

Chapter 10

The Theme of Death in the Music of Paweł Łukaszewski

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Abstract Paweł Łukaszewski is a Polish composer of the young generation and one of the most interesting creators of contemporary sacral music. Vocal and instrumental compositions as well as *a cappella* choral music occupies a significant place among his abundant achievements, becoming part of the Christian religious tradition. Many times their subject-matter is related to the most important periods in the Church's liturgical year or moments for experiencing the mysteries of faith. The rites that are the most significant are the ones contemplating the death of Christ as a divine entity and man. Meditation over the experience of human suffering and death constitutes a sense of The Office of the Dead. Prayers that are part of, among others, the vespers service or mass for the dead strongly resonate in musical art. Łukaszewski also related to these words in his three compositions—*Vesperae Pro Defunctis* (1995), *Salve Regina* (2009) and *Requiem* (2014). The paper shows the composer's strategies used to convey the most important messages and ideas. Interpretations—as the author says—constitute an attempt to bring closer one of the greatest mysteries of faith. Łukaszewski's deep rooting in European musical culture and Christian spirituality confirm this clearly as well.

10.1 Introduction

Paweł Łukaszewski is considered to be one of the most distinct composers in the field of contemporary religious music. His works attract great interest in Poland and beyond. The leading lights of his vast oeuvre are vocal-instrumental and *a cappella* choral compositions, referring to the Christian religious tradition. According to the composer, these references are tied to the cultural sphere he was brought up in. He was born in Częstochowa, near the Jasna Góra Marian Monastery; these circumstances enabled him to witness various significant religious and historical events (e.g. Pope John Paul II's pilgrimages to Poland). Łukaszewski also recalls the *Ars*

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Chori festival in Częstochowa (which later became the *Gaude Mater* International Religious Music Festival), where he could listen to the works of such Polish religious music composers as Andrzej Koszewski, Romuald Twardowski, Juliusz Łuciuk and Józef Świder. The artist says openly:

I compose my music as a religious believer, which I always stress without embarrassment. I am looking for a form of expression which would bring me closer to God and make me a better person – perhaps a more devoted believer too (Schabowska 2014).

Hans Urs von Balthasar emphasized:

When the artist is in fact subjectively religious, they view their work... through the eyes of a religious person. The religious moment acts as a creative impulse in the choice of, and approach to the subject (Balthasar 2007: 94).

The themes in Łukaszewski's works are often related to the most important periods in the liturgical year, which the composer treats as particularly significant times for experiencing the truths of his faith: Lent and Resurrection, All Saints Day, Advent and Christmas—works worth noting here are the oratorical compositions *Via Crucis*, *Ressurrectio* and *Missa de Maria a Magdala*, the quasi-cantata *Luctus Mariae*, choral *Stabat Mater*, Advent-themed *Antiphons*, and his own versions of Christmas carols. The composer's reflection also spans human existence: meditations on the experiences of suffering and dying are the themes of funereal liturgies, vespers and masses for the dead. The words of prayers resonate strongly throughout the music: many composers considered them not only a declaration of faith, but also an expression of the personal search for the meaning of life and death in tragic circumstances. Łukaszewski refers to prayers in three of his compositions: *Vesperae Pro Defunctis* (1995, rev. 2011), *Salve Regina* (2009) and *Requiem* (2014).

10.2 The Human Being in the Face of Death

As Regina Chłopicka writes:

Suffering and death are a fundamental issue for culture. [...] In the face of death, questions about values emerge with particular clarity (2000: 163).

The Second Vatican Council emphasized that the mystery of human fate is compellingly revealed in such circumstances. People display varying attitudes towards death, and even the same person can change theirs at various moments and stages of their life. In a death-themed essay, Izydora Dąmbska claims:

When we follow the question of death in Christian culture, we can notice two attitudes, displayed with varying strengths: death as salvation, and as a terrifying trial. In certain eras one or the other approach prevails (Dąmbska 1986: 56).

In *Genesis*, death was presented as a result of the original sin, a certain punishment, but also something that could lead to a new life—eternal happiness or eternal doom. Early Christianity treated death as salvation; in the late Medieval and

Baroque eras, the elements of awe and horror were emphasized, but their role was to help overcome the fear of death. During the Renaissance and later centuries, both tendencies coexisted and collided. In contemporary culture, marked by a crisis of faith and values, philosophers describe a dual approach towards death: either creating a sphere of taboo around it, or removing the metaphysical dimension through banalization and spectacle.

