

THE BROADSHEET

Issue X, December 2014



English Senior Seminar students with instructor Dr. Paul Vatalaro

An Inside Look at Senior Seminar

by Tony Rossetti

Do you like to read? I do. Words, unusual sentences, metaphors and similes, symbolism, empathy, lyrics and narrative—my intense fascination with these nuanced forms of connection and communication are what bent my path toward the goal of earning a degree in English at Merrimack College. I must say, I couldn't be happier.

Humans have always told stories—stories that entertain and stories that educate, stories that evoke great emotion and stories that elicit thunderous laughter. We have inherited a primal urge from our ancestors to connect with others through shared understanding and empathy, and narrative serves as one of the most basic tools we have for establishing and cultivating those connections. Stories inform and enrich cultures, histories, and lives.

As an English major at Merrimack, one of the most important steps in the journey involves completing the senior capstone seminar. This course is intended to provide students with the opportunity to reflect on their experiences in the English program and on larger disciplinary issues facing those entering the field of English studies. The responsibility for teaching the course rotates among the full-time English faculty, and this year Dr. Paul Vatalaro is serving as our instructor. We have been examining different forms of literary expression and specific texts as a way of setting a foundation for addressing the issue of literature's relevance and the relevance of literary study in our modern world. Gregory Lingley says the best thing about this course is that it "allows us to open the metaphorical box, and sets us up to explore the contents of the box later on in life."

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Former *Broadsheet* Intern Talks About Graduate School

by Janelle Clarke

Recent Merrimack College alumnus and former staff writer for *The Broadsheet* Alison Leonard, class of 2014, recently spoke with me about her life after graduation. Although there are many paths one can take, Alison chose to continue her education by going to graduate school. Graduate school can be a rigorous undertaking, however. Alison was able to share with me some of the wonderful experiences she has had thus far.

Alison graduated from Merrimack with a bachelor's degree in English and Psychology. She minored in Public and Professional Writing. This fall she began her graduate studies at Boston University in the Master of Science in Public Relations program. She was awarded a highly sought after assistantship in BU's Communications department. Alison says that BU's Public Relations program is actually the "first of its kind" in terms of the balance the program offers students between theory, strategy courses and hands-on courses. Next semester, for example, Alison will take part in a Public Relations lab in which she will get to "work on real client projects that the school (BU) has acquired." This work will help build Alison's portfolio.

As part of her program of study, Alison serves as a Teaching Assistant (TA) for an introductory communication class, CO101: The World of Communication. Alison is required to attend CO101 lectures, facilitate discussion groups once a week with 23 out of the 500 students enrolled in the course, and grade essays and tests. When asked about taking on the responsibilities of a TA, Alison said "it's been

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An official publication of the Merrimack College English Department, The Broadsheet is published monthly during the academic calendar year. Its mission is to celebrate the English Department's role in promoting the literary arts on campus, to acknowledge the accomplishments of faculty and students, to profile students and alumni, and to create a forum in which issues relevant to English studies can be discussed.

the box later on in life.”

In order to confirm literature’s current worth, we need no metaphorical box—we need only look as far as our present culture to see the obvious signs of its flourishing life. Literature is virtually everywhere—in coffee shops and on beaches, in homes and in stores, on computers and on phones and in the hands of travelers as they move across the globe—and, in all these places, literary works teach readers what it means to be human. Ironically, in spite of

“Literature exposes us to new ways of thinking and feeling”

literature’s ubiquity and mass appeal, enrollments in many English programs, as they are in many other subjects in the Humanities, appear to be declining.

Some have predicted that English departments will go the way of Classics departments and dodos. In an industrialized world where

many people go to college to obtain specialized training for a lucrative career, fewer and fewer students appear to be pursuing degrees in the Humanities, while a steady stream of students floods into the health sciences, technology, and business. Nationally, critics and scholars have debated the value of liberal arts degrees. In Senior Seminar, we’ve confronted many of the issues these individuals have raised. Together, we work as a class to identify the philosophical and political underpinnings of them and have worked at articulating for ourselves what literary expression of all kinds continues to offer our culture.

