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## Personality and Individual Differences: Literature in Psychology- Psychology in Literature

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### Abstract

Literature, which intertwines within such fields as history, philosophy, sociology, psychology and so on, is a discipline wherein language is used as a medium of expression so as to interpret man, existence and culture. The objective of this paper is to discuss literature in terms of its interdisciplinary structure, psychology, in particular, considering man and existence, personality and individual differences which have always been studied by writers, philosophers, artists, psychologists and psychiatrists. Several complex notions, unfathomable personalities and ambiguous motives have been associated with characters in literary genres: For example the term Bovarism is explained by means of Flaubert's Madame Bovary. Similar examples in literary works could be multiplied. Man and existence have been fundamental themes in literature, which has existed even before psychology. Works of literature and art enable individuals to be aware of their personalities and individual differences and to question life and existence, the main data in the field of psychology as well. It is overtly seen that there is a very strong correlation between literature and psychology since both of them deal with human beings and their reactions, miseries, desires, and their individual and social concerns by means of different concepts, methods, and approaches.

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Literature and Psychology

Literature which intertwines within such fields as history, philosophy, sociology, psychology and so on is a discipline wherein language is used as a medium of expression so as to interpret man, existence and culture, personality and individual differences which have always been studied and discussed by writers, philosophers, artists, psychologists and psychiatrists. There is a very strong correlation between literature and psychology for the fact that both of them deal with human beings and their reactions, perceptions of the world, miseries, wishes, desires, fears, conflicts and reconciliations; individual and social concerns, by means of varied concepts, methods, and approaches. An author represents life according to his/her objectives, perceptions, ideologies, and value judgments and opens the doors of the unknown and invisible worlds to readers not only by arousing feelings and emotions but also by helping them to discover the meaning of life and existence. Clearly, literature enables individuals to know and question their identities by raising consciousness and awareness. It is to be noted that man and existence have always been fundamental elements in most scientific studies, fine arts and literature.

Considering this salient correlation between literature and psychology, first of all the question, “what is literature?” should be answered. David Lodge in his work titled *Consciousness and the Novel Connected Essays* explains the meaning of literature as follows: “... literature is a record of human consciousness, the richest and most comprehensive we have. Lyric poetry is arguably man’s most successful effort to describe qualia. The novel is arguably man’s most successful effort to describe the experience of individual human beings moving through space and time” (2002:10). To Noam Chomsky, literature is one of the most significant means to obtain knowledge, concerning man and his life, his unique experiences and the idiosyncratic values: “... we will always learn more about human life and personality from novels than from scientific psychology” (Lodge, 2002:10). This acquisition of knowledge is due to the fact that “... science tries to formulate general explanatory laws which apply universally, which were in operation before they were discovered, and which would have been discovered sooner or later by somebody. Works of literature describe in the guise of fiction the dense specificity of personal experience, which is always unique, because each of us has a slightly or very different personal history, modifying every new experience we have; and the creation of literary texts recapitulates this uniqueness ...” (Lodge, 2002:10-11).

Joseph Conrad in the preface of *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, comments on the significance of the writers and the written texts in human life: “My task which I am trying to achieve is by the power of written word to make you hear, to make you feel- it is before all, to make you see. That and no more, and it is everything” (Preface). Personal history is actually one of the major elements that the reader learns through literature. As for the personalistic knowledge literature provides, it is claimed that “... Even when the ostensible subject of fiction is science itself, it is always a personalistic kind of knowledge that we obtain from it” (Lodge, 2002:16).

It is also asserted that literature is a means for cultural and social value transmission and expression: “Literature is a social institution using as its medium language, a social creation ... literature represents life, and life is, in large measure, a social reality, even though the natural world or and the inner or subjective world of the individual have also been objects of literary imitation. The poet himself is a member of society, possesses of a specific social status ...” (Wellek & Warren, 1963:94). Further to this, social and cultural milieu is of vital importance in the process of writing. Ideological and cultural issues or the debates of the age might be reflected in the works to a certain extent: “The writer is not only influenced by society; he influences it. Art not merely reproduces life but also shapes it ... Used as a social document, literature can be made to yield the outlines of social history ... But literature is no substitute for sociology or politics. It has its own justification and aim” (Wellek & Warren, 1963: 102, 103, 109). Literature is an invaluable means to gain insight into human experience. In the words of Trilling, “... only literature and its study would allow us to glimpse anything like the ‘whole’ of human experience, the ‘whole’ a person- the rational, emotional, sacred, and profane dimensions of being human” (Davis & Schleifer, 1998:7-8). Sartre comments on the function of literature and thus the objective of the author as follows: “... It is the writer’s mission to dispel inertia, ignorance, prejudice and false emotion” (Sartre, 1967: ix).

