THE MYSTERY OF FIRE IN LUCIAN BLAGA'S POETRY

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Abstract*: The present paper is aimed at commenting on the mystery of fire in Lucian Blaga's poetry, with special attention laid on the relationship between the cult of fire and the spiritual nature of light.*

Key words: *fire, light, mystery.*

By means of the mystery of love the lyrical character becomes fire, condensated light (i.e. "văpaia") and the beloved, though perishable, conformable to the mundane world ("-n prăpastia din tine"), receives sacred attributes in the poet's eyes, embraced by "raze de lumină". Thus, light triggers the sanctification of the being under the signet of love. The redeemer, elative love, the powerful, immense, ardent love, the love – light, the love – Divinity. The mystery of light is therefore transposed into the mystery of fire, another stage that the being accesses in the Great Passage.

In what regards the mystery of fire, Ivan Evseev remarks: "It is one of the fundamental elements in all the cosmogonic systems and natural philosophies, manifested in the shape of flame, warmth or light. It symbolizes life, creative power, passion, love, sublimation as well as destructive power. (…) It is the opposite of water, being the embodiment of the active masculine principle, whereas water is a feminine element" (EVSEEV, I., 1999: 166).

We encounter with Blaga the complete devourance by passion and power of love; the signet of fire is everywhere in *Noi şi pământul*: "scântei", "să-l aprindă", "arde", "flăcările", "rug" , "limbi de foc", "mistui", "aprinde", "scrumul", "cenuşă". The ardent, devouring love means not only internal struggle, it can lead, by its intensity, in the way the poet finally desires it, to the entire evanescence of the being, as a result of external and immanent combustion: " În noaptea asta-n care cad/ atâtea stele, tânărul tău trup/ de vrăjitoare-mi arde-n braţe/ ca-n flăcările unui rug./ Nebun,/ Ca nişte limbi de foc eu braţele-mi întind,/ ca să-ţi topesc zăpada umerilor goi,/ şi ca să-ţi sorb, flămând să-ţi mistui/ puterea, sângele, mândria, primăvara, totul./ În zori când ziua va aprinde noaptea,/ când scrumul nopţii o să piară dus/ de-un vânt spre-apus,/ în zori de zi aş vrea să fim şi noi/ cenuşă,/ noi şi – pământul."

Thus, one desires a gentle, total extinction. A dissipation into the nothingness of the self and of the surrounding world. Everything should disappear, as a mist, in the inviting warmth of love. And, maybe, the poet does not specify it, he only lets us imagine it, one expects a regeneration, a total rebirth of the being and of the universe, under an even better star, alike the Phoenix bird. Condensated, holy light, the fire conveys the mortal world into sacrality by the great power of love.

The cult of fire obviously derives from the spiritual nature of light. It dates from prehistory and has a polyvalent symbolism. Eversince archaic times man invested fire with metaphysical symbols in the sphere of su blime, to the metaphorisation of supreme powers: purification and regeneration, initiating burning and rebirth on a

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superior level of being, spiritual transubstantiation, mystical, ecstatic combustion, primordiality, the divine as such or the divine mystery.

As Luc Benoist notices "In order to perceive its coherence within its variety, one can have as an example the Hindu deities that represent its different facets: Agni, that is illumination of intelligence; Indra, that throws the arrows of lightning and of his powers; Surya, the sun that warms the world. As regards Agni, he is not only the spirit that gives light, but also the conquering will, the harsh warrior that destroys, thus being at the same time generator, purificator and destroyer." (BENOIST, L., 1995: 70)

This polyvalent symbolism comprised by fire is clearly brought forward in Lucian Blaga's poetry. One can notice it in the poem *Dorul*, too, where the fire is the sign of the closeness between the two lovers. Their world, separated from the ordinary universe –"parc-aş fi/ pribeag pe-un alt pământ" – is under the signet of fire, marked by the intense combustion that separates from the ordinary and that, by sacralization of time and place, triggers the wonders of other universes: "Setos îți beau mireasma şi-ți cuprind obrajii/ cu palmele-amândouă, cum cuprinzi/ în suflet o minune./ Ne arde-apropierea, ochi în ochi cum stăm./ Şi totuşi tu-mi şopteşti: «Mi-aşa de dor de tine!»/ Aşa de tainic tu mi-o spui şi dornic, parc-aş fi/ pribeag pe-un alt pământ."

