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Introduction

- The transfer, playful or not, of a character from one text to another can be observed in a variety of texts such as rewritings that change elements of the diegesis to reach a different conclusion or in companion novels (or coquels) that take the reader and some characters for a step aside and develop a new element. Character migration is also a feature of the sequel, a genre that is far from new¹ but which enjoyed a remarkable revival in its allographic form in the 1990s, novels by Jane Austen and the Brontës being among the favourites for follow-ups. ² Indeed, texts that are adapted, reworked or continued generally belong to the canon (Sanders 98) and it is often through their characters that texts are remembered. Characters thus constitute some of the main ingredients in sequel-writing. Daphne du Maurier's characters in *Rebecca* (1938) still have a hold on readers' imagination, with the formidable and haunting eponymous figure threatening the new couple and, through the agency of Mrs Danvers, the life of the second Mrs de Winter. This paper will examine the afterlives given to these strong characters in *Mrs de Winter* (1993), Susan Hill's sequel to *Rebecca*, as an instance of character migration.
- Hill was commissioned by the du Maurier estate to write this sequel. A prolific writer, Hill had at the time published over twenty titles, among which the successful *The Woman in Black* (1983). She had won the Whitbread Award for *The Bird of Night* (1972) and was considered as a literary writer. Looking back on Susan Hill's career ten years after the publication of *Mrs de Winter*, a reviewer wrote:

Mrs de Winter was commercially one of her most successful books, but critically one of her most derided. Geraldine Brennan in the Observer wrote: 'Why write it?' Stripped of their romance, the De Winters are not worth crossing the street to catch up with (Freeman).

- These comments point to several interesting elements that will be touched upon in the course of this paper: the possibility that the sequel effect ensured popularity if not critical acclaim to Hill's novel;³ the importance of characters for the reader and for the sequel; the fact that *Rebecca* is commonly considered merely as a romance and finally, the fact that Hill chose not to go down this (easy) road.
- 4 Before examining how and to what effects Susan Hill contrives afterlives for *Rebecca*'s characters in *Mrs de Winter*, Richard Saint-Gelais's concept of transfictionality whose focus is the consequences of diegetical transfers (12) will allow us to contextualise character migration and sequels.

1. Transfictionality and character migration in sequels

- Transfictionality explores the phenomenon by which two texts (in the large sense of the word) relate to the same fiction. In most cases, the fictional elements which are transferred are characters, with the understanding that the characters must be identical in both works.
- Saint-Gelais explains that transfictionality is not to be confused with hypertextuality. Hypertextuality is about imitation and transformation whereas transfictionality is about the migration of diegetical elements, among which the characters who must be the same and not a mere reference. So, for instance, Jack Maggs (1997), Peter Carey's novel which rewrites under a different name the character and the life of Magwitch, the convict and Pip's real benefactor in Great Expectations, falls into the category of hypertextuality but not of transfictionality. The same is true of du Maurier's Rebecca even if its plot is close to that of Jane Eyre's as the characters are not identical. On the other hand, Emma Tennant's Adèle, Jane Eyre's Hidden Story (2002) and Jean Rhys's Wide Sargasso Sea (1966) are instances of transfictionality as each picks up an identifiable character from Jane Eyre.
- Transfictionality heightens the referential illusion (Saint-Gelais 14): in a transfiction, nothing must endanger the fictional world in which the characters evolve because acknowledging fiction as such would set up a barrier between the world of fiction and the "real" (Daunais 350). For Saint-Gelais, transfictionality is thus distinct from parody which sets up a critical distance (55). D.M. Thomas's *Charlotte* (2000) is therefore excluded: it begins with a new ending to *Jane Eyre* and purports to tell the life of the newly-married Jane and Rochester but this fictional universe is challenged when it is later acknowledged as the invention of another character.
- Focusing on the characters, Isabelle Daunais wonders about the qualities and characteristics of transfictional characters. She posits first that only main characters migrate because it is the fact that they are memorable that makes them eligible for migration. This is in keeping with Umberto Eco's idea that characters with fixed characteristics reach out of their fiction because "we have made emotional investments in them" and "we choose them as role-models" (10). But this restrictive view needs to be put in perspective as there have been expansions of secondary characters in contemporary English-language fiction. Challenging master narratives, postmodernism

has led fiction to dwell on forgotten or suppressed voices. Apart from the already mentioned *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Adèle*, recent examples include Jo Baker's *Longbourn* (2014) where the focus in on the Bennets' servants, and Ronald Frame's *Havisham* (2012) which takes up the story of Dickens's eternal bride in *Great Expections*. Daunais, however, makes a suggestion that is valid of all: for characters to migrate, it must be possible to revitalise them—even though they were brought to full development in the hypotext—to give them a new lease of life (359). This, however, must be done without losing the essence and coherence of the original character.

