

The Impact of Capitalist Psychology of Mid Victorian Era in Charles Dickens' Novel *Great Expectations*

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Abstract

My thesis argues that Charles Dickens reflects the capitalist psychology of mid Victorian London in his novel *Great Expectations*. It is fully narrated in the first person and a time conquering master piece of Charles Dickens. In this novel, he touches on expectations in the life of diverse characters, the greatest of which being the expectation of Pip, the central character of the novel and also his moves from childhood to adulthood. He portrays how difficult it is for a lower class person to become a gentleman. The life for the upper class is easy but the life for the lower class is hard and painful in Victorian England. He vividly represents the existing picture of the society working in the minds of various characters and their expectations. Dickens's themes include wealth and poverty, love and rejection and the eventual triumph of good over evil. The purpose of this study is to describe the writer's view of capitalism and its consequences such as ending of family units, illness, mutual exploitation, human passions, expectations and selfishness through character and plot.

Keywords: Charles Dickens, financial capitalism, Great Expectations, Marxist, Victorian era

Introduction

Great Expectations was written in 1861 at the time of Queen Victoria reign and there was a change that transformed people with peasant occupations and local markets into industrial society with

worldwide connections. In 19th century, there was pioneering new forms of social and urban organization in Britain. The Industrial Revolution had transformed the social landscape, allowed capitalists and manufacturers to collect huge fortunes. Although social class was no longer entirely dependent on the circumstances of one's birth, the divisions between rich and poor remained nearly as wide as ever. More and more people moved from the country to the city in search of greater economic opportunity. Throughout England, the manners of the upper class were very strict and conservative. The gentlemen and ladies were expected to have thorough classical educations and to behave appropriately in innumerable social situations. It was the time of rapid economic changes which forced English society determinedly towards industrialization (Lloyd-Jones & Lewis).

The Industrial Revolution not only changed the means of production but also the lives of people and structure of English society as a whole. Dickens's works portrayed a very mobile society in which fortunes could be made and just as suddenly lost. Some of his contemporaries such as Karl Marx, believed that the social classes were being increasingly driven apart, divided into the two opposing camps of the bourgeoisie and the working class. This revolution enabled man to access means of living and production and escaped from the unpredictability of nature by bringing an end to the agricultural dominance (Mokyer, *The Economics of the Industrial Revolution*).

According to Karl Marx, the capitalist mode of production referred to the systems of organizing production and distribution within capitalist societies. Private money-making in various forms guided the development of the capitalist mode of production. It was based on wage-labour and private ownership of the means of production and on industrial technology which began to grow rapidly in Western Europe and later extending to most of the world. Capitalism, money-making activity, had existed in the shape of merchants and money-lenders who acted as intermediaries between consumers and producers since the beginnings of civilization (Duncan Foley and Gerard Duménil, *Marx's analysis of capitalist production*).

Victor Lippit says in *Capitalism*, "the core dynamic of the capitalist system is the accumulation process in which a portion of the profits reaped through the sale of goods and services is reinvested, swelling the capital stock, incorporating new technologies in the process and permitting larger sales and profits in the future" (p150). Dickens considered the capitalist system was destructive, harmful to humanity and representing a mere return to the law of the jungle. He criticized this system by illuminating its negative surface such as child labor and workers' exploitation. The poor were exploited and dragged to work for long hours in miserable conditions for low wages (Hollington, *The Reception of Charles Dickens in Europe*).

Dickens's *Great Expectations* was set in early Victorian time when great social changes were sweeping the nation. The Industrial Revolution transformed England from an agricultural to an

industrial society where the machine had replaced manual labor. There was the increasing number of slums along the Thames River and the exploitation of women and children at the factories for extremely low wages due to the migration of workers from villages (Calmon, 1994). People often thought that Victorian society had a rank which rigidly fixed their class identities but Dickens's novels expressed a very different story. The characters in his stories often made huge social transitions, both from wealth to poverty and the other way round. It told a dark, troubled version of a class transition and focused on psychological growth.

