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Trans-Temporal Mixture for a Modern Realistic Intruder: Hank Morgan's Adaptation to Medieval Fantastic World in Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*

Takuma Furukawa

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to explain Hank Morgan's trans-temporal transformation from a modern pragmatist into a believer in medieval 'fantastic' elements in Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889). This novel, which is Hank Morgan's story for seven years spent in Arthurian England, describes a modern man in the medieval world; it essentially contains the problem of mixture of the medieval and the modern. In this paper, we pay attention to the relation between Hank and Arthur, which is correspondent with one between the real and the fantasy. The conflicts and mixture between modern reality and medieval 'fantasy' give special energy to this novel and increase attractiveness of the work more.

Let us outline this paper. Section 1 reviews representative studies on this novel, and defines the use of the term 'fantasy' in this paper. Section 2 furnishes the ambiguous aspects of Hank's identity, pointing out lack of his name in Arthurian England. Section 3 surveys King Arthur's fantastic influence on Hank, grounded on the analyses in the previous section: Hank's lack of determined identity accelerates his adaptation to Arthurian England.

1. Background

Critics have related this historical novel to contemporary problems of the United States such as imperialism; they have inferred that Hank Morgan's deeds in Arthurian England parallel expansionism in the United States, aiming at overseas

possessions after the government declared that the frontier had vanished in 1890; this work came into existence in the previous year. Sam Halliday emphasizes that this novel "represents Mark Twain's most serious and sustained attempt to think about history" (416), and John Carlos Rowe considers that this novel as a warning book of imperialism in the United States; he infers that the book "anticipates most of the anti-imperialist views" (178). In addition, Ayako Suto analyzes the soap in this novel in relation to contemporary marketing and colonialism. We may also mention, in passing, that Charles H. Gold points out that Twain's "durable streak of pessimism" causes the change of the plot "from the essentially good-hearted, optimistic comic vision" of the original plan "to the profoundly disillusioned conclusion" (149). In general, it can be said that these studies attach a great deal of importance on the contemporary context of this work.

We, however, need to focus more on the fact that this novel is set not in modern United States but in medieval England. The critics above, having tended to point out the relationship between this text and the contemporary social problems, neither pay enough attention to medieval factors, nor investigate the reason why this novel does not describe the world of the United States but adopts that of Arthurian England. We, therefore, are required to consider the relation between Hank and Arthurian characters more.

There are some articles that deal with such relationship. For instance, J. D. Stahl points out that "Hank assumes the protective parental role of a mother to Arthur, whose position of privilege has kept him childlike" (94). However, most of them take it for granted that the modern American occupies a superior position to medieval nobles in that he has more knowledge of modern technology and democratic thought than they do. This assumption scrapes aspects of medieval influence off this novel. Here, what we would like to demonstrate is the way in which factors of sixth century world, especially King Arthur, intervene in nineteenth century protagonist.

It is the notable point that medieval characters and goods such as Excalibur's scabbard are often described as somewhat supernatural entities in this novel, which

are inexplicable by modern science in efficiency. Against this viewpoint, there can be the objection that medieval things are not necessarily related to supernatural ones without condition. Against the objection, we reply with an explanation of Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn on the definition of fantasy literature: "all [major theorists in the field] agree that that fantasy is about the construction of *the impossible* whereas science fiction may be about the unlikely, but is grounded in the scientifically possible" (Introduction 1; my emphasis). The United States as an Occidental nation has not experienced the age of the medieval; thus we insist that American literature can relate the medieval to the idea of supernatural impossibility: the United States cannot perfectly reconstruct the medieval culture and society with real data and materials. *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, therefore, needs the perspective of fantasy.

