THE DRACULA MYTH: EXILE AND HOMECOMING[1]

Adina Ciugureanu
Ovidius University, Constanța

The myth of Dracula has become as worldwide famous as the McDonald's burger, the Coca-Cola drink or the Nike sports shoes. It may therefore be discussed in terms of global production, circulation and reception though it is usually perceived as an American popular culture product. However, Dracula may be regarded as an exilic figure from Europe where he originated and where he 'performed' his terrific exploits. Since the publication of the novel *Dracula* by Bram Stoker in 1897, the protagonist has been the subject of thorough analysis as myth, icon, symbolism, sexuality, religion, disease, etc. He has been approached historically, psychoanalytically, linguistically, politically, mythically, culturally, post-structurally a.s.o., until it seemed that no outer or inner facet of his figure has been left unexplored. Yet, how about Dracula the immigrant, the self exiled from the mysterious land in the Carpathian area to America? In Stoker's novel, Dracula traveled to England in his intention to conquer and subdue it. If he had fulfilled his plans, he would have become an immigrant, a newcomer to the western world.

However, Dracula had managed to travel abroad in the late 1920s through his impersonation by Bela Lugosi, an immigrant himself, who made him famous to the American public. Originated in Eastern Europe, transferred to Western Europe and then to America, the myth of Dracula has proliferated into numberless alternative stories existing today and the character himself has metamorphosed into hundreds of alternative more or less scary figures. Americanized and globalized Dracula has returned to his "homeland" in the recent past where, against the will of the majority, he was finally accepted as a representative iconic figure of the region. This article

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will discuss the trajectory of the fantastic character, Dracula, from his birth to his self-exile and return to his supposedly native place.

Bram Stoker's Dracula is the product of the Eastern-European old folkloric belief in vampirism which merged in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century with the West-European, mainly British, belief in ghosts and supernatural malefic creatures. Thus, it is known that the Gothic and Romantic literature developed a kind of fascination with the mysteries of love, life, death and the passage between them and that the figure of the vampire as the undead fitted perfectly into this mould. According to Clive Leatherdale, who wrote on Dracula and its legend, "the folkloric vampire of Central and Eastern Europe would eventually metamorphose into the British-built vampire of Romantic literature" (Leatherdale 46), and this is exactly what happened. There had been several vampire-like characters in the vampire line, among which one could mention the "Life-in-Death" ghost of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1797), the female vampire in *Christabel*, Robert Southey's *The Old Woman of Berkeley* (1798), John Stagg's *The Vampyre* (1810), John Keats's *The Eve of St. Agnes*, *Lamia* and *La Belle Dame sans Merci* and, obviously, Sheridan Le Fanu's Carmilla, the lesbian vampire, a famous precursor of Dracula. Oscar Wilde's Dorian Gray and Poe's Morella and Berenice may also be seen as very close to the vampire type, while Mary Shelley's Frankenstein shares some of the characteristics of the vampire as well.

However, as already mentioned, it is Dracula who, having traveled from Europe, became a real, though multi-faceted, icon in twentieth-century culture (Auerbach 64-69; Leatherdale 54-55), a leading icon in American popular culture from which it has spread throughout the world. One of the reasons why Dracula has reached so much fame might be, according to Leatherdale, his capacity of fusing "the tradition of the Byronic/Gothic villain with that of the *femme fatale*," and overlaying "the whole with a rich veneer of folklore" (Leatherdale 55). Another reason may be his striking resemblance in terms of holding power and interfering in people's lives with Clark Kent/Superman and Bruce Wayne/Batman with whom he shares equal, but opposite interests (McNally, Florescu 125). An example to support this view is the recent comic book called *Batman and Dracula* in which the two iconic figures are imagined to face each other in a clash of 'good' (Batman) *versus* evil (Dracula).

Dracula is therefore a composite model, drawing on both West-European Gothic tradition and East-European vampire folklore. Having emigrated to America and then, by means of the instruments specific to popular culture, transferred to the whole world, Dracula has become the utmost vampire, "a kind of father-figure of great potency" (McNally, Florescu 125). However, it is in America that he underwent a number of

transformations from the frightening character of Bram Stoker's novel to the harmless Halloween impersonations of today.

