Art in the Blood

By Julie McKaras, ASH, BSI

Special Collections and Rare Book Curator Timothy Johnson received an email this spring from Audrius Plioplys, M.D. In the email, Dr. Plioplys wrote:

Dear Mr. Johnson,

I received your email address from Mr. Peter Blau. I was wondering if your Sherlock Holmes collection might like to receive a donation of my sister's Sherlock Holmes inspired decorated eggs.

Ramute Plioplys suddenly passed away a year ago. During her life she perfected techniques in Lithuanian decorated eggs (Easter eggs). She also was a fan of Sherlock Holmes and was a member of the South Downers here in Chicago. As part of her decorated eggs, she created a series of Dancing Men eggs.

Her artistic accomplishments can be seen on a website that I have recently set up in her honor: www.ramute-plioplys.com. There you will see her Dancing Men eggs.

From her estate, I received an ample supply of these Sherlock Holmes eggs. If you would like to receive a set of them, and would agree to display them, then I would be glad to donate a set to you.

You can find further information about me on my own website: www.plioplys.com.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,
Audrius Plioplys MD

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Ramute Plioplys

Photo courtesy of Andy Plioplys
The Foreign Language Collector

I have often been asked why I collect books that I cannot read. I have no simple answer for the question – only the fact of knowing I am not alone in my pursuit; I find myself in the company of the great collector, the “Hans Sloane of My Age,” John Bennett Shaw. His copies of foreign language editions of the Sherlock Holmes stories are a part of The Sherlock Holmes Collections at the University of Minnesota, and many bear his bookplate. The Collections hold a number of foreign language editions of Sherlock Holmes stories that were published 100 Years Ago, in 1908.

The fact that there are so many foreign language translations of the Canon is fascinating in itself. According to the Sherlockian Who’s Who there are thirty active Sherlockian societies in Europe, so this may not be that unusual. Looking a little deeper, one will find that the stories were translated into Catalan, French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, and Swedish almost as soon as they were published in English. What I find more interesting is why Sherlock Holmes is popular in so many non-English speaking countries. There have been critiques, parodies, pastiches, and burlesques published in a variety of languages other than English.

The Europeans have adopted Sherlock Holmes as their own, using Canonical references to legitimize their claims. Their societies are also very active. One of the results of these activities has been the publication of extensive bibliographies of Sherlockiana translated into their respective languages. There are bibliographies for German, Italian, Spanish, and Swedish translations. They cover more than just the Canon and are invaluable tools for the collectors of foreign language translations of the Canon or any other area of collecting Sherlockiana.

As a collector, I find the Internet is also a resource beyond compare. There are excellent Sherlockian websites in a variety of languages. There are two richly illustrated online bibliographies for Danish and French translations. Using the published bibliographies, the Internet, and networking with other foreign language collectors, it is possible to build a collection that is very unique in the Sherlockian world. Because the area of foreign language collecting is still grossly under investigated, it is easy to find translations that are not listed in any of the bibliographies.

Translations of the Canon were being published with regularity a century ago. In 1908, the Canon consisted of A Study in Scarlet, The Sign of Four, The Hound of the Baskervilles, The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes, The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes, and The Return of Sherlock Holmes. “The Adventure of Wisteria Lodge” and “The Adventure of the Bruce-Partington Plans” were first published in 1908, bringing the total to forty-one stories. The Catalan magazine Literatura Sensacional published nineteen of the Sacred Tales over a thirty week span. Each issue has a wonderful illustration by Jordi Ribab, and from July 17, 1908 through December 11, 1908 a new story was published every week. The final story published was The Hound of the Baskervilles, which was serialized weekly from December 11, 1908 to February 5, 1909. Although the story is actually in Catalan, it is listed as being in Spanish in Ron De Waal’s The Universal Sherlock Holmes. By this same time the complete Canon had been published in French. Publishers Librairie Félix Juven and Librairie Hachette both had several different editions in print in 1908.