The same process is, in fact, at work in sequels, which imply the migration of characters and are, for Saint-Gelais, the most obvious case of transfictionality, expanding an existing novel on the temporal level. ⁷ Sequels, as opposed to unfinished novels, re-open a narrative that had already reached an ending. They reactivate the reader's interest by infusing new dynamics into a narrative. Catherine Belsey's words apply here:

The only way to sustain the reader's desire would be to continue the narrative, and this in turn would be to tear the lovers apart again, to reintroduce the *absences* which are the necessary condition of desire, or the impediments on which narrative depends (Belsey 39, italics mine).

The common denominator of character migrations and sequels is these blanks or "absences". Apart from the possible open-endedness of a novel, fictional worlds can be considered as fundamentally incomplete because they cannot possibly give every single detail about a given character⁸. Therefore, there is always a blank or an absence waiting to be filled by an interpretation in a sequel—or in a companion novel (or coquel).

Sequels tend to be considered as quite lame, possibly because they are tied down to an original text and diegesis. If they technically do go "beyond the ending", it could be argued that this does not necessarily have the challenging or constructive dimension that Rachel Blau duPlessis implies, i.e. "express critical dissent from dominant narrative" (5). 9 Indeed, as far as Chantal Zabus is concerned, "sequels fail to dismantle narrative authority and priorities in the circulation of knowledge" (205). There are very few approaches to the sequel that do not consider it as conservative. In her study of film sequels, Carolyn Jess-Cooke's aim is to "consider the sequel as a trope of repetition, difference, continuation and memory" (3). Opposing sequels to seriality and series, Jess-Cooke sees the first as the agent of change: "the sequel champions difference, progress and excess" (5). Temporal progress indeed implies change in the characters. Before examining sequels to the Brontës' novels, Patsy Stoneman, too, acknowledges the theoretically progressive dimension of sequels: "sequels in themselves imply a revisionist intention" (240). It is true that, because the addition of new adventures denies the original ending its status, because the "the terminal quiescence of the end" (Brooks 103) originally reached by the characters is turned into a mere episode, so that a new conclusion is offered with the characters reaching a subsequent stage, the sequel, by definition, implies alterations.

Overall, it seems that sequels, through character migration, constitute a potential, if not always actual, locus of revision.

2. Characters migrating to *Mrs de Winter*: filling in absences or bloating the already there?

The reason to write a sequel, apart from the usual assumption of financial benefit (Genette 340, Jess-Cooke 1, Lynch 161) is to complete a tale that seems unfinished, to achieve closure where loose ends were left untied. Such a need is, however, not striking with du Maurier's novel which has, in fact, two endings. ¹⁰ Rebecca formally closes with Manderley in flames as an echo to Jane Eyre: "This closure signifies liberation from constraint, finally getting away from Bluebeard's castle, and, of course, liberation from the uncanny power of the Other Woman." (Bertrandias). Yet, what happened after this, and reads like an epilogue as it depicts the after-Manderley life of the de Winters, is displaced in the very opening of the novel with the famous incipit: "Last night I dreamt I went to Manderley again" (1); The heroine's dream, which marks the beginning of her narrative, years after the events took place, suggests that "Rebecca is not dead and vanished, but lives on now as a disruptive force in the narrator's soul" (Bertrandias). This is the thread followed by Susan Hill in her sequel.

In *Rebecca*, despite the narrator's professions of happiness, there are cracks in the couple's post-Manderley harmony during their exile (6).¹¹ For instance, the narrator contradicts herself, insisting, for instance, on the unity of the couple and the absence of secrets, while laying the stress on the unsaid,¹² and on the fact that their drama is over: "Well, it's over now, finished and done with" (8) nevertheless coming after

We have conquered ours [our devil], or so we believe.

