

The Devil Child: Demonic Possession and Witchcraft in the Horror Films

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Abstract

The Gothic novel's rise in popularity during the eighteenth century led to the emergence of the horror genre. Gothic literature and media can be considered a means of confronting the darker aspects of human nature. The paranormal, fear, and themes of death are all present in Gothic literature. The conflict between faith and science in the movie is often compared to the struggle for understanding these two dimensions of the human mind. The psychological complexity of possession is the focus of 'The Exorcism of Emily Rose', and 'The Exorcist' which offers a perceptive exploration of this complex phenomenon and emphasizes the importance of discussing and integrating repressed emotions and trauma. 'The Sixth Sense and IT Chapters 1 and 2' provide insightful analyses of Freudian psychological concepts, emphasizing the importance of discussing and processing one's past traumatic experiences and therapy's role in helping people recover and advance psychologically.

These films offer enlightening perspectives on the psychological complexity of individuals and how trauma can be conquered to lead happier, healthier lives. The films mentioned above demonstrate that cinema can comprehensively explore complex psychological concepts, including demonic possession, witchcraft, and the fear of death. These films examine the suppressed regions of the human mind through Freudian analysis, and they employ magical techniques to confront and expose these imperfections. In the end, these

movies are powerful gauges of our phobias and fears; they give us insight into the complexity of human mind-nature interaction with the external world.

Keywords- Trauma, Gothic, Demonic, Complexity, Traumatic.

INTRODUCTION

Modern horror did originate with the rise of the Gothic novel in the eighteenth century, but the genre was truly born in the early twentieth century with the release of classic movies like *Nosferatu* (1922) and *Dracula* (1931). The horror genre has experienced significant changes in recent years, but its popularity and quality have remained steady.

According to film historian David Roche, a new generation of filmmakers is resurrecting the horror genre by creating thought-provoking films that challenge traditional norms and create a new wave of audiences. It is believed that the Gothic novel was responsible for the development of the horror genre, which has undergone a significant change over time and experienced a resurgence in popularity and high quality in the twenty-first century. As long as society struggles with fear and anxiety, the horror genre is likely to remain important and relevant. (Roche 201)

The idea of a ghost has long been popularly linked with the themes of terror and horror in literature. Darkness, fear, and the unknown are common themes in the artwork of ghosts, monsters (especially human beings), and vampires that can both frighten and disturb readers.

Psychoanalysis' detractors frequently interpret the Gothic genre in terms of

repressed desires and irrational fear. According to this interpretation, Gothic signifies the return of repressed aspects to the conscious mind when restraints on the ego cannot keep the psychic energy in check within the subconscious. Therefore, Gothic literature and media can be viewed as a way to investigate and confront darker aspects of the human psyche.

In the Gothic subgenre, ghosts can signify things like staying in the afterlife, expressing guilt and trauma, or entering the present through paranormal means. The ghost theme, frequently used in literature and pop culture, serves as a reminder of human nature's mysterious and sometimes alarming aspects. The Gothic literary style can include themes such as death, mourning, loss, and the demarcation or separation of life and death. By focusing on these themes, gothic literature, and media can help us understand how the suppressed can come back to life and how we might deal with these inner demons.

In the 18th century, gothic art may have signaled a return to the sacred and transcendent, or even an outcry of imagination against reason in the midst of advancing modernity and secularism that rejects supernatural powers. On average, the Gothic is linked to reclaiming the obstinate neoclassical ideal of order and unity as it sought to recapture the

boundless primordial and barbaric creative freedom. Ghost and horror fiction, as well as films, are still influenced by Gothic literature. One of the challenges of considering the Gothic a genre that is inherently dark and nebulous is its failure to be abstracted from the literary forms it emerges from or those that follow it after its extinction. Thus, the creation of the gothic style indicates an imaginative viewpoint, and the process of creating the gothic style from a collection of parts is frequently reversed in Gothic criticism. There are times when the gothic genre seems more like a collection of framed conventions, still images of people or landscapes displaying intense emotion, and copies of these images.

Although the folklore surrounding demonic possession varies greatly among cultures, many of them consider the phenomenon to be a way for evil spirits, ghosts, or ancestors to contact the living. According to Rudin, who discusses possession in his book, possession can serve as a site of resistance against long-standing cultural norms: "Possession offers individuals the possibility of expressing what is often deeply repressed selves and desires" (Rudin 149).