Since, under the sign of fire, just like under the one of light, everything becomes privity, everything rounds by mystery and sanctity and the two lovers make their world eternal by the immense power of love: "Femeie,/ ce mare porți în inimă şi cine eşti?/ Mai cântă-mi înc-o dată dorul tău,/ să te ascult/ şi clipele să-mi pară nişte muguri plini,/ din care înfloresc aievea – veşnicii." (*Dorul*)

The closeness burns, destroys, purifies, regenerates, in the way Luc Benoist remarks; the being of the two lovers waits for the complete merger on another existential level, since they are now beyond the earthly universe, the fire of love has purified them, separating them from the thicket of ordinary world and propulsating them in full mystery, where everything has permuted into eternity.

One desires a destruction and a regeneration by means of fire – "cosmice vâltori", "avânt de flăcări", "mă arde" – also in the poem *Pustnicul,* where the Spirit of Earth expresses his wish to be equally earth and star, to surpass the margins of the natural and to merge with the sky: "Cu nouri grei de păcură m-am învălit/ şi cu-n potop de fulgere topit-am asprele verigi/ în care ferecat păzeam adâncul lumii./ De-acum îmi sunt stăpân / Şi pribegind prin cosmice vâltori/ într-un avânt de flăcări voi înfrânge / stavila ce mă desparte de tărie./ Din veci mă arde-acelaşi gând:/ să fii pământ – şi totuşi să luceşti ca o stea!/ Mă bate-n piept al mării val, / s-apropie izbânda mea."

Therefore, one traces the outlines of a new world that is regenerated by the passion of fire, the same world gradated by the aura of mystery, where the natural and the prosaic are annihilated and anything can be possible anytime.

Living within mystery by means of the fire that bears new existential dimensions turns out to be a constant of Blaga's lyrics and that is why one can place, without error, the mystery of fire next to the mystery of light, one deriving from the other one and thus, prolonging its significations.

God Himself disappears into the fire, closing Himself within the sky "ca-ntr-un coşciug" and thus, letting the human being "numai tină şi rană': "Apoi sălbăticia mi-a crescut,/ cântările mi-au pierit,/ şi fără să-mi fi fost vreodată aproape/ te-am pierdut pentru totdeauna/ în țărână, în foc, în văzduh şi pe ape." (*Psalm*)

Fire makes the transition from one existential dimension to another: God burns Himself in fire, like in the above-mentioned poem, and the worker has "găleții de foc" – he changes the matter, gives birth to beautiful, tangible things, thus assuming

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divine valences; he creates the earthly world into the natural order of the day, whereas The Great Anonymous preserves it through the waves of mystery by which He mantles the face of the earth: "Din fântâni sfredelite-n osia planetei/ îți scoți gălețile de foc./ Nu te cunosc, nu mă cunoşti,/ dar o lumină alunecă/ de pe fața ta pe fața mea,/ fără să vreau m-alătur bunei tale vestiri/ şi-o strig în sfintele vânturi." (*Lucrătorul*) Therefore, fire proves to be the generator of matter on the level of earth, the catalyst of earthly order.

The sign of fire appears in the poem *Pe ape*, too, but here it is a closed sign: "(...) Pe vatra corăbiei/ inima mi-o-ngrop subt spuză/ să-şi țină jăratecul. Paserea focului/ nu-mi mai fâlfâie peste pereți. / Dăinuie veşnic potopul. / Niciodată nu voi ajunge/ s-aduc jertfă subt semnul înalt/al curcubeului magic."

Fire signifies incandescent light, the spirit thirsty for the absolute, being frequently evoked by Lucian Blaga. He waits with "floarea de foc în mâni" the heavenly hour of the poetic speech. Thus, *Cîntecul focului* is a multiple metaphor of love: "În fabula verde şi caldă-a naturii/ tu crengi ai, iubito, nu brațe,/ şi muguri îmbii, cu mlădițele prinzi./ Descinzi dintr-un basm vegetal, al răsurii?/ Ia seama să nu te aprinzi/ cum se-ntâmplă adesea cu lemnul pădurii. / În chipuri atâtea, flacăra-ntâmpină pasul / oricărei făpturi pământene, / şi drumul i-aține, şi ceasul."