One of literature’s greatest powers is its ability to shape the socio-political world while simultaneously being shaped by it. Janelle Clarke said one of her favorite pieces we read together was an excerpt from Adrian Nicole LeBlanc’s book *Random Family*, mainly because she finds herself “intrigued by lives that are so different than [her] own.” Clarke is a perfect example of someone who had her perspective changed by her reading. Literature exposes us to new ways of thinking and feeling. Narrative is simply that powerful. But what if we are far removed from the culture we are reading about—historically, racially, economically? What relevance does a

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drama by Shakespeare or a comic, such as *Maus*, have on our lives now? Diana Le says that she has always felt as though “the past is always present within us.” After gaining some insight from Dr. Vatalaro, Le realized that “the present affects the way we look at the past, too.” She says that is why, whenever she gains an insight, she writes it down, because she “won’t see it the same [way] later on.” In a way, an imaginative piece of writing continues to shape us long after the first encounter.

The class was fortunate enough to have the pleasure of meeting Adrian Nicole LeBlanc at our own Writers House. Having the opportunity to speak with a successful living writer was incredibly valuable for our purposes, and she was nice enough to share some words of wisdom with us. She discussed her belief that everyone has a story. To LeBlanc, writing is just a means of saying “I was here. This happened here, and this was how I saw it and felt about it.” She claims that making the effort to write about something is a writer’s way of saying “I think you should pay attention to this.” To echo Diana Le, this is *why* it is important for writers to publish their writing as soon as possible, because they may feel differently later about the thing they wanted readers to experience.

“I have already lived a thousand lives through the stories I have read”

To be a student of the Humanities involves studying humans and human nature, and, in the process, cultivating one’s own humanity. Reading enriches the soul. Connecting with other individuals seems to be an inherent need in all of us, and the fine arts represent some of the best avenues available for developing those bonds. Can you imagine a purely utilitarian society that makes no investment in anything creative? I could imagine it, but really would rather not. I would much rather die than live a life with no art. It’s funny...at this stage in my life, I have less of a fear of death. I have already lived a thousand lives through the stories I have read, and I couldn’t be happier.



Moseley Wrought Iron Arch Bridge on a December afternoon.

A Classy Film Star’s Take on A Classic Villain

by Diana Le

Maleficent

Written by: Linda Woolverton

Directed by: Robert Stromberg

Starring: Angelina Jolie, Elle Fanning, Charlto Copley, Sam Riley, Imelda Staunton, Juno Temple, and Lesley Manville

Running Time: 97 minutes

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'Maleficent' Film Review continued from p. 2

When Disney Studios released the animated story of *Sleeping Beauty* in 1959, they painted Maleficent as the cruel villain whose obvious destiny was to be slain by the male hero, Prince Philip, on his way to rescue Princess Aurora with true love's kiss.

Fast forward 55 years and with the power of makeup and special effects, Angelina Jolie is transformed into the evil fairy Maleficent, sporting sharp cheekbones, horns, red lips and green magic. While the alluring Jolie portrays the classic fairy with magnificence, Elle Fanning, who plays opposite her, disappoints as Aurora with her overacting and inability to captivate audiences with her mediocre physical appearance. In addition to her unsightly crooked smile, her hair looked unnaturally yellow against her ultra pale skin. King Stefan also could have been portrayed by an actor with a less comical sound--Sharlto Copley's high-pitched voice, with what seemed like an Irish accent, inadvertently makes him a laughingstock throughout the film.

The story--told from the point of view of Maleficent--is fueled by vengeance and reveals why Maleficent became the way she is. As a young fairy living in the Moors, a realm where magical creatures reside next to a human kingdom, a peasant boy by the name of Stefan wanders in and the two become the best of friends and, later on, lovers. However, the film really starts moving once greed results in betrayal, and the human kingdom declares war on the Moors.

In the epic demonstration of disloyalty, Maleficent is robbed of her innocence and trust in humanity when her wings are severed off her back by the only person she every trusted. For viewers who may not have caught on, this event in the story is a metaphor for rape. This scene can only be described as Jolie's most powerful in the film, as it is not where her powers are best displayed but where she is most vulnerable.

You will recall from the original story that Maleficent storms the castle during the newborn princess' christening (evoking terror from guests and audiences alike), leaving a curse on the baby that she shall prick her finger on the spindle of a spinning wheel on her sixteenth birthday and fall into a deathlike sleep--which can only be broken by the kiss of true love.

