CHILDREN OF THE MOON
by
Martin Flavin

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A Production Thesis Presented for the
Degree of Master of Arts

by
Esther M. Jackson, B.S.

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THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

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Approved by:

[Signature]
Prefatory Remarks

The production-thesis: *Children of the Moon*, includes the following:

(i) Presentation of the play in the Drama Studio on July 30, 1946.

(ii) A stage model.

(iii) A production book.

The model and book are on file in the library of the Department of Speech. The portion of the book containing the literary and the theatrical analysis of the play is on file with the Graduate School.
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"Discussion of Production Problems of Children of the Moon"

by

Esther M. Jackson
INTRODUCTION

Children of the Moon was presented in the Drama Studio of Ohio State University, on Tuesday evening July 30, 1946. The play, a beautifully, yet unevenly written script, has the major characteristics of a tragedy, with pronounced tendencies toward fantasy in its closing scenes. This discussion is a record of the steps in production, the research preceding the rehearsal period, and the actual directional procedures involved in the presentation.

The major production problem of the director was to develop a means of control, that is, a method by which the tragic import and beauty of the play might be preserved, and the trite melodramatic aspects, which grew out of the lack of technical skill on the part of the playwright, might be subordinated. This method involved the development of what is technically spoken of, in both literary and theatrical provinces of drama, as "style". The directional proceedings were concerned with (i) the selection of style, (ii) the analysis of style, and (iii) the development of a means of controlling style. The first consideration of any director in
planning a performance is to determine what is to be the style of production. In this case the decision was influenced by several factors; the style of writing inherent in the script, the style of the Broadway production, and the degree and manner of success gained by the initial production. This information was secured in three phases of research, (i) history of the play, (ii) literary analysis of the play, and (iii) theatrical analysis of style.

The second consideration for the director in this production was the development of a plan by which the elements of direction might be used to create the desired style in production. This plan was executed in rehearsals to establish the appropriate style. The final consideration in this pre-rehearsal planning was the evolution of the most effective staging techniques for emphasis upon style. This plan, which evolved, included designs for the use of setting, lighting, music and make-up.

In the discussion which follows, a detailed account is given of material gathered and procedures followed in the production of Children of the Moon.
There follows a chart of the phases of procedure.

I. Research

(1) History.
(ii) Literary analysis.
(iii) Theatrical analysis of style.

II. Production

(1) Directional procedures
   a. Casting.
   b. Developing of stage speech.
   c. Blocking of stage action.
   d. Interpreting characters.
   e. Establishing rhythm, tempo, and mood.

(ii) Staging
   a. Setting.
   b. Lighting.
   c. Music and sound.
   d. Costumes and make-up.

I. Research

(i) History

*Children of the Moon* was written by Martin Flavin, a Chicago business man, in 1923. Its first public performance was given in New York, August 17, 1923, at the Comedy Theatre.

It was co-directed by Louis Calvert and B. Iden Payne. Mr. Payne's work in Shakespearean directing at Carnegie Institute had won him wide recognition. The play boasted, in addition to good direction, an
excellent cast, including the Shakespearean actress, Henrietta Crossman, as Madame Atherton. Miss Crossman's Rosalind of many years before was still remembered by the critics, and they observed that her flair for delicate portrayals found good use in the luminous charm she gave her new role. A singularly stellar performance was, reportedly, given by Beatrice Terry as Laura Atherton. Critics agreed that the play has merit, but they were not agreed as to the degree. Robert Burns Mantle did not select it as an above average play. He gives no comment at all on Mr. Flavin's initial dramatic effort. On the other hand, John Corbin of the New York Times reports that he and the first night audience were overwhelmed by the magnificence of the new play. It was the essence of Mr. Corbin's opinion, in two long articles written on the play, that the performances reached upon several occasions the peak of high tragedy. In addition certain elements of impressionism in the play were evident in the accounts of critics. Frequent mention

1. Robert Burns Mantle, *Best Plays of 1923-24*
2. "At the end of the second act, the audience rose in a spontaneous outburst of admiration such as has seldom or never greeted an American play of such literary and artistic intention." John Corbin, Theatre Section of the New York Times, August 18, 1923.
was made of the strong mood values.\textsuperscript{3}

