

# GOOD NAMES AND BAD NAMES. THE AXIOLOGICAL ASPECT OF LITERARY PROPER NAMES – A COGNITIVE APPROACH

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## Good names and bad names. The axiological aspect of literary proper names – A cognitive approach

**Abstract:** Personal proper names in literature fulfil multiple functions. They often present additional characteristics of their bearers or highlight certain aspects of the narrative structure that could otherwise remain unnoticed. This paper focuses on the axiological (valuing) aspect of *nomina propria* in fairy tales and children's literature. In the study, conducted within a cognitive perspective, two complementary ways of analysing the axiological aspect of semantically transparent proper names are used: investigating the conceptualizations and image schemas on which names are based, and describing the names as instances of masks. Image schemas underlie conceptualizations and usually give them their valuing. Name-masks may be considered an instance of language masks that use various linguistic means to profile the expressed content, so that in the given context the desired features are exposed.

**Keywords:** anthroponyms, language masks, axiology, cognitive semantics and pragmatics.

## Introduction

“Human beings tend to see events in terms of good and bad” (Wierzbicka 1988: 210, in Krzeszowski 1997: 226). The author of this statement, Anna Wierzbicka, also represents the view that seeing events in terms of good/bad is a kind of categorization (and thus, conceptualisation) and that it is universal. This view finds its clear reflection in the fairy tale tradition and in children's literature. Fairy tales, believed to be expression of folk wisdom, are an attempt at explaining the world and describing human experience. Often, they depict model situations, among which the fight between good and evil, where good wins and evil is punished, seems to be of paramount importance. According to Jung, these models are deeply rooted in the universal collective unconscious, as the fairy tale

has contents that are more or less the same everywhere and in all individuals. It is, in other words, identical in all men and thus constitutes a common psychic substrata of a suprapersonal nature which is present in every one of us (Jung 1968: 4).

A similar phenomenon can be easily noticed in the area of children's literature, where clear valuing is essential for didactic and socializing reasons. The necessity to teach and

explain the world in a way suited to the child's age and developmental stage, as well as other pedagogical and social obligations, seems to shape the writing for children.

The clear division between good and bad is such a universal phenomenon that it can be represented not only in the narrative, on the level of events and character description, but also in the onomastic layer of the given story. Thanks to this, not seldom at the first encounter with a character, before we even learn about his or her deeds, we may already know if we are dealing with a good or bad one. This sort of character introduction seems especially present in children's literature and fairy tales, where the protagonists are often very clearly characterised and valued, thus, it is often the case that the good characters have names associated with "nice things", such as beauty, kindness, friendliness, innocence and affection, with while the evil characters have names that are associated with "bad things", such as ugliness, fear, violence and unpleasant circumstances.

As in stories for children there is a need of clear characters and their clear valuing, certain characters are directly referred to as *the good fairy*, *the bad witch*, *the cunning tailor*, *the brave little tailor* (Grimms' *Household tales*). Although their denotations are semantically transparent and contain an overtly valuing word which reveals the character's identity, it seems that they cannot be treated as proper names, but perhaps as a sort of generic name, indicating a specific type of protagonist. On the other hand, names like *Cinderella*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *Rude Ralph*, or even *Bedtime Bear*, although their meaning usually determines their denotation and reveals the character's identity, may be considered as proper names. Among other features, they fulfil what van Langendonck (2007: 87) calls an

important reflex of the pragmatic-semantic characterization of proper names, that is their ability to appear in such close appositional constructions as 'the poet Burns', 'Fido the dog', 'the River Thames', or 'the City of London'.

Obviously, there are also semantically transparent proper names which do not have an evaluative character (e.g. *Bearskin*), but they remain outside the scope of the present paper. In the present study, a number of semantically transparent evaluative proper names from 'classical' fairy tales, children's stories, fables, novels and cartoons for children are analysed with special attention to the valuing aspect. We focus on less direct valuing (assigning an axiological load) in proper names, provided by image schemas, metaphors, metonymies (metaphonymies<sup>1</sup>), associations, and language masks. As the world of the fairy tale and children's stories is usually black and white, with a clear-cut borderline between positive and negative characters, the names to be analysed are divided into two categories: good and bad ones. The study focused on the question: How do names value the literary characters? We will demonstrate how the positive/negative distinction present in the narrative is reflected in the onomastic layer of the text, what specific "human values" are referred to, and also investigate on the role of humour in valuing. For that purpose, we propose to consider two ways of looking at valuing in names, both based on the cognitive approach to semantics and pragmatics: firstly, finding the underlying conceptualisations, based on the conceptual metaphor theory (Lakoff, Johnson 1980; Lakoff, Turner 1989, Kövecses 2002) and image schemas (Johnson 1987; Krzeszowski 1997, 2006; Lakoff 1987), and secondly, seeing names as instances of language masks (Biela-Wołośńcziej 2009, 2011a, b).