On the other hand, although it is a very complicated term to define, psychology can be described as “the science that systematically studies and attempts to explain observable behavior and its relationship to the unseen mental processes that go on inside the organism and to external events in the environment”(Kagan & Havemann, 1968:13).

As for the origins of psychology, it could be stated that, “The earliest origins of psychology are found in the writings of the ancient Greek philosophers about the nature of life, particularly in the work of Aristotle” who “used the term psyche to refer to the essence of life. This term is translated from ancient Greek to mean ‘mind,’ but it is closely linked in meaning to the word ‘breath’” (Lahey, 2009:1,2). Keeping the ongoing debates in the field of psychology, dating back to Aristotle, in mind, it can be pointed out that “... Modern psychologists study the same actions, thoughts, and feelings that fascinated Aristotle. Indeed, the term psychology comes from Aristotle’s word psyche plus the Greek word logos, which means ‘the study of’” (Lahey, 2009:2). The meaning of psychology in literature is explained by Wellek and Warren (1963: 81) as follows: “By ‘psychology of literature’, we may mean the psychological study of the writer, as type and as individual, or the study of the creative process, or the study of the psychological types and laws present within works of literature, or, finally, the effects of literature upon its readers (audience psychology)”.

Differing in their methods and approaches and perceptions, psychoanalytical theorists basically employ crucial concepts and terms, methods and classifications in Freudian psychoanalysis:

Freudian criticism or classical psychoanalytical criticism ... is concerned with the quest for and discovery of (and the subsequent analysis of) connections between the artists (creators, artificers) themselves and what they actually create (novels, poems, paintings, sculpture, buildings, music, etc.). As far as literature is concerned it analyses characters ‘invented’ by authors, the language they use and what is known as ‘Freudian imagery.’ Thus, in the Freudian method a literary character is treated as if a living human being... (Cuddon, 1999:332).

Focusing on the methods of Freudian psychoanalysis, psychoanalytical critics reflect not only the author’s mind and personality but also deal with the author’s works as the products or texts of the power of imagination which is of supreme importance for the individuals including artists and authors, in particular, in the process of creation. Within this frame, it is essential to point out that both literature and psychology appeal to imagination and feelings. Psychology has a noteworthy place in the analysis of literary works, and each field puts the individual at the centre of their studies and analyses. In this respect, it might be necessary to draw the reader’s attention to the Psychological novel, “which is for the most part concerned with the spiritual, emotional and mental lives of the characters and with the analysis of character rather than with the plot and the action ...” (Cuddon, 1999: 709-10). Literature which is a quest to find the meaning of man and existence is also a source of inspiration for many people and professionals, for example, Sigmund Freud, the pioneering figure in psychoanalytical criticism, analysed a great deal of literary texts including Shakespeare’s works.

Psychoanalytical criticism deals with the characters, who serve as the symbols of the world and existence to be presented as exemplary figures to expose the meaning of life. Readers might identify themselves with the characters, who might be regarded as real people as well: “People may model their lives upon the patterns of fictional heroes and heroines” (Wellek & Warren, 1963:102). Thus, the analysis of the characters and their attitudes is a psychological treatment for each character asserts a unique personality and individual differences. As for the characterization in literary works, it could be emphasized that, “The creation of characters may be supposed to blend, in varying degrees, inherited literary types, persons observed, and the self ... Characters in plays and novels are judged by us to be ‘psychologically’ true. Situations are praised and plots accepted because of this same quality. Sometimes a psychological theory, held either consciously or dimly by an author, seems to fit a figure or a situation” (Wellek & Warren, 1963: 89-91).

