

The Polemics on the Presentation of Time in Maile's *Boiphetetso* (Revenge)

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ABSTRACT Various literary critics maintain conflicting views regarding the presentation of time in Sesotho drama. Some of the critics maintain that time in Sesotho drama characterises itself as socially based and as a result it reflects the daily pursuits of the Basotho. Some of the critics argue that time in Sesotho drama merely emulates the Western European modern time. The paper intends to explicate the application of time in Sesotho drama with a view to reflect on the said arguments. The paper is based on Maile's *Boiphetetso* (Revenge), the Sesotho drama based on extra-marital relationship as a social problem. The results reflect that time in Sesotho drama should be analysed within its proper socio-cultural context. One basic observation levelled at this research work is that it is strongly recommended that the European standards should not be forced onto Sesotho drama as it has characteristics exclusive to itself. The fact that time in Sesotho drama lacks an element of precision does not compromise the quality and the integrity of Sesotho drama as it appears to be its inherent feature.

INTRODUCTION

The controversy between various literary critics regarding the development of Sesotho drama is based on the understanding that Sesotho drama is typically traditional and largely dependent on culture. Seeing that the cultural aspect supersedes other key aspects in Sesotho drama, it follows that even the elements of any written Sesotho drama are influenced by the magnitude of culture displayed in the text.

First School of Thought

The conception of literary critics is that there are no problems with regard to the presentation of time in Sesotho drama. They believe that time among the Basotho is merely understood to represent the African (Basotho) culture. In other words, time in Sesotho drama is merely the manifestation of culture as reflected in the Sesotho society. A number of critics support this view, among which Mokgokong (1980) maintains that:

"The traditional concept of time of the Northern-Sotho speaking people, as of most of the African, is intimately bound up with the entire culture of the people."

The above statement by Mokgokong (1980) simply implies that culture forms the cornerstone of Sesotho drama. Time is perceived as an im-

portant element that is functional to yield a sense of conviction on the part of the reader about the "reality effect" of drama.

Duvene de Wit (1979: 29) also supports the view that African (Sesotho) drama has no problems but reflect its own basic features by stating that:

"Tyd by die Swartes nie bloot ter wille van die matematiese aangedui word nie".

(Time among Blacks is not solely determined by mathematical devices).

It then appears in the above statement that De Wit (1979) also agrees that time among the Basotho is not necessarily measured in terms of mathematical devices but, as well, with the natural phenomena –and other processes. In this way, De Wit (1979) shares the same sentiments with Van der Poll (1981: 2) who raises an important view about the exclusivity of the basic features of Sesotho drama.

The influence of culture regulates the development of Sesotho drama in various ways as a result of which some literary critics seem to doubt whether Sesotho drama is well-developed in view of the Western modern standards. Van der Poll (1981: 2) states that:

"Certain African critics strongly emphasise the fact that African literature has characteristics exclusive to itself."

Such critics maintain that Sesotho drama is merely a manifestation of culture and that it may

even disturb stageability in one way or another. Wright (1966: 106) supports this view as he contends that:

“knowledge of cultural background is necessary for a better understanding of Black literature.”

The written Sesotho dramas are said to reflect on the Basotho culture. The use of time, for instance, reflects the daily pursuits of the Basotho. For those critics who understand that literature reflects on society, this is no problem.

Second School of Thought

There are other critics who measure the development of Sesotho drama against the Western standards. With the Western standards as background, the following literary critics argue that Sesotho drama has some flaws in terms of the presentation of time. They believe that Sesotho drama emulates the European Western drama. This view presupposes the fact that Sesotho drama is not yet developed to reach the standard of the Western drama. Pretorius (1982: 16) argues that:

“The modern drama in African literature is based on the European drama. Structurally, the drama in the African languages follows the same pattern as the drama in, for example, Afrikaans or English.”

Swanepoel (1977: 13) criticises Sesotho drama solely on the issue of stageability. He contends that because of the shortcomings in the presentation of time, most of the dramas written in Sesotho language cannot actually be staged. In his view, Swanepoel (1977) opines that:

“Die meerderheid gepubliseerde dramas in Afrikaans of Engels is opvoerbare dramas. Die meeste Sotho-dramas kan egter nie in hulle geheel op die planke gebring word nie”.