It is somewhat difficult to explain the wide discrepancies in critical evaluations. Some negative reaction to the play may have been due to the relatively large number of excellent scripts in production during the same season, many for the first time. \textit{Outward Bound, Beggar on Horseback}, and, about the same time, \textit{The Adding Machine} are but three of the many starred productions listed in the Burns Mantle publication. The major fault with the play seems to have been, not in the production, but in the faulty and uneven construction, particularly in the third act. The lack of motivation for Major Bannister's suicide, the complete and sudden change of mood and intensity from Act II to Act III are serious technical faults. Apparently, the director did not make adjustments sufficient in his own style to cover the inadequacies of the script.

\textsuperscript{3} "A strange...play". John Farrar. "To see or Not to see." \textit{The Bookman} Vol. LVIII. New York, Doran 1923, p. 305.

\textsuperscript{5} Director's Script, pp.38-39. (Reference to the script of \textit{Children of the Moon} will be referred to as Director's Script.)
(ii) **Literary Analysis**

In order to determine the appropriate style and the problems entailed in production, it is vital that the director make a literary analysis of the play which he is presenting. Martin Flavin has in this, his first play, a script with rare beauty, eloquence, and tragic height. The difficulties arise because of lack of focus, mixtures of style, story, and interests. It is difficult, to begin with, to determine his theme. He introduces lunacy, mother complex, and romantic love. Neither is sufficiently subordinate to the other to give the play a central theme or central subject, except by re-interpretation through direction. The most important theme, as the play is written, is the mother complex, the same subject to be somewhat differently treated by Sidney Howard in the *Silver Cord*. The subject is reminiscent of Ibsen and his problem plays, but assuming that this is his problem, he comes to no logical solution or ending for his own theme-problem. Because there is really no central theme, there is no central figure, and therefore, actually, no tragic protagonist. Laura Atherton, Jane, Major Bannister, and Madame Atherton share the interest and attention of the audience almost
equally. This diffuseness of sympathies is a serious fault and contributes to the looseness of construction in Acts I and III. Because of the same lack of focus, the plot in both acts suffers from lack of definiteness. Only in Act II, which is the best scene in the play, is there subordination of the emphasis. The result is dramatic intensity and effectiveness found nowhere else in the play. It is, therefore, necessary in the remaining acts for the playwright to bolster audience appeal by various theatrical devices and shifts. The clown scene which opens Act I,\(^6\) the mad scenes of the Judge and Jane,\(^7\) while excellent in many ways, are wide apart from the mood of Act II. This procedure results in a series of widely divergent tendencies in style, ranging from almost realistic conversation between Madame Atherton and Dr. Wetherell in Act I,\(^8\) through the grim behavior of Laura toward Major Bannister in Act II,\(^9\) to the unearthly scene at the end of Act III.\(^10\)

Martin Flavin's concept of tragedy includes elements of almost every period of the development of tragic form. Greek tragedy is characterized by impending

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6. Director's Script, pp. 2-4  
disaster, unavoidable doom for a person of great moral stature, and by loftiness and poetry in story. The Gods preside in Children of the Moon in the form of lunacy which appears inevitable. The servant, Thomas, seems somewhat similar in function to the Greek chorus as he comments upon the disastrous nature of the house and its surrounding. Indeed, he punctuates the note of tragedy throughout the play. There is in this play a formality, a simplicity, a lack of decoration and, at the same time, a loftiness, a height, characteristic of classic tragedy. The Elizabethan, notably Shakespearean, theory of tragedy is best exemplified by Laura who is nearest a tragic figure this play affords. She, like Hamlet, and Macbeth, is victim of internal conflict resulting from personal flaws, rather than foreordained doom from external factors. She, like Elizabethan figures, indulges in long introspective speeches in which her personal conflict is exhibited. The use of symbolism, the social pattern theory of tragic results are influenced by Ibsen. In spirit Children of the Moon is not unlike Ghosts.