<sup>1</sup> Metaphonymy is a combination of metaphor and metonymy.

## How do names value? Valuing in image schemas and metaphors and their presence in proper names

Why is it that the beautiful is primarily valued positively and the ugly negatively? For the simple reason, deeply rooted in our primary experiences in the course of development in our life (and probably as a species) that we perceive friendly-looking faces as good and would rather approach them, while fierce-looking ones generally scare us and repel us, before any intellectual reflection appears. In general, the realities which we physically experience as pleasant and beneficial, are perceived as attractive, preferred and desired (and valued as good), while those experienced as unpleasant are perceived as unattractive, not preferred and undesirable (and valued as bad) – already since our prenatal life (Biela-Wołośńiej, Fornalczyk 2011c). This very basic valuing of concepts alongside with schemas that underlie concepts, is learnt through these primary basic experiences and is always present in our minds and language when we think and communicate.

From the cognitive perspective, which sees language as a tool of the mind, we may say that valuing is often provided by the basic preconceptual (and pre-linguistic) image schemas, structures which underlie concepts and their combinations (e.g. metaphors) and function as conceptualizations of reality (“ways of understanding” reality). Many pairs of opposing schemas may be seen as having a binary axiological charge of positive-negative, e.g.: UP [+] – DOWN [-], ATTRACTION [+] – REPULSION [-], HERE / NEAR [+] – THERE / FAR [-], FRONT [+] – BACK [-], CENTRE [+] – PERIPHERY [-], FORCE [+] – LACK OF FORCE [-], LINK [+] – NO LINK [-], FULL [+] – EMPTY [-], BALANCE [+] – NO BALANCE [-], etc. (Johnson 1987, Krzeszowski 1997, 2006; Lakoff 1987). As these schemas often underlie conceptualisations, also metaphoric and metonymic ones, the conceptualisations usually take the valuing of the schemas – which may be referred to as the Axiological Invariance Principle (Krzeszowski 1997). For example, the valuing of *Sleeping Beauty* is positive, as it bases on the conceptualization ATTRACTION IS GOOD.

The above explanations show why we intuitively know that when a character’s proper name contains a conceptualisation (e.g. metaphoric or metonymic) that refers to a schema which has a positive axiological load, then the name indicates a character that is valued likewise. Many examples of this phenomenon may be found in stories for children. The well-known names of positive characters in fairy tales and children’s stories include:

- *Pretty Goldilocks, Prince Darling, Prince Charming* (ATTRACTION IS GOOD);
- *Faithful John, Ferdinand the Faithful, Iron John, Trusty John* (STABILITY / BALANCE IS GOOD);
- *Puss in Boots / Master Cat* (STATUS / HIGHER SPECIES / PERSONIFICATION IS GOOD);
- *Strong Hans* (FORCE / POWER IS GOOD);
- *Clever Grethel* (INTELLIGENCE IS GOOD).

Likewise, the negatively valued names are based on conceptualisations that refer to schemas and realities with a basic negative axiological charge, e.g.:

- *Bluebeard, the Ettin* (ODD / UNKNOWN / THERE / PERIPHERAL IS BAD);
- *Jack the Dullard* (LACK OF INTELLIGENCE IS BAD);

- *Nix Nought Nothing* (anti-name: NO IDENTITY IS BAD);
- *James Hook* (sharp, primitive tool: DANGER IS BAD).
- *Black queen* (BLACK IS BAD) [-]<sup>2</sup>