In some cultures, being in possession is seen as a penalty for crimes or curses. According to some societies, possession is regarded as a curse, brought on by a supernatural agency and visited upon a person or family. The belief holds that individuals possess more than just

themselves and that those who take action may be held accountable for their actions.

Certain societies consider possession to be an ongoing condition that necessitates constant care and treatment. For instance, in traditional African belief systems, possession is viewed as a chronic condition that necessitates the help of healers and middlemen. According to Ogunyemi, the practice of possession cults. Joining one of these cults requires a long-term commitment because they are not episodic and have a significant impact on the community's spiritual life (Ogunyemi 145).

Folklore beliefs about demonic possession can be seen as retribution, a chronic illness, a channel for ancestors or ghosts, or a means of achieving spiritual transcendence, and they vary greatly across cultures. While some cultures view possession as a problem that requires ongoing care, others place a higher priority on ritual practices as a means of managing and treating possession.

Even Christian children frequently experience severe demonic possession without their parents even being aware of it. I also discovered that children under the influence of demons are even more fantastic and stubborn than adults. Parents may become overwhelmed and silent when they see their kids acting out demons while giving birth. Even today, many societies still believe that unusual behavior that might indicate mental health problems is

the result of spirit possession, especially in less developed parts of the world where such beliefs are the most important aspects of the culture. It's interesting to note that theories about spirit possession do not fully account for the effects of psychopathology-related experiences.

A Christmas Carol, *Casper the Friendly Ghost*, and *Ghostbusters* are examples of movies where the ghost is amicable, but *The Amityville Horror*, *The Sixth Sense*, and *Poltergeist* are examples of movies where the ghost is malevolent. Ghosts are used to represent the 'soul or spirit of a deceased person' that can appear in the physical world. Ghosts can take many different forms and have different levels of visibility and realism. Around Halloween was the best time to watch ghost movies, listen to ghost stories, and talk about ghosts. Popular culture is filled with a variety of notable ghost characters.

It is a fact that evil exists within the Catholic Church, and they are actively engaged in fighting against it. The Catholic Church's catechism portrays human history as "the chronicle of a long battle against the powers of darkness", but it places special emphasis on the need for individuals to uphold moral ideals amid this conflict (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 409–412).

Emotional, spiritual, and religious factors are linked to an increased susceptibility to paranormal experiences such as ghosts and spirits. Irwin states that "Belief in the

paranormal has been associated with a range of personality characteristics or psychological variables, particularly mystical experiences, anxiety, and suggestibility" (Irwin 15).

Children's fascination with ghosts and spirits is largely due to their innocence and curiosity about death and the afterlife. According to Thompson, young children are often fascinated by the idea of ghosts and spirits. The notion that "there is something out there beyond the limits" particularly appeals to them in life in general" (Thompson 60).

Paranormal beliefs are often associated with emotions, spirituality, and religion. Despite the Catholic Church's recognition of the existence of evil and its ongoing battle, children are often subjected to the idea of ghosts and spirits due to their innocence and natural curiosity about what happens after death.

The depiction of horror films highlights the conflict between good and evil with their children. Their interactions with evil forces highlight the loss of innocence that may be felt by viewers. Horror movies, according to Clover, "expand precisely those qualities that make children so gratifying—their vulnerability, naivete, and innate goodness" (Clover 11).

The portrayal of children committing terrible crimes in horror films can be particularly disturbing, as it raises questions about their innocence. According to Konantz "A child behaving

violently or evilly is a direct affront to the viewer's perception of morality, which depends on the presumption that children are inherently innocent and good". (Konantz 170).

