# Creativity and Exodus: The Basque Imprint in *Finnegans Wake*

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#### Abstract

The appearance of words from languages other than English in *Finnengans Wake* has been the topic of much thought and debate in recent years since it is very difficult to try and trace the exact origin of Joyce's sources, moreover considering that his knowledge of languages was limited and that the text features words from some fifty different languages. This article tries to shed some light as to the possible origins of Basque terms in Joyce's Finnengans Wake by relating the late appearance of those words in the galley proofs with the outburst of the Spanish War, which found Joyce in Paris. One of the main consequences of this War was the dramatic exile of thousands of Basque people and the subsequent efforts made by the Basque Government to support them at the same time that they carried out a campaign promoting Basque culture and language with which to gain international favour. The coincidence in time of these two factors is a plausible starting point for a more consistent analysis of the genesis of Basque terms in Finnegans Wake.

**Keywords:** *Finnegans Wake*, Basque terms, Spanish War, genetic criticism.

Coming to terms with the genesis of any given text is always an arduous task but this is always more tortuous if one pretends to do so with Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*. As Luca Crispi has stated

[T]he Wake works as a concatenated series of intratextual echoes that proceed from the sketches. In order to get the Wake going Joyce needed to set up an initial chain of discrete textual events, the sketches, that would then,

"when they are more and a little order," start to generate further swaths of text that would in turn generate more verbiage, and so on, and so on. Joyce had experimented with a similar kind of textual concatenation in Ulysses, but there the intratextual echoes (or motifs) were suspended discernible if within not always referential points of contact (such as Homer and Dublin). In distinction, in the Wake scaffolding is generated internally. Hayman calls this procedure "nodality": the sketches function as nodes around which other passages coalesce in varying degrees. The text is built up of an almost fugal concatenation of these textual echoes. Instead of proceeding from a story or from a single theme, the text proceeds from the interactions of various discrete passages. This would be why Joyce was, from the very beginning, collecting seemingly random bits of text for his work: he needed to amass the raw components he later would need to fill in the avenues suggested by the interminglings of his text. (Crispi 14-5)

Many and varied are the sources in which Joyce found inspiration to write *Finnegans Wake*, as many are the languages Joyce knew and loved, among them French or Italian. It would, however, be presumptuous to assert that Joyce knew the more than fifty languages which appear—in one form or another—in the final text or in his annotations. It is widely accepted that Joyce filled in the gaps in his knowledge through the use of secondary sources. Textual material—in the form of dictionaries, newspapers, etc.—had a predominant role in carrying out this task; one should not, however, undermine the importance aural material played for Joyce, who had always manifested a love for music and the spoken word, and who was a remarkable conversationalist.

Of the two categories of languages Joyce had contact with during the composition of *Finnegans Wake*—those he knew and those he did not—, Basque sadly belongs in the second one. There is no written document which can testify that Joyce was acquainted with the basic principles of Basque grammar, let alone that he could fluently speak some of it. And yet the presence of Basque in his work is an undeniable, unavoidable and intriguing fact. The aim of this essay is to try to throw in some clarity as regards the genesis of this puzzling contribution of Basque to Joyce's creative work manifested in *Finnegans Wake*.

The topic is not a new one. The academic and critic Francisco García Tortosa, in an article published in 2009, made manifest the need for undertaking research into the sources of Basque expressions in *Finnegans Wake*, remarking at the same time the conspicuous appearance of Basque terms during the summer of nineteen thirty-seven,

De las 40 entradas del cuaderno unas 31 pasaron al texto definido, lo que significa una muy alta proporción si la comparamos, por ejemplo, con el trasvase de vocablos castellanos de los cuadernos al texto, que oscila entre un 35% y un 40%. El vocabulario vascuence se concentra en las dos últimas páginas de I.iv, y en II.i, ii y iii.

[...] Los primeros borradores del I. iv se pueden fechar entre noviembre y diciembre de 1923 y la primera publicación de un fragmento largo del capítulo tuvo lugar en julio de 1925. Pues bien, ni en los borradores ni en las galeradas para la revista *Criterion* aparece un solo vocablo en vascuence. [...] En marzo de 1937 le llegan a Joyce las primeras galeradas del libro I, en las que se aprecian abundantes *adendas* sacadas de diferentes cuadernos, pero en las del mes de marzo el vascuence sigue ausente de las galeradas.

