



# **THE GENERATION GAP: JULIET AND HER PARENTS**

## **2022**

### **All The Daughters of My Father's House**

notes taken from *RENAISSANCE DRAMA*: ARDEN SHAKESPEARE – BRINDA CHARRY

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## SHAKESPEARE AND FAMILY

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Shakespeare is a great dramatist of the family.

- Almost all his major characters are in thrall to family ties,
  - and Shakespeare lavished attention on these bonds throughout his career –
    - from Baptista and his daughters,
    - the children of York and Lancaster
    - and the Capulet household,
    - right through to the late romances where Pericles, Cymbeline and Leontes struggle with the varying turns of fortune that overtake their wives and children.

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## SHAKESPEARE'S PRIMARY INTERESTS IN FAMILY

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He was intrigued by both individuals and families contrasting and mirroring one another, and this is particularly noticeable when compared with his most successful rivals, Marlowe, Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher.

- Two aspects of the family dominate Shakespeare's attention: he had, Stephen Greenblatt noted,
  - 'a special, deep interest in the murderous rivalry of brothers
  - and in the complexity of father-daughter relations'.
    - Seventeen of the plays have significant father-daughter relationships, and surrogate fathers feature in many others.

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## MARRIAGES, AND MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS

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The two most examined marriages are both dysfunctional in their different ways;

- the Macbeths,
- and Leontes and Hermione.
  - Mothers and daughters are even rarer.
    - Lady Capulet's concern for Juliet promises much but soon turns to rejection –
      - 'I would the fool were married to her grave'.
        - From this play onwards wives are banished from most of the comedies.

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## GENERATION GAP OVERVIEW

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Yet another theme is the 'generation gap', the sad misunderstanding of each other's feelings and motives by parents and children.





- Later, in King Lear, Shakespeare was to show these misunderstandings from the point of view of the old,
  - but Romeo and Juliet is a play written by a youngish playwright about young people,
    - and the story is told from their point of view.
      - A city contains rival gangs; a girl from one side and a boy from the other fall in love, but have no chance of fulfilment and happiness.

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## FATHERS AND DAUGHTERS AND THE ROMAN DRAMATISTS

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Shakespeare's interest in fathers and daughters must stem partly from his education,

- and in particular the Roman dramatists
  - Plautus,
  - Seneca,
  - Menander
  - and Terence,
    - whose plays had been studied and performed in schools and universities since the thirteenth century.

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## THE PLAUTINE PLOT

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The typical Plautine plot concerns...

- the bringing together of a young couple,
- after overcoming the hazards of unsympathetic parents and unsuitable suitors,
- aided by cunning and resourceful servants out to further their own interests.
  - The plays figure prominently...
    - a father, the senex iratus (angry old man),
      - bent on marrying his filia astuta (wily daughter)
      - to a rich, unwelcome and sometimes stupid man,
      - while ignoring his daughter's own chosen lover.
        - Wives are usually absent,
          - or play little part in the plot.
            - This was the template that most dramatists adopted, and Shakespeare followed suit in his early plays –
              - The Two Gentlemen of Verona
              - and Romeo and Juliet,
                - though rarely thereafter

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## MODERN VERSIONS OF THE PLAY

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The play has been used as basis for the very successful musical set in modern New York, West Side Story.





- To bring it up to date we have only to replace 'Verona' in the first chorus by 'Belfast', where today it is impossible for a young Protestant to court a Catholic, and vice versa.
  - We see continual misunderstanding between Juliet and her parents, Juliet and her Nurse.
    - Romeo's friend the Friar thinks he can influence Romeo's thoughts and actions by preaching to him, but the whole situation is summed up when Romeo utters the eternal cry of the young:
      - 'Thou canst not speak of that thou dost not feel' (III.iii.64).
        - The old have forgotten what it felt like to be young.