The devil does not ride us any more. We have come through our crisis, not unscathed of course." (5-6, my italics)¹³

Hill ensconces herself in these cracks to re-open du Maurier's novel. Mrs de Winter introduces the same narrator with the same contradictions, such as "There had been no secrets. Yet the past still held secrets" (6-7).

Susan Hill picks up Rebecca's story and characters twelve years later than where du Maurier left them, with the de Winters still in exile after the avowal of Rebecca's murder and the burning down of Manderley. We are now in the mid-1940s, just after the war. From the outset, Hill gives herself little leeway for alterations. Firstly, she chooses to retain the same narrator as the one du Maurier created, which implies that in order to respect coherence the style must be the same and therefore suggests that the sequel is also a pastiche as "homage" (Genette 98). Secondly, Rebecca's narrator does not migrate on her own. As pointed out by Aranda, when characters migrate to a new text, they necessarily take some of their background with them (255). A sequel takes up the whole story and, unless the character has moved away (as if a sequel had been given to Mr Micawber's adventures once he was in Australia), it consequently invites the return of more than one character. This is particularly true in the case of Rebecca where the nameless narrator's story is intertwined with that of her new husband and his first wife. However, Hill chooses to retrieve every single one of du Maurier's characters. Hill thus increases the number of fictional elements that must migrate from Rebecca to her own novel, thus leaving very little room for novelty.15

17 A difficulty inherent to sequels is that they must deal with the necessity of establishing continuity and introducing difference. In *Mrs de Winter* the difference comes from the protagonist, whose perception has changed. She is now perturbed by an element that was

settled in *Rebecca:* whereas du Maurier's narrator condoned Maxim's murder (which was explained away as Rebecca's ultimate manipulation), Hill's narrator now considers her husband a murderer.

Hill's sequel does not invite fresh interpretations nor throw a new light on Rebecca. In du Maurier's novel, Rebecca remains fundamentally inaccessible and enigmatic. The narrator pieces together her own fantastic vision of the first Mrs de Winter through her interpretations of what is said and left unsaid about her in the narratives of Mrs Van Hopper, Mrs Danvers, Jack Favell, Franck and eventually Maxim. Yet, Maxim's confession towards the end of du Maurier's novel offers a finalising portrait, in the sense that it tranquilises the narrator's jealousy: the perfect woman imagined by the narrator was, actually, evil, and Maxim did not love her. The character of Rebecca migrates to Mrs de Winter in all its obsessive absence for the narrator who feels the same attraction/repulsion as of old. The title of the novel, which could apply to either of them, foregrounds the two characters' common point and interdependence.

But the blanks or absences left by du Maurier remain unfilled and Hill seems to deliberately deflect the reader's expectations. For instance, the narrator is told that Rebecca was a "most beautiful creature" (134) but she never sees any image of her. In Hill's novel, the narrator comes across a picture of Rebecca in a pre-war magazine. This picture causes much dismay to the narrator and to de Winter-"the shock was indescribable" (145). Yet, as the narrator herself says, even though there had been no photographs, "Everyone had talked about her, everyone had described her. I had known what she looked like in every detail [...]"(146). The picture does not add or change anything but only brings confirmation of what the narrator and the reader already know, frustrating the reader's hope to learn anything new and defeating the apparent purpose of the sequel.

In the same way, Hill does not offer to solve the mystery of the narrator's "lovely and unusual name" (du Maurier 24), a mystery that puzzled *Rebecca*'s readers and prompted them to write to the author (Taylor 77). Whereas appropriations highlight troubling gaps in a narrative (Sanders 98), gaps that are used to challenge the original, Hill's sequel plays on the same gaps as du Maurier's novel and leaves them untouched, enhancing the overall impression of repetition and subordination to the original text.

3. When going beyond means going backwards: a novel of regression

If there are limits to what a sequel can do, caught as it is by the necessary identity of the migrating characters, changes are not completely excluded. Indeed, based as they are on human beings, transfictional characters can evolve¹⁶ and this may constitute the attraction of a sequel.