The burning realizes a universal metaphorical exchange and it is everywhere; the fire, under its various manifestations takes into possession the sensible universe, effusing even over the celestial in an acme of condensated, sacred light. Everything means transformation, passage in such a universe where the ardour and the passion generate unimaginable spiritual extensions that can explode up to the sky.

The combustion of the lovers that burn each other passionately finds an echo in the fire that caught the Deity, this time without a complete burning.

Fire salutes the human being everywhere; sooner or later each of us goes through the mystics of burning, so that one reaches the point when love is exhaled from the earth, diffusing itself in the sky, where the Great Anonymous burns alone into eternity, sparing and caressing the thorns.

Fire constitutes the metaphor of the mystical experience that triggers an ecstatic vision. Fire means adoration, radiant power of love. It is the final, the supreme cosmic energy that unifies with God. Fire is a universal heart that reunites all the things in a pantheism resembling somewhat that of Spinoza's, the flame becoming the energy of final purification, dissolving of everything and self-dissolving – self-losing within itself.

The spring of this concentrated light remains buried within mystery, since fire represents a passage, a harsh itinerary that leads out of darkness into aureoles of pure sanctity. The mystery of fire joins the mystery of light, propulsating the latter on a superior level – light receives vibrations, it burns, it becomes tangible and it becomes flame, fire.

In an apotheotic universe, the damned poet cannot reach the joy of transfiguration by fire; no help from anywhere, no earthly calling; the sign of fire cannot bless him by washing his impurities and anxieties – like in the poem *Cuvântul din urmă*: "Viața cu sânge şi cu poveşti/ din mâni mi-a scăpat./ Cine mă-ndrumă pe apă?/ Cine mă trece prin foc?/ De paseri cine mă apără?"

In *Paradis în destrămare* one encounters the same atmosphere of down-grade, of metaphysical sadness, inutility and desolation: "Portarul înaripat mai ține întins/ un cotor de spadă fără de flăcări. / Nu se luptă cu nimeni,/ dar se simte învins."

Once again, fire becomes a silent sign, the flame is hidden, the passage remains a heavy story, the paradise in decay representing the world itself that has lost its

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sanctity. Sadness and desolation are determined by the feeling of recession of the divine from the world, by the surety of separation from the cosmic.

Tired with searching, the poet, identified with the winged porter who has lost his feeling of affiliation to cosmic, feels he has reached the limit of the great passage, his star has set. Divested of the gift of fire, the lyrical character leads an empty existence. The sward of blazing flames in the Bible now becomes "cotor de spadă", triggering the image of a modern world of sins, a world in decay, in which the divine and the sanctity are entirely lacking.

The light concentrated into fire in the poem *Vrajă şi blestem* burns here the matter in a demonic effervescence ("Duhul răului tot vine") and in *Trenul morţilor* the burning symbolized by light is extended far beyond the sky, as a definite sign of extinction: "Colo numai dintre spini/ pân' la stelele-n vecini/ licuricii dau lumini.// Licuricii cu lampaşe/ semne verzi dau spre oraşe/ pentr-un tren care va trece/ prin văzduhul mare, rece./ Pentr-un tren care-a veni,/ nimeni nu-l va auzi."

Therefore, one can notice that the fire appears not only in its hypostasis as a generator and purificator, but also as a destroyer, a pendule of the other world, of the world that silently interferes in the sky with ours, without our knowing it. Its mystery is slowly dissipated into the nature's configuration and it is never entirely revealed. In reality, this is the true beauty of the mystery that weaves this world – the half-revelation.

Fire can do and undo worlds, tearing apart and recreating universal structures under the everlasting aura of mystery. But its spring remains buried within mystery since "Bucură-te, floare ca ghiocul,/ şi dumireşte-te!/ Nu trebuie fiecare / să ştim cine-aduce şi-mprăştie focul." (*Bunăvestire pentru floarea mărului*)

Thus, the mystery of fire must be preserved and cherished with all the other universal wonders with a view to express the same luciferical attitude.