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## NURSES: CONTEXT

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### DEFINITION:

- a woman, often an employee wet-nurse, responsible for breastfeeding a child.
  - Also a person responsible for caring for a child or children or caring for someone in sickness on a day- to-day basis.
    - These jobs were women's tasks in early modern England.
      - Breastfeeding continued until the child was anything from nine months up to about two years old,
        - although some writers record breastfeeding up to three years –
          - so Juliet's weaning, at just less than three, is not exceptional (R&J 1.3.37–8).

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## WHY UPPER-CLASS WOMEN DIDN'T NURSE THEIR OWN CHILDREN

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Breastfeeding was unconventional amongst upper- class mothers,

- possibly because of the inconvenience and early discomfort involved
  - Wealthier households often employed a wet nurse to suckle the baby instead
    - However, most medical guidebooks and conduct books on female behaviour encouraged women to suckle their own children,
      - appreciating the power of emotional bonding
      - and the protective powers of the mother's own milk
        - In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries some of the nobility began to accept this line of thought, which was strongly associated with the Puritan tradition.
          - Elizabeth Clinton's *The Countess of Lincolnes Nurserie* (Oxford 1622) exhorts other women,
            - 'I pray you set no more so light by God's blessing in your own breasts, which the Holy Spirit ranketh with other excellent blessings . . . be not so unnatural to thrust away your own children; be not so hardy as to venture a tender babe to a less tender heart; be not accessory to the disorder of causing a poorer woman to banish her own infant for the entertaining of a richer woman's child, as it were bidding her unlove her own to love yours' (Aughterson 1995: 119–20).





## JULIET AND THE NURSE

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We learn more biographical details about Juliet's history than we do with any other character in Shakespeare, mostly through Nurse's affectionate, if embarrassing, banter.

- the Nurse sees marriage for what it mostly is in Verona, a practical matter concerned in the first instance with money
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## JULIET AND LADY CAPULET

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Lady Capulet says that she became mother to Juliet when she was Juliet's age, nearly fourteen (1.3.71–3)

- relatively young in comparison with the average age of first motherhood for early modern Englishwomen
  - According to this evidence, she would therefore be 28, and much younger than her husband who says he was last in a masque 25 or 30 years ago (1.5.33–40)
    - However, the stage directions in the Second Quarto refer to her as 'Old Lady'
      - Hosley (1967) explains the discrepancy by suggesting that compositorial error printed 'your mother' instead of 'a mother', and that Juliet is the only surviving child of the couple
        - In the excitement of preparations for the wedding, they joke about Capulet's past reputation for chasing women and her jealousy (4.4.11–13)
          - She is referred to as 'the lady of the house' (1.5.113)
            - and appears as a housewife, holding the keys to the stores where spices and preserved fruits are kept and concerned that the family will not be sufficiently prepared for a wedding feast (4.4.1–2).

## JULIET'S RELATIONSHIP WITH LADY CAPULET

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Lady Capulet has a more formal relationship with her daughter than does the Nurse who suckled Juliet,

- as can be seen when the topic of marriage to Paris is first introduced (1.3)
- and when she is angered by Juliet's refusal of the match to Paris.
  - She responds to Juliet's appeal
    - 'O sweet my mother, cast me not away!' by refusing to speak a word: 'Do what thou wilt. I have done with thee' (3.5.198–203)
      - Such indifference may be explained as a symptom of her grief at the death of Tybalt
        - She is certainly passionate in her wish for revenge; determined to find someone to poison Romeo (3.5.87–92). (c)
          - Richard Hosley (1967), puts the case for Lady Capulet as an older figure
            - An interesting performance choice is outlined in the anonymous *The True Ophelia*:
              - And Other studies of Shakespeare's Women by An Actress (1913), where the author argues in an account of 'The Insignificant Mother of Juliet' (pp. 65–93), that Lady Capulet is the





strongest character in the play, fired by jealousy of Lady Montague, who has a son (pp. 69–70).

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## A PERSPECTIVE ON CAPULET

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He can be seen in the following ways:

- a loving father
- out of his depth with a rebellious daughter

He can also be seen as a typically overbearing patriarch

- we can deduce Capulet is around sixty
  - the difference in age between Capulet (60) and his daughter (13) can be seen as a recipe for dramatic misunderstanding

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## HOW JULIET IS DESCRIBED

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Old Capulet argues that another two summers must pass, until Juliet is nearly 16,

- ‘Ere we may think her ripe to be a bride’ (R&J 1.3.10–11),
  - although he later changes his mind.