The movie's director, Robert Stromberg, is no stranger to the creation of grand special effects. He is responsible for the special effects in James Cameron's 2009 record-breaking film *Avatar*, as well as Tim Burton's 2010 film *Alice in Wonderland*. Now after proving his ability to skillfully personify creatures (such as trees engaging in war) using his expertise, Stromberg can call *Maleficent* a successful display of his directing and special effects knowledge.

The film is meant for any viewer old enough to understand the themes of temptation, treachery, redemption, and female empowerment among others. Though it is categorized as a dark fantasy film, there are comical elements throughout the movie, as it is meant to be a family film, and is in no way closely related to the thriller/horror genre. And if you possess a heart, it will likely be a tear-jerker, even the second time around, because you know that since it's a Disney movie, there will always be at least one scene to move you. In

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challenging to step into a role of authority with them, especially being so close in age. I've had to handle a few situations with students who were unhappy with the grades I'd been giving them, but overall navigating the role of TA has been really rewarding."

Conducting discussion sessions on Friday mornings is also an

interesting part of the job. Besides gaining practical experience, serving as a TA has afforded Alison opportunities to establish friendships with other TAs, which ultimately led to an introduction with her current boyfriend.

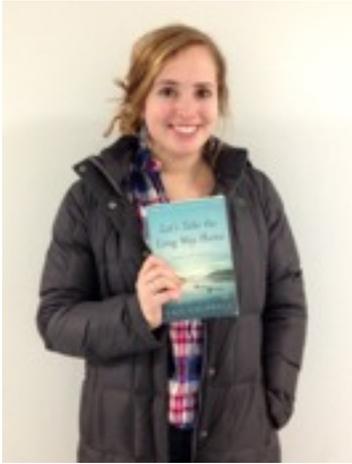
Working for *The Broadsheet* at Merrimack provided Alison with writing samples that she included in all her graduate school applications. These samples demonstrated the caliber of work Alison was capable of outside the classroom. For example, she had conducted several interviews while working for *The Broadsheet* and this experience gave her greater confidence in her ability to interact with others and then write about them. This semester alone, Alison has "...contacted and landed interviews with the CEO of the Make-A-Wish Foundation, as well as the current Miss Massachusetts, who were happy to talk with me just for school assignments."

While at Merrimack Alison also served as a tutor at the College Writing Center, a job that also helped her develop interpersonal and editing skills. Alison's collegiate experience testifies to the benefit of seeking out extracurricular opportunities to enhance what one is learning as a student in the English program.

Although much changed after graduation, a few parts of Alison's life have remained the same or minimally altered. Alison is happy that she can still live at home in Woburn and commute to BU. Braving the city traffic and Boston drivers demanded a huge adjustment compared to traveling back and forth to North Andover. She now has to manage her time even more efficiently than she once did. For example, as Merrimack's former halftime twirler at sporting events, Alison now devotes less time to this activity because of her new commitments. She is still able to enjoy painting and cooking Italian food though, especially ravioli and gnocchi. In the near future Alison intends to begin working toward a judge's license and take a trip to Italy with her best friend. Hopefully, Alison's continued success inspires and reassures others that no matter what path you choose after graduation, whether continuing your education or going into the workforce, it will prove to be thrilling, and scary all at the same time.

The Otter and the Dragonfly: A Review of *Let's Take the Long Way Home*

by Emily O'Brien



Emily O'Brien sporting a copy of *Let's Take the Long Way Home*

"I was the otter and she was the dragonfly, and I'd stop every so often to watch her flight." This is the metaphor that Gail Caldwell uses in her memoir, *Let's Take the Long Way Home*, to describe her friendship with the late Caroline Knapp, as they danced through the water by

that we came to value: She was the good girl and I was the rebel, and each of us learned enough from the other to expand our respective territories." This sense of give and take is another of the threads that weaves the memoir together.

Perhaps the strongest of the bonds between the two women was their dogs. "Like me, she had found a dog that had elicited in her a sustenance and warmth she'd never imagined." Both women were devoted owners of young dogs, a female Samoyed and a German Shepherd, and they became so close through the advice of their dog trainer, who had a gut feeling that the two women would hit it off.

