# Boy Companies in 1601: Thomas Dekker's *Satiromastix* and their Fortunes

Takaya SANO

### 1. Introduction

The end of the 16th century and the beginning of the 17th century saw a prevalence of satire and the reestablishment of boy companies in English drama. However, although the latter phenomenon has been widely discussed, researchers have paid little attention to what made the reopening of these companies feasible at this point in time. I have conducted a study to elucidate the factors related to the reopening of boy companies and have published two monographs on them: (1) an analysis of *Histriomastix*, which has been thought to be the cause of the Poetomachia (or the Poets' War)<sup>1</sup>, and (2) an inquiry into *Every Man Out of His Humour*, Ben Jonson's response to *Histriomastix*.<sup>2</sup> In these studies, I raised the importance of the role the Inns of Court played in the reestablishment of the "Children of the Chapel."

This paper will present an analysis of Thomas Dekker's *Satiromastix* as the third phase of my study, and special attention will be directed to the performances by the Chamberlain's Men and the Children of Paul's. Through this investigation into how the play was staged, I intend to clarify the movements of two boy companies between the years 1600 and 1602.

## 2. The Development of the Poetomachia after *Every Man Out of His Humour*

Before we proceed, we must confirm the relationship between Jonson and *Histriomastix*. The Poetomachia is thought to have been brought about through Jonson's aversion to pedantic neologism and the characterization of Chrisoganus (one of the main characters) in *Histriomastix*. Jonson's backlash by means of satire in *Every Man Out of His Humour* allegedly triggered satirical battles between Jonson and John Marston.

During the few years between Every Man Out of His Humour (which carica-

tured Marston) and *Satiromastix*, Marston produced two satirical plays, *Jack Drum's Entertainment* and *What You Will*, both of which were staged by the Children of Paul's. Jonson put *Cynthia's Revels* and *Poetaster* on the stage, and these were performed by the newly reopened Children of the Chapel. It is difficult to pin down which play was produced against the other, because documents dating Marston's plays are scarce. This is the reason I have listed the plays in chronological order below, mainly on the basis of Martin Wiggins' *British Drama* and J. P. Bednarz's *Shakespeare & the Poets' War.*<sup>3</sup>

- 1599 Jonson, Every Man Out of His Humour (staged around September)
- 1599 Marston, Antonio and Mellida (staged in October)
- 1600 Jonson, Cynthia's Revels (staged in May)
- 1600 Marston, *Jack Drum's Entertainment* (The chronological order of *Cynthia's Revels* and *Jack Drum's Entertainment* can be interchangeable)
- 1601 Marston, What You Will
- 1601 Jonson, *Poetaster* (staged around fall)
- 1601 Dekker, Satiromastix (staged in fall)

Satiromastix is abundant in satirical allusions to characterization and messages in Poetaster and could not have been created without Dekker watching Poetaster being performed. Because of this, researchers point out that Satiromastix could have been written as a response to Poetaster. When considering the performances of Satiromastix, two important issues must be taken into account. (1) Why was Dekker, who was not immediately interested in satirical battles, commissioned to write a play to expose Jonson's defects? In other words, what advantages did Dekker gain from producing Satiromastix? (2) Why could Dekker, who had no contact with the Children of Paul's, stage the play by the boy company? The following sections seek to illuminate these questions.

## 3. Writing Satiromastix: Dekker's involvement

Let us examine the first issue related to Dekker's involvement with the Poetomachia. Chronologically speaking, Jonson's *Poetaster* was first staged in 1601, sometime between spring and early fall, and *Satiromastix* had its premiere after the same fall. As I have already pointed out, because *Satiromastix* includes satirical com-

ments against Jonson, which could have been written only after watching the performance of *Poetaster*, the chronological order of these two plays is very clear. Therefore, it seems natural that a major cause of creating *Satiromastix* is generally thought to be as retaliation from Dekker who was mocked bitterly in *Poetaster*.

In the Induction to *Poetaster*, however, Envy as a prologue states the following:

Wonder not if I stare; these fifteen weeks, (So long as since the plot was but an embryon) Have I with burning lights mixed vigilant thoughts In expectation of this hated play, To which at last I am arrived as Prologue.