Dickens was fascinated not only by the similarity of people in a particular class but also by their differences. He described in detail the extraordinary ways of people by which they showed and acted out their class identities and aspirations by clothing, accent and behavior. When Pip became wealthy, he learnt how to speak, dress and even eat to look by others as a well-mannered person. It was humiliating for him to pay heavy price for escaping from the poverty and suffering of the imitation. Miss Havisham was very wealthy but she was only concerned about the matter of power and revenge. Pip also got little pleasure from his life as a wealthy young man in London. From the moment that Estella humiliated him for being rough and common, there was no escape from the pains, desires and performance of class identity in *Great Expectations*.

In his novel, it was often quite hard for characters to know about from which class they belonged to. Thus class identity was a matter of performance that didn't link to the job or the wealth. Class was never given but created a range of performances and roles. He explained many of his characters were performers and unwilling simply to accept their given place in society but were determined to transform it into something different, better or more impressive. He promoted the problems of the poor and marginalized classes in his novels. Andrea Warren remarks, "Charles Dickens was a more powerful catalyst for change than any queen, prime minister, or politician. He is known as one of history's greatest reformers." (Warren, p.3)

England reached her highest point of development as a world power during the long reign of Queen Victoria. All the foundations of the great industrial revolution that turned England from a rural to industrial nation had already been laid. Great Britain began quite rapidly to pick the reward, wealth and modernization of its Industrial Revolution. But at the same time, it began to pay the price. A huge explosion in population moved from the land to cities and a society seem- turned upside down. It served to produce terrible overcrowding, ending of family units, illness, poverty and confusion. They made many mistakes but tackled the new age direct and with great pleasure. They failed to eliminate poverty, hardship and inequality (Stephen).

According to Easton, only two possibilities were opened when population increased. Either the food supply must be increased or the population must decrease through food shortage, war or other

causes until the existing resources were sufficient to feed it. The additional population left the rural sector and tried to make a living in the city which created the problem of unemployment to the city unless there was a great increase in manufacture. In spite of working on the land, more laborers were agreed to work in the factories for the sake of improved income but they didn't earn higher than under the previous domestic system. The large landowners earned money from the exploitation of the mineral deposited under their land, especially coal. Their money was available for profitable enterprises other than improving the yield from agriculture and increasing their holdings of land (*The Western Heritage: From the Earliest Times to the Present*).

At the time of Industrial Revolution, more and more people moved from the country to the city in search of greater economic opportunity. Throughout England, the manners of the upper class were very strict and conservative: gentlemen and ladies were expected to have thorough classical educations and to behave appropriately in innumerable social situation. Dickens's novel was ironically written about the desire for wealth and social advancement out of economic necessity. The Industrial Revolution provided solutions for the longstanding problems faced by English people in terms of industry, higher income, steady employment and railway transportation, but it also created new issues such as poverty, urban overpopulation and lack of sanitation, diseases, and child labor. Dickens witnessed the consequence of the Industrial Revolution on England's social fabric and how it particularly affected the lives of the poor and downtrodden. (McNeese, 2000)

Research Method

This study is a descriptive qualitative research. I conduct formal object and material object for this study. The formal object is discussing about capitalism by using Marxism Theory and the material object is reading of Charles Dickens's novel. There are two data sources: primary data source and secondary data source. Primary data source is *Great expectations* novel and secondary data source consisting books, journal, articles and internet to complete the data analysis. In the techniques of collecting data, I use five steps

- i. Reading and understanding the novel "Great Expectations".
- ii. Browsing and reading the related articles, journals and some other information in the internet.
- iii. Taking important notes from the related books and articles for the study.
- iv. Identifying the problem in *Great Expectations*.
- v. Making conclusion based on the results.

Story of the novel

The character of this story is about an orphan boy Philip Pirrip who is taken care of by Mr. Joe and his wife, Mrs. Joe Gargery. Mr. Joe has a very soft corner for Pip and takes every possible effort to make him happy but Mrs. Joe Gargery despite being the sister of Pip is very rude to him. She

never forgets to remind him of all the pains she is taking for looking after him. She has made Pip's life very unhappy and miserable.

Pip finds some changes in himself in the presence of Miss Havisham's adopted daughter Estella. She holds all his attention and he cannot think of anything else except her. He has a great expectation of winning her heart and then marrying her but he is disappointed by her sudden rejection. She has the expectation of using her beauty to attract people of different kinds and getting married with a rich and wealthy man. She mocks and hates Pip at the same time. She doesn't want to spend her life in poverty with him. He suffers from inferiority complex and determines to be rich in every possible way for her.