De pronto, en julio del mismo año en una segunda tirada de pruebas, al margen del puño y letra de Joyce, las páginas 202 y 203 de las galeradas aparecen bordeadas por los cuatro lados de una doble línea en la que se acoplan los términos vascos que habrían de pasar al texto definitivo, y por si no quedara claro, en la página de la izquierda y a máquina se consignan las siguientes entradas: zillar, izarres, ur, uri, uria, burnzburn, Gorgona, gogor, gagar, Equerry Egon, Handi, Esquoro y biskbask. (Tortosa 2009)

This reference to the sudden inclusion of Basque expressions in the galley proofs during the summer of nineteen thirty-seven is not gratuitous, moreover bearing in mind its close proximity to the bombing of Gernika, which had taken place only two months before, in April. Since he was an avid reader, Joyce must have been clearly conscious of this situation thanks to newspaper coverage of the Spanish Civil War. Particularly important in this aspect were the articles published by The Times correspondent George L. Steer on the bombing of Gernika and which would, later on, become part of his book on the aforementioned bombings, The Tree of Gernika: A Field Study of Modern War (1938). One must also bear in mind the fact that during his stay in Paris, Joyce was witness to the arrival and establishment of the Basque community in exile, as reported by the press. It is estimated that the Spanish War forced the exile of an approximate 150,000 Basque people, many of whom opted for France as the place where they could rebuild their lives (García Argüello 12). Furthermore, the Basque Government was concerned with its international perception and reception. During its short-lived experience as an autonomous political entity during the War, the Basque Government opened delegations in a number of European cities of remarkable importance, such as Paris, London, Brussels or Bordeaux, which permitted not only the reception of food and other necessary goods but which also allowed them to bring international attention over the particular situation of the Basques,

> Para tratar de contrarrestar dicho aislamiento. el Gobierno de Euzkadi, que estableció un riguroso racionamiento, fijó los precios al mismo nivel de 18 de julio de 1936 y llegó incluso a emitir moneda, abrió varias delegaciones en distintas europeas, como París, Londres. ciudades Valencia y Barcelona. Bruselas. Burdeos. Gracias a la labor desarrollada desde estas delegaciones, el Departamento de Comercio y Abastecimiento, bajo las órdenes de Ramón María de Aldasoro, de Izquierda Republicana, pudo garantizar el suministro de víveres y productos de primera necesidad a la población,

especialmente a la de Bilbao y los municipios de su entorno, que no dejaba de aumentar con la llegada de refugiados de otros territorios vascos. (García Argüello 5)

The implicit assumption that Joyce included Basque words in his work as a consequence of the Spanish War contests the widespread assumption that Joyce had an apolitical character. As we know, the adult Joyce had given up any hope that politics could be walled off. All his work documents and bears witness to the situation of his countrymen as citizens of a colonized nation. After his voluntary exile to the Continent, Joyce began to find more parallelisms between the history of his country's subjection to England and other colonial experiences of oppression and rebellion. Despite having been accused of lack of concern for politics, Joyce repeatedly showed an interest in contemporary events, whether it be the development of fascism in France, conflicts in Ethiopia, Spain or China or a dislike of Mussolini, Hitler or English politics. Manganiello reminds us that, "The first work Joyce ever wrote was political. This was the poem 'Et tu Healy,' which was composed at the age of nine shortly after Parnell's death"

(Manganiello 3). Joyce might even be considered a political writer if we accept the meaning of the word "political" in the broader sense, "The whole of human relations in their real, social structure, in the power of making the world," as Roland Barthes defines the word (Ellmann 73), or in Robert Dahl's standard definition, "any pattern of human relationships that involves, to a significant extent, power, rule, or authority." (Manganiello 8)

Joyce exhibits a tendency to draw parallelisms between similar forms of particular "politics" and the exercises of power. Examples of this can be found as early as in *A Portrait*, where Stephen refuses to sign the universal peace

petition and MacCann accuses him of being an irresponsible reactionary who spurns the dignity of altruism,

MacCann began to speak with fluent energy of the Tsar's rescript, of Stead, of general disarmament, arbitration in cases of international disputes, of the signs of the times, of the new humanity and the new gospel of life which would make it the business of the community to secure as cheaply as possible the greatest possible happiness of the greatest possible number.

