

THE REFLECTIONS OF MATERNAL PASSIONS AS ASSERTED IN Y. B. MANGUNWIJAYA'S *MBAH BENGUK*

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Abstract

Today, the discourse of feminism pays more attention to correlations between women, motherhood, and society rather than tries to make women equal to men. Julia Kristeva explains maternal passion as motherhood's characteristic that relates biological state of sacred womb and sociological aspect of having children. *Mbah Benguk* as Y. B. Mangunwijaya's work tells about a grandmother who takes care of her two disabled grandchildren left by their mother. Mangunwijaya does not attack feminism, yet he underlines crucial role of mother. The question is; how is maternal passion reflected in Y. B. Mangunwijaya's *Mbah Benguk*? Using qualitative method, cultural concepts are used to explain relations between Mangunwijaya's story and Kristeva's perspectives. Tensions between biological concepts of woman and sociological ideas of mother are contradicted. Being a mother shows passion than emotion as seen in children's language as reflection of their mother's. Motherhood is sublimation of woman's desire to her children. In conclusion, the story of Mangunwijaya is enriched through Kristeva's perspective especially in how woman should be present as maternal passion of the womb and the caregiver to her children.

Keywords: Feminism, Julia Kristeva, Maternal Passion, *Mbah Benguk*, Y. B. Mangunwijaya

INTRODUCTION

Mbah Benguk is a story in an anthology of short stories written by Yusuf Bilyarta Mangunwijaya (Mangunwijaya, 2020). The book is posthumously published while the contents are written under Mangunwijaya's own name and some aliases that he uses (Arizandy, 2017). The story is quite short with drawings of village and poor circumstances. Mbah Kario or Mbah Benguk is an old woman who lives with her two grandchildren; a big brother and his disabled little sister, Santi. They live in a small house with poor condition (Mangunwijaya, 2020). The father of the two children is unknown while the mother is gone doing dirty work somewhere. Both of them do not really care about the children, so Mbah Benguk decides to always take care of them. The main idea of this story is how

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Mangunwijaya would like to show crucial roles of a mother to her children. It is his ultimate characteristic to draw such simple life of humanity (Mulyatno, 2013). He compares issues of becoming a mother with condition of being a woman that he thinks there is simultaneous accordance between those two roles. This aspect then is in line with Julia Kristeva's perspective of maternal passion. Her idea on feminism indicates that woman is a figure that reflects situation of a mother (Zakin, 2011). The birth of motherhood is actually potential continuation of womanhood.

Then, the question is; how is maternal passion be reflected in Y. B. Mangunwijaya's *Mbah Benguk*? By using qualitative method, cultural concepts are used to explain the correlations between Mangunwijaya's story and Kristeva's perspectives. Here, tensions between biological concepts of woman and sociological ideas of mother are contradicted. Being a mother presupposes passion rather than emotion. It drives children's language as reflection of their mother's as well. Motherhood is how tenderness of woman's mind is sublimation of desire to her children.

By using qualitative method, certain concepts and written data are analyzed to answer the question in this paper. Online and offline scripts are used to explain analysis of Y. B. Mangunwijaya's *Mbah Benguk*, Julia Kristeva's maternal passion, and how tensions between biological concepts of woman and sociological ideas of mother are drawn either. Online and offline scripts are derived from books, journals, and online resources to understand shown matters. The data analysis include attaining sources, reading them carefully, comparing with other issues, quoting into paper, and writing down in reference lists.

MOTHERHOOD IDEAS IN MBAH BENGUK

Mangunwijaya writes the story of *Mbah Benguk* in a quite unique pattern. He does not fully comprehend such words full of stories, nevertheless he also reflects the idea of the characters into comparisons of other sides. At first, he states thick senses of Javanese culture, but then he adds many aspects of Western, Biblical, and even Hindunese references (Mangunwijaya, 2020). The story is accompanied by Mangunwijaya's perspectives of motherhood. He does not really explain the figures of the mother that abandon her two children, but he asserts many fictions and non-fictional realities that have similarities with the attitude of the woman. He uses symbols to compare his story and other realms. His ideas in building the story is quite simple, but his way to explore things is interesting yet deep (Mulyatno, 2013).