The Church is trying to re-establish the correct spiritual dimension of death; artists make similar efforts by raising the subject in their works and thus ask significant existential questions.

10.3 The Subject of Death in Łukaszewski's Works

The subject of death in Łukaszewski's music is approached, due to the composer's beliefs, from a Christian perspective. Łukaszewski says:

In the funeral rites, the dead are being entrusted to God, the hope of the living is being reinforced, and the belief that all baptized people will be resurrected with Christ is being expressed; we pray for the dead to enter a new life through their death. The message of the funeral rites is hope for an eternal life, and the confession of faith in resurrection and meeting again in the Kingdom of God [...] (Łukaszewski 2014).

Łukaszewski refers here both to liturgical funeral prayers, and to genres preserved in the long tradition of the western Church. Musical strategies also point towards particular ethical values, telling good from evil and directing attention towards the most important truths of the faith.

10.3.1 *The Choice of Texts*

The composer has set to music Latin texts functioning in the *Officium* service (*Vesperae Pro Defunctis*), the liturgy of the Mass for the Dead (*Requiem*), as well as the funeral ceremony (the *Salve Regina* antiphon). It is worth emphasizing that the author considers Latin to be “a universal language, the language of prayer, still valid and alive thanks to the Church and music”.

The vespers and the antiphon strictly follow the original text from the liturgical books after the liturgical reform by the Second Vatican Council, whereas the *Requiem* presents a specific construction of the lyrical layer.

The composer has consolidated the text of *Vesperae Pro Defunctis* into six main parts (see Table 10.1). The contents of the hymn, psalms, canticle and *lectio* focus on the most important dogmas of the faith—Christ's victory over death and his eternal rule. They also refer to the motif of Judgment Day—the day awaited by the faithful departed, believing in the return of the judge who grants light and eternal life to all those who trust and love God (hymn). Another motif is the sinful nature of

Table 10.1 *Vesperae Pro Defunctis*, macro-form

<i>Officium defunctorum ad Vesperas</i> “Liturgia horarum iuxta ritum romanum”	
I Hymnus	<i>Immensae rex potentiae</i>
II Psalmodia	
2. Antiphonae I	<i>Dominus custodit te...</i>
3. Psalmus 120 (121)	<i>Levabo oculos meos in montes...</i>
4. Antiphonae I	<i>Dominus custodit te...</i>
5. Antiphonae II	<i>Si iniquitates...</i>
6. Psalmus 129 (130)	<i>De profundis clamavi...</i>
7. Antiphonae II	<i>Si iniquitates...</i>
8. Antiphonae III	<i>Sicut Pater suscitavit mortuos...</i>
9. Canticum	<i>Christus Iesus...</i> (Phil 2, 6–11)
10. Antiphonae III	<i>Sicut Pater suscitavit mortuos...</i>
III Lectio Brevis	<i>Ubi es, mors, Victoria tua?</i> (1 Cor 15, 55–57)
IV Responsorium Breve	<i>In misericordia tua, Domine...</i>
V Magnificat	
13. Antiphonae ad Magnificat	<i>Omne quod dat mihi Pater...</i>
14. Magnificat	<i>Magnificat anima mea Dominum...</i>
15. Antiphonae ad Magnificat	<i>Omne quod dat mihi Pater...</i>
VI. Preces	
16. Oratio	<i>Deus, qui Unigenitum tuum...</i>
17. Per Dominum nostrum...	<i>Per Dominum nostrum...</i>
18. Amen	<i>Amen</i>

man and the figure of the Saviour, the Good Shepherd (psalms). The vespers have both communal and individual characters. They bring praise, the glorification of God, thankfulness for the sacrifice of God’s son, and supplication—prayer to the Merciful Judge for forgiveness and eternal life.

The medieval text of the *Salve Regina* antiphon is the prayer of a lost human being to Mary, described as the Queen, Mother of Mercy, Intercessor, life, sweetness and hope. The introduction of the antiphon into the funeral rite points at the crucial role of Mary in the plan of human salvation, as an intercessor and Mother of the Church (as stressed by the Second Vatican Council).

