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Johanna Kinkel's *Thurm und Fluth* (Opus 19, No. 6): Revolutionary ideas and political optimism in a 19th-century art song

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Abstract. Johanna Kinkel (1810-1858) has for a long time been overshadowed by her husband, Gottfried Kinkel (1815-1882), who was an influential German political propagandist in the 19th century. When he was arrested as a result of a pre-unionist revolutionary speech in 1849, Johanna was not allowed to visit him, because the state estimated her influence as being harmful for Gottfried's peace of mind and his indoctrination. In fact, Johanna Kinkel was the co-founder of the political magazine *Maikäfer* and she expressed her sympathy for her husband's political activities in many letters and diary entries. Another interesting avenue to her political perceptions is her musical Œuvre including more than 80 art songs, three cantatas as well as incidental music. This paper aims to introduce Johanna Kinkel's lied *Thurm und Fluth*, Opus 19, No. 6, which was published in 1848, one of the most eventful years on the way from scattered regionalism to a united Germany. The consistently ambiguous words are delivered through a broad variety of compositional features, ranging from traditional formal aspects to fairly experimental harmonic and melodic progressions. The lyrics, which were written by Gottfried Kinkel, describe the German political status quo as well as the writer and composer's rather optimistic hopes using the power of nature as a major allegory. A musical analysis and interpretation of the lied will show how the piece carries political hints without arousing public suspicion of political agitation.¹

1. Introduction

Johanna Kinkel (1810-1858) has for a long time been overshadowed by her husband, Gottfried Kinkel (1815-1882), who was an influential German political propagandist in the nineteenth century. However, Johanna Kinkel herself seemed to be involved with politics and the distribution of revolutionary ideas just as much as her husband. Gottfried Kinkel was arrested after his involvement with the social democrat rebellion in the Palatinate in 1849. As the state considered Johanna Kinkel's influence on her husband as being harmful for his indoctrination, Johanna was not granted permission to visit him in prison.² Paul Kaufmann acknowledges Johanna's pivotal influence on her husband and refers to her as Gottfried Kinkel's demon.³ In fact, Johanna Kinkel was the co-founder and the only female member of the *Maikäferbund*, a literary and political association publishing the political magazine *Maikäfer*. Although Johanna Kinkel missed her husband whenever he left the house for the sake of politics, she expressed her sympathy for his political activities in many letters. When Gottfried Kinkel joined the revolutionary forces in the *Siegburger Zeughaussturm* on 10 May 1849, from which he did not return home as he tried to hide from the military, Johanna bemoaned his absence in one of her letters to him. At the same time, however, she promises him to control herself and grants him her full support:

"I want to pull myself together. – I want to stick to my promise to bring up the children as good revolutionaries. I believe, you were not able to act in a different way; and whatever

¹ The presentation of this paper at the conference "The National Element in Music", 18-20 January 2013, Athens, was financially supported by the Graduate Studies Office, National University of Ireland Maynooth.

² *Neue Leipziger Zeitung*, 242 (30/08/1850), p. 961.

³ Paul Kaufmann "Johanna Kinkel. Neue Beiträge zu ihrem Lebensstil", *Preußische Jahrbücher* 22 (1931), 3-47, p. 4.

may happen, if the torture of missing you exasperates me, you do not have to fear me blaming you".⁴

Besides Johanna Kinkel's psychological support of her husband's political activities, she herself actively contributed to the *Bonner Zeitung*⁵, as indicated in one of her letters to Gottfried, in which she discusses the option of her and the family following the sadly-missed husband and father to Berlin, where he worked as a member of the Prussian Diet from 23 February 1849 until May 1849:

"I believe that my presence is very important to the punctual publication of your newspaper. You can be sure that the paper will be looked after and driven carefully, and that I will take care of the evening work, the Sunday work and the reviews as long as I am in charge of them".⁶

Another promising avenue to Johanna Kinkel's political activity is the examination of her musical Œuvre which includes more than 80 lieder, 15 of which are settings of her husband's poetry.⁷

This paper aims to introduce Johanna Kinkel's lied *Thurm und Fluth*, Opus 19, No. 6, which was published in 1848, one of the most eventful years in nineteenth-century German history. The consistently ambiguous words written by Gottfried Kinkel are delivered through a broad variety of compositional features, ranging from traditional formal aspects to a fairly experimental piano accompaniment as well as thoroughly organised harmonic and melodic progressions. The lyrics summarise and criticise the German political status quo and show the poet and composer's rather optimistic hopes using the power of nature as a major allegory.