(Poetaster (Q), The Induction, 14-18)<sup>4</sup>

Additionally, in the "Apologetical Dialogue" of some 230 lines, which Jonson added to *Poetaster* as a prevention against any trouble or sensation *Poetaster* might arouse, a character points out the following defect to the Author, one of the three characters, and a representation of Jonson himself:

POLYPOSUS Yes: they say you are slow,
And scarce bring forth a play a year.

AUTHOR 'Tis true.

(Poetaster (F), Apologetical Dialogue, 180-81)

Judging from this evidence, completing *Poetaster* within four months represented a very urgent work speed for Jonson, and we can guess from his movements that a certain pressing problem existed for Jonson, though he tried to exert control over his dramatic activities, including the pace at which he wrote plays during this period.

Taking these circumstances into consideration, E. K. Chambers comments, saying, "Jonson must have known that the attack was in preparation, when he made Tucca abuse Histrio for threatening to 'play' him, and Histrio say that he had hired Demetrius [Dekker] 'to abuse Horace, and bring him in, in a play' (*Poetaster*, III. iv. 212, 339)." Cyrus Hoy presents the same interpretation as Chambers in his introduc-

tion to *Satiromastix* and points out that "the attack was being prepared, and he [Jonson] promptly set about anticipating it with *Poetaster*." Nevertheless, they present no solid foundation for their opinions, and Hoy goes so far as to say that "Rumors seem to have reached him not long after the production of *Cynthia's Revels* in the winter of 1600-1601." It is likely that these conjectures of Chambers and Hoy were formed on the basis of such descriptions by Jonson himself, as I have cited above, and according to lines from *Satiromastix*: "Nay I ha more news, ther's *Crispinus* [Marston] and his Iorneyman Poet *Demetrius Fannius* [Dekker] too, they sweare they'll bring your [Jonson's] life and death vpon'th stage like a Bricklayer in a play" (*Satiromastix*, 1.2.137-39). As the contents of the satirical battles between *Poetaster* and *Satiromastix* are factual by reference to Jonson's biography, we may safely say that the preemptive strike is a likely view.

In any case, Dekker intended to create or was commissioned to write *Satiromastix* before Jonson derided him; that is to say, *Satiromastix* should have been staged earlier than *Poetaster*, in the first half of 1601. Considering this, who was the manager to produce *Satiromastix*? Except for documents such as Henslowe's *Diary*, we have only one question that could be a clue to the solution: what company (or companies) commissioned Dekker? Interestingly enough, the quarto of *Satiromastix* that was published in 1602, in addition to the subtitle "The vntrvssing of the Humorous Poet," has an engaging description: "As it hath bin presented publikely, by the Right Honorable, the Lord Chamberlaine his Servants; and privately, by the Children of Paules." *Satiromastix* is thought to have been staged under the title of "The vntrvssing of the Humorous Poet," and "Satiromastix" seems to have taken the place of the subtitle when published. This supersedure, as well as a unique assortment of adult and boy companies, is key to examining the play.

If we trace Dekker's dramatic career, we find that between the years 1598 and 1601 he was very productive and created more than 20 collaborative plays, most of which were provided to the Admiral's Men. Furthermore, Dekker accepted financial support from Henslowe to be discharged from the Counter prison. It is therefore thought that Dekker was brought up and trained under Henslowe's supervision during this period. According to Hoy, however, from the fall of 1600 to the first half of 1601, entries of Dekker's name in Henslowe's *Diary* dropped sharply, with the only exception being a collaborative play with Henry Chettle, called *King Sebastian of Portugal*,

which was written in April or May 1601.8 Although what transpired between Henslowe and Dekker still remains a mystery, the marked decline in the number of entries containing Dekker's name in Henslowe's *Diary* is highly suggestive of the reason for Dekker's involvement with the Chamberlain's Men and the Children of Paul's, or of the motive for the approach to Dekker by the Chamberlain's Men.