The liturgical texts of the funeral Mass existed in various versions. They were largely unified by the Council of Trent, and their final order (with possible variants) was shaped at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. Composers, while working on musical versions of the *Requiem*, have eventually developed an independent genre divorced from its original liturgical function, in which they omitted, shortened or reordered the text, also including national language variants. Regina Chłopicka stresses that texts set to music are diverse in type, length and construction as well as content and general character. She points out two recurrent motifs: “light”—which symbolizes eternal rest and salvation, and “darkness”—the sign of fear, doom and

damnation (Chłopicka 2000: 100). Paweł Łukaszewski, deciding on a particular choice of texts, added his personal touch to the work.

Following the guidelines of the Second Vatican Council, the composer removed the *Dies Irae* sequence, replacing it with a joyful *Hallelujah*, with Christ's quotes from the resurrection of Lazarus. As the author says, these words are supposed to remind us about resurrection to eternal life for all the faithful. Additionally, instead of the funereal *Tractus*, he has introduced Psalm 23, which presents God as the Good Shepherd. The work ends with *In paradisum* and *Libera me* in an order reversing the traditional one. This way, the text of the composition opens and closes with the theme of a prayer for eternal rest and light. The specific choice and construction of the text, alongside the musical approach, has made listeners call the work "the lucid *Requiem*" (Table 10.2).

Table 10.2 *Requiem*, macro-form

Requiem—ritum romanum	Requiem—ritum Sarum	Łukaszewski's Requiem
1. Introitus <i>Requiem aeternam</i> + psalmus <i>Te decet hymnus Deus in Sion</i>		1. Introitus <i>Requiem aeternam</i> + psalmus <i>Te decet hymnus Deus in Sion</i>
2. Kyrie		2. Kyrie
3. Graduale <i>Requiem aeternam</i> + vers <i>In memoria aeterna</i>	3. Graduale <i>Si ambulem</i>	3. Psalmus 23
4. Tractus <i>Absolve Domine</i>	4. Tractus <i>Sicut cervus</i>	–
5. Sequentia <i>Dies Irae</i>	–	4. Alleluja
6. Offertorium <i>Domine Jesu Christe</i>	5. Offertorium <i>Domine Jesu Christe</i>	5. <i>Pie Jesu (Domine, Dona eis requiem sempiternam)</i>
7. Sanctus	6. Sanctus	6. Sanctus
8. Agnus Dei	7. Agnus Dei	7. Agnus Dei
9. Communio <i>Lux aeterna</i>	8. Communio <i>Lux aeterna</i>	8. Communio <i>Lux aeterna</i>
10. Responsorium <i>Libera me, Domine</i>	9. Responsorium <i>Libera me, Domine</i>	9. Antiphonae In Paradisum
11. Antiphonae <i>In Paradisum</i>	10. Antiphonae <i>In Paradisum</i>	10. Responsorium Libera me, Domine (from <i>Office of the Dead</i>)

10.3.2 Musical Strategies

The words of each work have a fundamental meaning for the composer—he derives his musical strategies from there. The artist says:

I appreciate respect for the Word, for which I am looking for a proper sound... I am not trying to construct a new reality through my musical creations, but I'm trying to illustrate this Word with a sonic language accessible to a contemporary listener (Markuszewski 2011: 2).

Łukaszewski reaches for traditional genres, forms and styles of music, introduces a neotonal harmonic language, melodic quotes, and eventually refers to rhetorical and symbolic gestures rooted in music.

Father Tadeusz Dzidek writes about the special religious experience of contemplation and meditation, where music is very helpful (2013: 149). It appears that Łukaszewski's *Vesperae Pro Defunctis* is a musical meditation on the mystery of human death and the glory of God. Its narration time can be described as numinous, sacred, or as the artist says—the time of internal experience. The composer introduces slower tempos, numerous repetitions of musical forms, pedal notes, and clear references to the original church chant—collective, choral.