In the psychological approach, the author’s perceptions, dreams, conscious or unconscious mind, the differences between the personality of the author and the author in the text are also taken into consideration. For example, “I am Madame Bovary” says Flaubert (Wellek & Warren, 1963: 90). Most themes, represented by the authors might be the signs of their own personality traits. In the words of Wellek and Warren, “... writers often document their own cases, turning their maladies into their thematic material” (1963: 81). In this context, personality, the key element in both psychology and literature might be described “as the total pattern of characteristic ways of behaving and thinking that constitute the individual’s unique and distinctive method of adjusting to his environment” (Kagan & Havemann, 1968:422). As psychology is actually related to psychoanalysis in literature, in addition to the characters, the author and the writing process, are also subjected to psychoanalytical approaches. To reveal the relationship between literature and psychology, it is widely held that psychology enriches the power of creation and production process: “For some conscious artists, psychology may have tightened their sense of reality, sharpened their powers of

observation or allowed them to fall into hitherto undiscovered patterns. But, in itself, psychology is only preparatory to the act of creation; and in the work itself, psychological truth is an artistic value only if it enhances coherence and complexity- if in short, it is art” (Wellek & Warren, 1963: 93).

Considering the creation process of the author, it is argued that, “The processes of his creation are the legitimate object of the psychologists’ investigative curiosity. They can classify the poet according to physiological and psychological types; they can describe his mental ills; they may even explore his subconscious mind. The evidence of the psychologist may come from unliterary documents or it may be drawn from the works themselves” (Wellek & Warren, 1963: 90). The artist is undoubtedly an extraordinary person, who recreates, reshapes, revises, rewrites, reorganizes, re-evaluates and re-examines, who is eager to produce to be independent and to achieve immortality. The artist is endowed with considerable qualities that an ordinary person might lack: For Jung, one of the most eminent psychiatrists “... the artist is an especially interesting case for the psychologist who uses an analytical method. The artist’s life cannot be otherwise than full of conflicts, for two forces are at war within him- on the one hand the common human longing for happiness, satisfaction and security in life, and on the other a ruthless passion for creation which may go so far as to override every personal desire” (1990:229-230). On the other hand, “The work in process becomes the poet’s fate and determines his psychic development” (Jung, 1990:230). Jung also claims that “... the personal life of the poet cannot be held essential to his art- but at most a help or hindrance to his creative task. He may go the way of a Philistine, a good citizen, a neurotic, a fool or a criminal. His personal career may be inevitable and interesting, but it does not explain a poet” (1990: 231-232). According to Freud, “the artist ... with his special gifts ... moulds his phantasies into a new kind of reality, and men concede them a justification as valuable reflections of actual life. Thus, by a certain path he actually becomes the hero, king, creator, favourite he desired to be ...” (Wellek & Warren, 1963: 82). Within this frame, “the literary man is a specialist in association (wit), dissociation (judgement), re-combination (making a new whole out of elements separately experienced). He uses words as his medium” (Wellek & Warren, 1963: 89).

Jung in his well-known work titled *Psychology and Literature* states that “It is obvious enough that psychology, being the study of psychic processes, can be brought to bear upon the study of literature, for the human psyche is the womb of all sciences and arts” (1990:217). Jung describes the work of art as the outcome of the artist’s psychic process of creation and postulates that “In the case of the work of art we have to deal with a product of complicated psychic activities ... In the case of the artist we must deal with the psychic apparatus itself. In the first instance we must attempt the psychological analysis of a definitely circumscribed and concrete artistic achievement, while in the second we must analyse the living and creative human being as a unique personality” (1990:217). Jung also argues that the hints related to the authors might be detected from their works: “It is of course possible to draw inferences about the artist from the work of art, and vice versa, but these inferences are never conclusive” (1990:217-218). In spite of their distinctive nature, and specific principles and terms, both psychology and literature benefit from each other in the process of explaining, interpreting, discussing the issues related to male-female relationships, man’s place in the society, his desires, failures, achievements and so on. Jung discusses the relationship between psychology and art by dwelling on their relative principles: “Psychology and the study of art will always have to turn to one another for help, and the one will not invalidate the other ... Both principles are valid in spite of their relativity” (1990:218).

