th’ moor by himself an’ play for hours. That’s how he made friends with th’ pony. He’s got sheep on th’ moor that knows him, an’ birds as come an’ eat out of his hand. However, little there is to eat, he always saves a bit o’ his bread to coax his pets”. *The Secret Garden* (2013, p.27)

The symbolic dimension of the characters and the setting

The Secret Garden is full of symbolism from the very beginning to the very end. Burnett uses Missel Moor, a robin, a 12-year-old boy named Dickon, and a garden. The first symbol Burnett introduces is while Mary Lennox is traveling to her new home in England. In order for her to get to her new home she must cross Missel Moor. At the beginning of this novel, the moor is dark and desolate and Mary immediately dislikes it, wanting nothing to do with it, “The wide, bleak moor was a wide expanse of black ocean . . . ‘I don’t like it,’ she said to herself, ‘I don’t like it,’ and she pinched her already thin lips more tightly together” Adams) explains that Mary doesn’t realize that the moor is a representation of her personality. She is dark and desolate; no one likes her just as she dislikes the moor. However, Mary’s growth as a little girl is symbolized through the growth of the moor. When Mary starts becoming healthier, happy, and pretty, the moor becomes more beautiful as well. It blossoms with the coming of spring that has finally arrived for the moor and for Mary.

Another symbol Burnett uses is a robin. The robin is a symbol of beauty, cheerfulness, being good-natured, and being curious, Burnett uses this robin to show the similarities between Mary and the robin. At first, the only similarity she has with him is that she is curious. When she starts to get better she and the robin become even more alike because both are cheerful, beautiful, and good-natured. Such as when Mary gets to go outside after a week of storming, “Mistress Mary forgot that she had ever been contrary in her life when he allowed her to draw closer and closer to him, and talk and try to make something like robin sounds” This shows that the robin helped Mary feel happy, like a normal child, instead of strange and cross. (Adams , 2013)

The robin is also a symbol of how one simple thought can change a person. When Mary first arrives at Misselthwaite Manor she has thoughts of how much she dislikes people, how she dislikes the moor, she doesn’t want to be at Misselthwaite, etc. However, when Mary sees the robin for the very first time her state of mind starts to change. While she didn’t realize it at the time, the simple thought of the robin started her healing process, because when she started thinking about the robin she stopped thinking about all her dislikes in the world, the narrator says, “When her mind gradually filled itself with robins . . . with secret gardens coming alive day by day, and also with a moor boy and his ‘creatures,’ there was no room left for disagreeable thoughts which affected her liver . . . and made her yellow and tired” (214). This shows how all these positive thoughts healed her body and helped her become a real child.

Even though it is odd to use a 12-year-old boy as a symbol, he is most like one of the most significant symbols. Dickon is a boy who lives in a cottage on the moor. He can tame animals and he is apart of the wilderness that inhabits the moor. Mary is told stories about Dickon from his older sister Martha, Mary was told all the stories about wild animals following him everywhere and how Dickon can tame them and how he is always happy and cheerful. Dickon is a symbol of healing, when Mary thinks about Dickon, all the stories she has been told make her joyful and yearn to be his friend.

The secret garden is also an important symbol. It is the power of nature that helped to give hope and meaning to the morbid lives of Mary and Colins. It helps them to transfigure and become hopeful optimistic and healthy both . The secret garden is not only outside but is rooted in our minds and all we need to do is dig deep for it to come out.

Part Four

Thematic Analysis

*“Is spring coming?” he said. “What is it like?”...
“ It is the sun shining on the rain and the rain falling on the sunshine...”*

Many important and central themes are apparent in the novel These themes make the novel a memorable and enjoyable work. Among these themes are the following.

1- The Power of Positive Thinking.

Positive thinking is one of the main themes in this novel. The idea that all illness and misery are caused by the mind, if one keeps thinking negative thoughts, he/she will always be miserable and sick, and thus one needs only to think positively if one is to be well.