Characters within a story may also be named with reference to each other's name, according to a consequent system which includes valuing. For example, in *The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood*, (Lang), the daughter is named *Dawn*, while the son is called *Day*, "because he was a great deal handsomer and more beautiful than his sister". DAWN is conceptualised as an introduction to DAY in its full beauty, and DAY is conceptualised as beautiful. An example of a story with a system of names to indicate good and bad characters by referring to similar metaphoric or metonymic conceptualisations is the television series and feature films *The Care Bears*. All positive characters' names refer to positively-valued concepts, metaphorically, metonymically or directly, e.g.: *Birthday Bear* (FEAST / PLEASURE), *Cheer Bear* (JOY / PLEASURE), *Baby Tugs Bear*, *Daydream Bear* (PLEASURE), *Surprise Bear* (SUDDEN PLEASURE), *Funshine Bear* (PLEASURE, SUNSHINE – LIGHT / WARM), *Friend Bear*, *Amigo Bear*, *Forest Friend Bear*, *Sea Friend Bear*, *Best Friend Bear* (FRIEND), *Good Luck Bear*, *Do Your Best Bear* (ENCOURAGEMENT), *Thanks-a-lot-Bear* (POLITENESS, THANKFULNESS), *Hopeful Heart Bear* (HOPE), *Play-a-Lot Bear* (PLEASURE), *Grumpy Bear* (humorous), *Champ Bear* (VICTORY), *I Love You Bear* (LOVE), *Love-a-Lot Bear* (MORE, LOVE), *Perfect & Polite Panda* (PLEASANT, PERFECTION), *Share Bear* (FRIENDLY ATTITUDE), *Take Care Bear* (GREETING), *Shine Bright Bear* (LIGHT), *Superstar Bear* (GLAMOUR), *Work of Heart Bear* (ATTRACTION), *Sweet Dreams Bear* (GREETING, DREAM, REST), *Noble Heart Horse* (DIGNITY), *Brave Heart Lion* (POWER). The bad characters' names, in turn, base on a conceptual reversion of the positive names, often within the same metaphor or metonymy, and include: *Auntie Freeze* (COLD), *Dim* (DARK), *Dumb* (LACK OF INTELLIGENCE), *Beastly* (DANGER), *Sinister Shadows* (DARK, NO COLOUR), *Dr. Fright* (UNPLEASANT EMOTION / DANGER). Another example of names with valuing based on the same conceptual metaphor and underlying scheme within one book are the names of the main adult protagonists in Dahl's *Matilda*: the extraordinary child's parents, rather primitive and negatively described, are usually referred to as *Mr and Mrs Wormwood* (UNPLEASANT TASTE IS BAD – REPULSION IS BAD), whereas her bright and friendly teacher is called *Miss Honey* (PLEASANT TASTE IS GOOD – ATTRACTION IS GOOD). Indicating the valuing present in the underlying conceptual structure of a semantically transparent name is an effective way of analysing its axiological charge.

### Why do names value? Names as masks

Another way of analysing the axiological load of names is to look at them as a type of a language mask. Literary names may be considered as an instance of masks when they suggest a way to perceive the character. Language mask is a tool for analyses within semiotics, pragmatics, semantics, discourse analysis, political linguistics, sociolinguistics, translation studies, etc. (Biela-Wolończiej 2009, 2011a, b). It is a meta-tool in communication (hence,

<sup>2</sup> While *black* is almost always conceptualized as bad (associated with darkness, danger, death, fear), *white* can be conceptualized as either good or bad, depending on which of its aspects are profiled in the given context.

also conceptualisation and perception) and has the same function as a mask in culture: to pretend, and thus entertain and/or protect. It works by “hiding and showing” at the same time, in that it selects aspects to be shown and those to be hidden – thus, profiles and modifies the expressed content in a desired way, and enables manipulating the expressed message (intentionally, but not necessarily consciously). The valuing of the selected element may vary from the valuing of the whole. Table 1 presents the types of masks present in culture and thus, in language.