The symbolism of purity and innocence is often associated with young girls. A girl child is a representation of innocence, hope, vulnerability, or salvation, according to Hoogland (Hoogland 215). In horror films, this symbolism adds to the horror of violence committed by a female child, even though it is commonly believed that she is inherently good because of her fragile and innocent nature. According to the paranormal group, children and babies are more prone to being considered paramilitary due to their developing mental faculties, while mature individuals become disillusioned with popular culture and develop different perspectives on events, people, and experiences. It is common for children to see ghosts, and there is no need to worry about it as their undeveloped eyes do not frighten them. Both infants and children experience it as either normal or unusual. They might occasionally have frightened or frightful experiences. A child might invite demonic possession knowingly or unknowingly, which would lead to possession. A child's body may be infiltrated by evil spirits due to an object or ceremony that creates a portal. It can also happen when a child uses it. In some films, a young viewer may discover a toy or object that is haunted or exudes a strong, evil energy. Other times,

the ritual the child participates in may be the cause of possession. Fear of the unknown and the risks of curiosity are frequent themes.

It demonstrates how actions that may not be immediately apparent can have unexpected consequences and how powerful forces can exert an insurmountable impact on our lives. While we should always be watchful and aware of our surroundings, we shouldn't let fear rule our actions.

Cases of alleged possession have been reported worldwide, particularly in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. There are various theories of possession, such as the Dybbuks from Jewish mythology that cause psychological and spiritual harm to victims or the ritualistic possession of an animal or plant related to an ancestor. The occurrence of witch hunts in Western Europe and North America during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries resulted in a significant number of cases of demonic afflictions. Freud's theories on desire and anxiety, which are central to horror film theory in psychoanalysis and horror movie history, also serve as a conceptual model for psychoanalysts.

The possession of a child in certain horror films is believed to be due to curses, witchcraft, or black magic. This could be a recurring theme in movies about witches, covens, or spells. The possession could have been caused by a curse or spell cast by one of the witches in the family, or by

the practices of their forefathers. These themes are particularly disturbing because they blend reality with the supernatural. They frequently play a part in our cultural anxieties about black magic and the unknown. It is possible that a child's possession is linked to an evil family or ancestry that is cursed, and it is important to note that the portrayals of witches and magic in these films are often overemphasized and do not accurately reflect actual events. In these films, people or families who are thought to be cursed or who have a history of involvement with the occult or the supernatural are frequently depicted. One could view the child's possession as either a result of the family's inability to make amends for past sins or as an inevitable consequence. This topic emphasizes our concern for what others may do and how we can avoid it. It's crucial to keep in mind that these are fictional tales and do not accurately depict reality. The majority of evil theories are based on myths or falsehoods, and we should avoid accepting them with suspicion and critical analysis.

Literature Review:

Academic scholars have given immense importance to children's demonic possession and witchcraft in movies like *The Exorcist*, *The Exorcism* by Emily Rose, *The Sixth Sense*, and *The IT Chapters* 1 and 2.

Scholars like Judith Lewis Herman's book *"Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of*

Violence - From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror" provide a detailed account of the traumatic experiences and recovery strategies that people can experience. Herman discusses the range of trauma types, from war and terrorism to sexual assault and domestic violence. Additionally, she delves into the impact of trauma on both the mind and body, as well as the process of recovery and healing for those affected. Emotional and behavioral problems, such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder, are common among complex trauma survivors. In treating such complex trauma, she says There is a multi-disciplinary approach that includes counseling, medication, and social support. "Herman highlights the significance of the therapeutic alliance in healing". According to her, effective therapy must emphasize developing a close bond between the patient and the therapist because this can create a secure environment in which the patient can discuss their trauma. Trauma victims are often stigmatized and isolated, which is why Herman believes therapists should be more compassionate and non-judgmental. Her book is a priceless tool for people trying to cope with the effects of violence because it acknowledges the complexity of trauma and the healing process.

Another Scholar *Anna French*, a writer has also written a book on *Children of Wrath: Possession, Prophecy and the Young in Early Modern England* focuses on severe religious experiences like demonic

possession and divine prophecy, this book investigates issues surrounding early modern infancy. Readers are introduced to the dualistic character of early modern views on their children through published reports of possession and prophesy. Additionally, it dispels the myth of modern period children's lives were unimportant by highlighting instances in which kids may be given authority or cast in roles of spiritual agency. The background of extreme spiritual connection, early modern religion's 'lived experience,' and the history of infancy are the three main topics it addresses.