I use the phrase "the approach to Dekker by the Chamberlain's Men" tentatively; even then, we have no idea as to which company staged *Satiromastix* first or which company took the initiative in commissioning Dekker. As far as I can tell by surveying earlier literature, most researchers mention the Chamberlain's Men first and then the Children of Paul's as printed on the title page of the 1602 quarto. In studies of early modern English drama, it is generally thought that playing companies held the ownership of play scripts, and when the right of ownership was transferred, such as in the case of *Titus Andronicus*, as a general rule one company handed over proprietary rights to another company by selling scripts as it disbanded. In the case of *Satiromastix*, it was very rare to have two playing companies printed on the title page without dissolution of one company. In order to interpret the situation logically some researchers suggest a "joint commission," the idea that the adult and the boy companies together requested Dekker to write a play that made sport of Jonson.

This suggestion seems to be plausible if we put ourselves in the Chamberlain's Men's place. Hoy insists that a motive for the company was the unpopularity of its production of Jonson's *Every Man Out of His Humour*<sup>10</sup> and that its retaliatory thought may have come from Jonson's railing at adult companies' repertory in his comedies of humours. A more plausible cause, in my opinion, is that Jonson published *Every Man Out of His Humour* without acquiring permission from the company. It is a valid inference that the Chamberlain's Men offered a joint fight to Marston, the playhouse manager of the Children of Paul's who led satirical battles with Jonson during this period.

Dekker was surely grateful for the offer of commission from the two companies, for he must have suffered from an unfavorable economic condition owing to some trouble or worsening of relations with Henslowe in addition to the decline in commissions. If so, from the companies' point of view, what was the reason they requested the production of a play in which Jonson was unmasked "to Dekker?" We can easily enumerate playwrights who would be candidates for this commission who were also on par with Dekker, such as Henry Chettle, John Day, William Haughton, and

Thomas Middleton, taking a survey of Dekker's collaborators during that period. In this sense, it is an exacting task to pinpoint the ground on which the companies adopted Dekker, and yet there is a clue to the adoption of Dekker: Dekker had been looked down upon by Jonson since an earlier time, and the companies took advantage of that.

As is already mentioned above, Dekker was ridiculed in *Poetaster*, and according to Roslyn L. Knutson, also before *Poetaster* Jonson seemed to revile Dekker in the portrait of Anaides in *Cynthia's Revels*. If so, why did Jonson think little of Dekker? The answer can be guessed from Jonson's poetics during this period: Jonson was probably disgusted by Dekker's idea of creative activities when they wrote plays together.

As is generally known, from about 1598, when *Every Man in His Humour* was staged, Jonson made every effort to improve his social position and be considered a poet rather than a playwright and was intent on differentiating himself from other writers. Even then Jonson, as a novice, had no option but to begin as a collaborator for public playhouses just like Dekker did. Jonson began to write plays during the same period (about 1597) as Dekker, and twice in that year Jonson received money from Henslowe. Judging from these records in Henslowe's *Diary*, Jonson is also thought to have worked for him. In consequence, Jonson would have had a few chances to collaborate with Dekker, and interestingly enough they wrote two plays together in 1599: *Robert II, King of Scots* and *Page of Plymouth*. 12 It was probably during this period of collaboration that Jonson was disappointed at Dekker's dramaturgy, and his frustration first showed itself in the lines of *Poetaster* as follows, in which Histrio criticizes Demetrius (i.e., Dekker):

TUCCA What's he with the half arms there, that salutes us out of his cloak like a motion, ha?

HISTRIO Oh, sir, his doublet's a little decayed; he is otherwise a very simple, honest fellow, sir, one Demetrius, a dresser of plays about the town here.

(Poetaster (Q), 3. 4. 258-61, underline mine)

Jonson's derogatory remark appeared once again when he conversed with William Drummond and spoke of Dekker as "rogue" dismissively. Jonson's contempt for Dekker is quite clear.

### 4. Writing Satiromastix: Dekker's connection with the boy company

It is understandable from the preceding argument why Dekker could present *Satiromastix* to the Children of Paul's, with whom he had no contact before. What is of importance is how actively Marston intervened in employing Dekker. When *Satiromastix* premiered in 1601, it was released under the title of "The vntrvssing of the Humorous Poet," and in the following year's publication it bore the new title, "*Satiromastix*." Needless to say, since the new title included a special suffix "-mastix," scholars have proposed the view that Marston, who was deeply involved with *Histriomastix*, might have been a collaborator. This theory has now been rejected, however, because satires against Jonson in *Satiromastix* are different from those developed in Marston's satirical plays, and it is now regarded as an independent work by Dekker.