Table 1. Functional typology of masks in culture and language (Biela-Wołończiej 2009, 2011a, b)

Mask type	Function	Physical world prototype
1. protective masks in “good intention”	protect, work for the benefit of the: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) wearer (sender): protect them from external threats</li> <li>b) the other party (receiver): protect them from the threat of the wearer/message</li> </ul>	gas mask  surgeon’s mask
2. protective masks in “bad intention”	protect the wearer, enable to act against the other party, being unidentified and not taking responsibility for one’s actions or intentions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) conceal the wearer</li> <li>b) mislead the other party</li> </ul>	thief mask  wolf in a sheep’s skin
3. social masks	concealing enables to disobey norms and social rules, provides entertainment and freedom of expression without taking responsibility for it	carnival mask
4. mediating masks	enable an invisible spirit or abstract concept become physically accessible, express the inexpressible	ritual mask
5. depicting masks	copy reality (a person’s face when alive or dead), create a lookalike, and potentially make it immortal	death/life mask
6. exaggerating masks	express the characteristic features of the face which are relevant in a given context, symbolically strengthen the message, simplify perception	theatre mask

As we can see, language masks are used to protect, to entertain, and for relevance (to expose the most relevant aspect) (Biela-Wołończiej 2009, 2011a, b). Used as names of characters, masks may modify the axiological charge (valuing) of the character, by highlighting a given aspect of his or her personality or behaviour. Thus, it is also possible that the valuing of the character’s name varies from the valuing of the character as such in the story (e.g. the name accentuates only an element of the character’s behaviour or personality).

A character’s name most frequently functions as an exaggerating mask, simplifying the perception of the character, by accenting his or her most relevant features (similarly to a theatre mask), often also in a valuing way, so that the child knows right away if the character is good or bad. Another common role of a name is to express “the idea” of the

character, and often figuratively express his or her personality, otherwise inexpressible and difficult to grasp “literally” – this function corresponds to the mediating mask (similarly to a ritual mask that represents an immaterial creature). These two roles often coincide. A humorous literary name may also play the role of a social mask when it is used to entertain or to challenge its “face value”, as if avoiding the responsibility by saying “I do not really mean it, just joking” (similarly to a carnival mask). It is also possible that a name functions as other types of mask, but the ones above seem most common.

A literary name-mask may modify the axiological charge of a character by highlighting the valuing of selected aspects of his or her personality or behaviour, using various masking tools, such as<sup>3</sup>:

- metaphor: *Superstar Bear (Care Bears)* [+] (<sub>STAR</sub> stands for light, beauty and attraction, which are positive, and, enhanced by <sub>SUPER</sub>, becomes even more positive; <sub>GLAMOUR</sub>)
- metonymy: *Fungus (Monsters, Inc)* [-] (fungus is considered unattractive by appearance and smell, thus, refers to the schema <sub>REPULSION</sub>, valued negatively)
- allusion: *Lucifer (The Master and His Pupil)* [-] (allusion to the devil), *Beelzebub (Jack the Giant-killer)* [-] (allusion to a demon, thus negative),
- hyperbole: *the Fleshlump eater, the Bloodbottler (The BFG)* [-] (“eating flesh lumps” and “bottling blood” are extreme deeds of violence, thus negative),
- litotes: *No Heart (Care Bears)* [-] (heart is a metonymy of <sub>LOVE</sub>, whose lack gives negative valuing),
- pun: *Work of Heart Bear (Care Bears)* [+] a homeophonic wordplay (paronomasia: *heart* refers to *art*, and thus evokes expression *work of art*, valued positively).

### Does a “bad name” always denote a bad character? Humorous names as social masks

In the above cases, a positive name refers to a positive character, while a negative name denotes a negative one. The more negative the name, the more negative the character. For example, the names of the nine evil, children-eating giants from Dahl’s *The BFG* are: *the Fleshlump eater, The Bonecruncher, The Manhugger, The Childchewer, The Meatdripper, The Gizzardgulper, The Maidmasher, The Bloodbottler, The Butcher Boy*, which refer to VIOLENCE, DESTRUCTION and devouring, thus, hyperbolically expressing various kinds of evil-doing that belongs to their nature, and indicate that their bearers are extremely bad characters. Their negative valuing is additionally stressed by the fact that they are giants – thus, the evil done by them is even greater. However, such obvious valuing is not always the case with humorous names. They may also play the role of social masks – to entertain, and possibly also to “hide from responsibility” behind the humour, so that the receiver is not certain if the author “really means it”.