Miss Havisham's fiancé has expectation of being wealthy through her property. When his desire is fulfilled of getting a large sum of money and other things from her, he abandons her. Miss Havisham has the expectation of getting married to her beloved and thus ensuring security to her life and property. Miss Havisham's relatives often visit her in the expectation of winning her sympathy and getting some shares of the wealth and property that is left by her husband.

At this moment, Mr. Magwitch gives him an opportunity to make him a gentleman. He has the expectation of sending Pip to London to improve his condition. This possible fortune makes Pip thoughtful of his bright future. It isn't easy for him to leave Mr. Joe and goes to London. In London, he makes friends with a young gentleman named Herbert Pocket and Wemmick. He starts to take tuition with Herbert's father for his education and Herbert also helps him learn, how to act like a gentleman. He secretly helps Herbert when he turns twenty-one and begins to receive an income from his fortune.

After earning money, he becomes an artificial man and also forgets Mr. Joe who was his main supporter of his childhood. He neither sends any money to Mr. Joe nor even asks anyone about him. He isn't interested to visit the low neighbourhood of England. People come to flatter him in the hope of getting money from him. It is money which has made such a great reversal in Pip's life. Pip is now what money has made him. He leads a fairly undisciplined life in London, enjoying himself and running up debts.

At the age of 23, he learns that his benefactor is the convict he encountered in the churchyard, Abel Magwitch. He has become wealthy after gaining his freedom in New South Wales but cannot return to England on pain of death. Pip is shocked and stops taking Magwitch's money. Magwitch reveals that the escaped convict whom he fought in the churchyard was Compeyson, the cheater who had isolated Miss Havisham and Estella is Magwitch's daughter. Miss Havisham wants to

take revenge of her broken heart so she has raised Estella to break men's hearts (Paul Davis (1999), *Charles Dickens from A to Z*).

As the days pass, Pip sees the good in Magwitch and begins to care for him deeply. Before Magwitch's escape attempt, Estella marries an upper-class lout named Bentley Drummle. Miss Havisham begs his forgiveness for the way she has treated him in the past, and he forgives her. At the same day, her clothing catches fire and she goes up in flames. She will continue to repent for her misdeeds and to beg for Pip's forgiveness in her final days.

Pip and Herbert try to escape Magwitch but Compeyson informs the police. Magwitch and Compeyson fight in the river, and Compeyson is drowned. Magwitch is sentenced to death, and Pip loses his fortune. Pip falls ill and Joe comes to London to care for him. Pip decides to go abroad with Herbert to work in the mercantile trade. After many years, he encounters Estella in the ruined garden and knows that her husband is dead now. The nature of Estella is changed and her cruelty has been replaced by a sad kindness. Then they leave the garden hand in hand. The whole story of the novel represents the role of money and class consciousness in the Victorian England. This is true not only in the case of Pip but also in the case of almost all the characters of the novel.

Life of Charles Dickens

Charles John Huffam Dickens was the greatest novelist and a social critic of Victorian era. He created some of the world's best-known fictional characters and got extraordinary popularity during his lifetime. His novels described the life and conditions of the poor and working class of England, when people lived by strict rules. He wrote 15 novels, five novellas, hundreds of short stories and non-fiction articles. In his writing, he campaigned vigorously for children's rights, education and other social reforms. Some of his famous novels are *Scrooge*, *David Copperfield*, *Oliver Twist* and *Nicholas Nickel by*. The critics and scholars of 20th century recognized him as a literary genius (Black, Joseph Laurence, *Charles Dickens*).

He was born on 7 February 1812 on the southern coast of England and he was the second of eight children of his parents. His father, John Dickens was a clerk in the Navy Pay Office and was temporarily stationed in the district. He asked Christopher Huffam, rigger to His Majesty's Navy, to act as godfather to Charles. The family moved and settled in Camden Town London due to the financial difficulties. At the age of twelve, Charles started to work with boys in a factory and also doing shoe polish. While his father was in debtor's prison, his family moved to live near the prison, leaving him to live alone. This experience of lonely hardship was the most significant event of his life. It colored his view of the world and would later be described in a number of his novels. His early life seemed to have been peaceful, though he thought himself a "very small and not-over-particularly-taken-care-of boy" (Forster, John, *Life of Charles Dickens*).