### 1.2. *Literature and the Reading Process*

Theatre, short story, poetry, and novel are regarded as major literary genres, all of which communicate and convey ideas and feelings to man by means of manifold structures, styles and discourses. To illustrate, the novel is a type of fictitious prose writing, which takes its name from the Italian word *novella*. As the word “novel” suggests, it focuses on novelty, in other words, unique experiences. The novel, “is characterized as the fictional attempt to give the effect of realism by representing complex characters with mixed motives who are rooted in a social class, operate in a highly developed social structure, interact with many other characters, and undergo very plausible and everyday modes of experience” (Abrams, 1998:119). Thus, the novel is the most suitable genre to employ a psychological approach to man and existence: “The novels which are most fruitful for the psychologist are those in which the author has not already given a psychological interpretation of his characters, and which therefore leave room for analysis and explanation, or even invite it by their mode of presentation” (Jung, 1990:219).

Through the act of reading, “we find ... a close imitation of man and manners; we see the very web and texture of society as it really exists, and as we meet it when we come into the world. If poetry has ‘something more divine’ in it, this savours more of humanity. We are brought acquainted with the motives and characters of mankind, imbibe our notions of virtue and vice from practical examples, and are taught a knowledge of the world through the airy medium of romance” (Allen, 1976: 14). Since the novel portrays characters, who are “endowed with moral, dispositional and emotional qualities” it definitely operates as a means for the psychological assessment (Abrams, 1998:22).

The reading process of novel or other genres is not merely limited to the comprehension of the plot structure, setting, and the characters, or its linguistic and formal aspects, it also requires an active reading process comprised of psychological, sociological, historical and philosophical approaches which provide the reader with new perspectives. This reading activity involves such mental processes as travelling in the mind of the characters, noticing the choice of words, observing the communal or individual events, making some inferences, evaluating certain emotions, deep fears, miseries, anxieties, finding the invisible behind the visible, discovering the unsaid, the hidden meanings or motives, problems, unconscious desires, wishes or instincts. For the fact that unconsciousness is the storehouse for the repressed or forbidden desires of man, it is useful to quote Lacan who points out that “The unconscious is structured like a language” stating that “both semiotics and psychoanalysis have the potential to dislodge and reorient traditional ways of understanding human experience ...” (Davis & Schleifer, 1998:398). Lacan also calls attention to the contextualisation process: “... a literary text would tend to ‘make sense’ when the author’s ‘actual’ aims can be retrieved and accurately understood. The textual ‘form’ conveying this message takes shape around the manifest representational figures (characters, settings, images deployed in both etc.) that appear more or less empirically in and form the substance of the text” (Davis & Schleifer, 1998:398). The unconscious itself might be studied as a language to find out the autonomy of persons, in other words, characters, by means of some images, signifiers, and relationships amongst the other characters in that psychoanalytical studies also refer to the relationships between parents and children, sexuality, love, certain codes of repressed desires, tensions, dreams, feelings, including real or unreal facts, thus provide multilayered meanings and expressions. As opposed to structural approaches to the texts, reader oriented approaches are essential for the fact that in each reading process, the texts are recreated according to different world views, historical and cultural perceptions, and individual and social value judgments of the reader to reproduce meaning in cognitive and emotional terms. In such a complicated and meaningful process, first of all, the writer and then the reader might be evaluated.

Within this frame, it might be necessary to mention Stanley E. Fish, who in his “Undoing the Case for Reader-Response Analysis” comments on the significance of the reader and the reading process in the act of creating a meaning wherein the reader acts like a psychologist or a psychiatrist: “... the reader’s activities are at the center of attention, ... The meaning ... include[s] the making and revising of assumptions, the rendering and regretting of judgments, the coming to and abandoning of conclusions, the giving and withdrawing of approval, the specifying of causes, the asking of questions, the supplying of answers, the solving of puzzles. In a word, these activities are interpretive...” (Leitch, 2001:2079).