(Most of the published dramas in Afrikaans and English are stageable dramas. Most Sesotho dramas cannot be staged.)

To some of the critics, it is believed that Sesotho drama does, in fact, have problems as it is believed that it merely emulates the Western drama. They assume that it does not have distinctive features of its own. Groenewald (1978) appears to support this view though he states it differently as he opines that:

“Although it is possible that African literature may have exclusive characteristics, that

does not necessarily imply that ‘localised’ and universal criteria should clash”.

It is obvious that Groenewald (1978) acknowledges the uniqueness of African literature in terms of those distinctive features that it has. But, of importance, Groenewald (1978) believes that its uniqueness should not dissociate it from the universal features of the basic dramatic genre conventions. In other words, the inherent peculiarities of Sesotho drama are expected not to be in contrast or repugnant to the general aspects of any other drama of a different language.

It then appears that there is a controversy between the critics who maintain that the Sesotho drama has no problems whatsoever. It is only that it is based on Sesotho culture and that its social culture gives it a unique character. The critics believe that Sesotho drama should be understood within its cultural context. Other critics believe that African drama has some flaws as it is not unique but tries to emulate the Western modern drama.

In view of the above outlined two schools of thought, the researcher wish to analyse these arguments further and establish a logical explanation of what is pertinent and relevant to the application of time in Sesotho drama.

Aim of Study

The aim is to reflect on the role of culture in the development of drama. This would also illuminate the polemics in the presentation of time by various literary critics.

As indicated in the introduction, there are two conflicting schools of thought regarding the use of time in African (Sesotho) drama. This work would contribute to explicate some finer details of the argument. It would, for instance, be clear as to whether time precision is significant in the development of drama and the actualisation of its stageability. It would be interesting to determine whether African (Sesotho) drama does in fact emulate the Western (English) drama or whether Sesotho drama is merely a reflection of reality as other critics maintain. Steadman (1994: 101) describes the development of African drama in his comment that:

“The Africans of the pre-colonial period practised various forms of dramatic enactment – in for example, songs, storytelling narratives.

Some of these, like the Xhosa intsomi and the Zulu inganekwane, would be invoked by later dramatists and theatre practitioners as important models for authentic theatrical dialogue and action."

Steadman is one of those critics who seem to acknowledge the uniqueness of the African (Sesotho) drama.

METHODS

There is no doubt that Structuralism will have to be applied in the analysis of this work. The researcher intends to apply it because Structuralism as a literary theory, addresses itself to the various elements of a text. In order to try to verify how time, as a structural element, relates with other textual structures, this particular literary theoretical approach would be significant. The text *Boiphetetso* (Revenge) by Maile (1955) is discussed with a view to analyse the parameters within which the argument would be based in this work. This particular text is classified as a social drama that presents family problems caused by extra-marital affair as analysed by Van der Poll (1981: 222).

The text would be analysed with a view to express the manner in which time is applied in terms of reference to the past, the present and the future (among others). Here follows the actual analysis of the selected drama text.

Operationalisation in *Boiphetetso* (Revenge)

Characters in this text act as social beings and they seem to fulfil the "real" life as living human beings in the real world. Reaske (1964:46) brings an insight in this regard as he opines that:

"The characters must somehow be brought to be images of real human beings existing in time. They have a past; they are not born in the moment of the play's opening. And, in the same sense, they have a future."

Reference to the Future

Act 2: Scene 1

Page 11: Mosuwe: *Moyanyana ono wa hae ke tla o sua ho fihlela o be o tswa tjoro.*

Mosuwe: (I will work upon her soul until she becomes despondent and her soul quits.)

Given the above extract, we realise that the duration of time is estimated in terms of events. In other words the length of time is determined by the length of time that a specific event took place. In the same vein, the event does not only determine the length of time but, of importance the experienced events justify the experienced time.

The time that has lapsed among the Basotho forms part of some of their experiences and their past knowledge to constitute the continuum or epistemology within their life view. Within the context of the text *Boiphetetso* (Revenge), the continuity of the specified event of torture against Hadiyo aggravates the intensity of conflict in this text. In every case, Hadiyo appears to be the victim of circumstances as Mosuwe racked and ruined her life. Yet, the revenge appears to be eminent and unavoidable.