“You don’t have to fight to get rid of a disease. Just the simple process of letting go of negative thoughts will allow your natural state of health to emerge within you. And your body will heal itself.” (Byrne, 2006, p.134).

Positive thinking was the major cause for Mary and Colin and even Mr. Craven’s conversion. So long as Mary’s mind was full of disagreeable thoughts about her dislikes of other people, she was a sick miserable child. She had no friends as she was not the kind of person that others would like to be friends with. However, soon after she let go of those negative thoughts and replaced them with positive ones, she began to heal and became a friendly, healthy, active little girl and she actually liked people and they liked her back.

The same with Colin, when he filled his mind with the idea that he was a sick child who would become a hunchback and die early, he was an unhappy child although he would get anything he asked for. But when he became Mary and Dickson’s friend and loaded his

mind with gardens, roses, and animals, he believed that he was as healthy as any other child in Yorkshire and so his whole life changed for the best. He actually was healed from inside and outside. “Where you tend a rose, my lad, a thistle cannot grow.” *The Secret Garden* (2013,).

Dr. Hagel (2006) said that: “Our body is really the product of our thoughts. We’re beginning to understand in medical science the degree to which the nature of thoughts and emotions actually determine the physical substance and structure and function of our bodies” (Byrne, 2006,)

Falcon (2004) noted that our thoughts influence our emotions and problems. He pointed out that experiments show that if we spend time thinking happy thoughts, it would affect our mood positively and we would feel happy. And if we spend time thinking of sad or angry situations, it would affect our mood negatively.

2- Rebirth ,Transformation and Transfiguration

“And the secret garden bloomed and bloomed and every morning revealed new miracles”. *The Secret Garden* (2013, p.213)

Transformation is a significant theme in *The Secret Garden*. Life in Misselthwaite Manor used to be so dark and gloomy, Colin was a spoiled brat, he had a very weak body and he was completely pessimistic. Mary, as well, was very spoiled and stubborn, she also was unhealthy and unfriendly. Nevertheless, everything changed soon after Mary came to the Manor, she brought life back to everyone and everything with her strong-will and determination.

At the beginning of the novel, Mary herself was a very negative, sick, sour child. Still, throughout the novel we notice the huge change in her look and attitude, the little girl converted into a lively positive person that gave hope to others. As soon as she discovered the secret garden and started spending time with Dickon within it, she gained all the positive power from it. Kilpatrick pointed out that:

“ Mary's petulance is replaced by a determination to see life and beauty in the garden. Her stubbornness is now directed toward getting Colin out of his darkened room and into the healthful air. Together Mary, Colin and Dickon bring new life to the garden and, ultimately, to Uncle Archibald”. Kilpatrick, (1994, p.162)

Colin, likewise, was unfavorable, he only thought of getting sick and dying early. But after he became Mary and Dickon's friend, and after he went into the secret garden, he began to alter into a positive child and only good thoughts bloomed inside his head.

Frances Burnett also discussed the rebirth of the secret garden. After the death of Mrs. Craven, Archibald locked the garden and buried the key for ten years, as a result, the garden mostly died. But then Mary found the key and got into it, with the help of Dickon, Colin, and Ben Weatherstaff, the garden was brought back to life with their care and love.

“The awakening of the secret garden parallels and is the cause of Colin and Mary's own rebirth” www.sparknotes.com

A blogger has outlined that the garden, with its beauty, and the children's friendship transformed both Mary and Colin. He also mentioned that the change in them and the garden was coordinate as the garden looked dead and gray, but with the care of the children it was converted into a heaven of beautiful blooming roses. Furthermore, Mary and Colin used to be gloomy, morbid and mean. But with the power of their friendship, and the beautiful effect that the garden had on them, they changed into healthy and bursting with life. (Caules, 2012)

3- Hope and belief.

Burnett also focused on how hope and strong belief can help us achieve our aspiration. Just after Colin believed that he was going to be as healthy as other children in his age, he began to be a lively, strong boy.