A short synopsis followed by a musical analysis and interpretation of the lied will show how the piece carries political hints without arousing public suspicion of political agitation. In a concluding section I would like to introduce further research points and questions resulting from this study.

⁴ Johanna Kinkel in a letter to Gottfried Kinkel on 14 May 1849, published in *Liebe treue Johanna! Liebster Gottit! Der Briefwechsel zwischen Gottfried und Johanna Kinkel 1840-1858*, ed. Monica Klaus (Bonn: Stadtarchiv und stadthistorische Bibliothek, 2008), pp. 506-508, p. 508. Original citation: "Ich will fest bleiben. – Ich will dir mein Wort halten und die Kinder zu guten Republikanern erziehen. Ich glaube, du konntest nicht anders handeln, und was auch daraus entstehe, wenn die Qual dich zu missen mich zur Verzweiflung bringt, keinen Vorwurf hast du von mir zu befürchten".

⁵ The *Bonner Zeitung* was Bonn's only democratic newspaper of the time and was edited by Gottfried Kinkel from 6 August 1848 until he became a member of the Prussian Diet in Berlin and moved to the Prussian capital city on 24 February 1849. From then on, Carl Schurz was appointed editor of the *Bonner Zeitung*, followed by Johanna Kinkel, who took over the editorship in May 1849 when Carl Schurz and Gottfried Kinkel both joined the *Siegburger Zeughaussturm*.

⁶ Johanna Kinkel in a letter to Gottfried on 10 March 1849, published in Monica Klaus (ed.) *Liebe treue Johanna! Liebster Gottit!*, pp. 453-454, p. 554. Original citation: "Endlich glaube ich, daß meine Anwesenheit für das pünktliche Erscheinen deiner Zeitung sehr wichtig ist. Dies konsequente Aufpassen, Antreiben, Versorgen für die Abendarbeit, für den Sonntag u. die Rezensionen bist du ja auch beruhigt, solange du sie in meinen Händen weißt".

⁷ Besides typical nineteenth-century themes such as longing, the South, love and romanticised pictures of nature, Johanna Kinkel includes different socio-political themes in her lieder compositions, such as nationalist allusions to history (e.g. *Rheinsage*, Opus 8, No. 2; words by Emanuel Geibel), revolutionary appeals (e.g. *Demokratenlied*, no opus, words by Johanna Kinkel; *Auf wohlauf, ihr Candioten*, Op. 18, No. 3; words by Gottfried Kinkel; *Stürmisch wandern*, Op. 18, No. 6; words by Gottfried Kinkel), the sorrows of a wife whose husband is leaving for war (e.g. *Abreise*, Opus 8, No. 6; words by Emanuel Geibel; *Des Lehnsmanns Abschied*, Op. 21, No. 6; words by Gottfried Kinkel), the fight against religious conventions (*Die Gefangenen*, Op. 16, No. 1; words by Johanna Kinkel) and nationalism under the disguise of orientalism (*Beduinen-Romanze*, Op. 19, No. 4; words by Gottfried Kinkel).

2. Words

Gottfried Kinkel gave his first political speech on 20 March 1848 in Bonn only one day after the March Revolution had commenced and had been violently put down by the emperor in Berlin.⁸ Reading *Thurm und Fluth* as a political poem, one is struck by the ambiguity that is evident throughout all five stanzas. The poet is using nature as an overall allegory for the German political status quo by choosing a tower as a symbol of the politically powerful Prussian emperor and the sea as a metaphor for the people. That way the sea could equally be considered as the revolutionary movement favouring a united Germany with a constitution.