The story is compiled through three main aspects; the elements of the story, the points of views of the mother, and the ideas of symbolic discourses of woman. Through the elements of the story, it is indicated through the appearance of Mbah Benguk. She is an old and poor widow who lives in a small village. She earns money by making and selling a food named *tempe benguk* (Mangunwijaya, 2020). She does not buy the material of the food since she only collects those from wild trees around her house. She works so hard that her neighbors call her with an alias to what she sells every day. She is an old woman as *mbah* and she sells *tempe benguk*, so she is called as Mbah Benguk. She lives in a small house with her two grandchildren. The big one is a boy around six years old while the little one is a girl of five years old. The boy is only told as the brother of Santi, his little sister. Santi is a disabled child since her muscles sometimes could not support her own body. Mbah Benguk really loves her grandchildren. She always plays with them and helps Santi to clean herself after playing outside the house (Mangunwijaya, 2020).

In that aspect, Mangunwijaya would like to show a simple life of Mbah Benguk in a static and fixed plot. She does not have any capital at all but does not live in total poverty. She may be stagnantly poor but she still lives happily with her two grandchildren. She does not complain about her condition but she does what she could by making and selling *tempe benguk*. Santi and her brother are also seen not as burdens for Mbah Benguk (Mangunwijaya, 2020). Their disabilities then bring in more happiness to her. She could give herself more to the children. It is the characteristic of Mangunwijaya's literary works that emphasize simple life of village's conditions and villagers' situations (Arizandy, 2017). People know that they may not be rich but they never give up. They still live the life without any further protest. Mangunwijaya would like to assert humble life through context of everyday life (Arizandy, 2017 and Mulyatno, 2013).

The points of views of the mother shift the focus to the brother's and Santi's mother. It seems quite normal in that area for a woman going out from home to entertain other men. The mother leaves her children with their grandmother while she lives somewhere to work (or to play) with her customers. Mangunwijaya states the mother's condition is like Mary Magdalene or Samaritan woman (Mangunwijaya, 2020). The mother is such representation of a woman who does not feel abused if being seen as an object by men. She is an escort in a playground owned by men. In other word, she is the satisfier of men's sexual needs. She is the *remedium carnis* in the term of *mulier tamquam remedium est carnis* (Mangunwijaya, 2020). The mother is a reflection of woman who plays role as remedy of meat; she is ready to accompany any man anytime in anyplace.

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Here, the story of *Mbah Benguk* explores the condition of the mother who is told to work as prostitute. It may be so vulgar to say so since the woman may only accompany some men in specific occasions. However, the main context here is the attitude of the mother who hugs other men instead of her own children. Indeed, Mangunwijaya would like to compare situation of the mother to the condition of Mbah Benguk (Mangunwijaya, 2020). The mother would like to find happiness in other places while the real happiness is at home with her children. Mbah Benguk also expands her happiness not only as a grandmother for the children but also as the mother too. Mangunwijaya would also like to underline that a woman should be subject for herself, not being such object for other men (Mangunwijaya, 2020). By doing so, he also explains that people should never satisfy too much to desire of the flesh. Human beings should care more for finding meanings in becoming a noble soul.

In the ideas of symbolic discourses of woman, Mangunwijaya then speaks about how a mother should play her role. He says that the main idea for being a mother is for her own children, not for other men. A mother is the owner of the true love that always gives care to her children. He quotes Bible by saying that the world may forget a child, but the mother never does so. He also tells how biological mother is full of goodness compared to step mother who is full of bad deeds in many literatures. He states contexts of step mother in Cinderella, Snow White, and *Bawang Putih* stories (Mangunwijaya, 2020). Posture of a mother is on the two sides of a coin; on a side, a mother is the idea of *almamater* and caretaker as seen in figures of *Ibu Pertiwi* and *Dewi Sri*, while on the other side, a mother could be destroyer like Durga, Sarpakenaka, and *Ratu Roro Kidul*. It is similar to how Christian people sees people like Ruth and Mary as ideal representations of woman while the real ones are indicated in the selves of Jezebel and Herodias (Mangunwijaya, 2020). For a child, a mother is not a myth. A mother is someone who does not only physically and biologically gives birth to a child, but also a person who factually loves, teaches, nurtures, and also takes care to the fruit of the womb.