Astral fires, concentrated in just as many hearts, in consonance with man's destiny on earth are also presented in the poem *Pleiadă*, where by means of this celestial fire comprised of the total amount of each astral flame, one witnesses a merger between the sky and the earth, since this incandescence belongs not only to the sky, but also to the rolling land: "Joc de focuri, joc de inimi – / Ostenescu-mă să număr/ înc-o dată aştri minimi./ Focuri mari şi focuri line – / Câte văd, atâtea inimi/ bat în spaţii pentru mine./ Ard în văi şi pe coline/ inimi mari şi inimi line."

In another poem, the poet's heart itself is burning silently in the flames of fire, on the background of the same crepuscular scenery, in which The Great Anonymous does not show, does not speak with the man, and the light remains just a story: "Stelele, ce-i drept, mai sunt deasupra, toate,/ dar Dumnezeu ne trece sub tăcere./ Tenebrele n-au capăt, lumina n-are înviere. / Inima mea – e-o carte care arde,/ un bocet/ în mijlocul Patriei." (*Inima mea în anul...*)

By this immanent combustion within a dark universe from which the light has disappeared, the lyrical character lives not only the story of his life, but the whole country's story, thus assuming it, as such.

A solitary combustion among foreign lands is also noted in the poem *Lângă vatră*: "Chem spre miazăzi şi noapte, n-am răspuns./ Să ard singur, orice zare să mă-nfrângă/ ursitoarele-nceputului m-au uns (...)"

There it is the creator's destiny – the wakefulness ("În străinătate-mi, pământean în lacrimi,/ stau de veghe lângă vatra mea de patimi."), the restless burning under the eternal star of unfulfilled searching: "Cat în preajmă, pretutindeni, printr-o

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rană./ Iscodesc prin văi, prin larga-mpărăție, (...)" The flame's anxiety is prolonged into the poet's soul in a complete fusion.

On the other hand, in *Nu sunt singur* the universe is responding, the poet's call is fulfilled, the earth and the sky join him in the Great Passage, curing his solitudes: "Jaruri sfinte, nor fierbinte/ trec pe cer, să nu ard singur./ Inimi bat, se spun cuvinte,/ pe pământ să nu cânt singur. (...)// Focuri sunt şi e credință./ Acest gând cât mai palpită/ schimbă moartea-n biruință:/ nu sunt singur, nu sunt singur."

As one can notice, in *Nu sunt singur* the universe is distressed and it offers a charitable hand to the poet in his way to fulfill his creative destiny. The poet's immanent combustion has as a correspondent the celestial combustion – "jaruri sfinte, nor fierbinte" – the sacred fire burning the creator's soul as well as the infinity in an effusion of faith, and this faith transforms death in an unwritten page, indubitably beating it.

One witnesses, like in *Noi şi pământul*, the total collapse of the being into fire, in the poem *Ardere,* too: "Ființă tu – găsi-voi cândva cuvenitul/ sunet de-argint, de foc, şi ritul/ unei rostiri egale/ în veci arderii tale?// Cuvântul unde-i – care leagă/ de nimicire pas şi gând?/ Mă-ncredințez acestui an, tu floare mie,/ ca să sfârşesc arzând."

It is a wanted burning, in the way the conservation of the flame is wanted, too. By "truda din vatră", by means of the flame, one reaches a communion sky-earth, thus the sky becoming the earth's mirror. In this respect Blaga advises – conservation of the fire becomes primordial in a universe of humans in which everything is perishable, ephemeral: "Ți-am spus uneori: ia sfatul vestalelor, dacă/ flacăra vrei s-o-ntreții./ Ți-am zis alte dăți: vezi tu jeraticul, truda în vatră?/ Din fumul albastru ce iese/ mereu cerul se țese." (*Ceas*)

It is as if the fire, in its hypostasis as a generator, gave birth to the celestial world, thus the sky becoming the fruit of the sacred ardour of burning. The cinder itself has sacred attributes, replacing wine in an obvious ritual of purification: "Pentru ca vinul lăsat printre cele rămase/ nimeni să-l bea,/ toarnă cenuşă-n ulcior."