Now let us describe more the use of the term 'fantasy' in this paper. Tzvetan Todorov presents general definition of the fantasy: "definite hesitation of one who does not understand except the natural law, when they face an event which seems supernatural" ("l'hésitation éprouvée par un être qui ne connaît que les lois naturelles, face à un événement en apparence surnaturel"; my trans.; 29). In other words, he assumes the fantasy as the function that leads the people in the real world to supernatural experiences; we may say that the situation of the definition is similar to that of Hank, encountering the world of the sixth century filled with supernatural ideas. His definition of the fantasy as a hesitation, however, cannot fully explain Hank's positive attitude toward these ideas that he sometimes belittles and sometimes credits. Instead of his definition, we would like to adopt the viewpoint of Maria Ornella Marotti, mainly handling the late works of Twain; she comments on the fantasy, with the preliminary acknowledgement that she may run the risk of contradicting Todorov's definition: "Twain's fantastic is an exploration of the powers of the imagination that leads eventually to the assertion of the power of dream over reality" (70). Compared to Todorov, her statement emphasizes that the power of dream overwhelms the real world; we would like to assert that her

definition can be applied to Hank, influenced by factors of fantastic things in the medieval world as stated below.

2. Lack of the Name of Hank Morgan

First, let us see who Hank is. At the very beginning of his narration, he declares:

> I am *an American*. I was born and reared in Hartford, in the State of Connecticut—anyway, just over the river, in the country. So I am *a Yankee of the Yankees*—and practical; yes, and nearly barren of sentiment, I suppose—or poetry, in other words. (4; my emphasis)

In the citation, it is notable that he introduces himself as an American or a New Englander; he refers to his sense of belonging, without the name of Hank Morgan. Next, in the second half of the citation, we can grasp that he attaches a great deal of importance to realistic deeds, and that he is poor at feeling poesy. John Bird emphasizes that his deed is full of metaphor, "more so than any other of Twain's fictional narrators" (138), though the protagonist himself denies so in the quotation above. In addition, T. J. Lustig points out that "he *can't* feel poetry but that he doesn't know he *can* feel it" (87). In other words, he, focusing on Hank's humanity and Twain's ideas on modern civilization, argues that Hank can have poetic feeling, but that he does not know the means to express it to others, including the listener of his narration: the reader of this novel. Bird's argument, however, does not have enough to examine the use of Hank's metaphor more deeply; his explanation of this novel consists of nothing but introduces former studies on Twain's rhetoric, such as the articles of James M. Cox and Henry Nash Smith. Besides, Lustig does not consider medieval characters and surroundings around Hank. We need to take notice of them in order to analyze the modern protagonist more deeply. Nevertheless, it is significant to explore the way in which Hank expresses himself in his narration.

The fact that he introduces himself without his name, as stated above, has a serious meaning all the time in this novel. One of the impressive descriptions is the following narration, after he arouses awe in the spectators around the stake, bluffing them into believing that he is able to control the weather as the solar eclipse, and makes his political antagonist Merlin fall from power:

> I was admired, also feared; but it was as an animal is admired and feared. The animal is not reverenced, neither was I; I was not even respected. I had no pedigree, no inherited title; so, in the king's and the nobles' eyes I was mere dirt; the people regarded me with it; through the force of inherited ideas they were not able to conceive of anything being entitled to that except pedigree and lordship. (65-66)

From the quotation, we can understand that Hank has already stood in awe of other people in Arthurian England, though he still worries about how they consider his presence, because of the turning events in his life and career as stated in the beginning of the paragraph. The scene brings in his decision that he presents himself as "the Boss" (69). It would not be too much to say that people in the medieval world look at the title as the substitution for Hank Morgan: his original name is unrecognized there. In other words, they are interested not in his personality (what sort of a person he is) but in his social position (what role he plays in society).

The scene is the target of our interest. For instance, Halliday argues that "Hank enjoys his own version of 'the pathos of nobility and distance,' homologous with that of the Arthurian knights" (423). The pathos of nobility and distance is the expression written by Friedrich Nietzsche, meaning "the continuing and predominant feeling of complete and fundamental superiority of a higher ruling kind in relation to a lower kind, to those 'below'—that is the origin of the antithesis 'good' and 'bad'" (13). Halliday, namely, shows that Hank is similar to Arthurian knights in that both are conscious that they are nobler than the lower classes; in

addition, the modern man feels superior to the privileged knights. Advancing the discussion, we would like to relate the sense of superiority to the context of his identity; the lack of his name helps to intensify his dependence on the title, causing him to enhance his superior feeling toward medieval people.