The telescope is very like the white horse of Rosmersholm. It represents a combination of circumstances
and events. Modern tragedy comes to accept in the twenties the psychological, Freudian, explanation of tragedy in the lives of individuals. In Eugene O'Neill's play, *Mourning Becomes Electra*, the entire source of tragedy is explained in terms of fixations and complexes. It is natural that a dramatist, writing in the nineteen twenties should give unique emphasis to this new concept of the roots of tragedy. Certainly the mother complex is heavily relied upon as the motivation for Laura in *Children of the Moon* and is thereby in many ways the underlying cause of the tragedy.

Despite these technical weaknesses resulting from admixture there are many things to recommend this script. Perhaps the strongest feature of the play, other than an intangible quality known as mood, is its characterization. The people in this play are well drawn characters.

The people of the Atherton household are varied, alive, and well chosen. Judge Atherton is the finest portrayal. He is a completely sympathetic character, full of the small contradictions which make a literary figure believable. He is mad, and yet very sane, pathetic and weak, yet very strong. Madame Atherton, Laura
and Jane are magnificent people, each totally different, alike enough to real characters as to be recognizable, and yet endowed with the strange and unreal quality of the play. Dr. Wetherell and the two comedy characters provide interesting background personalities. Only in Major Bannister does Martin Flavin fall short. As written, the young flier is too docile, passive, overly polite, to be an interesting theatrical personality. His lack of motivation has already been discussed. We do not get enough insight into Bannister's character. There is no apparent conflict, or indication of a desire to struggle. He becomes, therefore, unless re-inforced by direction and production, a weak and ineffectual character. Once this happens, however, Laura is almost without a worthy opponent in her selfish campaign and much dramatic interest is destroyed. Conflict is the essence of drama. It is important that conflicts be vitalized.

Dialogue has both good and bad features. The script has beauty of language and poetry. It lends itself to effective speaking, but it is generally, not good dramatic dialogue. The script is lacking in humour and variety. Informative scenes are, too frequently, obvious, long, and monotonous. Generally, the dialogue may be said to
be lyric and narrative, and, again, with exception of Act II, not too dramatic.

(iii) **Analysis of Theatrical Style.**

The term style is used to denote the use of the elements of drama to express a point of view, a philosophy concerning art and life, itself. Technically, style in the theatre, is controlled use of the elements of direction, and staging in the creation of a specific effect. There are various degrees and combinations of style. Inherent in the writing of most plays is a dominant literary style. While it is possible to superimpose a different style of production upon a play, it is generally conceded the wisest procedure to keep literary and theatrical styles consistent.

*Children of the Moon* is a mixture of several styles. The setting, itself, as suggested by the dramatist, is selectively realistic. The same may be said of Act I. Both represent a carefully chosen set of representations, which exclude unnecessary details. The material is recognizable, identifiable, and yet, nothing is present, either on stage or in the play itself, that is not necessary to the understanding of the audience. The exceptions are the scenes of the Judge, which in their remote, vague, and
symbolic nature are nearer theatrical impressionism. Here the play departs from reality into realms of mood, emotionally distorted and highly colored material. Act II is grimly realistic. Act III is almost entirely impressionistic, departing into almost an unreal atmosphere approaching fantasy. Present throughout the play are the elements of classicism, formality, simplicity, elimination of decoration, symbolism, eloquence, height, magnificence, and poetic quality of mood, speech and action. Woven through are threads of impressionism and realism.

II Production

(1) Directional procedures.

a. Casting.

Characters were selected, at open tryouts, with interest in their abilities and sympathies with the style combination (realism-impressionism-classicism). Desirable qualities noted were ease of movement, voice, direction, culture, imagination, stage presence, and flexibility.

The first meetings with the tentative cast were spent in reading, discussing and interpreting the play. The cast participated in further analysis of the script,
plot, characters, dialogue in determining dramatic strength and weakness and in deciding upon interpretation consistent with style. Opinions, were given and where disagreement was present, compromises were reached. Each actor helped to list general problems and objectives, and then, to list personal goals. The first efforts were made for understanding, on the part of both director and cast, of the point of view, and the psychology underlying each character, situation, action, and bit of dialogue. After dividing the production into problem areas, the cast and director decided to begin with dialect and diction.