2.1. Synopsis

Thurm und Fluth tells the story of a waterfront tower that is constantly touched and finally destroyed by the raging sea. The first stanza introduces the tower which is located at the cliffs overlooking the countryside. As a counterpart to each stanza the reader is confronted with a refrain that portrays the wild ocean, permanently bathing the quiet and strong tower. In the second stanza we are presented with a rhetorical question about the sea: Why would it keep itself calm? A second rhetorical question alludes to the sea's past which could be considered as a reference to German history. The lyrical I characterizes the current political force as a "drone" (line 10). The third stanza describes how the sea bravely approaches the tower but only takes away a grain of sand from it. At this stage the tower is referred to as a "castle" (line 21) which shows the strength and stability it is assigned. At this moment we reach the climax of the poem, and a turning point at the same time. In the following stanza the balance of power between the sea and the tower seems to change as spirits sally in from the West during the night. Here Kinkel adverts to his own political speech and the revolutionary movement in and around Bonn, Western from the Prussian court in Berlin. The Western approach results in the victory of the sea against the tower which finally cracks and collapses. The refrain could be interpreted as a positive development of the sea's attempt to crush down the tower. This becomes an ambitious political undertaking and could be read as an optimistic threat, voiced by a convinced revolutionary.

2.2. Interpretation

2.2.1. Imagery

The poem is laden with personification giving the reader the impression that the tower and the sea are acting like human beings. Especially the chorus "Die Wellen kennen nicht Rast noch Ruh" ["The troubled water knows neither rest nor calmness", line 7] seems to go beyond the literal meaning of nature. It constantly reappears in order to remind the reader of the staying power of the revolutionaries.⁹ Furthermore, the chorus forms a permanent contrast to the

⁸ Cf. Monica Klaus *Johanna Kinkel. Romantik und Revolution* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2008), p. 153. For more details on German history of the nineteenth century, especially the 1848/49 revolutions see Frank Eyck *The Revolutions of 1848-49* (Edinburgh: Longman, 1972), pp. 3 ff. and Ernest John Knapton & Thomas Kingston Derry *Europe 1815-1914* (Norwich: Jarrold & Sons, 1965), pp. 20 ff.

⁹ Although the Berlin March revolution (17 March 1848) was violently suppressed by the Prussian military, the insurrection awarded the revolutionaries freedom of press, which resulted in an increased number of revolutionary organisations and newspapers, which, in turn, enabled the revolutionaries to associate with each other. This is also reflected by Gottfried Kinkel's increasing political activities: On 20 March 1848, he gave his first political speech at the City Hall in Bonn; on 27 March 1848, he contributed to the foundation of a central committee of the Bonn democrats (*Central-Bürgerversammlung*); on 19 April 1848, Kinkel wrote a petition for craftsmen favouring a better education of this lower societal stratum, followed by the foundation of the *Handwerkerbildungsverein* (Educational association for craftsmen) on 28 May 1848 and the establishment of

verses. Whereas the chorus stays the same all the time, the preceding verses tell a story that incorporates a change of atmosphere. In addition to this the poet uses metaphors such as “krauses Haupt” [“fizzy head” (line 18) for the troubled water] in order to create variety and attract the reader’s imagination. Another reason for the huge concentration of imagery within the poem could be Kinkel’s awareness of the socio-political situation he was in. His profession as a Protestant theologian ended when he married a Catholic-born woman who had been married before.¹⁰ However, he certainly did not want to put his own life and his family’s life at additional risk publishing obvious revolutionary ideas that were not welcomed by the political powers.¹¹ Apart from that, Kinkel might have hoped for as big a readership as possible and therefore tried to hide his political message between the lines rather than putting off readers who were not on the same wavelength as him.

2.2.2. Formal aspects

The poem consists of five stanzas, each of which includes one alternate rhyme, followed by a rhyming couplet and the refrain. Each verse contains three stressed syllables and the poet only uses falling rhythmic feet, i.e. trochees and dactyls, depending on the number of syllables in a word. In order to keep that pattern the poet inserts fillers (e.g. “so” in lines 4 and 5) or uses elisions (e.g. “Well” rather than “Welle”, line 22).