Another Researcher Ellen Peel's "*Psychoanalysis and the Uncanny*" explores how the uncanny is a part of psychotherapy. "*The Uncanny*" by Sigmund Freud in 1919 is the first essay that introduced the idea of it, and it has since gained significant attention in the fields of literary studies and psychoanalysis. The resultant is a sensation of discomfort or strangeness, known as the uncanny, when something is both familiar and unfamiliar at once. Peel discusses these concepts about psychoanalytic ideas in her work. Peel begins by giving a succinct summary of Freud's theory of the uncanny. Freud believed the experience of the repressed returning is what creates the uncanny. The familiar becomes strange and creepy when it is reduced to its most basic, primitive components. Peel notes that physical objects such as dolls, wax figures, and

artificial limbs are often linked with the paranormal. The uncanny's relationship to psychoanalytic concepts like the death drive and the Oedipus complex is the subject of the following section by Peel. According to her, repressed sexual desires frequently resurface when the uncanny appears as a manifestation of the repressed. She also argues that the death drive is linked to the uncanny, which represents a return to nonexistence and undifferentiation. Additionally, she emphasizes the therapeutic value of working with the unpredictable, stating that it can be advantageous for both therapists and patients.

Jessica Balanzategui's book, "*The Uncanny Child in Transnational Cinema: Ghosts of Futurity at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century*" examines how foreign films portray uncannily young children from the late 1990s and early 2000s. The book looks at how these depictions highlight worries about humanity's future and potential risks from cutting-edge technology. The image of the unrecognizable child, as per Balanzategui, is a representation of destiny and all its potential implications. The uncanny child figure is a reflection of the anxieties and fears that society has in today's world due to technological advancements, which Balanzategui argues can be used to explore various themes related to this concept. These themes include how technology shapes human identity, the challenges of parent-child relationships, how kids fit into

society, and how politics and economic policies shape our lives. She examines a variety of foreign movies with eerie children throughout the book, including *The Others* (2001), *The Ring* (2002), and *The Host* (2006). The use of unsettling child characters by filmmakers as a means of exploring the wider socio-political landscape and surrounding cultural norms is highlighted here. The relevance of how the unsettling child is perceived in various cultures. Balanzategui asserted that international films display a range of cultural anxieties that fluctuate based on the directors' cultural perspectives. The book demonstrates how these figures are actively questioning and attempting to make sense of the complexities of contemporary life in different cultural contexts through a detailed analysis of the uncanny child figures in numerous international films. The study of the creepy child persona in worldwide cinema provides a unique and captivating means of comprehending the social issues of their time.

Research Methodology:

The research project is focused on examining horror fiction through an interdisciplinary approach that incorporates Freudian theory. The study will examine a variety of academic essays on horror fiction and critical analyses of the horror genre. The study will focus on films and secondary sources textual criticism, articles, and journals to help interpret horror literature. It is qualitative

and aims to make inferences from various data sources while also reviewing literature using a literature review approach that considers both primary and meta-literature sources. The literature review will feature journals and articles on horror fiction and related topics, as well as the Freudian theoretical framework. Films that fit into the horror genre will be used as the primary source of data for this study.

The Devil Child as Cultural Anxiety

The motif of the held child in horror cinema occupies a important symbolic position — it transgresses the abecedarian cultural supposition that childhood is a realm of purity, innocence, and vulnerability. Films like *The Exorcist* (1973) challenge this ideal by portraying a complete inversion of innocence. Regan, a pre-adolescent girl, becomes the locus of an intense spiritual and bodily transformation. Her possession by the demon Pazuzu marks a radical disruption not only of her own identity but of her family's social, moral, and religious framework.

Regan's metamorphosis embodies artistic anxieties about nonage, fornication, and moral corruption. The grotesque differences of her body — levitation, tone-mutilation, foul language — fantasize a deep-seated artistic fear that beneath the face of domestic life lurk dark, willful forces. This depiction parallels broader fears of societal breakdown during the 1970s, including challenges to traditional

authority(religion, patriarchy), sexual emancipation, and the loss of spiritual values. The Exorcism of Emily Rose(2005) updates this converse by combining supernatural horror with legal drama. Emily's possession is delved through the prism of ultramodern institutions — law, drug, and wisdom — each of which fails to adequately grasp her condition. The courtroom becomes a symbolic point of ideological conflict can religious experience be validated in a secular world? This narrative aligns possession with spiritual suffering that ultramodern systems — concentrated only on empirical confirmation — can not heal. Emily becomes a martyr-like figure whose suffering reviews institutional blindness to metaphysical realities. Through the figure of the held child, these flicks stage artistic anxiety about moral decline, institutional inadequacy, and the fragility of innocence in a world increasingly defined by secularism and moral relativism.