The gipsy student responded to the close of the period by crying:

—Three cheers for universal brotherhood! (*P* 223-24)

Stephen's enigmatic posture mirrors that of Joyce since he seems—at first—to be unaffected by pressing world problems, even though in the end the accusation proves to be unjust. Like MacCann, Stephen is a pacifist and not a practical anarchist who condones violence. His idea of politics is that of Realpolitik—politics based on practical and material factors rather than on theoretical or ethical objectives—, which, however, enables him to detect a warmonger in disguise, to foresee that Tsar Nicholas's crusade for peace would result in war, the Russo-Japanese war to be more exact. His informed refusal, therefore, punctures mock-idealism based on political naiveté.

Contrary to some people's belief, Joyce did not become blinded by his own genius and locked himself up in his library for the rest of his life; as is well documented, even in his exile, he kept up to date with the news from his motherland and from the world.

Joyce's political awareness was based on considerable reading. His library in Trieste included especially books by socialists and anarchists. He had, for example, the first 173 Fabian tracts bound in one volume. Among other writers who interested him were notably the two anarchists, Kropotkin and Bakunin, and the social reformer, Proudhon. (Ellmann 82)

Joyce's creative work, from Stephen Hero to Finnegans Wake, constantly challenges the reader to reconsider the effect ideology exerts on literature, and ultimately, to re-evaluate the nature of the political. It is the very nature of Finnegans Wake to question all monologic claims to a unitary authority, revealing the multiplicity inherent to all entities, dependent on their opposites/doubles/twins/fetches; as we know, all attempts to assert the Self by denying the Other are problematized as unstable in the multiplicity of the Wake, a point which the doubleness of everything in the book—the omnipresence of Twins, for instance—highlights. The British-Irish conflict was synecdochic of a more general situation. Both Britain and Ireland were part of a European system that had established hegemony over others in the name of a historical necessity or destiny for which culture provided the most powerful sanction. Culture — and literature in particular—provided an account of historical development that was based on the notion that European civilisation had produced the most fully developed account of the "human spirit." Literature showed what was universal in the European achievement and thereby relieved it of the charge of being culture-bound and therefore only one among a number of possible readings or articulations of human experience. This European claim was threatened by those inner disputes that endlessly disrupted its seemingly coherent civilization but it was resourcefully sustained through cultural

agencies until the First Word War brought it to the point of collapse. Much modern literature is preoccupied with that collapse and with the search for finding systems of authority that would overcome it. But, unlike T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, D.H. Lawrence and many others, Joyce saw that collapse as a disintegration that was to be welcomed because it had been brought about by the coercive exercise of that very patriarchal authority that many other writers wished to rescue and reestablish. *The Wake*'s fragmentation of canonical names and citations is, therefore, more than a display of Joyce's learning.

The shrapnel of voices follows upon the explosion of culture. The contemporary period of Irish history, from 1922, the date of the Treaty that effected the transformation and the beginning of the Second World War, is coincident with and absorbed deeply into the composition of *Finnegans Wake*. So arcane a work which seems, by virtue of its obscure and hermetic nature, to be far removed from history and politics, especially in their contemporary forms, provided startling examples of the ways in which a miscellaneous series of events could even be regarded as the final completion of a pattern that had been forming slowly over the centuries.

Leaving Ireland freed Joyce from aesthetic, political and family oppressions, and provided him with artistic deliverance although he personally, like Moses, never reached the Promised Land in the course of his exodus, a theme Stephen develops in *Ulysses*,

#### PLUMPS FOR OLD MAN MOSES.

- —Call it, wait, the professor said, opening his long lips wide to reflect. Call it, let me see. Call it: *Deus nobis haec otia fecit*.
- —No, Stephen said. I call it A Pisgah Sight of Palestine or The Parable of The Plums.
- I see, the Professor said. He laughed richly.