Let us adduce one example from Marston's drama *What You Will*, a response to Jonson's *Every Man Out of His Humour*. There Marston does not allow himself to be provoked by Jonson's bitter incitement and parodies Jonsonian satire by pointing out the unpopularity and deviation from the age's taste of his venomous tongues. To put it in other words, this is another kind of satire, which bites deeply in the shape of a proclamation that Marston will not contest on Jonson's terms.

On the other hand, Dekker accepted the poetic idea of Horatius that Jonson adored in *Satiromastix*. Thereafter, Dekker tried to force Jonson to show his true colors by revealing that Horace (who stands for Jonson in the play) is far from the Horatian ideal. Near the denouement Horace is brought on stage, crowned not with laurel but with nettle, and with Satyr's horns on his forehead. There Horace is blamed for his wrongdoings, and we may say that these are typical treatments of Jonsonian satire by Dekker.

In this way, as it is difficult to find Marstonian satirical elements in *Satiromas-tix*, the idea that Dekker collaborated with Marston must be dismissed. But that is not to say Marston did not interfere in the production of the play at all. It may safely be said that the change of the main title resulted from Marston's suggestion in publishing the quarto of *Satiromastix*.

When sent into the front line of the satirical battles, Dekker's behaviors look somewhat dispassionate or rather calculating, contrary to the heated Poets' War. It is true that Dekker may have suffered an unbearable insult when in *Poetaster* Jonson

abused Dekker as "a dresser of plays about the town," and all the more because "a dresser" was what he was in the theatrical world of London. But in the introduction titled "To the World," in the 1602 quarto, Dekker described a recent quarrel between Jonson and Marston as "that terrible Poetomachia, lately commenc'd between Horace the second, and a band of leane-witted Poetasters," and made an intriguing coinage "Poetomachia," while he mentioned other playwrights including himself in a mocking tone. The term "untruss" (i.e., undress), which was placed in the main title for the first performance and repeated persistently in the play, may have been used by way of retaliation for Jonson's insult.

When it comes to Dekker's distance from the satirical brawl, it is far more important how he estimated the "Poetomachia" itself. The reason is that although *Satiromastix* was intended to strike back at Jonson, its actual structure was composed of a comedy or romance to which a subplot for exposing Horace was attached forcibly or hurriedly, in disregard of what the title actually meant: a whipped satirist or the lash against a satirist. Furthermore, in the epilogue of the play, Dekker presented himself as being tough-minded and adept at chasing a profit:

Are you aduiz'd what you doe when you hisse? you blowe away *Horaces*[=Jonson's] reuenge: but if you set your hands and Seales to this, *Horace* will write against it, and you may haue more sport: he shall not loose his labour, he shall not turne his blanke verses into wast paper: No, Poetasters will not laugh at him, but will vntrusse him agen, and agen, and agen.

(Satiromastix, Epilogus, 19-24)

Dekker tried to anticipate Jonson's response and action, schemes to prolong the "Poeto-machia" by making Jonson produce another provocative play, and planned to increase profits by becoming the sole topic on the audience's mind.

## 5. Boy companies in 1601: standing at the crossroads of their management

Around fall of 1599, the Children of Paul's reopened for business, and in 1600 the Children of the Chapel resumed operations. Apart from the re-staging of John Lyly's old plays and a moral interlude, which probably covered a shortage of the repertory,

for about two years from the reopening to the performance of *Satiromastix* in 1601, the Children of Paul's had put Marston's tragedies and satirical plays on the stage almost exclusively. However, curiously enough, there are no records in 1602 of performances of Marston's plays, and to make up for that William Percy, the 9th Duke of Northumberland, provided for the company five plays that featured music, songs, and dances, between 1602 and 1603. Oddly enough, by about 1603, Marston, leaving the Children of Paul's, began to offer plays to the rival Children of the Chapel. After losing Marston, its playhouse manager, the Children of Paul's went on with dramatic activities and staged plays by Middleton or George Chapman and collaborative plays by Dekker and John Webster. However, the Children of Paul's stopped activities in 1606 and was never restored again. Although the cause is manifold, two factors are generally thought to have contributed to this: the growing-up of boy players to adulthood and their insufficient competitiveness as an adult company.