Act 4: Scene 5

Page 46: Mosuwe: *Ntate ke sa le mokgutshwanyane bakeng sa kofi. Ke tla bona mohlantse ke hlo-mang ditshiba.*

Mosuwe: (Father, I have not got the money to buy coffee. I shall, perhaps, afford to buy some in future).

Here the author uses the future to suggest that the whole event of buying coffee for Mokgerane is assumed to happen in future hence the future is implied. There appears to be a change of tone and the turn of events in the text. Mosuwe learns a different lesson. He seems to realise that he is being used to appease other people at the expense of his wife. He realises very late that even Tswibila herself who claimed to love him so dearly, is only there to take advantage of him. As part of the development of conflict and the building of plot structure in this text, there is recognition (*anagnorisis*) as cited by Pretorius (1982) and it changes the pace of development of conflict in the given drama text.

Reference to the Present

Act 1: Scene 6

Page 8: Moshahla: *O itse o tla tla hona ka-jeno. Oho, ntate, nka thaba haholo ha o ka*

Moshahla: *etsa kamoo o boletseng ka teng.*
(He said that he will come today. Oh, father, I will be so delighted if you can do as you had promised.)

The awareness of the significance of time is highlighted in that the solution to the problem could only be to intervene in the quarrel between Mosuwe and Hadiyo on the very same day. The longer the time before intervention takes place, the more intense the problems would be.

Act 3: Scene 6

Page 33: Tshweu: *Kajeno ke Labobedi. Ka Labohlano le ka tla kgotla, Roto.*
Tshweu: (Today, it is Tuesday. You can come to the court on Friday, Roto.)

We realise in this case that characters use calendar time. Days of the week are specifically pointed out to assure the readers about the events and the time thereof.

In the stage direction, it has been stated that:

Act 2: Scene 4

Page 23: *Hosasa motshehare wa mantsiboya Mosuwe a tsamaya.*
(Mosuwe left on the next day, in the afternoon.)

The time indicator “*hosasa*” (on the next day) has been used effectively to indicate when Mosuwe could have left from Tswibila’s place in order to once again reflect the developing conflict between Mosuwe and Hadiyo. From this point the researcher understands that Mosuwe had to stay overnight, without the concern of Hadiyo.

Just when people would come together at home after a long day of work, Mosuwe decides to leave his family. The time when he leaves his wife and son is significant to signify the problems that Hadiyo encountered as caused by her husband, Mosuwe.

Reference to the Future

Hadiyo reflects on the future in the following statement:

Act 3: Scene 10

Page 39: Hadiyo: *Ke ne ke rata ho siela ntatao mantswenyana e le hore mohla*

ditaba di mo thatafallang a tle a a hopole ...

Hadiyo: (I just wanted to say the last words to your father so that when he experiences some problems he should then recall them ...).

Hadiyo makes future projections that the time will come when Mosuwe will feel pity for his acts. This presupposes suspense on the part of readers that one day Mosuwe will suffer the consequences of his deeds. Readers’ interest is aroused as they seek to know what will happen at the end of it all.

Act 4: Scene 5

Page 46: Mosuwe: *Ntate ke sa le mokgutshwanyane bakeng sa kofi. Ke tla bona mohlang ke hlomang ditshiba.*
Mosuwe: (Father, I have not got the money to buy coffee. I will, perhaps, afford to buy some in future).

There is now a change of tone in this drama text. Mosuwe is no longer seen as the loved one as dearly as it used to be in the past. The sole reason for the change of the whole situation is the fact that Mosuwe does no longer buy anything for the Mokgerane family. Mosuwe begins to suffer as he lacks enough money to offer so randomly.

Act 1: Scene 1

Page 1: Mosuwe: *Ke tla inyalla mosadi ya tla ntlhokomela, a ntlhatswetse, a be a nkapehele.*
Mosuwe: (I shall marry another woman who will care, wash and cook for me.)

Here the future seems to suggest the possibility of the solution to the existing problems claims to have against his wife, Hadiyo. Little did he know that the option of divorcing his wife would finally lead to his total downfall. Mosuwe was not aware that the future is unpredictable especially with regard to the type of option that he decided to take.