“I shall get well! I shall get well! He cried out. “Mary! Dickon! I shall get well! And I shall live for ever and ever and ever!” *The Secret Garden* (2013, p.174)

Mary, as well, hoped that the secret garden would be alive again, and she believed that with the help of her friends and their dedication, the garden would come back to life. And she got what she hoped for, the garden bloomed again, and Mary and Colin blossomed too just like the roses in the garden.

“Mistress Mary always felt that however many years she lived she should never forget that first morning when her garden began to grow”. *The Secret Garden* (2013,p.89)

Archer has argued that:

“Hope is the belief that circumstances will get better. It's not a wish for things to get better... It's the actual belief, no matter how big or small... That you still have your health and family, and that you can and you will start over”. (Archer, 2013)

And so, whenever Mary and Colin hoped and believed that their circumstances were going to get better, their lives changed for the best.

“Hope is not a dream, but a way of making dreams a reality”. (Baker, 2006, p.12)

4- The Healing Power of Nature.

Indeed nature has a healing power for anyone's soul. And Frances actually felt that power. After the death of her son Lionel, she was beset by depression and that persisted until she discovered a dead garden and planted it and brought it back to life. The same thing applies in her novel *The Secret Garden*. As soon as Mary and Colin began to spend most of their time in the secret garden, their bad manners changed into good ones, and their souls began to heal, and so their ailment was gone.

“There's naught as nice as th' smell o' good clean earth, except th' smell o' fresh growin' things when th' rain falls on 'em” *The Secret Garden* (2013, p.88)

Gardening has a psychological benefits on us since it relaxes, teaches, and connects. “A small but growing body of empirical research substantiates these common-sense claims; gardening does reduce stress and contributes to wellness”. Randolph, T. , Hester, F. M. (1990)

Michelle noted in her blog that: “Happiness is truly as simple as good friends, good food, and fresh air”. Michelle, (2012)

Kitto (2014) observed that the theme of nature's power suggested an importance of being outdoor, the concept of getting out of the house and playing in the fresh air and being healthy runs throughout the novel.

“This could also been carried to a Christian Scientist ideology... There is the Romantic Movement that suggests the importance of communing with nature, which was a backlash against an emphasis on the enlightenment and scientific. The movement wanted to highlight the glory, beauty and power of the natural world. Both Christian Scientists and The Romantics believe the natural world to be a source of healthy thinking, emotions and ideas”. (Kitto, 2014)

The Power of Friendship

Friendship is one of the key issues in the novel. When friends love and support each other, they can do miracles. This is exactly what happened in the novel. Mary got the support from her friend Dickon whose lovely cheerful soul and character helped in her change and transformation. She learnt from him how to love life, herself and others and above all nature. She transferred these positive feelings to her friend and relative Colin who also through the love and support of his friends Mary and Dickon was able to heal himself. By his positive thinking which was transferred to him from his friends , he was able to recover and dismiss the negative thinking in his mind and replace it by positive ideas and attitudes.

Conclusion.

The Secret Garden is a tale of friendship, hope, and love. It shows that positivity along with strong will and the power of nature can work wonders.

Although *The Secret Garden* was written over a hundred years ago, it is still a hugely popular book amongst children and adults alike. One of its readers said:

“This read was, of course, a re-read... what's interesting is what a different, but still marvelous, experience it is, reading it again almost four decades later” Cheryl, (2011)

Gerzina, (2011) mentions that *The Secret Garden* has been translated into nearly every known language. Children around the world continue to love the story of children who, mercy and love started to waken when they befriended each other. The garden was their source of positive thinking and energy. As Burnett said to a friend, “I know quite well that it is one of my best finds”. Children and adults one hundred years later, still agree.

The major conflict in *The Secret Garden* is between each character and his own negative thoughts. Magic is provided as a parable of positive thinking and believing that it can solve everything. “The secret garden was placed for Mary and Colin to recover and to feel love that they never felt. This novel of ideas shows us life principles and the importance of positive thinking through young people(children who helped each other and tasted the mercy and glory of life at the end.”(Cetretrek,2009)

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