The Germans were not to be left out of the translation competition. Robert Lutz, the Stuttgart publisher, was running at least two different Sherlock Holmes Series in 1908. Lutz’s Kriminal- und Detektiv-Romane and Sherlock Holmes-Serie both featured the entire Canon. Both series also continued into the 1920s, adding new volumes as new stories became available. Also from Germany, Alfred Lichtenstein wrote a book of essays on detective fiction in literature. His work included an essay on Sherlock Holmes. In Portugal, A lenda do cão phantasma was published. The covers on these publications are wonderful pieces of artwork in themselves – many of the early illustrators seemed to try and outdo each other, which adds to the appeal of collecting foreign translations.

In Russia, Konovalov Publishing House put out a series titled “The Famous Detective Sherlock Holmes” with each volume featuring a Canonical tale. Another Russian publisher, Sytin, ran a series titled “The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes” with three stories in each edition. The Spanish were just as active in their translating of the Canon. Between 1907 and 1908, the entire Canon was published by Editorial Sopena in a seven-volume set. These are all uniform editions with the portrait of Holmes and St. Paul’s cathedral in the background.

The Europeans have an advantage over the English speaking collectors. Many have grown up in a multilingual household while the American collectors seem to pride themselves in being mono-linguistic. This is the probable reason I am asked so often why I collect books I cannot read. Regardless of the reason, it is a fascinating and challenging area of collecting that can be extremely rewarding and frustrating at the same time. It is thrilling to discover a new translation that no one else has ever seen yet it is equally as maddening to find that your new foreign language book is not Sherlockian at all. This just adds to the fun of it.

Don Hobbs
The Incunabular Sherlock Holmes – when I first came upon a reference to that intriguing title many years ago in a Baker Street Journal article, the word *incunabular* sent me on a dictionary search (an unabridged dictionary at that). I found that the word is pronounced *in-kyoo-nahb-yuh-lar*, has its roots in a Latin term referring to a cradle, and among book collectors refers to volumes printed before 1501 – the earliest stage of printing using movable metal type. Fine... but what does that have to do with Sherlock Holmes?

Well, in 1958 when Edgar W. Smith assembled an anthology for publication of early articles on Holmes, he puckishly termed the writings *incunabula*, although the earliest of these “incunables” were c. 1900 rather than c. 1500.

Many years later, that title sent me on another search, this time for a copy of the book itself. As I pursued my goal of collecting the 100 volumes listed in John Bennett Shaw’s *The Basic Holmesian Library,* I found some titles as accessible as the nearest Barnes & Noble, while others were nigh unto impossible to find. As it turns out, the last one of the 100 to be crossed off my list was *The Incunabular,* which I finally was able to secure in an online auction. As expected, the book was well worth the wait, the effort, and the price it was able to command.

In his foreword to the book, Smith wrote “The things [these early] writers have written are of a broad piece with the things that are being written today and that will be written tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow...” He pointed out that several of the pieces were written “when the Tales themselves were still publishing, and the corpus of the Canon was incomplete.” Because most of these early pieces had become hard to find by 1958, Smith decided that the time was ripe for bringing a few of the best of them together. I wonder if he could have guessed that in future years his own anthology would become as rare and desirable as the originals?

Although many mistakenly believe that Sherlockian criticism began in 1912 with Ronald A. Knox’s “Studies in the Literature of Sherlock Holmes,” which is to be found in the anthology, Smith also included less-familiar pieces that go back a decade earlier. The nineteen pieces in the book range chronologically from Arthur Bartlett Maurice’s “Some Inconsistencies of Sherlock Holmes,” originally published in The Bookman in 1902 – when episodes of The Hound of the Baskervilles were still appearing serially in the Strand Magazine – to Christopher Morley’s “Sherlock Holmes’s Prayer,” privately printed for the Baker Street Irregulars’ “Trilogy Dinner” in 1944. Topics range from textual criticism (particularly Watson’s erratic dating of cases) to speculative biographies of Watson and Moriarty, to pastiche, including one that inserts Holmes into Dickens’s unfinished The Mystery of Edwin Drood and another written by one A. Conan Doyle! (“How Watson Learned the Trick,” from The Book of the Queen’s Doll House in 1924.) Other noted authors represented include A.A. Milne, S. C. Roberts and Dorothy L. Sayers.

The varying pieces in the book do not present a uniform appearance, as an offset printing process was used that preserved the look of the original publications. Those pieces that could not be reproduced from original printings were typewritten for this volume, as were the page numbers and Smith’s acknowledgments of original sources. The resulting patchwork look of the volume adds to its charm.