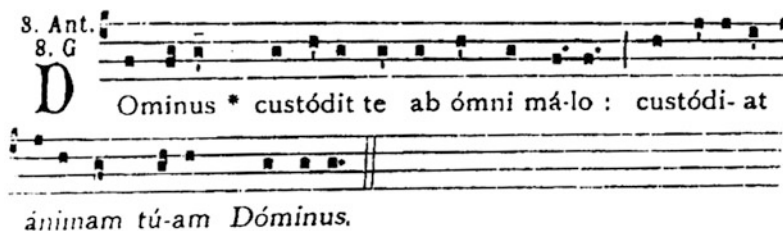
The laudatory and precatory nature of the hymn opening the vespers is achieved through polyphonic choral singing in a declamatory tone, as well as references to antiphonic singing (male versus female voices).

The *psalmody*, *lectio* and *responsorium breve* are characterized by references to a typical choral declamation, e.g. a more vocal antiphon (sometimes in a polyphonic version) as a frame for the words of the psalms, performed syllabically and individually by particular voices of the choir or solo baritone on an orchestral background. In order to emphasize the ties with Roman liturgy, the composer sometimes quotes Gregorian chant melodies (see Fig. 10.1). The orchestral parts not only accompany the vocal expression: purely instrumental fragments work as an introduction to the liturgical ceremony and prayer time (instrumental introduction), bring a moment of reflection (string interludes, or with a concertante, melodious oboe part).

The fragments particularly emphasized refer to Christ's death on the cross and resurrection (*Canticum*) and God's glory (*Magnificat*, *Per Dominum nostrum...*). Their type of expression contrasts with the remaining parts: praising, elevated, sometimes even grandiose tones dominate. Łukaszewski introduces polyphonic choral textures, layers voices polyphonically, usually operates with a tutti orchestra, uses animated rhythms, a strong dynamic (*f*, *ff*), builds tension through sequence (*Magnificat*), and eventually introduces dissonant structures which emphasize the drama of the crucifixion. The *Conclusio* though, is a quiet and humble *Amen*.

The prayer to Mary expressed with the words of the *Salve Regina* antiphon was located in the tradition of a cappella motet and antiphonic chant—two choirs (see Fig. 10.2). The composer follows a stanza construction of the text, simultaneously

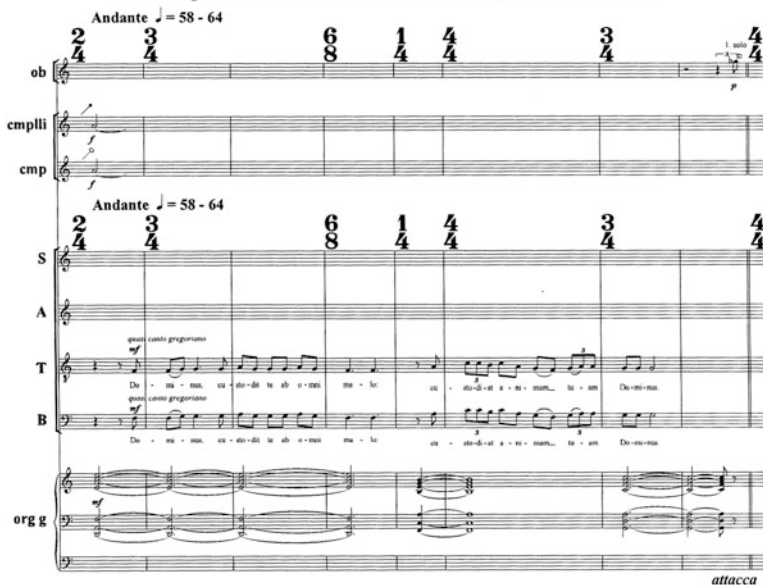
8. Ant.
8. G



D Ominus * custodit te ab omni má-lo : custódi-at
áninam tú-am Dóminus.