Freudian Frameworks the Return of the Repressed

Freudian psychoanalysis offers a rich lens to interpret the miracle of child possession in horror films. According to Freud, the unconscious mind houses repressed solicitations, traumas, and fears that ultimately return in disguised forms. Horror films like *The Sixth Sense*(1999) and *IT*(2017) personalize this return through ghostly or monstrous figures that haunt the child promoter.

In *The Sixth Sense*, Cole's ability to see and communicate with the dead serves as a conceit for the psychoanalytic process. He's burdened with implied and unseen traumas — not only his own, but those of the spirits that appear to him. His eventual mending comes through recognition and articulation — emblems of the “ talking cure ” in Freudian remedy. The ghosts are n't evil; they're instantiations of undetermined grief and injustice, moping because they've not been conceded. Cole's innocence allows him access to the repressed, making him a conduit for collaborative catharsis. In discrepancy, *IT* portrays suppression on a collaborative scale. The monster Pennywise symbolizes the city's buried traumas systemic racism, child abuse, homophobia, and neglect. The grown-ups of Derry have consciously forgotten or denied these horrors, and the children come the primary victims. The monster's cyclical return represents how unaddressed trauma resurfaces, further intimidating and destructive each time. The disasters Club, as children, must defy this horror directly, illustrating Freud's assertion that repressed content noway remains buried indefinitely — it always returns. Possession and haunting in these narratives therefore reflect the unconscious mind's struggle with trauma. Children, whose psyches are still forming, warrant the defenses of grown-ups, making them susceptible to internal and externalized forms of terror. Their “ possession ” becomes a conceit for how

artistic, domestic, and psychic restraint find expression.

Witchcraft, Ancestral Guilt, and Cultural Memory

Child possession narratives are often entwined with themes of witchcraft, ancestral sin, and generational trauma. These films personalize domestic guilt and literal injustice, showing how the once infects the present through children — nonfictional and emblematic heirs of their lineage. In *Hereditary* (2018), Ari Aster constructs a chilling narrative where possession is inherited. The demon Paimon does not attack arbitrarily; it targets a birth, and its infestation is eased by the family's dame. The film uses possession not as a random spiritual event but as a consequence of family secrets, internal illness, and cultic constancy. The child, Charlie, and latterly her family Peter, come vessels for this ancestral curse. The horror lies not just in the supernatural events but in the consummation that the family's fate was sealed by the conduct of former generations. This idea of inherited possession parallels Freud's proposition of the "family love," wherein buried family histories, battles, and solicitations return in distorted forms. The child's possession becomes an fable for the unconscious transmission of trauma. The family becomes a haunted space, where verity can not be spoken and therefore emerges as terror. Furthermore, numerous films — *The Ring* (2002), *The Witch* (2015), *Orphan* (2009) — depict youthful girls as

either witches or victims of necromancy. This challenges the unsexed artistic narrative of the innocent, unresistant girl-child. In *The Witch*, Thomasin is criticized for her family's mischances and ultimately joins the witches in the forestland. This metamorphosis reviews patriarchal fear of womanish agency. The girl, associated historically with chastity, becomes the depository of transgressive power, echoing artistic guilt over centuries of womanish persecution — witch hunts, suppression of womanish sexuality, and silencing of women's voices.

These narratives use possession and witchcraft to critique how societies construct innocence and wrong, particularly along gender lines. The held child becomes a point where artistic memory, literal injustice, and suppressed womanish power meet.

Religion, Ritual, and Redemption

Religion, particularly Catholicism, is central to numerous possession narratives. Exorcism serves both as a literal method of spiritual sanctification and as an emblematic ritual — restoring social, moral, and cosmic order. Flicks like *The Exorcist* portray the Church as a bastion of hope against satanic forces. The priests, through immolation and faith, act as mediators between the sacred and the profane.