The 186-page book was published in wrappers in a limited edition of 350 copies; Smith hand-numbered each one. The Collections has John Bennett Shaw’s copy, number 75, and W.T. (Bill) Rabe’s copy, number 31.

Although writer and editor Christopher Morley was the founder of the Baker Street Irregulars (BSI), no one represented the heart and soul of the organization more than Edgar W. Smith. An executive with General Motors in New York who retired in 1954, Smith might have seemed an unlikely candidate to take the reins of a literary society, but take them over he gradually did as Morley’s health declined and his interest flagged. By the time of Morley’s death in 1957, Smith was clearly the guiding light. The Baker Street Journal was Smith’s brainchild, and he edited it from its inception in 1946 until his death in 1960. His elegant editorials in the Journal still set the standard for graceful, thoughtful Sherlockian musings, and they are oft quoted today.

*Continued on page 7*
Acquisitions

Bob Katz submitted another package to the Holmes Collections. He included catalogues, a program for the Royal Shakespeare Company’s presentation of “Sherlock Holmes” and the July 1978 issue of Transactions and Studies of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia.

Michael Kean donated a copy of In Memoriam Christopher Morley which he edited with Dean Chapman. This was volume eleven of the Pondicherry Press Monograph Series, and was #4 of 50.

Mary Loving donated a DVD of two programs that were broadcast over ITV3 in Great Britain during “A Sherlock Holmes Weekend.” The DVD includes Elementary My Dear Viewer, narrated by Richard E. Grant, who played Stapleton in a television version of the Hound of the Baskervilles in 2002, and The Shackles of Sherlock, narrated by David Burke, who played Watson to Jeremy Brett’s Holmes in the early episodes of the Granada series.

The Red-Throated League of the Norwegian Explorers have contributed a recording of their latest performance, “Sherlock Holmes and the Case of the Accommodating Valise.” The cast and crew performed this Edith Meiser script at the Favek Museum of Broadcasting.

Charles Press of East Lansing, Michigan donated newspaper clippings, meeting announcements, dinner programs and the 50th anniversary booklet for The Greek Interpreters of East Lansing.

Julia Wallman donated an 18” Sherlock Holmes doll from the Effanbee Limited Edition Doll Club. It is a 1983 production and is #543 of 4470.

Using the Collections

I had occasion to visit the Special Collections & Rare Books part of the Elmer L. Andersen Library on May 2 to finish research for my soon-to-be published biography of William Gillette, the first major star to play Sherlock Holmes (in 1899). Gillette created the public image of Holmes with Inverness cape, deerstalker cap, curved briar pipe, and “Elementary, my dear Watson,” and who is one of the major reasons why today so many people believe that Holmes really lived. He was one of the major stars of his day, among the pioneers of realism and natural acting in the American theater, and one of the first American playwrights to both gain acceptance in Europe and raise the literary quality of American drama – a combination Neil Simon and John Wayne.

I found wonderful photographs which I had no idea existed, and three fabulous scrapbooks of news clippings and photographs. One scrapbook contained news clippings of Gillette’s tour of Great Britain – including the Irish and Scottish provinces – in Sherlock Holmes in 1901. Curator Tim Johnson was of invaluable assistance and wonderful to meet and visit with. Knowing I was coming on that day, he had everything ready.

Although Gillette has been the subject of several Ph.D and Masters dissertations, and one short and incomplete biography forty decades ago, no real in-depth biography of him has ever been published, so this will be the first. The research I conducted at the Elmer Andersen Library made it complete, and Mr. Johnson and the other staff members made it extraordinarily fun and enjoyable.