2. Antiphonae I : Dominus, custodit te ab omni malo

Andante $\text{♩} = 58 - 64$



ob
empli
cmp
S
A
T
B
org g

attacca

3. Psalmus 120 : Levabo oculos meos in montes

$\text{♩} = 30 - 40$



ob
vn I
vn II
vl
vc
cb

Fig. 10.1 Paweł Łukaszewski, *Vesperae pro defunctis*, *Psalmodia*—Gregorian chant and the beginning of part

5.
S Alve, Regína, * máter mi-se-ricórdi-ae : Vít-a, dulcé-
do, et spes nóstra, sálve. Ad te clamámus, éxsu-les, fí-

S $\text{♩} = 50$ *mp*
Sal - ve Re - gi - na, Sal - ve Re - gi - na, Sal - ve Re - gi - na, Sal - ve Re -

A *mp*
Sal - ve Re - gi - na, Sal - ve Re - gi - na, Sal - ve Re - gi - na, Sal - ve Re -

T *mp*
Sal - ve Re - gi - na, Sal - ve Re - gi - na, Sal - ve Re - gi - na, Sal - ve Re -

B *mp*
Sal - ve Re - gi - na, Sal - ve Re - gi - na, Sal - ve Re - gi - na, Sal - ve Re -

S
Sal - ve, Sal - ve, Sal - ve, Re -

A
Sal - ve, Sal - ve, Sal - ve, Re -

T
Sal - ve, Sal - ve, Sal - ve, Re -

B
Sal - ve, Sal - ve, Sal - ve, Re -

Fig. 10.2 *Salve Regina*—plainchant melody in *tonus simplex*, opening; Paweł Łukaszewski, *Salve Regina*, opening

building an arch-like musical form. A similar approach to motifs appears in the opening and closing words, which refer to Mary's characteristics. They become semantically strengthened through numerous repetitions. The content referring to Mary and Christ receives the same musical motifs, which symbolically stress the ties between Mother and Son. It is worth noting that the first ascending melodic motif resembles an intonation of a plainchant melody in *tonus simplex*.

Requiem refers to the cantata genre and the reflective practice of musicalization from the French tradition, which lacks the descriptions of the horrors of Judgment Day. The composer gives his work a personal dimension by dedicating particular parts to the memory of people dear to him, including composers Wojciech Kilar and John Tavener, the Primate of Poland Cardinal Józef Glemp, and members of the Łukaszewski family. The composer's interpretation is dominated by a prayer-like tone (many repetitions of musical formulas), in which two categories of expression are present: a mild request and a dramatic supplication. Both appear in the work interchangeably, in a contrasting manner. The human prayer is both communal (choir), and individual (solo vocal). The mild request (see Fig. 10.3) is characterized by fading vocal motifs, referring to the intonation of a sigh (rhetorical *suspiratio*), harmony moving towards "soft", minor tones, choral recitation or solo, quasi-cantilena singing (based on distant intervals), low dynamics and a soft instrumental sound (strings, harp, woodwind instruments).

The dramatic supplication (see Fig. 10.4) is expressed through rhythmic groupings introducing metrical shifts in accents, quick choral declamations and the melody of particular choir parts shaped by distant interval steps, dissonant harmonic structures and high dynamics, as well as a more active participation of brass, percussion and piano.

Two categories of prayer are combined in the final part but the dramatic request for salvation on the Judgment Day (which brings culmination to the previous motifs) is softened by a final, quiet, humble request for eternal rest (ending in a *pp*, E-flat minor chord).

Łukaszewski's *Requiem* is played out between the darkness of the human world, affected by sin, uncertainty and death—and the light and hope brought by God and his eternal paradise. These two main threads are expressed in two motifs, symbolic for the *missa pro defunctis* genre: darkness and light (derived from the lyrical layer). For the former, supplication was ascribed, with dissonant structures, characteristic rhythms, contrasting registers, and sometimes—references to conductus motifs (e.g. part 3, "walking through the valley of the shadow of death"). The latter is expressed through bright sound—high registers, particular instrumentation (bells, harp, flutes, etc.), a uniform, calm rhythmic pace, major chords, perfect fifths, and high dynamics. Usually, the motif of light is associated with the culmination of a particular part. We can say that Łukaszewski refers to musical archetypes, hence emphasizing the most important Christian dogmas.