When his father repaid his debts, Charles returned to school, but at the age of fifteen, he was again forced to leave school and work as an office boy. After that he worked as a freelance reporter and stenographer at the law courts of London. By 1832, he became a reporter for two London newspapers and began to contribute a series sketches to the newspapers and magazines, signing some of them “Boz.” These scenes of London life established his reputation and were published as *Sketches by Boz*, his first book in 1836.

He published his novel *Oliver Twist* in which he expressed his interest in the life of the slums. It traced the fortunes of an innocent orphan through the London streets. His other novels were *Household Worlds*, *All the Year Round*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, *Dealings with the Firm of Dombey and Son* and *Barnaby Rudge*. Dickens published *Dombey and Son* which established a new standard in his novel and marked the turning point in his career. *David Copperfield* was the first complete record of the typical course of a young man’s life in Victorian England. This autobiographical novel fictionalized elements of his childhood, his pursuit of a journalism career, and his love life. It was not his greatest novel but it was his personal favorite (Hauser, Arnold, *The Social History of Art: Naturalism, impressionism, the film age*).

In 1851, within a two-week period, Dickens’s father and one of his daughters died. In 1858, a year after he fell in love with an actress, he separated from his wife. Dickens’s next series of works were called his “dark” novels, though they rank among the greatest triumphs of the art of fiction. *Bleak House* was the most complicated plot of any English novel. He served to create a sense of the interrelationship of all sections of English society. In *Hard Times*, he described an English industrial town during the height of economic expansion and details of up-close view of the limitations of both employers and reformers. In *Little Dorrit*, he portrayed the conditions of England and the conflict between the world’s harshness and human values in its most impressive artistic form. In 1859, he published *A Tale of Two Cities*, a historical novel of the French Revolution.

Dickens’s *Great Expectations* was regarded by some as his most perfectly executed work of art. For several years his health declined. He never fully recovered from a railroad accident in 1865. He suffered a stroke on 18 April 1869 in Chester. After further regional readings were cancelled and he began work on his final novel *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (Tomalin, *The invisible woman: the story of Nelly Ternan and Charles Dickens*). Dickens died of a fatal stroke on June 9, 1870, leaving the novel, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, unfinished. The day of his burial was made a day of national mourning in England.

Expression of Capitalism in novel

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Dickens's novels were well-known for their criticism of industrial society. However, the term industrial society was both puzzling and misleading. Historians were re-defining about the complication of the Industrial Revolution and its effects on Victorian society. Victorian cities were based upon Industrial Capitalism. It was the world of lawyers, bankers, brokers, merchants, clerks and governmental institutions which Dickens so appropriately described in this novel. Dickens was mainly concerned how the commercialism and the market economy affect human relationships. By the 1850s the "City had made Britain the wealthiest and most powerful country in the world, supreme and impregnable" (Borer, *The City of London*).

That period observed the growth of capitalism accompanied by cycles of explosion and negative aspect. Dickens mentioned the exploitation of the bourgeois employers, supported by the government against the working class. He noticed the drastic effects of capitalism on English society. The rich classes lived a luxurious life attended by servants whereas the poor lived in dirty and overcrowded areas. The poor were also suffering from hunger, cruelty and illness. So, they diverted into the city, looking for job in factories and shipyards to survive. They were used like machines and also victimized by their employers (Houston, G.T).

According to Karl Marx, Charles Dickens represented an example of revolutionary English novelists whose realistic and expressive pages issued to the world more political and social truths than the professional politicians, publicists and moralists (Stearns & Burns). While George Orwell described that in every page of Dickens's work, one could see a consciousness that society was wrong somewhere at the root. They thought, Dickens believed that literature was an expansive and effective medium of creating and spreading class consciousness and social awareness among people (Pakditawan, *Childhood in Victorian England and Charles Dickens' novel "Oliver Twist"*). Bernard Shaw was impressed by Dickens' *Great Expectations* and he described as "his most compactly perfect book . . . all of one piece and consistently truthful as none of his other books are" (Shaw, p12).