Henry Zecher

A Call for Correspondence

Andy and Deborah Fusco were hard at work in the Collections reading room during the last week of May. Their research at this point is primarily the correspondence files that belonged to John Bennett Shaw. And as they noted, the letters that were sent to Shaw are often interesting, but what would make them even more interesting is to have the letters, or at least copies of the letters, that Shaw wrote to his fellow Sherlockians. Andy is the General Editor of the BSI Manuscript Series and will be editing the 1970s edition of the BSI History Series. If you have originals or copies of letters from John Bennett Shaw, please consider donating them to the Sherlock Holmes Collections.
An Update from the Collections

A large sum of money is at stake, for the scholarship is a very valuable one...” (3STU)

In late winter an announcement was made by the Friends of the Libraries that caught my attention. It was the annual notice of the Staff Development Grant Program. It read:

“The Friends of the Libraries support the University of Minnesota Libraries in many ways, always aiming to help the Libraries realize their vision of providing intellectual leadership and extraordinary information experiences. A key component of an outstanding library is outstanding staff. Since 1996, the Friends have sponsored staff development grants, offering support for research, study, or conference attendance – experiences that will aid a staff person’s professional development, which will also enrich programmatic and service development for the Libraries.”

The purpose of the grant is to “provide financial support for Libraries staff professional development. Possible activities for the grant include travel, study, research, and conference attendance. These examples are illustrative – the widest range of proposed activities is encouraged. The Friends welcome proposals demonstrating a significant opportunity for professional enrichment and development but which fall outside general funding opportunities from the Libraries. The proposed professional development activity must be completed by June 30, 2009.”

This notice had caught my eye before. For the ten years that I have been with the Libraries, I have pondered this generous prospect, but never submitted an application. However, this year was different. Maybe it was the amount of the grant — $1,000 — or the thought that I had a good idea and a proper way to use the grant. Happily, and with the gracious help and support from Kris Kiesling, the director of Andersen Library and my supervisor, my proposal was submitted in early March for consideration by the Friends. The notice indicated that the winners would be selected and notified by April 1st, nearly a month away. It was a time of patient waiting.

What did I propose to do with the grant? In my letter of application I wrote that I “intend to use the grant to travel to Portsmouth, England, to do research in the newly opened Richard Lancelyn Green Conan Doyle Collection. In addition, I plan on consulting with the research and technical staff who are processing the collection to gain ideas on how the collection is being made accessible to researchers.” Travel to Portsmouth (and possibly elsewhere in England) would allow me to see the size and breadth of Richard’s collection, to look for items that might be added to the Supplement to De Waal’s bibliography, to make personal contacts and develop relationships with members of the staff at Portsmouth that will, I believe, facilitate further collaborations and cooperative projects in the future, and to visit a number of sites connected with the life and work of Arthur Conan Doyle.

Once my trip was completed I hoped to share my experience in a number of ways. One obvious audience is our Friends of the Sherlock Holmes Collections member group. I planned to do two things for the Friends: write an account of my visit and research for the Friends newsletter, and present a public program for the Friends and interested members from the Libraries and general public. Beyond that, I proposed a brown-bag presentation to the Libraries’ staff. Third, I imagined that some of my experience and findings would find their way into my online web log (blog) and that there might be images or text that could be mounted on our Holmes web site. Finally, I would look for additional publication opportunities, either in the more popular journals of the Sherlockian world or in academic/library journals that would have an interest in international library relationships and collaboration. In order to make the best use of time and money, I proposed to take my research trip during the off-season, when airfare and housing costs might be lower.

That was my proposal. On the day the Friends were to meet and make their decision on the applications a Spring snowstorm interfered; the meeting was postponed. But a few days later a determination was made and the winners notified. I was selected to receive one of the two grants! What was equally pleasing was to hear that my colleague, Christine Dezelar-Tiedman (who has cataloged many of the books in the Holmes Collections) was the other winner. She will use her grant to attend a conference in Berlin. On the evening of April 24th, at a reception during the Friends annual meeting and dinner, Christine and I were honored with our awards.

No doubt, you will hear more about my trip and project in the months ahead. At the moment, I am working on a trip itinerary and making contacts with individuals in England. I look forward to sharing this experience with you. My thanks, again, to the Friends of the Libraries for making this research opportunity possible. It is a great way to mark my first decade at the University of Minnesota.

Timothy Johnson
Tim didn’t take long to respond and advise Dr. Plioplys that these beautifully decorated eggs would be a welcome addition to the Collections.