The image displays a page of a musical score for the opening of Paweł Łukaszewski's Requiem. The score is written for a full orchestra and vocal soloists. The tempo is marked "Adagio" with a metronome marking of 60. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 4/8. The score is divided into two systems. The first system includes parts for Flauto, Oboe, Clarinetto in si, Fagotto, 2 corni in fa, 3 tromboni, timpani, campane tubolari, triangolo, piatto chiodato, tam-tam, gran cassa, pianoforte, arpa, and vocal soloists (SOPRANO solo, BARITONO solo, S, A, T, B). The second system includes parts for 5 violini I, 5 violini II, 4 viole, 3 violoncelli, and 2 contrabbassi. The score features various dynamics such as *p*, *mp*, and *legato*. The arpa part includes the instruction *laissez vibrer sempre*. The vocal soloists have parts marked *div.* and *unis.* The string parts include *pizz.* and *mp* markings.

Fig. 10.3 Paweł Łukaszewski, Requiem, opening

The musical score is divided into two systems. The first system includes woodwinds (flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, cor, trombone), strings (trumpet, cymbal, violin I, violin II, viola, violoncello, double bass), and vocal parts (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass). The second system includes strings (violin I, violin II, viola, violoncello, double bass) and vocal parts. The score features complex rhythmic patterns, primarily eighth and sixteenth notes, with dynamic markings such as *p*, *mf*, and *mp*. The vocal parts include the Latin lyrics: "Re - qui - em, re - qui - em ac -".

Fig. 10.3 (continued)

The musical score is arranged in a standard orchestral format. At the top, it specifies the tempo 'Andante' with a metronome marking of a quarter note equal to 60 (♩ = 60). The time signature starts as 4/2 and changes to 2/2, 3/2, 4/2, 2/2, 3/2, and 4/2 throughout the piece. The woodwind section includes flute, oboe, clarinet in si, and fagotto, all marked with a forte (f) dynamic. The brass section consists of 2 corni in fa and 3 tromboni, also marked with f. The percussion includes timpani (mf), campane tubolari (mf), and a piatto. The piano part features a complex texture with multiple layers of chords and is marked with fortissimo (ff). The harp part is marked with f. The vocal parts for Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenor (T), and Bass (B) are present but contain no notes. The string section includes 5 violini I, 5 violini II, 4 viole, 3 violoncelli, and 2 contrabassi, with dynamics ranging from f to ff and some parts marked 'div.' (divisi).

Fig. 10.4 Paweł Łukaszewski, *Requiem*, *Kyrie*: opening

The musical score is arranged in a standard orchestral format. At the top, the woodwind section includes flutes (fl), oboes (ob), clarinets (cl), and bassoons (fg). Below them are the brass instruments: trumpets (cr), trombones (tn), and tuba (tp). The percussion section consists of a snare drum (cmp) and a pair of cymbals (pl II). The keyboard section includes an arpeggiator (ar). The vocal section features four voices: Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenor (T), and Bass (B). The string section at the bottom includes Violin I (vn I), Violin II (vn II), Viola (vi), Violoncello (vc), and Contrabass (cb). The score is in 4/4 time and begins with a key signature of one flat. The vocal parts have lyrics in Latin: "Ky - ri - e, Ky - ri - e, Ky - ri - e, Ky - ri - e." Dynamic markings such as *f* (forte) and *p* (piano) are used throughout the score to indicate volume changes.

Fig. 10.4 (continued)

10.4 Conclusions

Hans Urs von Balthasar highlighted two types of religious works (Balthasar 2007). In the first group, he counted those with objectively religious themes (motifs, facts), into the second—compositions expressing the private faith of the artist. It seems that Łukaszewski's works belong to the former group due to their direct references to Christian revelation. As the composer says:

My interpretations are an attempt to bring near one of the biggest mysteries of faith (Łukaszewski 2014).

The individual, original interpretation of the *Requiem* though, indicates that subjective religiousness played a role here as well. The composer has focused to a lesser extent on the meaning of death in human existence, instead—following the thought of the Second Vatican Council—stressing the idea of eternal life after death. This is why, after the first performance, critics wrote that the atmosphere of the Polish composer's new work differs from other funeral-themed works, dominated by sadness and reflection. In the context of semiotic theories (Jabłoński 1999; Tomaszewski 2005), Łukaszewski's works can be considered as having a phatic function—their role is to deliver the author's message to the listener, unite both parties, be a medium of understanding, a “tune to a common tone”; this integrating element would be the referral to styles, genres and means typical for European religious music. Łukaszewski's idea is what he considers his credo:

As a composer, I would like to become the messenger of Truth (Markuszewski 2011: 4).

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