2.2.3. Sound

Besides the well-chosen allegory of nature¹² as a disguise for a political statement, an evenly organized formal sketch and a regular metre there is another feature which adds to the musical qualification of this poem, namely the sound. The words seem extremely harmonious as the poet uses many alliterations (e.g. “Rast noch Ruh”, line 7) and assonances (e.g. “wühlen und spülen”, line 8).

3. Musical Analysis

Many of the above-mentioned features that create regularity and seem to result from a thorough organisation of the syllables, words, verses and stanzas recur in the musical framework of Johanna Kinkel’s setting.

3.1. Formal Sketch

Looking at the formal sketch of the song (Figure 1) one is reminded of the traditional eighteenth-century phrasal pattern. Four bars form one phrase and we have a total of 24 bars, i.e. six phrases. This supports the regularity Gottfried Kinkel applied in his poem, especially because

the *Demokratischer Verein* (Democrats’ association) on 31 May 1848. On 6 August 1848 he took editorship of the *Bonner Zeitung* and on 15 November 1848, Kinkel made a public appeal for tax refusal. (Cf. Monica Klaus *Johanna Kinkel*, pp. 152 ff.)

¹⁰ Cf. Monica Klaus *Johanna Kinkel*, p. 90.

¹¹ On 10 February 1846, Gottfried Kinkel was appointed professor at the Faculty of the history of arts at the Bonn University, which made up for the financial shortage caused by Kinkel’s religious dishonest behaviour and which polished up financially the Kinkels’ household. However, Gottfried Kinkel’s political engagement with the *Siegburger Zeughaussturm* in 1849 cost him his job at the Bonn University and endangered his family’s life to a great extent (Cf. Monica Klaus *Johanna Kinkel*, p. 183); a fact, of which he did not know when he wrote his poem *Thurm und Fluth* in 1848.

¹² This is also a general typical feature of the romantic era, in which, according to Rey M. Longyear, the “love of an unspoiled pre-industrial nature” alludes to the industrialisation that influenced large parts of Western Europe in the middle of the nineteenth century. (Cf. Rey M. Longyear *Nineteenth-Century Romanticism in Music*, third edition [New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1988] p. 12)

each line is always assigned two bars. One stanza consists of three phrases, whereas the first two phrases, in accordance with the alternate rhyme, seem to be an entity. The third phrase sets itself apart from its preceding phrases as it is made up of a rhyming couplet. The rhythmic change of the piano accompaniment adds to the contrast between the first two phrases and the third phrase.

The musical organisation of the song conforms to the poetical structure of the poem as Kinkel inserts one bar, namely bar 13 that functions as a bridge between stanza and refrain. However, this bridge introduces a little bit of irregularity as bar 13 is a stand-alone section. The following four bars, i.e. phrase four, cover the first part of the chorus in which the refrain repeats one line. The second part of the refrain is represented by three bars, which, if we add bar 13, makes the chorus into an entity of eight bars, i.e. two phrases. That means that the irregularity generated in bar 13 is balanced at the end of the chorus and the traditional number of four bars per phrase has been restored. At this stage the song could finish off, but Johanna Kinkel composes another phrase for the solo piano. Summarising the formal structure of this composition I would like to stress the close relationship to the German folk song as it is a strophic setting.

bar	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
verse	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
phrase	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
melody	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
section	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	B	B	B	B	B	Chorus	Chorus	Chorus	Chorus	Chorus	Chorus	Chorus	Chorus	Chorus	Chorus	Chorus
piano	Triplets/ arpeggios	Triplets/ arpeggios	Triplets/ arpeggios	Triplets/ arpeggios	Triplets/ arpeggios	Triplets/ arpeggios	Triplets/ arpeggios	Triplets/ arpeggios	8/8 – 4/4	8/8 – 4/4	8/8 – 4/4	8/8 – 4/4	8/8 – 4/4	Triplets/ arpeggios	Triplets/ arpeggios	Triplets/ arpeggios	Triplets/ arpeggios	Triplets/ arpeggios	Triplets/ arpeggios	Triplets/ arpeggios	Triplets/ arpeggios	Triplets/ arpeggios	Triplets/ arpeggios	Triplets/ arpeggios
harm.	g	g	Eb/Bb	B	g/B ⁺	Eb/Ab	Eb/Bb	Eb	c/D	g	Bb/c	D	D/d	c/F ⁺	Bb/Eb	Ab/c/D	g/D	G	G	G	G	G	G	G
com.					climax				melody/ words!	melody/ words!	melody/ words!	melody/ words!	melody/ words!	melody/ words!	melody/ words!	melody/ words!	melody/ words!	harmonics contrast	harmonics contrast	harmonics contrast	harmonics contrast	harmonics contrast	harmonics contrast	harmonics contrast