The European Dracula

Looking for a subject for a ghost novel, Bram Stoker is supposed to have discovered the vampire folk tradition in a remote European place, Transylvania, situated in the east of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, bordering Moldavia and Wallachia, two small countries outside the civilized European world. What Bram Stoker allegedly found out during his seven-year research at the British Library was proof about the existence of a strange Wallachian Prince, Vlad Draculea, born in Transylvania, who had become famous for his habit of impaling whoever stood up to him. He may also have read Sabine Baring-Gould's *Book of Werewolves* (1865), which recorded the story of a seventeenth-century Hungarian countess, Elizabeth Bathory, also born in Transylvania, who is supposed to have killed over 650 female servants for pleasure or for the purpose of bathing in their blood for cosmetic rejuvenation.[2]

Why did Stoker choose Transylvania as the birth-land of his count Dracula? It may have been because, for a Westerner, Transylvania was a mysterious place at the border of civilization, described in the travel articles of the time as primitive and superstitious. Completely unknown to the British public before 1850, Transylvania, with its northern territory Bukovina and its sister Danubian Principalities (Wallachia and Moldavia), came to light during the Crimean War when these territories were the bone of contention between the Turks, the Russians and the Austrian-Hungarians. As the Western journalists became interested in these remote and 'primitive' lands, they decided to visit them and inform the reading public about the local people, their culture and history. One of the earliest nineteenth-century accounts of Transylvania, for instance, is an article entitled "The Wallachs in Transylvania," published in *Frazer's Magazine* in November 1850. It is a well-documented article which describes the Wallachs (Vlachs) as a traditional, patriarchal people, untouched by modern civilization, and preserving a lot of ancient Dacian and Roman culture which they rather interestingly managed to mix with Christian Orthodox religion. Thus, the local people are described as dutifully celebrating the Orthodox holidays, but also enjoying older, seasonal events, belonging to pre-Christian traditions. The importance the Wallachs attached to the rites of passage (such as

[2] Bram Stoker did some research at the British Library where he read, according to his notes, Sabine Baring-Gould's *Book of Werewolves* (McNally and Florescu, 1994:126).

weddings and funerals) is also illustrative of the extent to which they were rooted in a strong and older culture, which they have surprisingly managed to preserve in an almost pure form.[3]

The Wallachs' belief in vampires is a well-known fact as is their fear of them. Some of these practices are so deeply rooted in the burying tradition that customs like the one described above are still practiced today in some of the countryside areas of Romania. Bram Stoker may not have read all the articles about Transylvanian and Wallachian folk traditions and beliefs, yet, during his research at the British Library, he came across "Transylvania" and thought the *topos* was perfect to embody what Dracula was to him: 'otherness,' 'the margin,' 'the mysterious,' 'the unknown.'

Dracula is never described by Stoker to be a Walach (a Vlach),[4] the local people situated at the bottom of the stratified society in Transylvania (the Wallachs, the Hungarians, the Austrians); he is actually presented as a Szekely, the descendent of a noble Hungarian family. Yet, as he claims to have fought the Ottomans and stopped their invasion to Central Europe, which the Wallachian Prince Vlad Draculea did (Ciugureanu 63-71), he is generally connected to the Wallachian character and not to the Hungarian noble families. Irrespective of the source of inspiration (whether Dracula is an impersonation of Prince Vlad, the Wallach, or of Szekely, the Hungarian count), Dracula embodies whatever was alien to the Western Europeans in general, and the British people in particular. His odious plan of destroying the West (starting with London) signifies an act of subversion, an extremely audacious, yet insane attempt to undermine, and eventually terminate, the apparently strong economical and political structure of an empire. Dracula represents, therefore, primitivism against civilization, old, embedded tradition against modernity, the margin against the center, chaos *versus* order, the uncanny *versus* the canny, or superstition *versus* rationalism, stagnation *versus* progress. As a "racial threat" to the civilized England, which he actually attempts to destroy (Senf 39), Dracula is depicted as belonging to a different race, as most probably did the Wallachs according to their portrayal in the nineteenth-century periodical press.