As a novelist and social reformer, his concern was focused to prevent power from being abused. He deconstructed the capitalist system by arguing against a free market for labor and fighting against personal greed, insensitivity and bitterness. He was irritated by the English legal system and its indifference by giving poor people only the responsibility of the Church and not the state. They didn't enjoy economic or political rights although working like a slave. They worked in dangerous conditions in low wages and many people shared a single room lit by a candle, without clean water (Warren).

In this context, Peter Childs and Nicolas Tredell argued that Dickens's *Great Expectations* made a world in which "the individual human freedom and fulfillment is frustrated by what are usually

promulgated as society's great expectations and those values usually associated with progress, civilization and modernity" (*Charles Dickens*, p167). The exploitation of working class could be reduced only from money but it changed innocent characters not only into evil or greedy creatures but also emotionless, pitiless, selfishness and snobbishness. Crime was also increased due to monopoly capitalism and selfish economic policies. In novel, Magwitch explains to Pip that he turned to crime because he was starving and no one ever "measured my stomach," for "I must put something into my stomach, mustn't I?" (*Dickens, Great Expectation*, p284)

Dickens observed strong connections between capitalism and criminal behavior where families were torn apart by violent and unlimited competition. In *Great Expectations*, he warned that wealth and status were corrupt and corrupting, reminding social emptiness, inactivity and snobbery. The novel clarified the terrible impacts of greediness and class difference on human relationships. Pip, Miss Havisham, and Magwitch were changed into corrupt, arrogant, controlling, greedy and machine-like persons blinded by their hungry desire for ownership, property and revenge. They felt pleasure in exploiting poor people (Bouziane, *Materialism versus Human Values in the Victorian Novels: The Case of Great Expectations and Wuthering Heights*).

Society's great injustice encouraged Magwitch to turn Pip into a gentleman, looking for fame and appreciation in return. But he also had thirst to take revenge with his manipulating former partner, Compeyson. Havisham was left by Compeyson on her wedding day so she used Estella as an instrument to utter her anger, frustration and revenge against society. She stole Estella's heart away and put ice in its place. Estella drew men as a candle attracts moths and ignored the emotions of everyone coming close to her. She was rude to pip and did not hesitate to insult him. Estella's rudeness and arrogance increased his feelings of shame and class inferiority and highlighted how love and marriage were strongly entangled with social status (Newlin, *Understanding Great Expectations: A Student Casebook to Issues, Sources, and Historical Documents*).

Havisham enjoyed the power of the oppressor without feeling guilty where she felt that men were her natural enemies. She constantly reminded Pip that he was a poor boy while Estella was a rich and educated lady and claiming that their union was impossible. Pip felt ashamed and unsatisfied with humble origins and family and came to the conclusion of crossing the class boundaries. He became disappointed and found the emptiness of being part of the high society. After being humiliated, his nature was changed into a corrupt and snobbish person His qualities were also corrupted by the temptation of wealth (Roberts, *Great Expectations*).

In Dickens' *Great Expectations*, characters often make huge social transitions, both from wealth to poverty as well as the other way round in the age of financial and social instability. Pip wished to inhabit in the high society and wanted to quit, considering he was an orphan deprived of any status in the changing English Victorian society fostered by industrial capitalism. He felt himself

as a burden that was ignored, left to go hungry, die by society and taken care of by foster parents who robbed his identity. The capitalist system dominated the lives of people in England where social status was associated with wealth and money (Bowen, *Great Expectations and Class*).

Dickens portrayed in detail the small differences of behaviors, clothing, and accents of the characters in the novel through which they displayed their ambitions and class identities. He was more interested in marginalized and minor people who felt helpless in the unstable world of the Victorian economy rather than who were at the center of social classes. When there was the matter of class identity, many of his characters were unwilling to simply accept their given place in society and they were determined to do better for their positions and lives. However, their ambitions could result in arrogance, greed and dishonesty. When Pip achieved his best position in London, he lost his innocence and becomes unfaithful to his social class. This revealed capitalism and the materialistic system were the powerful cause of the destruction of affection and human relationships among people (Bowen).