Furthermore, *Thurm und Fluth* reminds us of the traditional bar form A – A – B if we examine the stanzas separately from the chorus. The lyrics address a large audience that might go beyond the musically well-educated social stratum and might include musical laymen. Hence the appliance of two folk-like structural features might have been chosen in order to assist the listener as it increases both comprehensibility and memorability of the piece. One might be tempted to assume that Johanna Kinkel structured this piece as a folk song because she was most used to folk songs herself due to the lack of organised musical education during her childhood. However, I would like to hold against this that the composer's musical understanding must have developed from 1836 on as she then went to Berlin and spent a lot of time with Fanny Hensel who had enjoyed a brilliant musical education as a child and certainly must have influenced Johanna Kinkel's compositional style. Kinkel was also friendly with Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy¹³ with whom she was in close touch discussing compositional matters and on whose compositions she gave lectures in London in the 1850s¹⁴ – a point which might prove Kinkel's musical and compositional understanding.

¹³ Adeline Rittershaus "Felix Mendelssohn und Johanna Kinkel. Ungedruckte Tagebuchblätter und Briefe", *Neue Freie Presse. Morgenblatt.* (19/4/1900), pp. 1ff. Johanna Kinkel's close friendship with the Mendelssohns is also reflected in her memories of her time in Berlin, in which she speaks very well of Felix Mendelssohn's sister Fanny Hensel and her *Sonntagsmusiken* (Cf. Monica Klaus *Johanna Kinkel*, p. 44). Furthermore, Mendelssohn's other sister Rebecka Dirichlet was involved with Gottfried Kinkel's escape from prison in November 1850, as she kept the money Johanna had sent to Berlin in order to conduct the escape until Carl Schurz, who finally freed Gottfried Kinkel with the help of a few prison guards, collected the money at Rebecka Dirichlet's. (Cf. Monica Klaus *Johanna Kinkel*, p. 234)

¹⁴ The lectures are archived in the Handschriftenlesesaal at Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Bonn.

3.2 Piano Accompaniment

In opposite to the quite simple formal organisation of the song, the piano accompaniment is far from simple. The huge amount of triplets and arpeggios produces a fast tempo and challenges the pianist. Thus the composition could hardly be considered as a folk-like piece from the pianist's point of view. This observation is contradictory to the argument that Johanna Kinkel intended to compose a folk song for a large audience as the superior piano accompaniment certainly hindered public performance and, therefore, distribution. On the other hand it is understandable that Kinkel wanted to show her whole musical and compositional potential and therefore assigned a fairly important role to the piano. This is not only recognisable by means of the last four bars which include a solo piano passage. But the piano exceeds a purely accompanying function throughout the lied and takes on a semantic role.

A good example of an effective pianistic figuration used to illustrate the text is found in the chorus, bars 18-20 (musical example 1). Whereas the first verse "Die Wogen kennen nicht Rast noch Ruh" ["The troubled water knows neither rest nor calmness"] is accompanied by triplets and arpeggios supporting the fast motion of the troubled sea; the piano part becomes independent in bars 18-20. These bars are made up of triplets in the right hand and groups of four quavers in the left hand. The coexistence of an even and an uneven rhythm reinforces the unsettledness of the sea and accurately pictures the contents of the last verse, which is "Sie wühlen und spülen immerzu" ["They constantly grub and swill"].

3.3. Melodic aspects

Remaining with the last verse of the chorus, bars 18 to 20, it is striking how Kinkel uses melody as a means of contrast. Whereas the piano part portrays the troubled water, the vocal part consists of only one note, namely "g" (see musical example 1). As the sea is used as an overall allegory for the people the tonal uniformity could be interpreted as the persistence of the revolutionaries who fight against the Prussian powers.