The description of the opposition between the British Empire and Transylvania as center *versus* margin and between the English people and the vampire as 'self' *versus* the 'other' may reveal two reasons why *Dracula* has had such a huge impact on the world-wide audience since the publication of the novel at the end of the nineteenth century. On the one hand, the very existence of such a creature raised awareness about the existence of 'the

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[3] See Ciugureanu, 71-74 for an analysis of the illustration of pre-Christian rituals with the Wallachs in the British periodical press.

[4]Etymologically, 'Vlad', the name of the Wallachian Prince, means 'vlach', the word used at the time to name the local people in Transylvania and the Danubian Principalities.

other', the 'outsider'; on the other hand, it warned everybody of the possible destructive powers of the 'outsider', voicing the very fears which existed in the people's subconscious. However, taking into account the fact that the Irish themselves were opposing the English at the time, feeling marginalized and despised by the English rulers, Stoker's Dracula might also be read as an expression of the Irish 'voice' against their oppressors. Or, it may be seen as an altogether 'alien' voice coming from an almost 'non-human' world viciously threatening the modern world of the humans. *Dracula* may thus be read as a fable of invasion from without[5] and its protagonist, Count Dracula, as an outsider who is "a congenital criminal or an insane or degenerate genius" (Hughes, Smith 4). Or it may be read as a threatening voice from within, a potential malefic force from the inside, the 'other' in our 'selves', the disorderly in the orderly, the uncanny in the canny. In this way, it may be argued that Dracula and his female victims, who are, like him, both culturally and sexually dangerous, are potential deviations from the norm, from the ordinary and orderly and may thus create an imbalance of power through insanity and disorder. Dracula may thus be read as a threat to the socio-economic balance of the western world, whether from the outside or from the inside, a threat to progress and modernity as conceived and understood in the nineteenth century.

The American Dracula

Dracula's symbolic significance as a threat to civilization and modernity partially changes once he emigrates to America, with Bela Lugosi, as if the character himself became Americanized. He retains his significance as "the other", but he is perceived as a "foreigner" rather than as an outsider, an "immigrant" rather than a creature from a non-human world. An interesting interpretation of Dracula as a 'foreigner' in America is offered by Nina Auerbach in her study *Our Vampires, Ourselves* (1995). In the subchapter "Draculas and Draculas", she discusses the transplantation of Stoker's Dracula in America where it underwent various impersonations between the 1920s and the 1970s. First, these impersonations were on the stage in the play that was based on the Stoker story. The first actor who played Dracula on the stage was Bela Lugosi, the Hungarian born in Lugoj, Romania, who also starred in the first American motion picture about Dracula in 1931. Lugosi, a self-exiled, is reported to have spoken very poor English and to have memorized his part in the play, without understanding, at times, what

[5] See Jeffrey Richards, "Gender, Race and Sexuality in Bram Stoker's Other Novels." *Gender Roles and Sexuality in Victorian Literature*. Ed. Christopher Parker. Aldershot: Scholar Press, 1995. 148.

his co-actors were saying. Lugosi was 'foreignness' incarnate. He was very much what Count Dracula, his character, was not: he had little intention to perfect his English and wore the Dracula-kind of costume offstage, even in broad daylight. Yet, Lugosi's Dracula had such an impact upon American popular culture at the time through his singularity that, according to Auerbach, "to be Dracula meant speaking in a different voice" (Auerbach 113). Being Dracula meant, therefore, being 'a foreigner', an immigrant, an exiled.

Consequently, Dracula's singularity, which became a vampiric attribute, equally created in twentieth-century America "a new order of fear…: fear not only of otherness, but eventually, and more subtly, of kinship", that is fear of ourselves (Auerbach 116). This fear generated what Auerbach calls the 'psychic vampire', the first type in the Dracula 'offspring' line. It is actually hard to say whether this type appears because it "appeals to nations in crisis" (Auerbach 116), as America was at the time, or because to the Americans the connotation of Dracula is different from what it is to the Europeans. What actually becomes obvious is that in America, Dracula partially loses the meaning of 'the outsider' and some of the malefic powers he was endowed with and turns to be more internalized and less interested in total destruction.