Here, some may be suspicious about our choice of this scene from the text, and note the following narration on Hank's perception of where he says: "I was just as much at home in that [sixth] century as I could have been in any other; and as for preference, I wouldn't have traded it for the twentieth" (62-63). His words, showing that he becomes comfortable living in sixth century England after he blasts Merlin's tower, have already been argued by a lot of critics. We shall return to this citation later.

On his perception of time and space, we need to look at the following: "Of course that taint, that reverence for rank and title, had been in our American blood, too—I know that; but when I left America it had disappeared—at least to all intents and purposes" (67). In the quotation, he actually feels that he had become free from the class system in nineteenth century United States, for he consequently leaves his homeland for the medieval foreign land. Nevertheless, he does not cease to cling to his status in the class system of Arthurian England; he rather seeks to get a higher social position than he used to have; he had been a trivial factory worker in the United States.

We must now return to the point of the context of his identity. As we demonstrated before, Hank usually pays attention to whether he becomes the focus of public attention. The following quotation is its typical instance: "Of course I was all the talk—all other subjects were dropped; even the king became suddenly a person of minor interest and notoriety" (55). On his attitude, seen in the citation, as if he were an entertainer, Cox refers to "his characterizing compulsion being his urge to gain attention" (205). Cox takes sides with the opinion that Hank overwhelms Arthurian characters, in that he has knowledge of modern technology and thought.

On the other hand, David Ketterer argues that the world of this novel includes

"two negative visions of the sixth century and the nineteenth century and two corresponding positive visions" (1106); using Armageddon motifs, he tries to describe how Hank's nineteenth century traits are replaced by sixth century ones. Let us examine this instance:

> Apparently the whole nation wanted a look at me. It soon transpired that the eclipse had scared the British world almost to death; that while it lasted the whole country, from one end to the other, was in a pitiable state of panic, and the churches, hermitages and monkeries overflowed with praying and weeping poor creatures who thought the end of the world was come. (54)

Reading the citation, some may say that Hank imagines that the British world and its tradition come to end. We, however, have to be reminded again that he feels "just as much at home in that [sixth] century" (62). We agree more with Ketterer than with Cox in thinking that he receives the influence by sixth century culture in these points. Hank does not take action without paying attention to medieval people; he performs nothing without assuming their presence and public attention. His deeds and narration, therefore, are inseparable from the medieval.

Such tendency appears in the decisive scene in which he declares the end of chivalry:

> The day was mine. Knight-errantry was a doomed institution. The march of civilization was begun. How did I feel? Ah, you never could imagine it.
>
> And Brer Merlin? His stock was flat again. Somehow, every time the magic of fol-de-rol tried conclusions with the magic of science, the magic of fol-de-rol got left. (393)

Scholars have related the scene in the quotation to another turning point in this novel, when Merlin revenges himself on Hank for the interruption that causes the medieval

magician to be replaced by the modern man, during the battle between an army of the man and a number of knights of the Church; the magician puts him to "sleep thirteen centuries" (443). Peter Messent mentions that Hank, using his technology in order to ruin chivalrous pride of Arthurian knights, is a typical Twain "disenchantment" (*Mark Twain* 125) character, while he considers that "this is the implication of the ending where Merlin's 'magic' finally defeats Hank—Realism is not allowed superiority over Fantasy" ("Towards" 182). His studies are helpful for us, in that he makes Hank correspond to realism, the medieval magician to fantasy. However, we need to advance the discussion for deeper interpretation.

Let us now attempt to extend the observation into King Arthur. Michael Davitt Bell states that "this sleep in effect turns the Yankee into his supposed opposite, [Thomas] Malory's King Arthur; for like Arthur, the once and future king, the spellbound Yankee lies sleeping in a cave until the moment for his return" (62). This is an interesting comment, for he finds a new means of relating Hank to the King. Of course, we cannot explain the relation, making use of the single scene; in the next section, we would like to examine the relation between Hank and King Arthur, going back to this work all over.