The humorous aspect is difficult for an axiological analysis, as it often involves a distortion of valuing. As such, humour provides pleasure and entertainment, and hence evokes positive valuing of whatever is dealt with (Biela-Wołończiej 2008). However, if a name whose literary value is negative, is at the same time humorous, its negativity is challenged. Obviously, since it strongly depends on the receiver’s sense of humour and

<sup>3</sup> The “+” or “-” symbols indicate whether the valuing is positive, negative or mixed (the latter is discussed below).

ability to achieve distance to reality, the author may never be sure if a character's name that is intended to be funny is actually perceived as such by all readers (and not, for example, as in bad taste or scandalising). Nor may we be sure when we analyse humorous names. Generally, however, humorous names (often hyperbolic) question the overt meaning (and value) expressed by the denotation, and suggest that the character is ambiguous, e.g. their semantic-based valuing is not to be taken too seriously. Such are certain names in Dahl's *Mathilda*, e.g. *Miss Agatha Trunchbull* [-/+ ] (TRUNCH, as in TRUNCHEON, is a metonymy of hitting, thus negative, but it is also absurd and funny, thus of mixed valuing), and in *Miss Battle-Axe (Horrid Henry)* [-/+ ] (BATTLE-AXE is a metonymy of FIGHT or VIOLENCE, thus potentially negative, but in the context of the story it is absurd and funny, thus of mixed valuing).

Names may function as social masks when irony, a specific form of humour, negates, or rather "doubts in" the content and its initial valuing, resulting in a less predictable overall valuing (not necessarily opposite, but mixed). Irony is achieved when the semantic meaning of the name is not consistent with the characteristics of its bearer. This form of humour is perhaps more suitable for older children and is present in books like the *Horrid Henry* series, where it is clear whether the characters support or oppose the protagonist. However, most "good characters" (those to be identified with) have "funny bad names", while many "bad characters" (not to be identified with) have "funny good names". In the name of the protagonist, *Horrid Henry*, and his supporters, such as *Rude Ralph*, *Greedy Graham*, *Tough Toby*, etc., one finds alliteration and a hyperbole, which results in a humorous, ironical effect. The negative is exaggerated, ridiculed – thus, questioned – and as a result, it becomes less negative. The lack of coherence between the funny name of the given protagonist and the content-based valuing in the narrative weakens the negative overall valuing. The character becomes "nasty, but friendly/funny". The young reader is meant to identify with and like this group of characters. *Horrid Henry's* main opponent, *Perfect Peter*, and other "negative" characters, such as *Tidy Ted*, *Good-Goody Gordon* or *Spotless Sam*, also bear alliterated, hyperbolic names, in which the positive is exaggerated, ridiculed – and doubted. Therefore, the positive valuing based on the semantic layer of the name, is also weakened by the humour. The names clearly function as social masks, enabling the wearers to escape responsibility for their deeds, break conventions and provide entertainment.

Another instance of a humorous mask would be when the semantic meaning of a name directly opposes the character's features. Then, the character's undesired feature may be masked or "tamed" by reversing it jokingly, e.g. in Boglar, a fat boy is called *Chudy* [from Polish: Skinny]. Although still ODD IS BAD, it is reversed, and thus, to a certain extent neutralised. This name may be treated as a combination of a social and protective mask "in good intention", used to entertain and weaken the negativity (a euphemism). Altogether, humorous names suggest that the character is ambiguous, i.e. their valuing is not to be taken too seriously.

### **Names with "tricky valuing": A bad name imposed on a good character, profiling in masks**

When a bad name-mask is imposed upon a good character, it is as though someone (the society or an evil force) wanted to impose a bad identity upon them, in order to harm them. In certain situations, the basic rule "a good name denotes a good character and a bad

name denotes an evil character” may be distorted for reasons other than humour/irony. In *Beauty and the Beast*, at least in its version by Madame de Villeneuve (Lang), *the Beast* is in fact a kind and gentle prince, enchanted into a petrifying monster by an evil witch. Here, the negative name, referring to the physical, denotes a positive hero, as if imprisoned by the mask of his body, as well as his name. Similarly, the *ugly duckling* (exceptionally, we are considering a denotation, rather than a *nomen proprium* as an example) appears ugly (negative) only as long as it remains a “duckling”; however, when its true swan identity is revealed, it becomes attractive (positive). A similar case is *Cinderella / Cinderwench* – the narrative stresses her goodness and gentleness in opposition to the negative name, which on the semantic level refers to dirt, low position and humiliation. In these cases, the names (*Beast, ugly, Cinderella*) are nicknames, not real names revealing the true identity of their bearers, like a “bad mask”, forced on them through an enchantment or unfavourable circumstances of life. Interestingly, their appearance changes at the end of the story, when their true identity is revealed, followed by the change of their name or denotation (“the Prince”, “the new swan”, and “the lady / princess”, respectively).