Juliet’s age is mentioned no fewer than five times with reference to ‘fourteen’.

- One of these (1.3.15–18) spells out that she will be fourteen in little over a fortnight, on 31 July.
  - Fourteen is of course also the line-count of the sonnet, the play’s most distinctive literary form.
    - While the play gives Juliet’s age and birthday (her star sign is Leo, fittingly for her undaunted mettle), it says nothing about...
      - her appearance,
      - whether she is tall or short or the perfect height for a thirteen-year-old girl,
      - what colour her eyes are,
      - or whether her hair is blonde, as it appears to be in Brooke when ‘with cruel hand she tare her golden hairs’ (2389) just as Brooke’s Romeus tears ‘his golden locks’ (1291) on hearing news of his banishment.

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## ACT III, SCENE IV ANALYSIS

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In the Capulet mansion, Old Capulet is explaining to Paris that there has not been an opportunity to speak to Juliet, mourning for Tybalt, about his wooing.

- But, secure in the belief that his little daughter will do whatever he advises, Capulet arranges that Paris will marry Juliet immediately.
  - It is Monday; Thursday will be the wedding day.





- An Elizabethan father, especially in a wealthy family where property was concerned, expected and usually received absolute obedience from his daughter.
  - In A Midsummer Night's Dream Theseus tells the rebellious Hernia, 'To you your father should be as a god' (I.i.47)
    - and her father Egeus states unequivocally, 'As she is mine, I may dispose of her' (I.i.42).
      - This attitude Capulet assumes without thought, as a matter of course.
        - Romeo and Juliet has been called a 'tragedy of unawareness', and this scene certainly bears out that description.
          - The Capulet parents think that Juliet is mourning for Tybalt - they have no idea that she has done more than glimpse Romeo.
            - Meanwhile Juliet is receiving Romeo to consummate their marriage, with no idea of the plans her father and Paris are forming.

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## ACT III, SCENE V ANALYSIS

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Even as Capulet goes off to bed, Romeo and Juliet appear on the balcony.

- Their conversation is a kind of aubade, or 'dawn song',
  - the song of secret lovers forced to part by the coming of day –
    - typified by the troubador's (type of poet) refrain, 'Ah God, Ah God, that day should come so soon'
      - Warned by the Nurse of Lady Capulet's coming, Romeo climbs down from the balcony, and the lovers part for ever.
        - Romeo at the last moment tries to be optimistic:
          - ... all these woes shall serve / For sweet discourses in our times to come. (53)
        - Juliet, however, as earlier in the orchard scene, has a premonition:
          - o God, I have an ill-divining soul. / Methinks I see thee, now thou art so low, / As one dead in the bottom of a tomb. (54)

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## LADY CAPULET DOES NOT UNDERSTAND JULIET'S TEARS (3.5)

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In answer to Lady Capulet's call Juliet joins her mother on the main stage, wondering why she is summoned and unable to hide her grief, so that even Lady Capulet must notice, and, asking what is wrong, rebuke her daughter for

- 'evermore weeping for your cousin's death' (69),
  - and advise a more moderate amount of grief.
    - They have an extraordinary conversation in which Juliet speaks in riddles, conveying very different meanings to her mother (who believes her 'feeling loss' is Tybalt) and to the audience, who have just seen her parting from Romeo.
      - Lady Capulet is still exhibiting her hatred, and calling for vengeance, suggesting that Juliet's tears are not for Tybalt's death, but rather because his murderer Romeo is still alive.
        - 'Would none but I might venge my cousin's death' (86) says poor Juliet –







- for then Romeo would have nothing to fear.
  - But Lady Capulet responds '[We will have vengeance for it, fear thou not](#)', and plans to send a poisoner to Mantua to kill Romeo. (Few in the audience will have time to wonder how on earth she knows that he has gone to Mantua!)