Thus surveying the brief career of the Children of Paul's after its reopening, we may point out that the first two years of its activities with the support of Marston—the period that overlapped with the crucial phase of the Poetomachia—were its high season. In this sense, the year 1601 was a great turning point for the Children of Paul's.

In that case, how was the development of the Children of the Chapel, another party, concerned with the Poetomachia? Originally, the company reactivated its business, watching carefully how the Children of Paul's restarted. In 1597, Nathaniel Giles, who took over mastership from William Hunnis, first held the Blackfriars playhouse on lease from Richard Burbage (in alliance with Henry Evans). Consequently, Giles and Evans seemed to have hired Jonson as playwright of satirical plays, which were promising repertories for their company. However, their scheme miscarried owing to Jonson's aggressive personality. After offering two satirical plays to the Children of the Chapel, Jonson changed the course of comedies of humours, and in 1601 and 1602 he received money again from Henslowe with whom he had broken for his self-realization. Moreover in 1603, Jonson presented a Roman tragedy called *Sejanus*, which was of quite a different nature from the preceding satirical plays, on the stage of the King's Men from which he had parted.

One of the restarters of the Children of the Chapel, Evans, was caught in a difficult predicament, and in as early as the spring of 1602 the management of the company was hindered from progressing satisfactorily. In order to effect a breakthrough in

the situation, Evans tried to cancel the lease of the Blackfriars playhouse and to divide the authority of management among persons concerned. In addition to these remedial measures, it is likely that he planned to look for new playwright(s). Although we cannot describe Evans's detailed movement, the company survived the difficulties, and for three or four years following this period the Children of the Chapel mainly staged plays by Chapman and Marston (who had just moved to the company from the Children of Paul's).

In spite of the trouble caused by Jonson, judging from these new dramatists, we may safely say that the Children of the Chapel continued to produce the same kinds of plays that featured satire and humours. Because Marston's primary role in the satirical culture during this period does not need explaining, I will investigate the case of Chapman here. Chapman, who began writing plays in about the middle of the 1590s, finished the latter half of *Hero and Leander*, which was left incomplete by Christopher Marlowe in 1598, through his profound learning of the classics. In the same year, he was highly rated in *Palladis Tamia* by Frances Meres, as an author who wrote not only poetry but excellent tragedies and comedies. In other words, he was already established at that time

As with other playwrights referred to in the paper, at the outset Chapman also offered plays to the Admiral's Men under Henslowe's management. *The Blind Beggar of Alexandria* (1596), which is thought to be his first work, was staged 22 times at the Rose playhouse (recorded in Henslowe's document), and *An Humorous Day's Mirth* (1597) became a 13-times-staged hit. What is of importance is that both plays belong to the category of plays that feature "humours" and are forerunners of comedy of humours, although they do not have bitter satire characteristic of Jonson's plays.

Although Chapman seems to have had a good start as a playwright, we cannot retrace his steps in 1600 and 1601 after he produced a play in 1598 and three plays in 1599. The next time he appeared in the theatrical world was with the Children of the Chapel in 1601 or 1602. We are unaware of how well Chapman got along with Henslowe during that period, but the only certain thing is that the new repertory of the company was presented by Chapman, who invented a genre of comedy of humours (which led to Jonson's satirical comedies) and who was highly cultivated in the classics as Jonson was. We can infer from these phenomena that the Children of the Chapel, even after Jonson's parting, tried to carry on dramatic business, making the most of

geographical proximity to the Inns of Court, the center for satirical culture.

A likely candidate for reinforcing the inference was Samuel Daniel. As mentioned above, the Children of the Chapel was facing difficulties during the spring of 1602, and one of the primary causes, besides the trouble caused by Jonson, was the impressment of Thomas Clifton by Giles and the lawsuit raised by Clifton's father. Affected by the adverse situation, Evans was compelled to withdraw himself from the company's management, but he seems to have attempted to evade the legal enforcement by forming a syndicate of management. The syndicate was joined by a few members, two of whom were Marston and Daniel. In my opinion, Evans probably held the reins of management, although he ostensibly retired from his office. The reason Daniel was picked out may still come from Evans's intention when he restarted the company: to take advantage of the popularity and influence of satirical culture.