Reference to the Present, the Future and the Past

Act 1: Scene 2

Page 2: Mosuwe: *Ke hlile ke ikemiseditse ho mo tshwara jwalo. Maoba mona ke tswa nka tjheletana ya hae eo a e*

fumaneng ka ho hlaolela batho ba bang. Ke tla mo amoha yona jwalo ho fihlela ha pelo ya hae e kena hara madi, mme a itahla.

Mosuwe: (I really have decided to treat her thus. Just yesterday I took her little money which she received by weeding for others. I shall deprive her of it until she becomes despondent and goes away.)

In this extract, we realise the use of a combined interaction of temporal aspects, namely, the present, the past and the future. These are functional to in this case to signify the awesome challenges that Hadiyo is faced with.

Reference to a Combination of the Present and the Past

Act 2: Scene 3

Page 14: Moshahla: *Ntate, ke tswa bitsa ntatemoholo le nkgono jwalekaha ke o boleletse maobane.*

Moshahla: (Father, I went to call both my grandfather and grandmother as I told you yesterday.)

There is actually a combination of categories of time, namely present and past. The specified time (yesterday) specifies the actual time when the first event took place. The researcher therefore realises that both the specificity of time, as measured in terms of the calendar; as well as time, as suggested by events, has been used.

In the analysis of the time specified in the above extract, the researcher realises the following as dependent on the nature of the time that is applied:

Reference to the past has been applied to indicate that the domestic problems in the family of Mosuwe and Hadiyo had existed for a long period. The past has also been used to typify Mosuwe as a character who is preoccupied with negative thoughts about his wife, Hadiyo.

Reference to the present simply implies a follow-up action that is based on the previous discussions that came before the actual calling of both the grandfather and the grandmother.

Act 2: Scene 1

Page 11: Hadiyo: *Kajeno ha o fihla, etswe ke sa tsebe mo o tswang teng, o se o fihlela hodima ka ka tsona ditaba tsela tsa maoba!*

Hadiyo: (Today when you arrive, I do not even know where you had been all along, you pounce upon me with all those issues of the past!.)

Time serves as the unifying factor between the characters, events and space. The researcher learns from the time specified in the text that the type of treatment that Hadiyo is exposed to, occurs frequently. Viewed from its temporal perspective, this extract denotes the stringent relations between Mosuwe and Hadiyo. Apparently Mosuwe does not bother to consult with his wife when he has to do anything. Hadiyo is almost reduced to nothingness.

Reference to the Frequency of Events

Act 1: Scene 2

Page 2: Mosidi: *Wena o re ha a hle a o tli setse kgoho e ntse e le kaofela, ka mohlomong a tlise tjhelete, motho ya jwalo a ka hla a lahlwa?*

Mosidi: You should imagine a person who brings the whole fried chicken; sometimes he would bring you money. How can you ignore such a person?).

Frequency as a mode of time applied in this case signifies that Mosuwe did some favours to the Mokgerane family quite often. The frequency has a bearing on the developing conflict as well in the sense that it aggravates the intensity of conflict up to its highest apex.

Frequency also relates relevantly with the statement of Moshahla that he used to think that his father will also support his mother financially with the money that Moshahla always send to him. It then appears that the frequency suggests that on many occasions Mosuwe transfers the money to the Mokgerane family without bothering whether Hadiyo and his son, Moshahla are also in need of support. Moshahla's statement follows:

Act 1: Scene 3

Page 3:

Moshahla: *Tjhelete ke nnile ka o romella yona ntate.*

Moshahla: (Father, I used to send you money quite regularly.)

The use of “*nnile*” (always) suggests that the act of Moshahla of sending money to Mosuwe occurred quite frequently and consistently. This act corresponds with the act of buying coffee and chicken for Mokgerane. It appears that Mosuwe had always been spending money on Tswibila’s family at the expense of his son.

RESULTS

Time in *Boiphetetso* (Revenge) is applied in dialogue and *didascalies* (stage directions and stage properties). In dialogue time reflects all the various categories or modal aspects of time. Time is applied to reflect on the future, the present as well as the future. The three aspects of time are relevantly used to imply that Mosuwe ruined the soul of Hadiyo (his wife) at all times.