This idea reflects that the story could also be read as an essay since Mangunwijaya involves his perspectives to condition of Mbah Benguk. It could also be considered as literary work since it includes various literary references compared with social discourses. In addition, he would like to say that a woman is a mother in potential. Every womanhood is indirect mirror of motherhood. A woman may destroy and love, but a mother is caring than ever (Mangunwijaya, 2020). In this case, he points ideas out of merely biological context of a mother. He stresses the role of Mbah Benguk that does understanding to the children while

the real biological mother leaves away. Motherhood in reality is reflected in the role of Mbah Benguk. She is not the real mother of Santi and his brother but she loves them more than their truly mother does. Love in the frame of motherhood is real and factual, not what the ideal means (Mangunwijaya, 2020).

MATERNAL PASSIONS OF MOTHERLY WOMAN

The expanding aspects of literature touch other disciplines outside matters of literary criticism. The criticism then includes range of both social and natural sciences since literature also widens to various ideas too. Language is also indicated not only as tools of communication, but also how people move in everyday life. The term of language has become so cultural that reflects habitual deeds in how every person sits, stands, walks, and even runs (Kristeva, 2018). Identities are the main key factors to understand the language. Language is not like a train that is coming, going, and passing by but it is quite embraced tightly by people.

One main aspect of literature is the existence of woman. Today, woman is not seen only as different from man. In history, woman has been stated as the number two under man's rules (Kristeva, 2018 and Sadehi, 2012). Differences which is used to be spoken in duality, then is widely known as hierarchical of dualism. Dualism emphasizes a side as dominant while another is sub-dominant. Here, woman is exactly drawn so. Themes of woman then become main point of analysis in literature especially in order to eliminate that kind of dualism. Feminism then arises as a perspective to analyze literature. Almost all of literature that touches figures of woman could be interpreted through feminism' points of view today (Kristeva, 2018 and Oliver, 2008).

Former feminism would like to actualize equality between man and woman. The struggle involves rights fulfillments in any aspect of everyday life (Kristeva, 2018). Once the rights have been fulfilled, it is believed that woman will be appreciated equally with man. However, that aspect only touches the surface point of woman's suffering. Latter feminism then tries to solve the problems by accentuating the roots of the problems of woman's dualism in society (Kristeva, 2005 and Sadehi, 2012). Discussions through existing identities are flourished including religions, culture, and also nationalism. Literature also becomes focal point to dig and to search the source of trouble. The shift between former and latter waves of feminism is clear. Equality is still a goal that needs to be reached (Litowitz, 2014). Moreover, many experts try to dig the characteristics of woman as an individual and her roles in society. By doing that, woman could be specified as a special person with her own abilities to color

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the world (Kristeva, 2018). Woman could also be superior rather than man. In other words, latter feminism would like to change the condition of dualism into duality that will appreciate other side simultaneously better from time to time (Zakin, 2011 and Sadehi, 2012).

As a feminist, Julia Kristeva points how woman is special. Her idea of psychoanalytic feminism brings in another perspective that reflects mental conditions between individual and society (Zakin, 2011). Psychoanalysis itself is derived from understanding that sexuality in any way links to subjectivity. Influences of unconscious drives are mixed with symbolic structures that shape individual deeds towards society. Sigmund Freud himself says that woman could not be escaped from matter of Oedipal Complex. Woman is such sexual instinct that roots in individual experience (Kristeva, 2005 and Litowitz, 2014). Staying as instinct is known by Kristeva too, but living in it is never similar to become individual. In mental frame, Freud's psychoanalysis puts woman as intermediary between man and children. She only exists if those two aspects are present (Zakin, 2011). Woman will only be defined by man's being and will transform to children that she gives birth to. Subjectivity of woman in psychoanalysis states inside relations between those two sides. Woman could not be defined as herself. She remains dependent not as otherness but a part of sameness (Kristeva, 2018 and Litowitz, 2014). That is what Kristeva opposes.