Dwelling on the mirror metaphor, which allegedly never reflects a vampire, only the image of the person in front of it, both Nina Auerbach and Veronica Hollinger claim that when "we look into the mirror we see nothing *but* ourselves" (Hollinger in Gordon and Hollinger 201). This means that our fascination with vampires and monsters may come from our partial identification with them either in our subjective fantasy or in our search for social, cultural, or political legitimation. In other words, we may read the vampire as an iconic image of our darkest subconscious drives and need therefore to look at its reflection in order to be reminded of their existence. Like the vampire, whose image cannot be reflected by the mirror, our darkest subconscious drives cannot be seen, but are there. Interestingly, some of our darkest drives may come to the fore when we displace ourselves, in an exilic adventure, when we feel no linger the pressure of our traditions and customs at home. To the contrary, we can grow more traditionalistic and stick to our customs more drastically in a foreign environment, mainly if it is of our own choice.

While the "psychic vampire" is part of ourselves, the "new vampire" (Zanger in Gordon and Hollinger 17-26), another possible type in the Dracula line, prefers communal life to solitude and therefore is usually presented with a family or living and relating to other vampires. Revealing examples in this respect are the vampire(s) in Anne Rice's *Vampire Chronicles* and film scripts such as *The Hunger* (1981), *The Lost Boys* (1987), or *Little Dracula Goes to School* (1992). Moreover, Jules Zanger

claims that the survival of the Dracula myth in contemporary popular culture is arguably due to a shift that has occurred from the vampire as metaphor to the vampire as metonymy (Zanger 20). Being only partially identified with Dracula the 'father,' these 'relatives' of him reveal themselves as demystified, humanized Draculas who have apparently undergone democratization and socialization. The new vampire is torn by remorse, has lost his magical powers or is immune to mirrors and crucifixes (e.g. Louis from Anne Rice's *Interview with a Vampire*, 1976). He is no longer a metaphoric Anti-Christ, but a marginalized victim who, according to Zanger, resembles "a member of a secret society or a subversive political association" rather than the embodiment of Satan or of one of his direct destructive agents on Earth (Zanger 19). This, again, could be one type of the immigrant as well.

In America, therefore, Dracula underwent demystification and democratization, which turned him into a real American citizen. The demythologized vampire, devoid of his mutability scheme and other magical powers, a sensual lover able to make sacrifices, a reluctant killer or a remorseful murderer, whose moral dimension is larger than his evil inclinations may be anybody, ourselves or our next-door neighbor. In becoming Americanized, Dracula reveals all the features of the various types of the immigrant, all personified by this mysterious, East-European character. Dracula's Americanization has obviously entailed his secularization, his disenchantment with the fantastic in the different vampiric impersonations he has undergone since his exile in the 1920s. A revealing example in this respect may be the hero of the television series *Forever Knight* who is a reformed vampire turned police detective, struggling hard to give up his bad old habits and to help people in view of possible future atonement.

Dracula and Popular Culture

Although the first film based on the Dracula story was made in Europe (*Nosferatu*, 1922), Dracula turns into a popular culture icon only after his emigration adventure into American culture where he appears both on stage and in motion pictures. After Lugosi's horror movie about Dracula (1931), over 160 films have featured Dracula in a major role, while the total number of films that have included a reference to Dracula may be as many as 649, according to the Internet Movie Database. Among the best movies based on the Dracula story made between 1931 and 1960 one can mention "Dracula's

Daughter" (1936), “Son of Dracula (1943), "House of Frankenstein" (1944), "House of Dracula" (1945), “Horror of Dracula” (1958).[6]

Although America’s interest in the Dracula character had always been high, as proved by the number of films produced in the States until 1960, the publication of Raymond McNally and Radu Florescu’s book *In Search of Dracula* in 1972 attracted even more popular attention. In the book the two historians make the connection between the Wallachian Vlad III Draculea, also known as Vlad the Impaler (1431-1477), and the fictional character Dracula. Since then, many authors have dwelt on the possible link between the two and most have claimed it to be real, although it has never been proved by Stoker’s meticulous notes or by any facts in the fictional character’s life that may remind one of Vlad the Impaler’s deeds. The popular effect of McNally and Florescu’s semi-historical book was immediately felt: the 1973 television series “Dark Shadows”, the 1974 “Blood of Dracula”, the 1977 BBC television version of Dracula, the 1977 revival of the Lugosi’s Broadway Dracula, and the 1979 sexually-charged Dracula.