As has already been pointed out in my former monograph, before Jonson became involved with the Children of the Chapel, he was intent on seeking the patronage of the courtiers of the Pembroke-Sidney circle and laying a solid foundation to realize his own poetics.<sup>17</sup> As a matter of fact, Daniel himself had an intimate relationship with members of the Pembroke-Sidney circle, which means Daniel belonged to the same cultural environment as Jonson.

It is very likely that Evans tried to maintain the management of the good-starting Children of the Chapel even after Jonson's departure, with such playwrights as Marston, Chapman and Daniel whose satirical plays appealed to the intellectuals. As is well known, the continuation of a lineup of satire led to several cases of sanctions against authors, and the company's fortunes underwent rapid deterioration. In this regard, we can say that the year 1601 (when Jonson's *Poetaster* was staged, and he left the company) was a marked watershed for the Children of the Chapel.

#### Notes

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- 1 Takaya Sano, "The Reestablishment of the Children of Paul's and John Marston: Histrio-mastix as an Inns of Court Play," Studies in Language and Literature 73 (2018): 19-34.
- 2 Takaya Sano, "Ben Jonson and the Revival of the Children of the Chapel," *Studies in Language and Literature* 75 (2019): 47-62.
- 3 Martin Wiggins and Catherine Richardson, British Drama 1533-1642: A Catalogue, vol. 4

- (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2014); James P. Bednarz, *Shakespeare & the Poets' War* (New York: Columbia UP, 2001).
- 4 All the quotations from *Poetaster* are taken from *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson*, vol. 2, eds. by David Bevington, Martin Butler, and Ian Donaldson (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012).
- E. K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, vol. 3 (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1951) 293.
- 6 Cyrus Hoy, introduction to Satiromastix, Introductions, Notes, and Commentaries to Texts in 'The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker,' ed. by Fredson Bowers, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1979) 181.
- 7 All the quotations from *Satiromastix* are taken from *The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker*, vol. 1, ed. by Fredson Bowers (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1970).
- 8 Hoy 179.
- 9 Hoy 180; Roslyn Lander Knutson, Playing Companies and Commerce in Shakespeare's Time (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001) 137.
- 10 Hoy 180.
- 11 Knutson 135.
- 12 Alfred Harbage, *Annals of English Drama 975-1700*, rev. S. Schoenbaum (London: Methuen, 1964) 68-69.
- 13 Satiromastix, To the World, 7-9.
- 14 1599 Marston, Antonio and Mellida
  - 1600 Marston, Jack Drum's Entertainment
  - 1600 Anon., The Wisdom of Dr Dodypoll
  - 1600 Lyly(?), The Maid's Metamorphosis
  - c.1600-1 Marston, Antonio's Revenge
  - 1601 Thomas Middleton(?), Blurt Master Constable
  - 1601 Marston, What You Will
  - 1601 Dekker, Satiromastix
  - (Edel Lamb, Performing Childhood in the Early Modern Theatre: The Children's Playing Companies (1599-1613) (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) x.)
- 15 1603 Chapman, The Old Joiner of Aldgate
  - 1603-4 Middleton. The Phoenix
  - 1604 Dekker and Webster, Westward Ho
  - 1604 Middleton, A Trick to Catch the Old One
  - c.1604-6 Middleton, A Mad World, My Masters
  - c.1604-6 Middleton, Michaelmas Term
  - 1605 Dekker and Webster, Northward Ho
  - 1605 Middleton, The Family of Love
  - 1606 Chapman, Bussy D'Ambois
  - 1606 Marston, Parasitaster; or, The Fawn
  - 1606 Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, The Woman Hater
  - 1606 Middleton, The Puritan
  - 1606 Anon., Abuses
  - (Lamb x.)

- 16 Michael Shapiro, *Children of the Revels: The Boy Companies of Shakespeare's Time and Their Plays* (New York: Columbia UP, 1967) 24-26.
- 17 Sano, "Ben Jonson and the Revival of the Children of the Chapel," 52-58.

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