3. Realistic Hank and Fantastic Arthur

First, let us see Hank's plan. Having beaten the knights with a gun three years before, he virtually takes over the rein of government and then renovates the social system of sixth century England, changing it into that of the nineteenth century. He also maps out the scheme after the King passes away:

> . . . commanding that upon Arthur's death unlimited suffrage should be introduced, and given to men and women alike—at any rate to all men, wise or unwise, and to all mothers who, at middle age, should be found to know nearly as much as their sons at twenty-one. (398)

Through his words, we understand that Hank is instituting the voting right for most of the citizen. Focusing on the fact that he deprives the right of the court, we may argue that he denies royal authority. We can say with fair certainty that he is conscious of regal power, for he refers to "divine right of kings" (67), invented and guaranteed by the Roman Catholic Church, which is the disgusting menace for him. The denial, however, is only an aspect of his attitude toward the King. He attaches rather a great deal of importance to the sacred authority of the King; the serious consideration cannot be separable from fantastic motifs.

What we would like to lay on the table of consideration, is the king's activity of curing people. Before going out into life space of freemen incognito with King Arthur, Hank actually sees the scene of the King curing scrofulous patients by touching them with his hands. Then he narrates:

> In other places people operated on a patient's mind, without saying a word to him, and cured him. In others, experts assembled patients in a room and prayed over them, and appealed to their faith, and those patients went away cured. Wherever you find a king who can't cure the king's-evil, you can be sure that the most valuable superstition that supports his throne—the subject's belief in the divine appointment of his sovereign—has passed away. (256)

In this quotation, some may infer that the text intimates the séance, which came into fashion among some people who followed the Modern Spiritualist movement in nineteenth century Occidental countries. Hank is convinced of the effect of cure, reminding himself of the séance as contemporary activity with him.[1] There is some

[1] We may add the historical context that Twain himself was a member of the Society of Psychical Research (SPR) in a certain period as other intellectuals, such as Arthur Conan Doyle and Henri Bergson. Some nineteenth century people believed spiritualistic phenomena such as mesmerism and phrenology as science, which modern science finally came to consider negatively as pseudoscience.

truth in that. We, however, find that his reference is also applied to the royal touch, which is the cure activity, seen in medieval Europe.

Former studies of history examine the act and its reception by medieval people. For instance, Marc Bloch, a historian of the Annales School, demonstrates that the phenomenon of the cure is well-grounded by "the collective consciousness" ("la conscience collective"; my trans.; 19) of the people: "the whole group of superstitions and legends which form the monarchical 'marvelous' element" ("de tout le groupe de superstitions et de légendes qui forme le 'merveilleux' monarchique"; my trans.; 18). The statement corresponds with the situation in this novel; Hank also believes that the royal miracle really exists.[2] We cannot deny that he certainly introduces modern technology and a modern social system into Arthurian England, while he calls himself the magician, in order to urge the medieval people to accept his modern knowledge without a sense of discomfort; besides, he finally marries Sandy, a medieval lady, and begets a child in Arthurian England, a country far from his home. These deeds would demonstrate that Hank becomes closer to the medieval people, in that he adopts their vocabulary and thinking, as he presents himself as the most influential magician in the medieval world.

It may be worth mentioning, in passing, that he somewhat continues to entertain a respect for Arthurian knights. After putting them to rout with the gun in ch. 39, he describes them as "the selectest body known to chivalry, the knights of the Table Round, the most illustrious in Christendom" (389). Some may say that he refers to their fame, in order to achieve greater one, by defeating them. That, however, can mean that he realizes usefulness of their fame for him; he, in fact, makes use of them for a display of his power.

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[2] We could also point out another reference to the king's activity of curing people in another Twain's novel: *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885). A fraud, gone by the name of 'the king,' introduces his medical skill: "I've done considerable in the doctoring way, in my time. Layin' on o' hands is my best holt—for cancer, and paralysis, and sich things; and I k'n tell a fortune pretty good, when I've got somebody along to find out the facts for me" (161).