Kristeva condemns humanism by saying that condition is about fraternity of the same (Zakin, 2011). Fraternity means man is taking control by holding his freedom in full ability to define anything. Becoming the same is dictating sameness to wider realms of otherness. Kristeva follows the path to embrace ambiguity of bodily differences. She tries to bring in otherness in important matter compared to man's concepts (Kristeva, 2018 and Oliver, 2008). Woman has been alienated from society and she would like to call them by signifying practices rather than distinguishing societal routines. Kristeva underlines the stage of pre-thetic; possibilities that rely on prior reigns of propositions and judgments from man (Zakin, 2011). This stage is important to regress position of man and to enhance postures of woman. History could be re-interpreted by asserting the base of civilization that is woman being.

She does not really reject representations since it is impossible to cover all things at once. She rather offers pre-Oedipal period by emphasizing woman's role as intermediary which is actually the most important of all matters (Zakin, 2011). In simple words, Oedipus is born from a mother while the children are given birth from a woman's womb either. Woman's thought to give birth and to become a mother is her own decision. It is her own potential that drives self-transformation (Oliver, 2008). Kristeva is known as advocate of

poetic revolution that includes reconfiguring language by emphasizing heterogeneities between semiotic and symbolic elements (Zakin, 2011 and Sadehi, 2012). She sees the ethics of psychoanalysis by proposing otherness especially in womanly perspectives. By exploring heterogenic sides, she puts woman as a special being that is the existing and the potential of a mother. She does not say that every woman must be a mother, but she says that motherly deeds are reflected in woman's posture. Every love and care that a woman do is matter of motherhood in herself (Kristeva, 2005). Only she and herself that could transform the drives of womb into the desires of love towards other persons.

Kristeva proposes reflection of maternal passions. She says that while psychoanalysis is shadowed with paternal functions, woman is still pushed aside only as instinct (Zakin, 2011 and Lombardi, 2019). It is maternal function that matters to show importance of woman's role. The passion is not reflected through concepts, but rather to experience of love relations. In this case, Kristeva explains the maternal passions into main indications from emotion, time, and desire. Passion is different from emotion (Kristeva, 2005). While emotion comes from matters of bodily sensations, passion is stated through possible bond with the other. This passion is not always about when a woman is pregnant and builds such bonds with her child. It is deeply rooted in woman as figure in general. Her idea is always to get closed with others. She potentially will give love to others that she greets. It is not matter of merely choice between loving and hating. It is because woman is carrying a womb; a potential to take care of someone other than herself (Kristeva, 2005 and Lombardi, 2019). In this case, it is her biological condition that shapes her love and care towards others in the name of otherness either.

Maternal passion is reflection of the beginning of time (Kristeva, 2005; 1981). A mother gives birth means she gives freedom to a new human being. She is the matter of freedom itself, as both the source and the intermediary. She has big courage to start a new life, not only for her to be a mother, but also crucially to otherness that is her baby. Woman is the one that provides everything (Zakin, 2011). She is someone who protects in her maternal presence. This is indeed get lost in exact meaning of Oedipal Complex but finds its relation in intermediary and before the story begins. Mother's language is the time itself (Kristeva, 1981). She starts the time and being the ultimate figure to be dependent to (Kristeva, 2005). She is not in separated condition with her fruit of the womb even though the child was already born. She is still there concerning her passion to protect. Passion will never leave otherness (Kristeva, 1981). Maternal passion is walking together with the child by hugging as symbol of protecting and taking care as well.

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That maternal passion is sublimation of woman's desire to her children (Kristeva, 2005 and Lombardi, 2019). While Freud says that desire is always sexual, Kristeva follows Lacan on desire is reflection of language. Language of mother drives language of children. Mother's tenderness of mind is transformed positively through sublimation on language to her children (Kristeva, 2018). Her stress does exist but it will be changed to love for her children. Her anxiety is potential alteration of hope for the children (Kristeva, 2005). She will never apply the same anxiety to the children. Instead, her passion constructs affections from anxiety. Her inner life is continuation of outer world. Her mind is how children is seeing the language. Desire of mother is the life of the children as well.