In some cases, time has been applied to imply a combination of the present, the past and the future. In this way, time links the previous events, as a result of which it reflects on the developing conflict towards the final building of the theme or the underlying message of the text. There are also times when a lot of the frequency of events has been used in order to show that Mosuwe has repeatedly persecuted his wife and son mercilessly. A concise analysis of the findings based on the presentation of time in this text in terms of the three textual aspects (dialogue, stage directions and stage properties) can be presented as follows:

Dialogue

Most of the events of torture which were meant to torment the soul of Hadiyo as well as her son, Moshahla, were performed at night by Mosuwe. This is the time when Mosuwe left home very late at night to consult his power-doctor without the consent of his wife, Hadiyo.

The fact that Mosuwe would not inform about his whereabouts and particularly at that time of the day, was a strong reason that is enough to cause more challenges in the life of both Hadiyo and her son.

Therefore the author utilises the time (night) to reinforce the conflict. Time is symbolic of the problems that Hadiyo and Moshahla encountered from Mosuwe.

It was at *night* when Mosuwe used to visit Tswibila and bring chicken and coffee for the family whereas his wife and son are starving at home. It was at night when the fate of Hadiyo in her relationship with Mosuwe is decided by the Mokgerane family. In this case we realise that time reflected and symbolised sin. As it has always been determined, death is the necessary end of sin. As a form of extra-textual reference, Maile as the-then minister of religion brought into the text the whole concept of death as a form of punishment for sinful acts. This particular theme is reflected in the Holy Bible in the book of Romans 6:23 as follows:

“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Mosuwe was paving his way to death as we realise in the following paragraph.

On the other side of the coin, on the day when Hadiyo and Moshahla revenged against Mosuwe, it was again at *night*. This is the time when Hadiyo and Moshahla denied to accommodate the ailing Mosuwe at their place just on at the brinks of his death. Time in this case symbolises the trials and tribulations that Mosuwe was exposed to prior his death.

Stage Directions

Even though time has been used in various ways as part of the stage directions, it is important to realise that the most crucial event in the life of both Hadiyo and Moshahla had been when they arrived at Sekameng and met with King Maele. It was during the day when it happened and that served as the ultimate solution to their problems. Time has been used to contradict and contravene the previous torture that the two have experienced at the hands of Mosuwe and the Mokgerane family.

Stage Properties

Time has been determined by an indication of the physical objects that are specified to be in use in this particular drama text. Some objects signify the typical traditional setting whereas some signify a modern and contemporary social setting. Some of the stage properties referred to

in this text include the (*traditional – mokubetso (fumigating medicine), mokgorwana (small hut), kgotla (court), bohadi (dowry), lenkwana (small pit); and modern – sekotlolo (dish), dikofi (coffees), and so on.*

As a matter of fact, the stage properties create an impression that the actors in this text were in their transitional stage. They were moving from tradition to modern life and perhaps even assuming modern contemporary philosophy of life.

This view is captured by the fact that Mosuwe is now getting divorced against Hadiyo which is a common practice in contemporary modern societies – unlike the traditional Basotho cultural practices. Time is then employed in this case to reflect on the social life of the actors – for readers to have a perspective of the society that is reflected in this drama text.

Critics have a tendency to take Sesotho drama out of its cultural context. As a matter of principle, it appears that if Sesotho drama is discussed or focused within its proper cultural context, then it would not be seen as having any problems in terms of its development or literariness. In the same plane, if Sesotho drama is taken out of context in various discussions and research works, it would appear as if it has problems or whether it really imitates the English Western modern drama.

Taking time as an example in discussing the polemics in this text, it appears that within the traditional Sesotho drama, time is not indicated by mathematical means. In other words, the whole issue of precision is not significant in the case of Sesotho drama. As a matter of fact, time is even determined by events or the occurrence of the natural phenomena.

But this does not imply that Sesotho drama cannot be staged as an illusion can be made to signify the occurrence of those events. We have to remember that drama is merely a reflection of reality but it is not reality itself.

An illusion would be created as a sign of conviction on the part of the spectators so that, presumably, suspense can be created. In this way, more interest is developed among readers and spectators as generated by the illusion that has been created.

DISCUSSION

Time has not been used as a norm or utilised for decorative purpose, but, it had been used to

communicate a particular meaning towards the development of conflict or the plot.

As a matter of fact, the researcher has already realised how the author applied contrasting time of the day to suggest conflict, trials and tribulations in the family life of Hadiyo and Moshahla.