—I see, he said again with new pleasure. Moses and the promised land. We gave him that idea, he added to J. J. O'Molloy. (*U* 7.1053-62)

Joyce's inability to leave aside his Irish identity mirrors the central paradox of Exodus: the simultaneous capacity and incapacity to forget Egypt or bondage, the Jews seek freedom while trying to escape it; yearly they recount their bondage while promising, as Bloom remembers, "next year in Jerusalem" (*U* 7.207). For Joyce, this takes the form of his denial and acceptance of Ireland, forsaking the country but writing about it exclusively; or, as he stated in *Finnegans Wake*, becoming "an Irish emigrant the wrong way out." (*FW* 190.36)

Being himself a political exile, Joyce could not help but sympathise with those who were enduring similar circumstances. Although Paris in those years was full of famous literary exiles —Hemingway, Stein, Pound, Fitzgerald—, Joyce wore his exilic experience with a difference. Exile was not, for him, an experiment. It was a crucial element in his integrity as a writer and, more specifically, as an Irish writer. Ireland remained central to his work at the cost of remaining peripheral in his life. He remained aloof from the glamorous Paris of the expatriates,

Much Modernist art has taken its stance from, gained its perspectives out of, a certain kind of distance, an exiled posture – a distance from local origins, class allegiances, the specific obligations and duties of those with an assigned role in a cohesive culture. In his increasing immersion in the city the artist has come to approximate to the condition of the intellectual. And, just as the modern intelligentsia has

become something like a classless grouping, disposed to novelty, attempting to advance seeking consciousness, to provide independent and futuristic over-view. likewise with Modernist artists – who have so often cut themselves off, like Stephen Dedalus, from family, race and religion to forge the uncreated conscience of their race. This has encouraged much of that specialised aesthetic questioning, that obsessive concern with craft and form that distinguishes one part Modernism. But equally it has encouraged the exploration of the social environment out of which cultural novelty was transmuted. (Bradbury 100)

A parenthesis is needed here to clarify the difference between Exile and Exodus; exile entails dislocation and rupture, a sending away, a withdrawal or banishment with no goal or purpose to pursue. Expelled, the exile considers his displacement as only temporary, and incessantly recalls his earlier home. Exile is draining and stressful, as homelessness dominates the separation of the figure from its origin. Even though it can on occasion provide imaginative stimulation, exile is on the whole a negative experience of longing. By contrast, exodus brings emancipation as it is an act of freedom and has a purpose, often of self-fulfilment, as well as a stimulating quality.

In our thinking, "exiles" have usually been those famous American and British artists seeking a change in creative surroundings. They have not referred usually to those displaced by world war and colonization, in the sense suggested by Edward Said when he says,

[it]is necessary to set aside Joyce and Nabokov and even Conrad, who wrote of exile with such pathos, but of exile without cause or rationale. Think instead of the uncountable masses for whom UN agencies have been created, or refugees without urbanity, with only ration cards and agency numbers.

Exile and nationalism are conflicting poles of feeling that correspond to more traditional aesthetic conflicts: artistic iconoclasm communal assent, the unique vision and the collective truth. In fact, many words in the exile family divide themselves between an archaic or literary sense ad a modern, political one: for example, banishment vs. deportation; émigré vs. immigrant; wanderer vs. refugee; exodus vs. division between and flight. The exile nationalism, therefore, presents itself as one not only between individual and group, but between loser and winner, between a mood of rejection and a mood of celebration. (Brennan 60-61)

Joyce opted for his own Exodus under the belief that his going away would free him to create and to revolutionise the nature of the novel, "You talk to me of nationality, language, religion. I shall try to fly by those nets" (*P* 231). However, Richard Ellmann argues that,

[...]Joyce needed exile as a reproach to others and a justification of himself. His feeling of ostracism from Dublin lacked, as he was well aware, the moral decisiveness of his hero Dante's exile from Florence, in that he kept the keys to the gate. He was neither bidden to leave

nor forbidden to return, and after this first departure he was in fact to go back five times. But, like other revolutionaries, he fattened on opposition and grew thin and pale when treated with indulgence. Whenever his relations with his native land was in danger of improving, he was new incident to solidify intransigence and to reaffirm the rightness of his voluntary absence. In later life he even showed some grand resentment at the possibility of Irish independence on the grounds that it would change the relationship he had so carefully established between himself and his country.