Still, horror films are infrequently innocent of religious authority. While *The Exorcist* eventually affirms the Church's part, it also shows the mortal limitations of its

representatives — Father Karras is agonized by guilt and doubt. The Exorcism of Emily Rose takes this farther by questioning whether religion can be understood within secular legal fabrics. The courtroom becomes a symbolic battleground where the metaphysical is put on trial.

This pressure reflects broader societal questions about the place of religion in a scientific, rational world. As society grows further temporal, possession narratives come more complex — lower about affirming faith and further about questioning its capability to address mortal suffering. Rituals of exorcism are no longer just spiritual acts; they're also acts of narrative resolution, where belief, trauma, and justice intersect. Irwin notes that factors similar as suggestibility and artistic environment influence experiences of possession. therefore, possession may reflect not just supernatural reality but cerebral need. Films exploit this ambiguity, allowing observers to oscillate between belief and skepticism. The ritual, also, becomes a dramatic performance of redemption — not just for the held child but for the culture that fears its own loss of faith.

Ghosts and the Paranormal as the Voice of the Suppressed

In numerous horror flicks, ghosts and supernatural marvels are conceits for the repressed. Freud's conception of the “uncanny”(das Unheimliche) explains why

certain effects — like ghosts, doubles, and déjà vu — are both familiar and intimidating. They're repressed rudiments of the tone that return, challenging the boundaries between real and fantastic .

Films like *The Sixth Sense* and *Ma*(2013) use child characters to access this uncanny realm. Children, with their heightened perceptivity and minimum social exertion, are more “ open ” to the paranormal. Their propinquity to the unconscious makes them natural foreseers and practitioners of suppressed trueness. Ghosts in these narratives are n't malevolent by nature — they are echoes of injustice and trauma seeking resolution. In *Mama*, for case, the ghost is a mama figure who can not let go of her dead child. She haunts the adopted children of another family, not out of malignancy, but out of undetermined grief. The child characters serve as interposers — helping both the ghost and the living process their emotional injuries. Ghosts, also, are expressions of what can not be said in polite society abuse, loss, violence, and guilt. Their relations with children emblemize an hassle between the suppressed and the suggestive. The child's capability to “ see ” and empathize with the ghost suggests that mending comes through recognition and understanding — what Freud calls “ working through ” suppression.

The held Child and the Fear of the unborn maybe the most unsettling aspect of the held child is its emblematic representation of the future gone amiss. Children are

culturally enciphered as symbols of stopgap, eventuality, and durability. When they're corrupted, it signifies a dislocation in the generational narrative — a fear that the sins of the history will be inherited and amplified by unborn generations. In a world fraught with ecological collapse, profitable insecurity, and political polarization, the held child becomes a conceit for climactic anxiety. In IT, the monster feeds on the city's neglect of its children. The fear is n't just of the critter but of the adult world's incapability to cover innocence or defy its own failures. The return of Pennywise every 27 times suggests a cyclical heritage of trauma also, in *The Omen* (1976), Damien represents an anti-Christ figure — born into honor, loved by all, yet fated to bring about the world's destruction. His calm address and innocent face belie a cosmic trouble. Then, possession is n't just about the individual child it's about the fortune of humankind.

These narratives suggest that unless once traumas are addressed — be they particular, social, or literal — they will pollute the future. The held child warns us that innocence, if left unguarded or repressed, can come the veritably vehicle of destruction.

CONCLUSION

The horror genre has developed dramatically from 18th-century Gothic literature to current media, with the focus remaining on personal fears and societal worries. Death, trauma, and the

paranormal continue to be major themes, reflecting the complexity of culture and psychology. Gothic novels and horror films dig into the unconscious, dealing with suppressed impulses, unresolved childhood trauma, and societal issues such as discrimination and mental health stigma.

The relationship between Freudian psychoanalysis and horror is demonstrated by films like *The Exorcist*, *The Exorcism of Emily Rose*, *The Sixth Sense*, and *IT*. These movies serve as symbolic representations of suppressed anxieties and the therapeutic process of facing one's inner demons. They also stress how crucial therapy and knowledge of early experiences are to psychological health. By portraying supernatural elements, horror films provide a lens to examine cultural beliefs, the human psyche, and social inequalities. While they can provoke fear, they also encourage critical reflection on deeper psychological and societal issues.

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