The movie culture also exploited the presupposed affiliation between the mythical and the historical character and combined elements of the two in the Draculea/Prince Vlad character of Francis Ford Coppola’s famous picture *Bram Stoker’s Dracula* (1992). This ‘new’ Dracula is an interesting combination between the legendary vampire and the sadistic prince, equally focusing on the erotic side of vampirism (recalling the 1979 sexually-charged Dracula) and on the human side of the character. Able to sacrifice himself for his love’s sake, Coppola’s Dracula seems to be a creolized vampire combining the European with the American side in the construction of the character. The film also introduces facts about Romania’s history (Vlad’s fight and defeat of the ottomans), fragments of Romanian orthodox rituals presented as if they were some kind of magic rites rather than Christian religious manifestations, and Romanian language (with no subtitle). The film openly identifies Dracula with Vlad Tsepesh, which gives Dracula a more complex identity. His identification of Dracula with the Wallachian Prince, Vlad Tsepesh, in popular literature and film has stamped Dracula’s origin as former Transylvania and Wallachia, that is, present Romania. Dracula has acquired a new identification when his genealogy pointed to the Danubian lands. Present Romania has been regarded in the last 40 years as Dracula’s homeland.

Coppola’s movie of 1992 was followed in 1995 by Mel Brooks’s comedic parody, *Dracula: Dead and Loving It*, in 2000 by *Shadow of the Vampire*, which recounts the filming of *Nosferatu* in 1922, and in 2003 by

[6] See http://en.wikipedia.org for a completed list of the most celebrated films based on the Dracula story between 1931-2010.

the silent movies *Dracula: Pages from a Virgin's Diary*. The most recent movie adaptations of Dracula are *Van Helsing* (2005) and *Underworld Evolution* (2006). The former foregrounds Helsing as a monster hunter located at the Vatican, while the latter describes the saga between vampires (the Death Dealers) and werewolves (the Lycans). Dracula has also been a recurring character in comic books, such as "Tomb of Dracula" in the 1970s, "Buffy the Vampire Slayer," where he appears as a villain, and the "Helsing" cartoon series, where he turns up as the vampire Alucard (Dracula spelled backwards).

Both in popular culture and in critical studies, Dracula is thus perceived from various perspectives as a central character and a marginal one, when the roles are reversed and the points of view belong to Helsing or Mina. Mina Harker, for instance, appears in different comic books and films like "The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen", which features numerous Victorian characters as members of the league. Adapted for children's literature and entertainment, Dracula serves as the basis for several vampire cartoon characters such as the Muppet character Count von Count on "Sesame Street", or Count Duckula or even Count Chocula, the animated mascot of the breakfast cereal of the same name. More recently, Dracula has become an important character in video games, like the Japanese series *Castlevania* featuring Dracula as the main antagonist. In the films for children, comic books and cartoons, Dracula has undergone the same transformations from a malefic character to demystified, humanized, and often parodied impersonations. The horrifying Dracula has ultimately turned into inoffensive Draculas as the singular Dracula has turned global.

Dracula's 'homecoming'

Little was known in Transylvania and the Danubian Principalities, which later joined to form Romania, about Dracula and his alleged connection to Vlad the Impaler after the publication of Stoker's novel. In the twentieth century, mainly during the Cold War, the affiliation of Dracula to Prince Vlad was considered to be preposterous and offensive to the Romanian people. Vlad the Impaler was regarded, and still is, as one of the leading figures of Romanian history, a cruel but just prince, who fought the Ottomans and liberated the country from the Muslims. Any attempt of connecting the two was deeply resisted by historians and ordinary people alike. A strong attitude of resent was met at mentioning the possible connection. McNally and Florescu's books on Dracula, published in the States in the 1970s have not been translated into Romanian and have been regarded as irrelevant and 'unscientific' by official, communist historians. Not even after the fall of the Iron Curtain did the Romanians' attitude toward

the Dracula topic change in any dramatic way. Coppola's 1992 *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, for example, did not enjoy in Romania the success it had abroad, because the Romanian public strongly resented the connection made between Dracula and Vlad the Impaler.