When *Rebecca*'s characters are reintroduced, they are all easily recognizable as the narrative insists on their main characteristics as previously set by du Maurier. In fact, the passing of time is noticeable only insofar as the characters bear its physical marks and their social positions have developed. Colonel Julyan (now retired), Franck Crawley (Max de Winter's agent now married and managing an estate in Scotland), Jack Favell is (as seedy as ever and the worse for wear from drinking), Mrs Danvers, even Mrs Van Hopper, now merely looking greyer and older. They are suffused with the same distinctive

characteristics as in *Rebecca*. Giles and Beatrice's son, merely mentioned in du Maurier's novel, reappears as a brave veteran from the Second World War, thus anchoring the plot in post-war Britain. There is one new character, Bunty, who appears in the last part of the novel. Onomastics (an analysis of the origin of this diminutive) confirms that she reincarnates the character of Maxim's sister, Beatrice. As suggested by the paronym "bunty/bounty" the character is marked by its benevolence like Beatrice whose name's etymology evokes happiness. With this character's appearance in the last part of the novel when Beatrice disappeared in the first one, a sort of circularity is set up, suggesting that the story is not moving forward.

The paradox is that, whereas a sequel purposefully aims at continuing the story and therefore at moving forward in time, Mrs de Winter mostly seems to be stuck in du Maurier's tracks.¹⁷ Not only does it return to the past by picking up already existing characters but it takes these characters back to what they were before they developed in the original novel: on their return to England, the protagonists in Mrs de Winter revert to their old selves before the plot of Rebecca unfolded. In Hill's novel, Maxim de Winter is again a figure haunted by his past, afraid of returning to England. Hill brings him back to the same state he was in in Monte Carlo when first meeting the narrator in Rebecca. Whereas the passing of time inherent to a sequel implies a certain amount of change brought about by maturity, Mrs de Winter seems to pick up the characteristics of the narrator when very young, as if disregarding the development enacted in Du Maurier's novel. As before, the narrator is still "weaving [her] old fantasies [...] an old habit [...]" (73). The narrator, who, by the end of Rebecca, had become more assertive once assured she had no reason to be jealous of her husband's love for his first wife, behaves again like a child and seems utterly deprived of self-confidence: "I felt myself reverting again to my old, inferior, child-like role" (92). Referring to the ball at Manderley when she wore the same dress as Rebecca, she says she carries her own shameful memories which the reader expects her to have grown out of by the end of du Maurier's novel.

Rather than going "beyond the ending", it seems that Hill's transfiction ignores it: *Rebecca* 's characters migrate with their characteristics prior to the ending set by du Maurier: the state reached by the character at the end of the original story is ignored. This does not mean that the original development is denied so that a different one can be introduced, as the characters hardly develop. Hill does not add anything to the characters that would mean changing them. She only reinforces what we already knew and, in an odd way, she makes them regress rather than move on.

The constant summarizing and countless allusions to what happened before in *Rebecca* may be a characteristic of sequels. ¹⁹ It certainly sounds repetitive and redundant (as it may be assumed that few readers would read a sequel without having read the hypotext) confirming views (such as Chantal Zabus's, mentioned above) that, like a parasite, the sequel only lives off the original text. Yet, in *Mrs de Winter*, the narrator's constant references to past events may also read as an indication of the character's stultified state. She introduces herself as a middle-aged women (when she must be in her 30s) and the prospect of having children seems to be receding as she dreams about them. The lack of progress, which the reader may resent, is the one the narrator experiences.

A significant redistribution of qualities or roles can however be noticed: the narrator behaves in the same effacing and embarrassed manner with the hotel staff and with DeWinter as she had with Mrs Van Hopper. Besides the regressive dimension, this suggests a troubling equation between these two characters. The narrator seems indeed

to be holding the functions of companion (reading aloud), maid (packing and dealing with all the menial details) and nurse (reassuring presence) to her husband, in the same way as she did with Mrs Van Hopper, which suggests that the de Winters have a companionate but possibly sexless marriage, and that being a wife is like being a paid companion –which is the most feminist statement that can be extracted from Hill's novel [...] Indeed, if, in postmodern fiction, retrieving a character is often the occasion to empower this character, it is not so in Hill's novel. The narrator created by du Maurier already had a voice but Hill does not give her a name other than that of her husband, stressing her existence as a mere "relative creature", the fact she exists only in relation to him. Hill does not particularly empower the narrator, only allowing her moments of rebellion at being treated like a child (when this is supposed to have come to an end at the close of du Maurier's novel), thus spelling out DeWinter's patronising attitude. In Taylor's words,

What is puzzling about this sequel is that, given the decisive closure Hill provides [...], it denies us the vengeance the reader yearns to come from the repressed, innocent narrator herself. Though expressing doubts and a rising rage about her husband [...] she is never allowed active intervention in his fate. He still makes all the crucial decisions, and her character never develops (Taylor 82).