It was felt that dialect should be rehearsed from the beginning and always associated with the script.

(b) The development of stage speech.

Since theatrical dialect should represent, rather than imitate, the objective in *Children of the Moon* was a suggestion of a British accent. Certain sounds, characteristic of cultivated British speech were selected:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>British</th>
<th>American</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>( u ) as in &quot;father&quot; rather than ( a )</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( e ) as in &quot;fancy&quot; rather than ( e )</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( o ) as in &quot;doctor&quot; rather than ( a )</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( o ) as in &quot;war&quot; rather than ( a )</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( a ) as in &quot;butter&quot; rather than ( a )</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( u ) as in &quot;blew&quot; rather than ( u )</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( o ) as in &quot;either &quot; rather than ( i )</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A transcription of Madame Atherton's speech might follow:

"ou dəkə, hav a? nu tol bələ arə?"

Certain characteristic inflectional patterns were also selected; particularly emphasized were the sharp arising and falling patterns so common in standard British. Diagram indicates patterns:

I say are you going home?

Oh dear me!

Madame Atherton, how are you?

It was observed that British inflectional patterns are much more varied and sharp than our own, but that they have more music and beauty of speech, appropriate, especially, in this play.

The second speech problem was posed by the Cockney sequence. Here again, no attempt was made to duplicate the dialect. Certain key words were picked out and emphasized. Characteristic of Cockney speech is the extensive use of diphthongal sounds. Example:
The second group of rehearsals for stage speech were devoted to listening to records of standard British and Cockney speech, and to making analyses (phonetic) of sounds, and to drilling for sounds and inflection.

Individually, actors worked out inflectional patterns for each speech in the script. At the end of two weeks of rehearsal, a pattern of British speech was fairly well established.

Control of speech was a very important factor in style, as the play hinged on speech rather than on physical action. And so, it was vitally important that actors be able to communicate an infinite number of nuances and shades of meaning. Inflection was important in allowing speeches to be rapidly, yet clearly delivered, as well as giving beauty and poetry to the words of the script.

3. Blocking Stage Action

The next important phase of rehearsal was the blocking of stage action. There are, on every stage, at least
six areas: up left, down left, up center, down center, up right, down right, and on larger stages these are often subdivided with additional middle or center areas. The Studio stage has six. The terrace at the extreme up center provided a seventh area.

It is usually conceded in the theatre that these stage areas have certain mood values. The down left area is intimate, but not too friendly; the up left area is strange, remote, mysterious. The down center area is violent, blatant, and harsh, while the up center area is formal and distant.

The down right area is warm, affectionate, and friendly; the up right area is romantic, enchanted. While these statements are not inflexible, for it is always possible to play any scene in any area, stage conventions have accepted them in usual circumstances. *Children of the Moon* was blocked according to the conventional pattern regarding these mood values of areas. Most of Act I, which is friendly, radiant, and to a large degree unaware of tragedy, is played in the down right area, near the fireplace, which is likewise the symbolic center of warmth. In certain scenes involving the Judge and Jane, emphasis is drawn to the terrace.
which is used as the area indicating lunacy. For there is located the telescope; there is the connecting link with the moon. The remoteness of this area adds to the mood value of strangeness, weirdness.

Act II is played down center. The harsh, unrelieved quality of front center stage is compelling, urgent, and a good atmosphere for violent quarrels. Center stage is also appropriate for the climax of act II. The Act ends in the terrace area indicating the sharp departure in mood.

Act III is played in the up left area which connotes remoteness, and strangeness. This area is removed and thereby softened for the audience, a factor which increases unreality. The play ends in the mad area—the terrace which by this time has come to be associated in the play only with lack of sanity. The difference in level as well as the distance enhance the effect.

In order to emphasize the simplicity and formality of the play, all detailed action was eliminated. Movement was formal and broad, never minute and detailed. There was little realistic follow through. Difference in strength suggested by this arbitrary use of level was an adaptation of classicism. Similarly, the formal
use of stage balance was taken from classicism. Impressionism, creation of mood, with its subjective values, was emphasized in the picturization, holding of poses, and emphasis upon visual aspects.