The website Dr. Plioplys originated about the life and work of his sister is quite informative. A native of Toronto, Canada, Ramute was born in 1953. She contracted polio when she was three years old, which left her with paralyzed legs. In 1964, the Plioplys family moved to Chicago. She graduated from the University of Chicago and moved to Providence, Rhode Island. From there, she relocated to Lithuania for two years where she focused on her interest in the Lithuanian language at the University of Vilnius. Upon her return to Chicago, she taught the language at the Lithuanian Pedagogical Institute and translated several linguistic text books into English. After she passed away, a scholarship fund in her name was established to provide support to a student studying the language.

She brought another skill back to Chicago: her talent utilizing the traditional folk customs and art of Lithuania. While studying there, she visited museums often and studied with native folk artists. Her art, which incorporated native skills with her own interpretations, was shown at a number of art fairs in the Chicago area and at exhibits at Chicago’s Balzekas Museum of Lithuanian Culture (<http://www.balzekasmuseum.org>). The Museum now hosts a permanent display of her decorated eggs.

Ramute was a member of the South Downers and the Criterion Bar Association, two Chicago area Sherlockian societies. Her website states:

One of Doyle’s stories was entitled “The Adventure of the Dancing Men” in which coded messages were written using dancing figures. Each distinct figure corresponded to a letter of the alphabet. In these decorated eggs, Ramute applied both the alphabetic and the encoded “Dancing Men” expressions. Or, is it possible that Ramute encoded a different message in the “Dancing Men”? Some of the “Dancing Men” patterns were issued in limited edition quantities. These decorated eggs were initialled and numbered by Ramute.

Susan Diamond, ASH, BSI and Allan Devitt, ASH, of Chicago knew Ramute and added that each year she would prepare a booklet with monthly reports for the South Downers’ meetings. The covers are a distinctive green, with a message done in the dancing men code. Susan and Allan donated these chronologies to the Collections to add to the recently donated Sherlockian eggs.

“Art in the blood is liable to take the strangest forms” remarked Sherlock Holmes in “The Greek Interpreter.” He might have been talking about the Plioplys family. Dr. Audrius “Andy” Plioplys is an artist as well, and has chosen to combine his artistic skills with his profession. Dr. Plioplys, a neurologist, describes himself as a self-taught artist. His artwork can be viewed on his website, noted in his letter to Tim Johnson.

The Sherlock Holmes Collections is proud to announce the addition of Ramute Plioplys’s Dancing Men eggs. We thank Dr. Andy Plioplys for donating them, as well as Susan Diamond and Allan Devitt for donating Ramute Plioplys’s chronologies.

The Museum now hosts a permanent display of her decorated eggs.

Susan Diamond and Allan Devitt, with one of Ramute Plioplys’s booklets
Very few Irregulars of today were privileged to know Edgar W. Smith personally, but one who did is George McCormack of Brooklyn, New York. When asked to reminisce about Smith, George wrote: “I well remember feeling surprised, pleased and humbled when Julian [Wolff, Smith’s successor] asked me to prepare and deliver the “On The Terrace” eulogy for Edgar [at the first BSI annual dinner after Edgar’s death], even though I was only an unknown, brand-new Irregular. All I remember about the eulogy was saying that Edgar and I were both Brooklynites,* and that we were both “Eagle Boys” — that is, that around age 12, we both delivered the now-extinct Brooklyn Daily Eagle to our customers in our neighborhoods. [Edgar] was a kindly and gentle man and held in highest esteem by all Irregulars.”

* While he did spend some of his youth in Brooklyn, Smith was born in Bethel, Conn., on April 1, 1894, and spent his earliest years there. His birth certificate, with details about his parents, is reproduced on the back of Jon Lellenberg’s Disjecta Membra: Stray Scraps from Irregular History, 1932-1950. – Ed.

The Incunabular Sherlock Holmes was the sixth in a series of reprints and original works that Smith assembled and published for the BSI. Introducing Mr. Sherlock Holmes followed in 1959, and Smith planned to do several others, but his sudden death the next year brought the series to an end. His last volume, a bibliography of editions of the canonical tales, was published posthumously in 1962. Even those of us who never knew him still mourn his passing.

John Bergquist, BSI

From the President

Monday, October 27, 2008 has been set for the Annual Membership Meeting of the Friends of the Sherlock Holmes Collections at the Andersen Library. The meeting will begin at 7 pm, and the keynote address will be delivered by Edgar Award winner Les Klinger, well-known editor of The New Annotated Sherlock Holmes and the nine volume The Sherlock Holmes Reference Library published by Wessex Press. Les will discuss his new book, The New Annotated Dracula, with introduction by Neil Gaiman. The book will be published by W.W. Norton on Halloween. We expect to have copies available for signing after the presentation.