Hill operates a reversal insofar as the narrator now is the one with secrets, the one who keeps information away from Maxim but hiding her encounters with Favell and Mrs Danvers hardly empowers her. Michèle Théry rightly suggests that the narrator is the (unwitting) agent of Maxim's death acting as "the instrument of Rebecca's vengeance" (23).

"We can never go back. That much is certain", the narrator declares in the opening lines of the second chapter of *Rebecca* (5). The underlying regret becomes more apparent in *Mrs de Winter* whose heroine depicts England as a lost paradise to be recovered and whose desire for it overrides the original certainty. Hill shows that Du Maurier's narrator was right and the attempted return, albeit in a markedly different corner of England (Cobbett's Brake is said to be as different from Manderley as can be), results in Maxim's suicide. Maxim's death is the main novelty in Hill's transfiction and, according to Taylor, it brings "satisfying closure" (81). It definitely provides the moral conclusion that was denied by du Maurier, whose hero's only punishment was the burning down of the family property and exile. With Maxim's death, there is no final reconciliation, no re-enactment of the romance that was an element of the popularity of *Rebecca*. Rather than play on this appealing and facile dimension of the novel, Hill chooses to dwell on existing darker aspects.

Mrs de Winter ends on a similar image as Rebecca. Whereas Manderley's ashes originally blew towards the couple, Maxim de Winter's ashes are now lifted away from the narrator, suggesting her ultimate separation and freedom from her husband's paternalistic grip. Yet, the overall similarity and use of the same concluding clause ("with the salt wind from the sea"), which may read as Hill's respectful homage to du Maurier, also confirms the lack of progression from one novel to the next.

Conclusion

"(A)daptation and appropriation tend on the whole to operate within the parameters of an established canon, serving indeed at times to reinforce that canon by ensuring a continued interest in the original or source text, albeit in revised circumstances of understanding"

(Sanders 97-98, my italics). Transfictions of all kinds may indeed have contributed to establishing the novel's status as masterpiece (Taylor 76). In Helen Taylor's words,

Rebecca has achieved the status of 'masterpiece' or classic text largely because of the cumulative impact of acclaimed film version, stage and opera version, critical, commercial, tourist office and biographical attention, and sequel publication (76-77).²¹

31 Both Sanders and Taylor suggest that the effect of transfiction works both ways: if a sequel draws on an established work, it also contributes to enhancing its status. In the same manner, as demonstrated by studies in transfictionality and on sequels, if the characters in a sequel build on the reader's memory of a work, they also add to and transform the memory of the original text (see Daunais and Jess-Cooke). *Mrs de Winter* hardly does this. ²² In her sequel, Hill does not contradict in any way what du Maurier established (Rebecca is evil and Mrs Danvers, like Favell, prey on the de Winters) but she inflates and bloats what was already there. *Mrs de Winter* seems closer to Taylor's assessment of the sequel as "a conservative genre" than to Jess-Cooke's notion of a progressive one. Hill increases the limits within which she has to work by adopting and migrating nearly all the characters created in *Rebecca*. Besides, not only does she negate the ending du Maurier devised for her characters, but she also negates the development the characters undergo within the pages of *Rebecca*. More than conservative, Hill's novel appears to be regressive, and this, undeniably, makes it an original type of sequel.

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NOTES

- 1. After *The Illiad* and *the Odyssey, Don Quixote.* Hillis Miller gives Anthony Trolloppe's and Elisabeth Gaskell's texts ("The cage at Cranford") as examples for the nineteenth century. However, these are all autographic sequels.
- **2.** See Stoneman (238-9) and her subpart "The Sequels syndrome" (234-252) and Lynch (160). Recently, the Austen Project has sollicited contemporary novelists to update Austen's characters and plots to the modern world. The first in the series was *Sense and Sensibility* by Joanna Trolloppe in 2013.
- **3.** Mrs de Winter was reprinted twice in 1994 and again in 1996. For examples of contemporary reviews see Brayfield and Walter.