However, in recent years, the Romanians started having mixed feelings about linking a national hero to a fictional character maybe because there is a lot of fiction in the life of the national hero as well; or maybe because the alleged Dracula places may attract a large number of visitors which may cause a boost in tourism. Under the pressure of global Dracula, the Romanians have realized that there may be touristic benefits and, consequently, historical places connected to Vlad have been publicized under a Dracula theme to cater to home and foreign markets. The following may be the best examples in this respect. Bran Castle, a temporary location for Vlad and his troops, is advertised as Dracula's Castle both at home and abroad. On the Internet site http://www.draculascastle.com, the visitor is shown pictures of the castle, is given a short tour and a link to the Castle Store to buy, for a few dollars, Dracula mouse pads, mugs, T-shirts, calendars, aprons, framed prints, and caps. In Bucharest, a dungeon-themed restaurant called "Dracula" opened a few years ago in the basement of a former inn close to the archeological site of the Old Court. If the public is numerous enough, Dracula may reincarnate and turn up for a few minutes in an attempt to 'scare' the customers. In the medieval town of Sighisoara (Transylvania), Vlad the Impaler's real birthplace, the house which belonged to the Impaler's family has been turned into a restaurant. Sighisoara was about to participate in the construction of a Dracula theme park, commissioned by the Ministry of Tourism in 2001. As there was some strong opposition by both locals and historians to transform a very well-preserved medieval town into a popular culture site, which might have diminished the unaltered beauty of the city, the plan was dropped and moved to a site in the vicinity of Bucharest. Here, again it met with resistance as Bucharest has little connection to Vlad/Dracula. Although the plan still exists, it is constantly postponed either because of the scarcity of funds or because the Romanians have not yet adopted myhtical Dracula as their own. However, Dracula's quasi-successful return to his birthplace and his partial acceptance by the Romanians may be described as the reverse effect of culture or as its 'boomerang effect' (Ciugureanu 170).

Conclusion

Like Coca-Cola, McDonalds, Superman, and Batman, Dracula has become an icon in American culture, turned global as an effect of the cultural globalization phenomenon. But unlike Coca-Cola, McDonalds, Superman

and Batman, Dracula is not an American brand. The character was imported (or appropriated) from Europe (Ireland) and 'Americanized' first by making it visible and second by endowing it with features that recalls immigrant treatment: Dracula becomes socialized, humanized, demystified, gets a family and turns out to be our next-door neighbor.

Yet, there are two divergent trends in the dissemination of the Dracula myth. One trend is towards *homogenization*, that is towards the imposition of a specific icon which combines the face and costume of Bella Lugosí, the malefic powers of Stoker's character and the personality of Vlad the Impaler. The homogenized Dracula icon is actually a cultural hybrid of American origin and tends to become global as Superman and Batman have. The other trend is towards *diversification*, that is towards the construction of various vampire figures apparently with no or little connection to the original Dracula. Unlike Superman and Batman who are unlikely to undergo diversification because of their frozen iconic representation, the various Draculas may acquire local characteristics both in America and abroad. The two trends, which stand in dialectic relationship, involve the simultaneity and the inter-penetration of what are conventionally called the global and the local and are part of the cultural globalization phenomenon.

According to recent views, homogeneous global culture turns out to be a simulacrum (Beck, Sznaider, Winter 4). Therefore, homogenization and diversification, like globalization and localization may be described as interpenetrating processes, giving birth to, what Roland Robertson has called, 'glocalization'. Returning to Dracula, one can notice that the proliferation of the icon in its homogenized and diversified forms expresses both the tendency of imposing a 'global' Dracula and the acceptance of multiple more or less local figures.

Considering the theoretical approaches to globalization and the description of Americanization and McDonaldization among its component parts, I would venture to call *draculization* the process by means of which the Dracula myth is proliferated and disseminated as a cultural icon and hybrid. 'Draculization' shares a number of features with McDonaldization as both are characterized by efficiency, predictability and control (Ritzer (2004) 82-92) and, obviously, with Americanization because most Draculas propagate American ideas and institutionalized values. Yet, 'draculization' bears with it the mystery of the non-American tradition more than other globalized phenomena do. Though Dracula has become a hybrid, both the figure and the myth resist homogenization and constantly remind us of Dracula's non-American origin, of his final 'return' to his 'birthplace.'

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