'Tell me,' he said to a friend, 'why you think I ought to wish to change the conditions that gave Ireland and me a shape and a destiny.' That Joyce could not have written his books in Ireland is likely enough, but he felt the need for maintaining his intimacy with his country by continually renewing the quarrel with her which was now prompting him to leave for the first time. (Ellmann 108)

Despite obvious differences, Joyce's situation shared a certain common ground with Basque exiles. Both had left their country for political reasons—even though Joyce's was self-imposed—and yet both struggled to keep in touch with their native culture. Joyce always kept an interest in Irish affairs although he returned sparingly to Ireland; in the same way, he wrote almost exclusively about Ireland in a way that leaves little doubt about his concerns with the country. Similarly, Basque exiles—especially, the Basque Government—made an effort to maintain a certain degree of normality and a sense of community among its people, who felt the pains of imposed exile and which was especially acute among children. The

academic Jesús J. Alonso Carballés reminds us of how an important part of the resources which were available for the Basque Government were devoted to palliate the situation of exiles, "Durante el resto del conflicto una buena parte de los recursos del ejecutivo vasco fueron dedicados a la atención de estos exiliados y a afianzar su legitimidad y su presencia en numerosos ámbitos, con dos escenarios prioritarios: Francia y Cataluña." (Alonso Carballés 695)

Among these activities there was one which acquired a great importance—presenting Basque culture to the world. Aguirre's Basque Government was preoccupied with the international perception of the Spanish War and also with the reception of exiles abroad. What had been initially meant as a stay of no more than a couple of weeks was becoming a long-term exodus. Numbers were increasing rapidly as were the different communities in which exiles were placed. Alonso Carballés gives an estimate of 100,000 exiles in 1937 distributed in places like Cagnolle, Itxasou, Ciboure, Saint-Jean-de-Pied-de-Port, Ghétary, Dax, among many others (Alonso Carballés 698). All these exiles required housing, medical assistance. nourishment and —very often— schooling, and the French authorities soon began to express their concern over such a polemic matter. In order to win public opinion over and claim international attention, the Basque Government carried out a number of propagandist actions—the Euzkadi football team the France, Europe and America and Internationale des Amis des Basques, created in 1938, made an impressive effort by agglutinating relevant members of the French intellectual community. Most relevant for the present study was the publishing of Euzko Deya, a bi-weekly journal French and Basque, which appeared written both in uninterruptedly from the 29<sup>th</sup> of November, 1936 to the 10<sup>th</sup> of May, 1940 and which constituted an important source of historical and up-to-date information on Basque culture for

Parisians. Similarly, two folk groups—*Eresoinka* and *Elai-Alai*—toured France performing Basque songs and dances, and whose performance in the Théâtre National de Chaillot Palace and in the Salle Pleyel in Paris was highly acclaimed.

These last two points—the publication of Euzko Deya and the touring folk groups *Eresoinka* and *Elai-Alai* —acquire greater relevance when considering the exposition these gave to Basque culture and, especially, to the Basque language. Together with the attention-grabbing Spanish conflict, they served the purpose of portraying Basque culture and language as a remnant of an old society on the verge of disappearance. Essentially, the situation was no different where the linguistic issue was the defence of a disappearing language —often one which, like Basque and Welsh, was virtually on the point of extinction in the new industrial-urban centres of the country. Certainly defence of the old language signified defence of the ancient, inherited ways of a given community against the subversions of modernity, which helps explain the support which such movements as Bretons, Flemings, Basques and others received from the Roman Catholic clergy. To this extent they were not simply middle-class movements. Yet, Basque linguistic nationalism was singular in that it was not a movement of the traditional countryside, where people still spoke the language.

Living in Paris at the same time and concerned with the concept of the human faculty of language, the news-devouring Joyce must have been intrigued by a language like Basque, so geographically close to both Spanish and French and yet unrelated to either. That he was exposed to several sources of the language can easily be inferred from the fact that in his writings he distinguished between French and Spanish Basque. Furthermore, the words "ur," "uri," "ura," included on pages 202 and 203 of the galley proofs in July, 1937 bear a conspicuous resemblance to the traditional Basque song, "Uri, uri, ura," which is sure to have been performed by any Basque

folk association. It would not be too far-fetched, then, to assert that Joyce's curiosity, stemming from the Spanish War, had been further stirred by the propagandistic and cultural movement carried out by Aguirre's Basque Government, the publishing of *Euzko Deya* and the acclaimed performance of the Basque folk groups in the French capital, and that he had actively sought to find written and oral sources for *Finnengans Wake*. Regarding the genesis of Basque terms in the text, Tortosa reminds us,