Attempts were made to create emotional values through picturization of each minute change in attitude as well as picturization of plot.

1. Interpreting characters.

Not until the technical details of large interpretative movement and speech were worked out was characterization considered. Conferences with each actor gave much assistance. Ideas were consolidated and a common interpretation consistent with style were agreed upon. Actors then wrote character sketches for themselves including details of characteristic movement and speech. Individual rehearsals on stage helped to establish these fine points. Detailed movement, small action, were for the great part eliminated, as these were not in keeping with the style of the play. This problem then arose: What was to be done for break up, variety, and interest? How were properties, sewing, tea-cups, and the like, to be handled? As the important
element in classicism and impressionism is picturization, it was decided that the actor assume a series of fleeting pictures, punctuated by changes in body positions.

Properties were to be held for poses, never moved constantly. This focused attention at important points and could stop action at any time to underscore mood. Once actors mastered individual picturization, including a certain degree of representational acting in body movement, (example: Jane's fear, Laura's anger, Madame Atherton's grief,) they were ready for the rehearsal of units. The following list shows the break up for rehearsal.

Act I.

Scene I. Walter and Thomas
Scene II. Jane and Madame Atherton
Scene III. Madame Atherton and Wetherell
Scene IV. Madame Atherton and Wetherell
Scene V. Madame Atherton and Bannister
Scene VI. Bannister and Jane
Scene VII. Bannister, Jane, Wetherell, Judge
Scene VIII. Bannister and Jane
    (Thomas and Walter)

Act II.

Scene I. Madame Atherton and Wetherell
Scene II. Madame Atherton and Wetherell, Bannister and Jane

13. Director's Script, pp. 49-57
Scene III. Madame Atherton and Wetherell
Scene IV. Madame Atherton, Wetherell, and Laura
Scene V. Madame Atherton, Wetherell, and Laura Jane, Bannister and Judge
Scene VI. Madame Atherton, Laura and Jane

Act III.

Scene I. Bannister and Wetherell
Scene II. Thomas, Jane and Judge
Scene III. Jane, Laura and Madame Atherton
Scene IV. Madame Atherton, Laura Wetherell, Thomas
Scene V. Laura and Bannister
Scene VI. Bannister and Thomas
Scene VII. Bannister and Jane
(Thomas and Walter)

These unit rehearsals established rapport, helped to suggest relationships, began realization of climaxes, and cleared technical details, such as entrances, exits, sitting, standing, and walking. Once stage skills such as these were mastered, the important part of direction in regard to characterization consisted in stimulating understanding of the individual mind of the character being portrayed, of checking reactions, changes in thought, impreciseable nuances of meaning and feeling. It was vital that the actor be sensitive to much more in the role than he actually exhibited on stage. It was necessary for adequate characterization that each actor load words with dynamic emotional meaning for the audience, and that he picturize, vividly, the situation. As this type of understanding grew, many technicalities
were automatically cared for. As the actors were able to understand the minds of the characters, many details of portrayal fell, naturally, into place. Interpretations agreed upon were these:

Walter Higgs--a young cockney Englishman with a likable personality. Vigor radiates from him.

Thomas--a rather weird old "sea dog" of about sixty. He seems gifted with the unusual preception of the superstitions.

Madame Atherton--a pleasant, attractive gracious, sprightly lady of about sixty. She is still youthful in idea. (Central figure of the play.)

Jane--a lovely, sensitive, somewhat too romantic girl of about twenty. There is always a quality of strangeness about her, growing out of her unusual environment and her extreme sensitivity and dreamlike nature.

Dr. Wetherell--a bright, vigorous, unpretentious country doctor, age forty-five. He is a friend of the family.

Major Bannister--a charming young man of about twenty-eight. He is thoroughly wholesome. He is polite, yet strong. He is not a weak character.

Judge Atherton--a romantic, who having found life
too difficult, has escaped by denying reality. He is a man of great intelligence, sensitivity, love of beauty. He is a philosopher. His insanity is not madness; it is utter peace. It exhibits itself largely in extremely poetic speech, vagueness, remoteness. He is quiet, underplayed, simple, and dignified.