Let us return to our main subjects. Hank hears that King Arthur dies in battle against Mordred, who is rising in revolt against the King. Then he says: "I was utterly stunned; it had not seemed to me that any wound could be mortal to him" (417). In this citation, his response suggests that he still believes in sanctity of the King, which we would like to discuss in the rest of the paper. He would not do so, if he did not give credit to the immortality of the soul. He, in fact, continues to feel respect for the medieval King and his knights somewhere in the back of his mind, though he ostensibly mocks them for demonstrating out-of-date deeds for him over and over again through this novel. Furthermore, Kim Moreland points out that Hank sees the King as "the larger-than-life Arthur, the mythic hero" (62). We agree with him to some extent, but we cannot bring ourselves to accept his opinion completely, in that Moreland does not mention the King's sword and the scabbard as stated below. It is a debatable point, as we show.

The useful scene is Merlin's reference to the fantastic effect of the scabbard of Excalibur, the sword of the King: "Ye are more unwise, said Merlin, for the scabbard is worth ten of the sword, for while ye have the scabbard upon you ye shall never lose no blood, be ye never so sore wounded, therefore keep well the scabbard always with you" (27). This phrase above, which is the medieval magician's advice to the King, is the evidence of Hank's mourning when he hears the news of King Arthur passing. According to the magician, the scabbard is ten times worthier than the sword itself, for the former has a supernatural power to protect the owner against any wounds in the body. On the other hand, it can be said that the latter is only a weapon for hurting enemies in the battle field, representing the realistic material. Accordingly, the scabbard is correspondent to the fantastic item, which would be a more sacred iron for the modern man than the sword.

There is another notable point. In the tale below, told by an old man to Hank, the narrator, exhibits a complex structure of the dialogue. The following passage is a typical instance:

> Anon withal came the damsel unto Arthur and saluted him, and he her again. Damsel, said Arthur, what sword is that, that yonder the arm holdeth above the water? I would it were mine, for I have no sword. Sir Arthur king, said the damsel, sword is mine, and if ye will give me a gift when I ask it you, ye shall have it. By my faith, said Arthur, I will give you what gift ye will ask. Well, said the damsel, go ye into yonder barge and row yourself to the sword, and take it and the scabbard with you, and I will ask my gift when I see my time. So Sir Arthur and Merlin alight, and tied their horses to two trees, and so they went into the ship, and when they came to the sword that the hand held, Sir Arthur took it up by the handles, and took it with him. (26)

Let us analyze the quotation sentence by sentence. The first paragraph is the narration of the old man, describing the scene, when the damsel, the Lady of the lake, approaches to the King. Next, the second and the third ones are the voices of the King, questioning about the sword in order to get it. In the fourth and the sixth, she explains it to him; he swears to her that he would grant her demand in the fifth. The last sentence returns to the voice of the old man, showing that the King obtains the sword. We would recognize the complexity of the frame telling; and moreover, we would like to focus on Hank, hearing the complicated tale, though he is not referred to on the surface of the telling.

Hank, similarly to the readers, has a difficulty recognizing the reality of the tale; we cannot judge well whether the old man's narration is true or false. What we can know is the fact that he narrates the tale. That is because there is a great distance between the listener and the characters in the tale. The old narrator does not describe the scene of the quest of Excalibur directly, but often inserts the dialogue of the King and the damsel; the magician also plays a role of the speaker later, such as in the above quotation on the effect of the scabbard. That causes the frame telling to be more complicated, and the distance to arise. The situation, moving away from the credible reality, is consequently close to the fantastic one.

Some may say that Hank feels the tale suspicious as he himself narrates: "It

seemed to me that this quaint lie was most simply and beautifully told; but then I had heard it only once, and that makes a difference; it was pleasant to the others when it was fresh, no doubt" (30). Lesley C. Kordecki also supports the opinion that he "is intolerant of the lies" (341). We, however, object to it, illustrating his positive attitude toward the King and royalty. Let us add another example of his belief in the fiction.