In this context, *Beauty and the Beast, the ugly duckling, and Cinderella* are consistent with the conceptualisation PHYSICAL ATTRACTION IS GOOD, in the sense that the “unattractive” names are treated as a “bad masks”, not their true names, and the characters only appear ugly (and thus, are perceived as bad!), but when their identity is revealed, they become attractive, so the story is consistent in this aspect. This convention is purposefully broken in *Shrek*, when *Fiona*, instead of disenchanting *Shrek*, herself becomes ugly, thus deliberately violating the conceptualization PHYSICAL ATTRACTION IS GOOD. In this situation, the story uses other means of ascribing positive value to its protagonists (e.g. humour). However, this is not a typical children’s story. *The cowardly Lion*, on the other hand, is an instance of an unconventional attribute suggesting the character’s unfortunate position (the oxymoron bases on the conceptualisations BRAVERY / FORCE IS GOOD, COWARDICE / WEAKNESS IS BAD, but possibly also HARMLESSNESS IS GOOD), but without violating any common axiological conceptualization, and results in an overall unclear valuing of the character.

Why, then, may similar names be valued differently? The answer is in the aspect of profiling in masks: they only focus on selected aspects and the valuing of these aspects. This is the case with *The Snow Queen* and *Snow White*, which both refer to snow, but each in a different way. In the case of SNOW, we may focus on its positive features, such as beauty, purity, whiteness, calmness and softness, or on its negative ones, like coldness, the lack of life, and the association with winter and eventually death. The choice of the profiled aspect depends on the context. Thus, if an old queen is called *The Snow Queen*, we associate her with a powerful old woman, and thus, the mask focuses on the negative aspects of snow: *the Snow Queen [-]* (SNOW IS COLD, COLD IS BAD plus QUEEN IS POWERFUL gives: COLD AND POWERFUL IS DANGEROUS).

On the other hand, if a young princess is called *Snow White*, we associate her with a young, thus, usually attractive and innocent woman, and focus on the positive aspects of snow which correspond to her age and status. Similarly, when white, a colour of an ambiguous valuing (representing both light/purity and death/emptiness) is combined with snow and a young woman, the name as a mask profiles and exposes only the positive aspects and the vulnerability, purity and beauty of the princess:



*Snow White (Schneeweißchen, Sneewittchen) [+]* (SNOW IS PURE / DELICATE plus WHITE IS PURE, gives VULNERABILITY / BEAUTY).

This phenomenon is complementary to the Invariance Principle, where the structure of the source domain of a metaphor is mapped onto the target domain. As we can see, the structure is indeed mapped, but in its profiles, whose valuing might vary.

### Final remarks

Valuing is a universal human activity, one of the basic aspects of categorising and conceptualisation. In children's literature valuing enables to teach and to explain the world. In the present study we used two complementary ways of analysing the axiological (valuing) aspect of semantically transparent proper names in children's literature, both within a cognitive perspective: investigating the conceptualizations and image schemas the name bases on, and treating the names as instances of masks. Image schemas underlie conceptualizations and usually give them their valuing. Name-masks may be considered an instance of language masks that use various linguistic means to profile the expressed content so that in the given context the desired features are exposed. It must also be noted that in the cases when a positive valuing is present alongside the negative one, they do not neutralize each other, but rather coexist simultaneously and form a mix, similarly to the sweet-and-sour taste, where both tastes are distinguishable (as opposed to a dull neutral taste). Characters whose names do not have a clear valuing, visible at the first sight, are then valued based on the plot, but a detailed elaboration of this issue deserves another paper. Masks help the author to focus the readers' attention on the desired aspects, so in the case of the present analysis we may say that masks modify the message "from the adult world" so that – according to the adult – may become compatible with "the child's world".

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