From the points above, maternal passion lives between biological concepts of woman and sociological aspects of mother (Kristeva, 2005). Both aspects may contradict each other due to tendency to another side than another. However, maternal passion comes from womb of a woman that is fulfilled by her role of a mother. Freud's psychoanalysis shows those two aspects as two separated aspects (Wilson, 2014). Biological means instinct while sociological means intermediary. Both of them are maternal passions that reflects how a woman is always reliable (Kristeva, 2018). A mother follows her instinct to love otherness as seen in symbol of her child. She is also a medium for a child to understand outer world. The difference between Freud's and Kristeva's point is that Kristeva does not see maternal passion as a destiny (Zakin, 2011 and Kristeva, 1981). It is not a dictation for a woman, it is a passion that is lived voluntarily and even happily. Woman's womb as biological aspect is what makes woman special since it gives her more knowledge to understand others. Sociological side of being a mother is also matters of practice of love and care in everyday life. Her womb is not source of her anxiety, but it is her potential of sublimation of desire to love her child (Kristeva, 2018 and Lombardi, 2019). Her role as a mother is not a torture too, but it is actualization of herself as a woman being.

REFLECTION OF MOTHERHOOD LANGUAGE IN CHILDHOOD WORLD

The main idea that Mangunwijaya proposes is crucial comparison of contradictions between Mbah Benguk and the mother. The figure of Mbah Benguk is symbol of poorness but full of love for her grandchildren (Mangunwijaya, 2020). She lives as she is. She tries to do what she can to earn anything to be sold for daily needs. She lives simple life. *Tempe benguk* that she sells does not make much money but she still feels sufficient by doing that. She had less complaint about poverty that she experiences, even no complaint at all. It is reflection of living in a small village that does not require many demands. It is more

important to live happily rather than to have much money. Her happy life is seen in how she fully takes care of her grandchildren (Mangunwijaya, 2020). She lives role of being more than a grandmother as she cares to them in motherly love. She understands the conditions of her two grandchildren. The brother acts like normal children with his innocence while Santi, the sister, is a disabled child and Mbah Benguk still loves both of them. She does not really care what others will say or how her life indicates poverty. What she could give, to whom she lives with, is love. That is the most important of all. Her love goes beyond herself through her grandchildren (Mangunwijaya, 2020).

Meanwhile, the figure of the mother still lives as a woman but not really a mother. She does not fully comprehend the idea of being a mother. She neglects her own children by going somewhere else. She may be a mother who gives birth to Santi and his brother, but her role does not prolong to them (Mangunwijaya, 2020). She does not find and even found any happiness at home by hugging her children, yet she finds it in the comfort of other men. She lives her overrated freedom as she does not want to get trapped in being a mother with small world. It could be said so since her negligence really brings bad impacts to the role of being a mother. She is in totally contrast condition to Mbah Benguk. While Mbah Benguk plays roles more than her own self as a grandmother by being a mother too for her grandchildren, the mother leaves them all behind and having fun somewhere else. The Latin term that Mangunwijaya underlines is reflection of how the mother only cares for her own sexual desire or the will of the flesh (Mangunwijaya, 2020). Indeed she may gain money by doing that, but it also shows how she constantly satisfies her own desire to her ego. She does not care much about social norms or even role of a mother. She goes away from her children since they may be such burdens for her own adventure (Mangunwijaya, 2020). She may want to be always free, not by deepening her own roles, but by abandoning own identity as a mother. She does not play double roles as she is still herself with her own desire. She ignores what she already has and takes care of other men who may bring better comfort for her (Mangunwijaya, 2020).

Indeed, the motherhood language in this story does not come from the mother itself. It comes from role of Mbah Benguk who sacrifices her own life by taking care of Santi and her brother. If there is saying that motherhood language is reflection of childhood world, this story urges that condition as an ideal but the reality is so different (Mangunwijaya, 2020). Santi and her brother understand the language of a mother not from her own mother but from her grandmother. Something that is unusual but reflects diverse kind of realities. Kristeva underlines how maternal passion is about motherhood as transformation from a woman to a

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mother (Kristeva, 2005). Being a mother is such continuation of existence of being a woman. Transformation from womb to child is such actualization of potential to real life. In this case, then the role of a woman also widens to the role of a mother. However, the mother in this story does not follow that pattern. It is the grandmother that takes the role as a mother. Still, maternal passion exists in there as continuation of existence of a mother. But the existence does not come from the mother as fulfillment of her destiny (Zakin, 2011 and Wilson, 2014). The condition actually finds the source well enough in the figure of Mbah Benguk.