El primer paso debería orientarse hacia la fuente de la que Joyce sacó la información, pero desafortunadamente la única referencia la hallamos en una tarjeta postal dirigida a su hijo George, fechada en Paría el 9 de agosto de 1937, en la que se dice: "Sending you a book about the basques which you may read in the shade." (Letters, III, p.402). (Tortosa 2009)

Joyce was, however, not alone in his genuine interest in languages. As Seton-Watson explicates, the nineteenth century was, in Europe and its peripheries, a golden age of vernacularizing lexicographers, grammarians, philologists, and litterateurs. The energetic activities of these professional intellectuals were central to the shaping of nineteenth-century European nationalisms. (Benedict 70-71)

By the late nineteenth century, scientific racism had become intertwined with the biological sciences and hardly a single branch of the humanities remained unaffected. Archaeology, anthropology, history, palaeoanthropology and sociology: all became crucially defined by race. Positioned in a framework provided by linguistics and Darwinism, such forms of knowledge worked in opposing ways to "prove" the workings of "progress" in the social as well as the natural

world and —at the same time— to identify a process of social and cultural "degeneration" so powerful as to be thought potentially capable of reversing human history and bring about chaos. This theoretical disposition led many fin de siècle Western intellectuals to understand modernity as a degradation of originary Enlightenment idealisms or, indeed, as a cultural condition that had been disastrously reared on thwarted ideas of "natural rights" and false principles of "equality."

This latter position was held by many of Joyce's "modernist" contemporaries, certainly those working in the field of literature —W.B.Yeats, Ford Madox Ford, Ezra Pound, T.S.Eliot, Percy Wyndham Lewis and D.H. Lawrence—, all identified with right-wing radicalism, and not simply as a matter of youthful experimentation. (Platt 3)

Finnegans Wake takes a political position on race, and it is here that Joyce is at odds with his writer contemporaries. For Joyce does not think of race as the essentialist condition sometimes mystified in Modernist literature where "The Dark Demon" is in general conflict with a "White Spirit" counterpart. Race in Joyce is a cultural construct whose primary purpose is understood in terms of the preservation of social cohesion. Race identity here becomes a matter of culture rather than of biology, which means that the racism which typically disguised itself as the rational measurement and management of difference becomes an ideology, operating at the structural levels of culture and society as knowledge, authority and power. Such an identification of the wider politics of race is central to Finnegans Wake and involves the recognition that the scientific racism legitimized by such politics was not an English colonial aberration but a European phenomenon closely linked to the rise of modernity, to myths and fantasies about the self and cultural identities that the European Academy once privileged as advanced and valuable human knowledge. When political grievances are forgotten the cultural treasures of the traditional society can, of course, be

scattered freely through the utopian mixture of words and languages we discover *Finnegans Wake*.

Most writers believe that by changing language and style you may in time alter thought; and that by altering thought you may transform the world itself. Joyce believed that common culture, already under threat in that day, could be remade along more multicultural lines, with infusions from many national and spiritual traditions, because the future would be what artists like him already were. In that context, *Ulysses* exists like a blasted road sign in a war zone, pointing to a future that is exhilarating to precisely the extent that it is uncertain and open. (Kiberd 18)

Joyce's questioning of political and cultural constructs seems to manifest itself in the incoherence expressed in the amalgam of languages which populate Finnegans Wake. The inclusion of Basque terms in the Wake is conspicuously coincident with the development of the Spanish War and the subsequent bombings of Gernika, which is sure to have reached Joyce's self-imposed exile in Paris. The cultural efforts carried out by Aguirre's Basque Government —the publication of periodicals, the staging of Basque dances and songs— and the cultural impact Basque language and culture acquired in those days might well have been the source for the always complex and absconding inspiration of the Irish writer, who delighted in the sheer pleasure of discovering new sounds and languages. It would certainly be interesting to open up new research paths to further delve into the coincidences of Basque folk groups and exiles in Paris at a time when Joyce was working on his masterpiece, analysing the songs and publications which were then performed and trying to establish a possible genesis for Basque terms in Finnegans Wake.

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