Musical example 1: Bars 18-20 of Thurm und Fluth by Johanna Kinkel¹⁵

3.4. Harmonic aspects

Also the harmonics are used as a meaning-bearing musical parameter. The piece is set in G minor with all its common tonal mediants as well as its dominant key D major arranged around it. The desperate attempts of the sea to approach the tower are represented by a rather restrained g-minor tone. However, the chorus is used as a means of modulation to G major and thereby brightens up the general atmosphere. It does not surprise that Johanna Kinkel uses the note "g" for the melody in the last phrase of the chorus as this functions as a stabilizer of both the originally introduced key g minor and the newly established mode G major. The shift from G minor to G major in the chorus supports the initial interpretation of the refrain as an optimistic and enthusiastic appeal to the revolutionaries. In relation to this, the solo piano part

¹⁵ Musical example: Johanna Kinkel *Sechs Lieder* (Köln: M: Schloß, 1848). It has been transcribed by the author.

in G major at the end of the piece could be considered as a reassessment of the words voiced before, which increases its contextual function.

4. Summary

Thurm und Fluth contains many stylistic means which attract the reader's imagination. Furthermore, the musical appearance of the words, the strophic organization and the regular metre enabled Johanna Kinkel to compose a piece that, at the first glance, seems like a folk song. The setting of five stanzas which are each structured according to the Minnesang bar form increases the comprehensibility and memorability of the piece. In addition to this, the melodic and harmonic progression takes on a contextual level and supports the message that is hidden between the lines which could be summarised as the attempt of the revolutionary movement to dispossess the political force. The chorus functions as both an appeal to Johanna and Gottfried Kinkel's like-minded people to not give in and keep fighting as well as a clear statement towards the Prussian court who had violently put down the political rebellion on 19 March 1848 in Berlin.

5. Conclusion

However, more than likely this piece was perceived as a political message only by a small part of the population rather than the general public as it would have taken a certain perspective, namely the perspective of a revolutionary, to interpret the piece as an attempt of political agitation. Furthermore it is questionable in how far the general public was intellectually able to understand and interpret Johanna Kinkel's message. As Kinkel was the mother of three children, a fourth child on its way, she might have purposely hidden her revolutionary ideas under the disguise of "mother nature" as she certainly did not want to endanger the well-being of her family for the sake of politics any more than necessary.¹⁶ Having said this, it would be interesting to examine if this piece was promptly performed and, if so, under what circumstances and on which occasion the performance took place.

In addition to this, I would like to raise attention to the question of distribution of revolutionary ideas, expressed through music. Such ideas can certainly only be considered politically influential if there is some kind of public distribution at all. The media preferably published words that carried political information more obviously. The *Bonner Zeitung* for example, since 6 August 1848 under Gottfried Kinkel's editorship, published Johanna Kinkel's *Demokratenlied* in December 1848.¹⁷ But as the *Bonner Zeitung* was a fairly revolutionary medium the distribution of the words through this medium might not have gone beyond the revolutionary crowd that agreed with Kinkel anyway. It shall be interesting to investigate if Johanna Kinkel also published her works through non-political media such as women's magazines, art journals or rather neutral daily newspapers.

Thurm und Fluth could have been a useful means to distribute revolutionary ideas to rather neutral and undecided sections of the population as the lyrics are not as obvious and aggressive as for example the words of the *Demokratenlied*. Opus 19 was published in 1848 by the music publisher Schloss in Cologne. But has the general public ever been confronted with these thoroughly chosen words and notes or was *Thurm und Fluth* **not** much more than a teamwork experience of highly-psychological value for Gottfried and, more importantly, Johanna Kinkel?

¹⁶ Monica Klaus *Johanna Kinkel*, p. 154.

¹⁷ *Bonner Zeitung*, 192 (6/12/1848), p. 1.

Having raised this point, I would like to try to transfer my findings to a more general argument and I would like to address the following question to my audience. If we consider music carrying revolutionary content as a phenomenon of fringe groups, i.e. a small part of the population, rather than a mainstream occurrence, why is it that such kind of music is assigned a huge political relevance, sometimes even a danger by its respective political force?

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