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## JULIET TRICKS LADY CAPULET WITH HER WORDS (3.5)

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Now Juliet speaks her longing for Romeo and her grief for Tybalt, but in such a way that Lady Capulet thinks she is demanding Romeo's death.

[Indeed I never shall be satisfied  
With Romeo till I behold him - dead –  
Is my poor heart so for a kinsman vexed ... . . .  
O how my heart abhors  
To hear him named - and cannot come to him –  
To wreak the love I bore my cousin  
Upon his body that hath slaughtered him. \(93\)](#)

- Dr Samuel Johnson thought that 'Juliet's equivocations are rather too artful for a mind disturbed by the loss of a new lover';
  - Perhaps her wits are sharpened by her sense of desperation.
    - But worse is to come.

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## LADY CAPULET THINKS JULIET WILL BE HAPPY WITH MARRIAGE TO PARIS

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Brushing aside grief and revenge, Lady Capulet now tells Juliet the 'joyful tidings' (104) that in three days time, on a 'day of joy', Paris will make her a 'joyful bride'.

- How ironic the repeated emphasis on 'joy'.
  - Juliet, horrified and shocked, can do nothing but object, yet still speaking with double meaning:  
[I pray you, tell my lord and father, madam,  
I will not marry yet, and when I do, I swear  
It shall be Romeo, whom you know I hate,  
Rather than Paris. \(120\)](#)
    - 'Tell him so yourself,' returns her callous mother.

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## CAPULET SPEAKS IN LEGAL TERMS

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Capulet enters and is vexed to find Juliet in tears, 'evermore showering' (130).

- He feels and speaks as an absolute ruler, in legal terms:
  - [How now wife, Have you delivered to her our decree?](#) (137)





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## LADY CAPULET BEGINS TO REJECT JULIET

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Lady Capulet's concern for Juliet promises much but soon turns to rejection when she indicates, in a brutal phrase and a foreboding one, that Juliet is unwilling –

- 'I would the fool were married to her grave'.
  - The way Shakespeare structures this aspect the relationship between mother and daughter is similar to the overall tragic structure of the play
    - Just as the difference between tragedy and the survival of the protagonist is separated by mere moments, the relationship between mother and daughter promises much but soon turns to rejection
      - This is one of the structural choices Shakespeare uses to generate sympathy for Juliet
        - And this is likely the same reason why Shakespeare changes Juliet's age from 18 or 16 as in the source texts, to 13 in his version of the story

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## CAPULET SHOWS HINTS OF VIOLENCE

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- Capulet cannot believe his ears.
  - 'Doth she not give us thanks? Is she not proud?' (142).
    - The wretched Juliet tries to show that she is grateful for his endeavours on her behalf, though hating their outcome,
      - but Capulet, in an expressive speech written with masterly rhythm, at last realises what she is saying, and puts his foot down.
        - She is disobeying her lord.
        - She is a traitor to the family.
          - If she won't go willingly to St Peter's Church, he will 'drag thee on a hurdle thither' (155), as traitors to the state were dragged to their execution.
            - Even Lady Capulet is appalled by this fierce attack - or is it to Juliet that she calls 'Fie, fie! what, are you mad?' (157).
              - Capulet will not listen to his kneeling daughter, but storms so violently that the Nurse tries to intervene, and is in her turn snubbed and silenced.

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## PARENTAL AUTHORITY IN ELIZABETHAN ENGLAND

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To the Elizabethan audience the authority of ruler over subjects was paralleled by the authority of parents over children, each absolute,

- and each part of the 'great chain of being', on which decency and order depended
  - Parents would sympathise with Capulet's feelings





- He has done the very best he can for his beloved only child,
  - arranged a match (and at this level of society almost all marriages were arranged) with a
    - high-born gentleman
    - rich
    - young
    - well-educated
    - an ideal husband
      - He has actually fixed the wedding day with the bridegroom.
        - And now this wretched little girl rejects the splendid future he has conjured up for her,
          - and will make him look a fool in the eyes of Paris