Laura— is a misguided selfish woman who has met difficulties but has not the resources to accept or resolve them. She, therefore, takes out her unhappiness in her pathological possessiveness of her daughter. She is frustrated to the point where her ability to reason has completely disintegrated. She is completely out of harmony with the quiet dignity and beauty of the household.

As characterization is the most important feature of the play, this somewhat restrained, less stereotyped interpretation of character eliminated the great possibility of melodrama which results when characters are types rather than reasonably motivated individuals. This relieves some emotional tension as well as reduces empathy in unpleasant scenes. That is, a tragedy must remain a certain distance from the audience to maintain the aesthetic value which makes for the feeling of
exaltation rather than grief and thereby remains tragic rather than pathetic. In characterization attempts were made to keep the aesthetic distance, the formality, the sweep, the grandeur, and the individual moral stature. These were the feature which stemmed from classicism. The picturization, and representational acting for mood were elements of impressionism. Selective realism in details of characterization made the characters recognizable.
e. Rhythm and Tempo

After the major problems in direction had received consideration, the play was in need of tightening, emphasis, and focus. This was accomplished in a finishing and polishing process which involved adjustment of rhythm, pace, and the resulting climaxes and builds. Following the mood already established, a swift pace was decided upon for Act I, a more rapid and more obvious build for Act II, and a slow, relatively even rate, for Act III. Within each act, climatic points were noted with action permitted to rise and fall pending the main crisis. Each climax was faster than the preceding one, until the major conflict of Act II was reached. Within the overall rhythm of the play, each
individual actor had his own tempo. Madame Atherton's rate was approximately half that of Jane. Thomas' speed was twice as slow and much more even than that of Walter. Speed and rhythm are major factors in determining the overall mood of the play.

Dramatic intensity, as in Act II, was largely a matter of proper manipulation of timing. Impressionistic scenes were dependent on rhythm for the creation of mood.

(ii) Staging

The important problem in staging was the preservation of the values created by direction. The mood qualities desirable were: simplicity, a degree of formality, charm, loftiness, tragic height, and unreality in certain sequences.

a. Setting

The scenery was designed on somewhat formal lines, with the lofty lines of the formal entrance, and the stairway. Most decorations and detail were eliminated for simplicity. This use of the absolute essentials, only, was selective realism. The formal doorway and the stairway were an outgrowth of classicism, and the terrace as a symbolic area of lunacy marked by the
telescope was impressionistic. Soft, neutral colors were used to decrease melodramatic possibilities. Although the setting suggested an English household with its knotty pine woodwork, and its hedgerow, not too much emphasis was placed upon locale, because tragedy should be universal rather than local. Too much attempt to identify setting decreases the universality of the play.

b. Lighting

In an attempt to veer away from melodrama, functional lighting was largely used. Only in the closing scene of the play was atmospheric lighting exploited. Lighting was simple, used largely for illumination in the mood of the household, and for effective exploitation of the actors in keeping with the restraint of the production. Only motivated lighting was used. Even in the impressionistically lighted final scene, lighting was motivated.

c. Music and Sound

Music, in many respects, was more important than either setting or lighting in the creation of mood. Music, a completely impressionistic element in this play, was intended for emotional effect. Music became
an overture to create anticipation. Mendelssohn's *Overture to Fingal's Cave* provided the proper note of anticipation. Debussy's impressionistic work, "Clouds," from his *Nocturnes* was completely atmospheric in its capacity as music identified with lunacy. This selection was particularly good for background music because of the impressionistic mood and the lack of melody line which made audience distraction less likely. Other sound effects like fog horns, surf noises, and planes added immensely to the creation of mood.

d. Costumes

Costumes, again, followed the rule of simplicity. Color was selected to suggest symbolism, for example, lavender suggested aristocracy for Madame Atherton, black for Laura, and white for Jane. Other costumes simply repeated, with restraint, the neutral shades of the set.

Make-up followed the usual patterns. Most characters were straight. The only actual character make-up was applied to Judge Atherton. Generally, make-up followed the principles of realism.
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