Pip believed that real gentleman's and good manners were related with money. He only concerned about his own reputation and social status. He did not want to be seen with Joe because he thought Joe was not sophisticated. His concern with wealth and status formed a big distance with his family. During his travel to Satis House to attend Miss Havisham's birthday, he felt disgusted to share the coach with two convicts. He thought himself superior before the criminals but he was unknown about the fact that he was going to link with the world of criminals throughout his life. But when he knew the reality of his actual sponsor, he was almost destroyed and his whole logic was spoiled and emptied.

Then he remembered his humble roots how he used to steal food from his home to feed the escaped convict, Magwitch. He also discovered that Estella, a symbol of high class, was only the daughter of the convict. Dickens was dedicated to provoke a new kind of social consciousness among the upper classes by raising the dark side of capitalism. There was need of a bridge to connect the huge gap between the upper and lower classes created by capitalism. Pip's suffering and humiliation at his sister's hands symbolizes the lower class's helplessness to the upper class. His sister reminded him that she saved him from starving to death and without her help; he would be lying dead in the churchyard along with his parents (Stearns & Burns, *About the human condition in the works of Dickens and Marx*).

Dickens was primarily concerned with the effects of commercialism and the market economy human relationships. It not only produced inequality but also left its serious impact psychologically. Although urban migration, sanitary problems and unemployment were widespread throughout Victorian cities due to the financial make-up of the capital these problems

manifested themselves differently in the city of London and may be considered individually modern. He struggled with the problem of how humanity can survive amid continual disorder and change. His themes of money, separation and loneliness in an urban society warn of the dangers of urban psychology of which the twentieth century is the inheritor. Consciously and unconsciously, Dickens's novels embody what is essentially an analysis of a modern psychology.

Findings

Character- In this novel, the researcher found three types of characters. The first character is Upper Class. Miss Havisham is from Upper Class who has a lot of wealth and has a big house called Satis House with the iron hedge. She also has highest social status in that era.

The second character is Lower Class such as Joe Gargery, his wife and also Pip. Joe Gargery worked as blacksmith and his wife worked as Servant. Poor character is people who do not have persistent work and have less income to fulfill their everyday necessary. The poor character in this novel is a prison who doesn't have wealth. The thirds character is Moving Class Character from Lower class to Upper Class, played by Pip. Pip is an ordinary boy and now he is a gentleman and having authority to use wealth that given for him.

Setting- Setting is the place where events or stories occur. It builds the atmosphere of the scene and the story and develops the plot in order to produce the real character. There are two places in this novel, the first is Down Town and the second is uptown. Down town is placed in the small area which is usually dirty, dense and usually becomes a division between one regions with another region. Uptown is area which is placed in the center of the town and in this novel is from London.

6.3. Symbolism- Symbolism is used to describe moods and emotions in a literary work. The first is Miss Havisham's Satis House which is the sole symbol of prosperity. The Second is The Rising Mists that offers moments of clarity for Pip.

Conclusion

Great Expectations by Charles Dickens is an outstanding novel holding a faithful mirror to the representation of social faults, bad habit and hollowness. He has very profoundly defined the inner social working of the Victorian England in his time. The class consciousness, crime, guilt, innocence and various other factors of the society have been depicted through the projection of different characters.

Industrial Revolution that culturally and sociology caused many changes in England has influenced his *Great Expectations*. The changes or the consequences of Industrial Revolutions can

be revealed through Pip, Estella, Pip's sister, Miss Havisham, Herbert, Compeyson, and Magwitch as the characters of the novel. The life of Pip and Estella who have no parents and lack of love and affection as well represent the dissolution of family units. The concept of money as disease and illness can be seen through the attitude of characters toward their problem.

Dickens analyses economic and social conditions of Victorian society. Indeed, the novel puts its bright focus on different aspects of human life through the characterization. He criticizes economic, social and moral abuses in the Victorian era which is destructive and harmful by showing its negative sides such as the class system, child labor, workers' exploitation, and transformation of the moral and psychological structure of Victorian society. He criticizes the associate of greed and dislike of humankind promotes by capitalism and emphasizes the idea that wealth based on the exploitation of the poor cannot achieve happiness and satisfaction. On the contrary, it promotes arrogance, greed, feelings of hatred and revenge. *Great Expectations* shows the "Expectations" of all characters which represent human passion and ambition through the hard life caused by capitalism in industrial life.

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