Talking about significance, Blaga educes – the flame's significance is not the smoke, it may be the combustion itself, in all the splendour of its flounder between agony and life, the poet does not clearly assess that. He lets everyone of us recompose the flame's way from spark to ash and find meaning to the mystery that veils it: "Tâlcul florilor nu-i rodul/ tâlcul morții nu e glodul./ Tâlcul flăcării nu-i fumul,/ tâlcul vetrei nu e scrumul." (*Tâlcuri*) It is not the finality that is primordial here, but the road in the light, the Great Passage that ascends and descends, the song of the seconds, the smile and the silence.

Once again, fire accompanies and guides the saints, crowning them, without their knowing it, with aureoles, so that, full of light and fire, they attract the flight of the night butterflies that are thus transformed into cinders: "Şi umblă zvon că noaptea câteodată/ când stă pe întuneric în chilie/ văpaie i s-aprinde pe la tâmplă.// Nu bănuieşte sfânta ce se-ntâmplă./ Nu bănuieşte aureola vie/ ce-n jurul capului îi luminează,/ zvâcnind şi întețindu-se-n visare./ Ea simte numai şi se miră trează/ cum fluturii de noapte-o cercetează,/ cum sfârâind prin păr ca-n lumânare/ îi cad pe rând, cenuşă, la picioare." There is no cure for the almighty fire that embosoms the sacred hearts.

One iterates the concept that fire burns the entire nature. Life itself develops under the signet of fire, with its hot summers "cu grele poame" and with "sfintele toamne": "Linia vieții mele,/ printre morminte şerpuind,/ mi-o dibuiesc, mi-o tâlcuiesc/ pe jos – din flori, pe sus – din stele.// Nu-n palma mea, / ci-n palma ta/ e scrisă,

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Doamne, / linia vieții mele. / Ea trece şerpuind/ prin veri de foc cu grele poame, / prin ani-dumineci, sfinte toamne." (*Linia*)

The idea that life is made up of fire is also presented in the poem *Drumul lor*: "Toți morții se duc/ undeva, fiecare/ în urmă lăsând/ foc, vatră şi greier,/prag, treaptă şi nuc."

The solstice proves to be in another poem the season of treasures full of light and fire; from the other world, the solstice descends upon us in tireless veils of flames. We develop ourselves by fire, our road through spikes and fire is not superfluous, but one that heals us, purging us from ardour and suffering, strengthening our spirit and elevating us, since fire embraces us from everywhere, purifying us: "E ceasul când tinerii şerpi/ cămaşa şi-o dezbracă-n spini./ Comori la rădăcini se-aprind,/ se spală-n flăcări de rugini.// Privind la hora flacării/ întâmpinăm solstițiul cald,/ ce se revarsă peste noi/ de pe tărâmul celălalt.// Ne pierdem ca să ne-mplinim./ Mergând în foc, mergând în spini,/ ca aurul ne rotunjim/ şi ca ispita prin grădini." (*Solstițiul grădinilor*)

By living within light, within fire and love, we live within mystery. Our coordinates disappear and we are enfolded by the thrills of some other kind of worlds, since nothing is certain here and nothing has well-defined outlines. Everything is nuance and saving virtuality.

Under the ardour of love, life becomes tireless fire for the couple, a fire that burns and elevates the spirit to unknown skies. Thus, fire gives birth to a new world inhabited only by the two lovers. The beloved continues the fire's acting, appearing in its colours, as if dreamy-like in the eyes of her lover.

In another poem, the woman's body is of Tanagra clay and it burns in the arms of love. Therefore, the fire's story remains just the same – the stake of passion burns in the flame of love into resurrection: "Când îți ghicesc arzândul lut/ cum altul de Tanagra nu-i, / din miazănoapte până-n sud/ mai e nevoie de statui?" (*Strofe de-a lungul anilor*)

In *Vara Sfântului Mihai (8 noiemvrie*) the sign of the beloved is a sign of fire – the woman lends solar significance to the things in nature and brings the fire's thrills and quiver into the poet's soul: "Iubito, -mbogățește-ți cântărețul,/ mută-mi cu mâna ta în suflet lacul,/ şi ce mai vezi, văpaia şi înghețul,/ dumbrava, cerbii, trestia şi veacul./ Cum stăm în fața toamnei, muți, / sporeşte-mi inima c-o ardere, c-un gând. / Solar e tâlcul ce tu ştii oricând / atâtor lucruri să-mprumuți."