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## CAPULET DISPLAYS HIS DISAPPOINTMENT

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An you be mine, I'll give you to my friend;  
An you be not, hang, beg, starve, die in the streets,  
For, by my soul, I'll ne'er acknowledge thee,  
Nor what is mine shall never do thee good.  
Trust to't; bethink you; I'll not be forsworn - (192)

Capulet strides out,

- a bitterly hurt and disappointed man
  - Juliet turns to her mother:
    - 'O sweet my mother, cast me not away.' (199),
      - and again uncannily forecasts her own fate:  
Delay this marriage for a month, a week,  
Or if you do not, make the bridal bed  
In that dim monument where Tybalt lies. (200)

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## MOTHERLESS YOUNG WOMEN: A SOURCE OF DRAMA

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Shakespeare has proved not alone in finding motherless young women a rich source of drama.

- Jane Austen, for example, started her career by creating the rather ineffectual Mrs Dashwood in *Sense and Sensibility*, and the heavily satirized Mrs Bennett in *Pride and Prejudice*.
  - The reasons for this device are not hard to find.
    - A dead,
    - or absent, mother leaves a young daughter without the support of the adult who has largely brought her up and understands the trials and tribulations of a woman in a male-dominated society
      - though Shakespeare does not dwell on the daughter's sense of loss,
        - daughters are at the mercy of a father who has been distant in her development.
          - Father and daughter are naturally and socially the two most opposed members of a family, through...





- gender,
- age – (Capulet is around sixty and Juliet 13)
- status
- and expectation.
  - The dramatic possibilities for conflict and/or growing dependence are endless,
    - and Shakespeare particularly relished writing such clashes,
    - perhaps because of his delight in creating a whole range of elderly men, fathers to a single daughter.

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## CONTEXT: SHAKESPEARE'S LIFE

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It is worth noting that Shakespeare created his great comic heroines between 1595 and 1600, when his own daughters were in their teens.

- the influence that his own experience of family had on his writing needs to be approached with great caution.

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## RECOGNISABLY GENDERED

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She is anchored in her family in ways that are recognizably gendered.

- Whereas Romeo can roam the streets at night with other young men from Verona without being answerable to parents, and even woo his first love, Rosaline, with rich gifts (1.1.212), such freedoms are unimaginable for Juliet.
  - The extent of her containment by family and father is evident from the clash in 3.5,
    - the timing of which is crucial because by then she is Romeo's wife, owing her primary loyalty to her husband and no longer to her father.
      - Two of her father's remarks indicate how high the stakes are:
        - in conversation with Paris he notes that Juliet is 'the hopeful lady of my earth' (1.2.14).
          - Most editions follow Q2 here and reproduce 'Earth hath swallowed all my hopes but she, / She is the hopeful lady of my earth',
            - which would seem to imply that Juliet once had brothers and sisters.

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## JULIET'S BEAUTY

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Juliet's beauty is perceived as a reflection of the divine

- Juliet is 'Beauty too rich for use, for earth too dear!' (R&J 1.5.47)
- in the final scene her beauty takes on a transcendent quality





- It is apparently unconquered by death, reigning still in her lips and cheeks and making 'This vault a feasting presence, full of light' (R&J 5.1.85–6).

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## THE EFFEMINISING EFFECTS OF JULIET'S BEAUTY

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Love, it was felt, could also effeminize a man

- In *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) Richard Burton stated that love is 'full of fear, anxiety, doubt, care, peevishness, it turns a man into a woman'.
  - According to the angry Romeo, Juliet's beauty effeminizes him (R&J 3.1.110) and worries that Juliet's 'beauty hath made me effeminate / And in my temper softn'd valour's steel' (3.1.115–16)
    - Romeo has little chance when even warriors like Antony in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* (c. 1607) and Tamburlaine are softened by love
      - The latter recognizes that his adoration of Zenocrate is 'unseemly ... for my sex' and makes him 'effeminate and faint' (Part 1, 5.2.111, 114).