In May, I visited the Arthur Conan Doyle Collection at the Toronto Public Library. Curator Peggy Perdue and Bob Coghill, who works in Special Collections, showed me the treasures of the Collections as we toured. Friends Chairman Doug Wrigglesworth, Cliff Goldfarb, Trevor Raymond and the new Manager of Special Collections, Archives and Digital Collections Mary Rae Shantz met us later at The Artful Dodger Pub. It’s these kind of experiences that make me feel very close to all our Canadian friends.

On April 24, 2008 the University of Minnesota Friends of the Library had their Annual Dinner. I am very happy to report that our curator Tim Johnson was awarded a staff development grant that will allow him to visit the Arthur Conan Doyle Collection Richard Lancelyn Green Bequest in Portsmouth, England. This will enable Tim to consult with the research and technical staff on collection processing and accessibility for researchers. He will also view and add items to the Supplemental Bibliography of The Universal Sherlock Holmes and develop relationships to facilitate further collaboration and future cooperative projects. The University’s selection committee was impressed with Tim’s work in the field of Sherlockian studies and its international significance. Congratulations to Tim on his award.

I hope that many of you will be able to attend our Annual Membership Meeting and renew your connection with the Friends. Together we can make the Sherlock Holmes Collections the world center for the study and appreciation of Sherlock Holmes. Please consider an additional donation of money or material.

Richard J. Sveum, MD, BSI
Musings

As we move from our short, cool Minnesota spring to our hot summer, Curator Tim Johnson has been very busy with The Sherlock Holmes Collections. We’re all very excited that Tim has made plans to visit the Portsmouth Museum, and we know he will represent the Collections well. In addition to the ongoing business of research questions, updating The Universal Sherlock Holmes, and new acquisitions and donations – to name just a few things that Tim encounters each day – there have been a number of visitors, including two people who wrote articles for this issue. Don Hobbs, the maniac collector, and Henry Zecher, William Gillette biographer. I’d like to thank both of them for contributing articles about those special interests. The Sherlock Holmes Collections have also proved to be an invaluable resource for the research being conducted by Andrew and Deborah Fusco. Please see the note elsewhere in this issue titled “A Call for Correspondence” and how you can help researchers. As the website for the Portsmouth England City Museum indicates, the Sherlock Holmes Collections feels fortunate to have also received “a stunning set of decorated eggs inspired by Sherlock Holmes and created by a USA expert in folk art.” I would like to extend my thanks to Andy Pioplys who generously allowed us to quote the

Don Hobbs and Tim Johnson

information about his sister. I related to him the story of a field trip a number of years ago to a Festival of Nations exhib-

it in St. Paul Minnesota with my group of 12 Girl Scouts, a story for which the world is not ready, and the girls’ fascination with decorated eggs. Andy replied that “Ramute herself attended many such ethnic fairs and showed interested individuals, especially children, how to make decorated eggs.”

Dick Sveum has updated us on his wanderings north of the border as well as Tim Johnson’s award. John Bergquist has written the 50 Years Ago item about Edgar W. Smith and his The Incunabular Sherlock Holmes. We were very surprised when we realized that in the eleven years that this newsletter has been published, we’ve never featured any writings by Smith. How could that have happened? We’re happy to correct this oversight and focus on the eloquent Mr. Smith, about whom, as John wrote, “Even those of us who never knew him still mourn his passing.”

Julie McKuras, ASH, BSI

Remembrances

In supporting the Sherlock Holmes Collections, many donors have made contributions either in honor or in memory of special persons.

In Honor Of
Howard Burchell, MD
Tim Johnson
Julie McKuras

In Memory Of
Chauncey A. Clayton
Sebastian T. Galbo
E. Allan Nisbet III
Paul Smoedgegaard
Francine M. Swift
Dr. Benton Wood

From
Raymond Scallen, MD
Phil and Karen Bergem
Phil and Karen Bergem

From
Bebe Clayton
Thomas Galbo
Frances Wang
Gordon Speck
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