Narration of medieval characters, including the fantastic content, decides Hank's destiny on occasion. In ch. 4, Sir Key introduces the tale of his achievement to the King and the knights:

> It was time for me to feel serious, and I did. Sir Kay told how he had encountered me in a far land of barbarians who all wore the same ridiculous garb that I did—a garb that was a work of enchantment by player, and had killed my thirteen knights in a three-hours' battle and taken me prisoner, sparing my life in order that so strange a curiosity as I was might be exhibited to the wonder and admiration of the king and the court. (31)

In the citation, it is notable that Hank realizes the seriousness of the situation. He cannot make his way out of the narration; what he can do is only to accept his telling and receive a sentence of death. He, having just begun to take action in Arthurian England, cannot capture the initiative from the knights. Moreover, Sir Key adds some fantastic elements to his tale, such as a garb that Hank wears. The knight emphasizes his force of arms, adding the fictional facts to the tale. Hank can criticize the content of the narration as much as he can after the telling scene ends. The modern man, however, cannot afford to do so while the knight continues to narrate the story in front of him; Hank feels the reality that is almost to the life in Sir Key's telling. His tale determines what Hank experiences next: a crisis in his life.

Here, let us remember the first part of the paper, in which we mention the definition of fantasy. We would like to cite Marotti's comment again: the

imagination is “the power of the dream over reality” (70). The scene is representative of it, in that the reality does not work in the complex frame of narration, which describes the tale of the symbol of the royal sanctity. Hank himself shows that he still believes the tale, when he hears the news of death of King Arthur. The news suggests that the fantastic protection of the scabbard loses its efficacy in the battle between the King and Mordred.[3] The protective effect, therefore, remains in the mind of the modern man, hearing the tale.

At last, we would like to focus on Hank’s last moment. The following citation is a part of his groan:

> Yes, I seemed to have flown back out of that age into this of ours, and then forward to it again, and was set down, a stranger and forlorn in that strange England, with an abyss of thirteen centuries yawning between me and you! between me and my home and my friends! (447)

Hank suffers from a hallucination of Sandy, after he is forced to go back to the nineteenth century by Merlin’s hypnotism. He utters groans, as if he had a nightmare, eating into his real life, but he would not be troubled by the medieval but by being back in the nineteenth century; the abyss between sixth century England and the nineteenth century that he feels, makes him realize that he considers Arthurian England as his homeland; he believes in royal miracles, and gets married to Sandy, a medieval woman.

Furthermore, we argue that the abyss suggests another dividing: realistic nineteenth century world and the fantastic Arthurian England. As we point out in this paper, he, coming from the nineteenth century, the age of realism, finally accepts things, characters and beliefs of medieval England. His change cannot be carried out by such fantastic factors, leading his dying words: “A bugle? . . . . It is

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[3] This novel does not refer to the scene in which King Arthur loses his scabbard. In Malory’s *Le Morte d’Arthur* as a source of this novel, Morgan le Fay deprives the scabbard of him and throws it into a lake (150-51).

the king! The drawbridge, there! Man the battlements!—turn out the—" (447). Thus, his last auditory hallucination of the bugle, suggesting the power of King Arthur, is the consequence of his fantastic experiences in sixth century England: he has changed from the realistic.

Conclusion

The analyses in this paper lead to the conclusion that fantastic images of King Arthur more or less accelerate Hank's adaptation to medieval England; the images generate driving forces for the story to advance to the collapse of his plot and his destiny. Some may say that Twain wrote medieval world as the means of understanding relatively nineteenth century United States; we can find that scenes in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* reflect not a little on the old-fashioned society of the South of the United States, and that there is the critical mind toward the customs such as slavery. We, however, also need to give attention to the fact that he created works on premodern Europe; we show several instances: *The Prince and the Pauper* (1882), *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc* (1896), and *No 44, the Mysterious Stranger* (1916).[4] The analysis of anachronistic mixture in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, therefore, can contribute to our deeper comprehension of Twain's works.

The anachronistic mixture of the recent period and the older one would remind us of trend of mid-twentieth century Latin American literature: magical realism. On this tendency, Sharon Sieber argues that "magical realism is tied to the dream world in that it represents the site where the conscious and unconscious worlds meet" (172). According to him, magical realism makes the world in the novel the multi-layered, not single. We arrive at the conclusion, making use of

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[4] In addition to these novels, we may note *The Innocents Abroad* (1869): a record of Twain's travel around Europe and the Mediterranean Sea. This book refers to Peter Abelard and Héloïse, who were intellectuals in twelfth century France.

Sieber's statement above: *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, combining the modern and the medieval, represent the location in which the opposite notions meet.

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