- **4.** "L'hypertextualité est une relation d'imitation et de transformation entre textes; la transfictionnalité, une relation de migration (avec la modification qui en résulte immanquablement) de données diégétiques" (10-11).
- **5.** In an essay from 1990 about Brontë's novel, Angela Carter famously claimed that *Rebecca* "shamelessly reduplicated the plot of *Jane Eyre*" (qtd in Munford 68).
- **6.** This novel was later published under different titles: Thornfield Hall and The French Dancer's Bastard.
- 7. "proposer une expansion d'une fiction préalable, à travers une transfiction qui la prolonge sur le plan temporel ou, plus largement, diégétique" (71).
- 8. Saint-Gelais sums up the situation (49-53).
- 9. See Stoneman 240.
- **10.** Both scholars and reviewers seem to agree on the fact that the story is closed. See Jagose and Walter.
- 11. In Helen Taylor's words, "it ends not with conjugal bliss but middle-aged resignation and exile" (78) and du Maurier herself thought the ending "too grim' to appeal to readers" (Beauman 48).
- **12.** "We have no secrets now from one another" (6) is shortly followed by "[...] keep the things that hurt to myself alone. They can be my secret indulgence" (7).
- **13.** None of this appears in Hitchcock's *Rebecca* that only keeps the dream and the incipit as a starting-point: only one ending, the couple is reunited while the house burns down (last shot on a pillow marked with R).
- **14.** This is the same type of mixed happy ending that perturbed readers of *Jane Eyre* (See Taylor 78).
- 15. See Aranda 259.
- 16. "A la différence des sites, événements ou artefacts, dont l'inertie est très supérieure, le personnage a une faculté d'évolution qui explique son statut récurrent privilégié. Il peut se mouvoir dans l'espace et surtout évoluer dans le temps, physiquement, psychologiquement, socialement, ou encore ne pas se renouveler et conserver une physionomie psycho-rigide, le tout en gardant une même identité." (Aranda 256).
- 17. Direct quotes or references to key episodes from *Rebecca* abound: deWinter first inviting the narrator to sit at his table, the traumatic Manderley ball, the night of the fire, the postcard from Manderley etc.
- **18.** Jagose laments *Mrs de Winter*'s removal of the homosexual subtext: "a conservative attempt [...] to prioritize heterosexuality -particularly the heterosexual couple- over other sexual formations" (endnote 44, 185).
- 19. Emma Tennant certainly does the same in Pemberley, for instance.
- **20.** I am indebted here to the title of Françoise Basch's study of female characters in Victorian novels: *Relative Creatures* (1974).
- **21.** A remake of Alfred Hitchcock's 1940 *Rebecca* is currently in the making by Dreamworks and Working Title Films and there are regularly TV adaptations (see bibliography).
- **22.** Annamarie Jagose makes a negative criticism of Hill's sequel, which according to her, changes the initial message.

ABSTRACTS

Character migration is a major feature of the sequel, a genre that is far from new but that enjoyed a remarkable revival in allographic form in the 1990s. Daphne du Maurier's characters in *Rebecca* (1938) still have a hold on readers' imagination, with the eponymous formidable haunting figure threatening the new couple. Using Richard Saint-Gelais's concept of transfictionality, this paper will examine how and to what effects Susan Hill contrives afterlives for *Rebecca*'s characters in *Mrs de Winter* (1993), her sequel to *Rebecca*, as an instance of character migration.

Cet article s'intéresse à la migration des personnages dans les suites de roman, genre qui a connu un renouveau sous une forme allographe dans les années 1990, dont elle constitue une caractéristique majeure. En s'appuyant sur le concept de transfictionalité développé par Richard Saint-Gelais, cette étude examine *Mrs de Winter*, la suite proposée par Susan Hill en 1993 à *Rebecca* de Daphne du Maurier.

INDFX

Mots-clés: Susan Hill, Mrs de Winter, Daphné du Maurier, Rebecca, suite, transfictionnalité **Keywords**: sequel, transfictionality

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