The theme of the text, namely *death as the ultimate end of sin*, is expressed through an inter-play of time (contrasts of *light* and *darkness* in terms of *day* and *night*). Light and darkness are significant symbols that underpin the developing conflict in this literary text.

The shining sun in the life of Mosuwe went down unceremoniously to create way for the sun to shine again in the life of both Hadiyo and Moshahla. In this way, Hadiyo and Moshahla managed to revenge against Mosuwe who let them suffer for such a long time and who made them to appear as laughing stock by the Mokgerane family as well as other insensitive members of their community. Van der Leeuw (1955) has made a brilliant discovery that budding and professional dramatists and presenters should contextualise societal norms in their work of art. This is so, in order to capture the imagination of the reader or spectator that drama demonstrates life, social norms, values and traditions of the targeted readers.

Regarding stageability, the use of time in Sesotho drama cannot disturb the stageability of drama. In the first instance, an illusion of 'reality' is created as a way of stageability. Large physical objects do not necessarily have to be brought on stage but an impression can just be made through illusion to readers, viewers or spectators. The researcher has already noted that drama is impression-formation of 'reality'. It serves as the mirror through which readers visualise reality.

If the researcher focuses on the nature of time specifications in *Boiphetetso* (Revenge), he/she realises that a décor can be used as part of stage properties to create an impression of the setting in display. It does not necessarily have to be real. In case of small tangible objects that could be brought on stage to reflect on the time of events, it is necessary to bring them on stage.

Generally, time in this text has been presented through events, time specifications in dialogue and as part of *didascalies* (both instructions to the producer of drama as well as the stage properties), change of localities. Acting

time has been used to create acceleration and deceleration of time and occurrence of events in this drama text. Accelerated time facilitates the temporal momentum of the text towards the establishment of the theme whereas decelerated time forms anti-climaxes and prolongs the stageability of the text in terms of performance.

CONCLUSION

There is a misconception in the interpretation of African drama. In the event where African drama is believed to emulate Western drama, it could be in the case of a literary (scripted) drama. It is a transitional drama that encompasses both the traditional and modern features.

Obviously, in the case where it is described as having its own basic characteristics, it is in the case where it qualifies to be classified as an indigenous traditional drama. In this case, there are no apparent signs of emulation, instead only the basic inherent features are discernible in African drama at this stage.

The forms of modern written drama in Africa have also been influenced by the Western forms of drama. The language is, more often than not, a Western language, especially as far as the published plays are concerned, which besides are mostly published by European publishing houses. The verbal element dominates the music, singing and dancing. The contemporary drama takes a shorter time of performance than it had been in the past. Themes have changed, parallel to society itself.

The paper has demonstrated therefore that there is a shift of paradigm in terms of the perception of African drama. It is no longer perceived as a straight jacket emulation of the Western modern drama but has its own peculiar and distinctive features. The quality and standard of literary expertise displayed in this text signifies the development in African drama. The aesthetic ability in terms of the use of irony and symbols culminate into a meaningful synchronisation with the underlying message as well as other literary devices to put the polemics levelled at this drama into a clearer perspective.

RECOMMENDATIONS

African drama can be categorised into indigenous tradition or traditional drama as well as an acquired tradition (from Western drama) or liter-

ary drama (scripted play). The traditional drama will have its own original African characteristics whereas a literary drama may have some elements that it shares in common with the European western drama.

It is of course not correct to use Western drama in the way it has developed during the last centuries, as a criterion to decide whether drama exists in other cultures or not! It is granted and verifiable in this work that people should always take into account the norms of the society itself with respect to the forms of drama it appreciates and performs.

Drama among Africans (Basotho in particular) should be understood to be reflective of the Basotho culture and therefore should not be divorced from the dramatic Basotho rituals. In doing so, African drama would be discussed within its proper socio-cultural context. Sesotho drama should be perceived and analysed within its peculiar cultural context at all times.

A descriptive approach and not prescriptive approach should be implemented so as to build and produce clearer impressions about this genre. The guiding principle when dealing with Sesotho drama should be to gather more information for the sake of understanding and describing it as an indigenous drama, but also to bear in mind that there are budding playwrights out there who have to develop the genre further.

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