Kristeva pays attention to how sexual desire of woman is transformed into calmness of heart of a mother. The desire is still there but it non sexual anymore. It is such sublimation that changes anxiety of being a woman into positive deeds of motherly love (Zakin, 2011). Here, the desire of a woman is not similar to a mother. Being a mother is still potential which will appear as maternal passion once she gives birth. It does not omit role of a woman but it gives wider opportunities to fulfill full condition of being a woman into a mother (Wilson, 2014). In this story, the mother escapes the pattern once again. She gives birth to Santi and his brother but she does not transform to a mother. She is still in the realm of a woman with her own sexual desire (Mangunwijaya, 2020). She ignores then ignores her own maternal passion. Mangunwijaya would not like to express idea of hyperbolic freedom of a woman. Yet he urges maternal passion by comparing the role of the mother with the love of Mbah Benguk. Mbah Benguk, even though she is not the real mother, has transformed from a grandmother to a mother for Santi and her brother (Mangunwijaya, 2020). While the real mother fails to realize roles of being a mother, Mbah Benguk is successful to take part in sublimation of her own desire.

Recent feminism still would like to outlive patriarchy system, by not destroying it, but by proposing special aspects of woman. Being a mother is such a beautiful gift for a woman and that makes a woman special (Kristeva, 2005 and Lombardi, 2019). A woman has a womb that will make her a mother. The reflection of the mother in this story not only shows negligence of being a mother but also underlines how she could not live without man. The mother still lives under the shadows of man, and even many men. Instead of living free from man by accompanying her children at home, she chooses to surrender to man. By being a mother, she owns a world with her children, yet she leaves it and goes to other world where she could not be herself. She refuses to be a subject by being a mother, yet she chooses to be object for man. Losing maternal passion also means being not special anymore and having no sensibility of wisdom (Kristeva, 2005 and Wilson, 2014). Now, she is not a mother that could

define her own world. She is only small part of man's world who will only experience life if there is a man. No matter what the reason is, her desire shapes her to be supplement of man rather than being the main subject for herself. It also means that she could not be independent as she is always dependent to the world of man. The absence of maternal passion also shows that she ignores the idea of otherness. She only cares for herself by paying attention to her own desire. However, she rejects idea that a mother remains not for other men, but for her own children as her own fruit of the womb (Mangunwijaya, 2020).

Mangunwijaya tells this story not to undermine the role of a mother, yet he asserts the real roles of a mother (Mangunwijaya, 2020). In this case, he urges idea of maternal passions as stated by Kristeva. A mother is someone who is full of responsibility, especially for her own children (Zakin, 2011). He compares the condition of the mother with other realities of many women. Indeed, woman could destroy anything, but inside she has infinite love as passion for her own children. That is what Santi's mother does not have yet Mbah Benguk indicates that exact matter. A mother does not neglect and leave (Mangunwijaya, 2020). She takes care for her own descendants. She loves the children as she loves herself and her own world. She understands any difficulty by sacrificing her own whole to her every part of life. She is the one who stays whatever the problem is (Mangunwijaya, 2020). She is the most loyal being that will give anything for her children. She may not be perfect but indeed is special in her biological conditions and sociological roles (Kristeva, 2005). She gives haven to any problem faced by her children. She will continuously protect her children at any cost like she keeps them in her own womb. And, ultimately, she is the one who hugs her children in any condition (Kristeva, 2018). Those are how maternal passion is reflected to the role of a mother.

CONCLUSION

The story of Mangunwijaya is enriched through Kristeva's perspective especially in how woman is urged to be present as reflection of maternal passion of the womb and the caretaker of her children. While the real mother is leaving her own children, Mbah Benguk as the grandmother takes care of them so much as her own. Living in poverty does not make Mbah Benguk complain about anything. She still loves her own grandmother and gives them fully what she has. While Kristeva indicates that maternal passion is value of a mother, Mbah Benguk indicates that passion in this story even though she is not the real mother. Mangunwijaya urges woman to be responsible, by caring, protecting, and hugging her own fruit of womb. That is the real maternal passion that is best known by a mother.

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