Literature communicates through overt or covert codes which could only be decoded through the readers; this faculty is an indispensable part of the reading process in order to unfold the nature of not only the reader but also the creator: “What is concealed spurs the reader into action, but this action is also controlled by what is revealed; the explicit in its turn is transformed when the implicit has been brought to light. Whenever the reader bridges the gaps, communication begins. The gap functions as a kind of pivot on which the whole text-reader relationship revolves” (Leitch, 2001:1676-7).

By the same token, Wolfgang Iser in his work entitled “Interaction between Text and Reader” puts emphasis on the interaction between the text and the reader: “Central to the reading of every literary work is the interaction between its structure and its recipient. This is why the phenomenological theory of art has emphatically drawn attention to the fact that the study of a literary work should concern not only the actual text but also, and in equal measure, the actions involved in responding to the text. (Leitch, 2001:1673). Thus, it is unequivocal that the reader visualizes and experiences in or through the text: “As the reader passes through the various perspectives offered by the text; and relates the different views and patterns to one another, he sets the work in motion, and so sets himself in motion, too” (Leitch, 2001:1674).

Novels, poems, short stories or plays are believed to teach something about different cultures, lives, experiences, moral beliefs, such social and cultural values as honesty, respect, love, hard work, friendship, patience, justice, kindness, explicitly or implicitly that might be of prime importance for various classes, ethnicities, sexes and so on. Whether the texts welcome those values to teach or take granted or do not challenge the status quo, rejecting the idea of change and innovation, they contain a wide range of varying or multiple moral, social, cultural, religious values, experiences or perspectives, and they stimulate a critical analysis and interpretation for the fact that they include levels of meaning. In fact, it is apparent that literature or a literary text, produced by man and for man, aims at teaching to a certain extent. That is to say, the objective of poetry is to please and instruct, to entertain and teach as is stated by Horace in *Ars Poetica* (Dulce et utile: sweet and useful): “Instruction to convey and give delight, /Or both at once to compass ...” (*Ars Poetica*). In other words, “Poetry is the art of uniting pleasure with truth, by calling imagination to the help of reason” (Johnson, 2006).

### 1.3. Sample Texts in Literature

Clearly it is to be admitted that, lots of themes, notions or feelings have been read, learned, remembered, and analysed through literary works, and several complex terms, unfathomable personalities and ambiguous motives have been associated with characters in literary genres for centuries: For example, the term Bovarism is explained by means of Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary*. Living in a world of dream and fantasy and having adulterous love affairs to escape from her monotonous husband and life, Bovary doesn’t find any outlet other than committing suicide as she has already exceeded the limits designed by the male-dominated society. By the same token, Pip in *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens is known with his ambition and snobbery for the sake of his great expectations at the cost of losing his roots, and his belated maturity. However, Pip learns to accept the barriers between the classes eventually. Dickens has been criticized and accused of presenting so many painful and touching events that would be too tragic to happen in actual life; nevertheless, he refutes such accusations, saying that: “everything he wrote was true that these surprising reversals of fortune, these sudden conversions were not simply the material of fiction. They represented the way of the world. Indeed for him, they were the breath of reality itself” (Ackroyd, 1992: 2). Shakespeare’s Othello is a hero who murders his innocent wife Desdemona due to his delusional jealousy which is also described as Othello syndrome in psychology. Othello’s dreams, the language he uses, and his unconscious mind, the balance or unbalance between his ego, super ego and id could be evaluated to unveil the mystery behind his murder. The tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet* is a symbol of hopeless romances. *Hamlet* is one of Shakespeare’s tragedies, adapted into screen and stage for several times. The very famous phrase in Hamlet’s soliloquy, “To be or not to be? That’s the question” (Act III Scene I) is a contemplation on existence and revenge. Herman Melville’s protagonist Captain Ahab, who has Biblical connotations as well, is one of the most perplexing fictional characters, who is obsessed with his nonsensical and intense desire to take revenge on Moby Dick at the cost of his life.