One can notice the fact that with Blaga not only the human being, but the entire nature aspires for transfiguration and transcendence under the benevolent signet of the purifying flame – *Cerbul*, *Cântecul spicelor*.

Made up of fire, thus acquiring all its attributes, the woman remains an eternal wonder: "M-am oprit lângă tine,/ descoperind că părul tău e o flacără/ pe care vântul n-o stinge./ şi lângă minunea cea mai simplă/ am stat cum se cuvine." (*M-am oprit lângă tine*)

The time of love elevates the restless combustion to a supreme rank. The couple is shown in a simple contingency, sitting on a bench "tâmplă fierbinte lângă tâmplă". Their immanent fire adds up the fire of the surrounding nature that effervescently continues the love story on another level, enriching it with new significations. To love's combustion and ardour, nature is responding with a thrill: "De pe stamine de alun,/ din plopii albi, se cerne jarul./ Orice-nceput se vrea fecund,/ risipei se dedă Florarul." (*Risipei se dedă Florarul*) The love story seems to be about to begin, this being also suggested by the acting of the nature that is sifting embers – incipient state of fire – "De pe stamine de alun,/din plopii albi".

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Ivan Evseev specifies in this respect: the embers of a fire are "a symbol of ocult energy, of the hidden, dull fire, whenever about to be reignited with a natural flame. They represent the image of the fire (masculine principle) in the earth's captivity (feminine principle). On a psychical level, they signify latent force, secret, hidden passion. The unlit, cold and black cinder is a product of fire and a new potential fire. It is considered a purifying agent and it is used in the evil eye spells and other acts of popular magic." (EVSEEV, I., *op. cit.*: 228)

At the antipode one can find ashes, cinders. The mirage, the mystery of flight, of beauty and love is the ash – "praful", the mysterious dust that elevates: "Frumusețea ca și zborul și iubirea/ de cenuşe-ți leagă firea./ De-i ştergi fluturelui praful, nici o boare – / nici o vrajă nu-l vor face să mai zboare." (*Lângă un fluture*)

The ash, as Ivan Evseev specifies, "is a residual element of burning, a product of fire, whence its presence in some purifying rites, rites of penitence and expiation. The monks blend the ash in their food. But the ash can also cover a dull fire that might be reignited. (...) The magical properties attributed to the ash of the bakestone can also be explained by the rite of cremation." (*ibidem,* p. 90)

Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant bring new significations to the symbol of the ash: "The symbolism of the ash initially results from the fact that it is by excellence a residual value: what remains after the extinction of the fire, so from an anthropocentrical point of view, the corpse, residue of the body after the fire of life was exctincted.

From a spiritual point of view, the value of this residue is zero. Therefore, in any eschatological vision, the ash will symbolize the lack of value, nulity in connection with human life because of its precarity." (CHEVALIER, J., GHEERBRANT, A., 1993 : 283)

One can find in *Zodia Cumpenei (în metru safic*) this value of the ash – it suggests exactly the precarity of the human being mentioned by Chevalier and Gheerbrant. Everything is flowing, is slowly being decanted, everything is change and burden. Our way into light represents the assuming of the difficulties and suffering as a sine qua non state, because the outage of humans is an immanent condition of life.

However, the positive values of the ash are as well taken into account in Chevalier and Gheerbrant's interpretation: "Nowadays the Chortis tribes, descendent from Maya, make an ashy cross in order to protect the maize fields against the evil spirits and blend the ash with the seed to protect from putrefaction, rust or any other danger that threatens the bead." (*ibidem,* p. 283)

Here it is with Blaga the body and soul's resurrection by ash: "Iată că părul meu se face/ Ca o cenuşă ce-a înflorit./ În curând fi-va pace, pace./ şi pe pământ un sfârşit." (*9 mai*), a resurrection that waits for everyone of us to experience it.

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