*A Rose for Emily* by William Faulkner exemplifies the theme of life in death: Loneliness and social pressure, including her father’s, turn Emily into a lunatic. She is persuaded to give back the corpse of her father; however, she has lived with her beloved, (his corpse) whom she poisoned, for forty years: “A thin, acid pall as of the tomb seemed to lie everywhere upon this room decked and furnished as for a bridal...The man himself lay in the bed” (Ch.5). Samuel Richardson’s Pamela is known with her ability to assert her autonomy in a patriarchal society that denies women’s equality: “...my soul is of equal importance with the soul of a princess” (97). Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*, opens with the following ironical statement: “It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife” (Ch.1: 5). The female protagonist Elizabeth agrees to marry the man she loves after she has overcome her pride and announced her equality: “In marrying your nephew I should not consider myself as quitting that sphere. He is a gentleman; I am a gentleman’s daughter: so far we are equal” (Ch. 56: 274). Jane Eyre begins as an orphan but ends up as an emotionally fulfilled person in her quest to find the real love: “I am my husband’s life as fully as he is mine...we are precisely suited in character...perfect concord is the result” (Ch. 38: 445). By the same token, Lucy Snowe in Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette* is silent and invisible; however, she struggles hard not to lose her autonomy and she becomes visible at the end of her story, achieving financial and emotional security: “M.Emanuel was away three years. Reader, they were the three happiest years of my life” (504-5) Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s narrator in *The Yellow WallPaper*, who is depicted as a miserable female victim in the institution of marriage, living in enclosure and confinement, does not find any outlet and goes insane. *The Bell Jar*,

the semi-autographical novel by Sylvia Plath, who suffers from depression and finally commits suicide, focuses on the protagonist Esther Greenwood who attempts to suicide several times. Maggie is unfairly described as an outcast in *The Mill on the Floss* by George Eliot. Though she is a victim of misogynistic male characters including her brother Tom, she never gives up loving him: “In the death they were not divided” (468).

Thomas Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure* explores the theme of marriage, focusing on tragic circumstances, and the characters’ efforts, ending in failure, and death. Hardy’s another unforgettable character Tess is found guilty although she is the most innocent character in the novel. She kills the man, who ruins her life, by stabbing him with a knife, which might be described as an act of rape. Robinson Crusoe, who is the symbol of an individual capitalistic power, is able to establish his own kingdom on an island. T. S. Eliot in *Four Quartets* (V *Little Gidding*) refers to the cyclical nature of life: “What we call the beginning is often the end/And to make an end is to make a beginning. The end is where we start from.” Wordsworth in “My Heart Leaps up” exposes the basic paradox in human life: “The Child is father of the Man.” Coleridge puts emphasis on the theme of committing a sin against nature and its curse on human beings in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. Shelley discusses the consequences and futility of the tyrannical power in his poem titled “Ozymandias.” Similar examples could be multiplied. All these circumstances, symbols, images, communal or individual troubles, fears, failures and achievements might be examined in psychological terms.

## 2. Conclusion

In the light of the above mentioned examples, it could be said that, “Human nature has long been a matter of curiosity and great interest. People have always wanted to be able to understand and predict the behaviour of others” by including the verisimilitude and the fantastic; the real and the imaginary, common and exotic aspects (Sollod et al. 2009: ix). Although the methods may vary, human nature had been and will always be an authentic and invaluable study for professionals, philosophers, artists and authors, celebrating the human nature as an indecipherable tangle. Literature is one of the most fundamental means to understand human nature. Works of literature serve as the tangible instruments of cultural and aesthetic heritage to be studied as the sources of man’s creative process. Literature teaches a diversity of themes and notions about feelings, reactions, tensions, anxieties, motives, desires and numerous occasions, related to man and existence. Clearly it is to be admitted that the interdisciplinary structure of literature cannot be disregarded for the fact that literature is not devoid of a cultural, psychological and philosophical context in terms of its relationships with human beings in all aspects. Psychology, which makes use of even the ancient literary works as samples to provide multi-faceted analyses, concerning the human mind and spirit, is one of the major disciplines that literature is closely related to. Obviously, literature is quite rich as a source of human mind and soul which are the principal materials in the field of psychology and psychiatry. That is to say, literature is the store of experiences and individual realities, basically the human psyche, idiosyncrasies, emotions and feelings. Consequently, both literature and psychology are preoccupied with similar issues and both may barrow from each other to offer multiple interpretations and perspectives. It can be detected; then, the common feature of psychology and literature is each discipline’s capacity to employ different methods and approaches to analyse human nature and existence.

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