It was the dogs, Clementine and Lucille, that brought the two women to Fresh Pond and the paths in the woods time after time, and who taught them a thing or two about friendship and loyalty. Caldwell often relates her bond with her dog, Clementine, to her relationship with Caroline. "For us, dog training was a shared experience of such reward that the education was infused

careful strokes of arms and oars. Their steadfast devotion to the water was one of many commonalities between the two women that made their friendship seem like a destiny written in the stars. Caldwell uses these connections in her memoir to frame the story of their friendship, emphasizing the existence of what Caldwell refers to as their "parallel lives."

The common threads that connect Caldwell and Knapp also serve a larger purpose: they connect the reader to the story, and help us to understand the magnitude of their beautiful life-giving friendship, so that we can later feel the devastation of its sudden ending. After all, it is made clear from the opening of the book that this is not just a story of friendship, but a story of a friendship cut short. "I had a friend and we shared

"I had a friend and we shared everything, and then she died so we shared that, too"

everything, and then she died so we shared that, too."

The real magic of Caldwell's writing, however, is

that she manages to make the life of the friendship outshine the death of the friend. After reading the last line, I closed the book and shut my eyes to reflect on how the story had moved me. When I closed my eyes, I didn't see hospital rooms and teary funerals, but instead the two women laughing and talking as they follow their dogs through the winter woods. These moments of friendship become the central focus of the memoir, rather than the moments of death, loss and grief.

Caldwell often defines her friendship with Knapp not only by their interactions, but also by their similarities and differences. Although they had a lot in common, Knapp and Caldwell were individuals, and the two of them learned to navigate their differences accordingly. "This was one of the dynamics between us

"...the best friendships, no matter how long they may last, should have at their core a fundamental trust built from both the darkness and the light"

throughout the friendship...a complex effort of patience and observation and mutual respect."

This mutual respect and give and take becomes the cornerstone of Caldwell's and Knapp's friendship, and provides a message to readers about how female friendship should be. Too often in the media we see friendships between females portrayed with a tinge of cattiness and competition, but this friendship exhibits none of that, and as a result is a breath of fresh air. Caldwell has a way of using intricate metaphors and crystallizing language to illustrate not only the glowing lights but also the darkest corners of their friendship. Both women were recovering alcoholics, graduates of years of therapy sessions, and this comes through in their friendship. The exposure of the rocky sides of their lives humanizes the friendship that could otherwise come off as too perfect. "We needed each other so that we could count on the then endless days of forests and flat water, but the real need was soldered by the sadder, harder moments--discord or helplessness or fear--that we dared to express to each other." This is the very essence of the message of the book: the best friendships, no matter how long they may last, should have at their cores a fundamental trust built from both the darkness and the light.

'Maleficent' film review cont. from p. 3

Maleficent, that scene is when she realizes too late that she has grown to love Aurora like a daughter, but cannot reverse the curse she'd placed on her as an infant.

The silly bits of the movie are mostly credited to the roles of Maleficent's crow, Diaval (played by Sam Riley), and the incompetent fairies (played by Imelda Staunton, Juno Temple, and Lesley Manville) responsible for raising the princess for sixteen years. The film can be described as a blend of *Ella Enchanted* and *Snow White & the Huntsman*. The former falls under the comedy genre and the latter is a dark fantasy action film that possesses no comical elements. 'Maleficent' brings components from both films together.

About 90 minutes long, *Maleficent* represents the perfect length for a movie. Its plot does not drag on, nor does it leave the viewer feeling ripped off. It will hold your attention from beginning to end, which is a task many films struggle to achieve. A film appropriate for families to watch together, *Maleficent* contains several morals including the age-old *there are two sides to every story*, as well as new lessons such as, *true love can come from unexpected places*.

This *Sleeping Beauty* remake is a must-see regardless of the poor casting choices of Stefan and Aurora. It shall not repel you from Jolie's stellar work as an actress or cloud the strong themes and lessons of the story. If you haven't yet, grab the snacks and the tissues because this is not a film to be missed. And don't forget that who the villain is depends on who's telling the story.



Merrimack Campus on a December night.

Review: *Dracula Untold*

by Laura Dupre

Dracula Untold

Written by: Matt Sazama, Burk Sharpless

Directed by: Gary Shore

Starring: Luke Evans, Sarah Gadon, Dominic Cooper, Art Parkinson, Charles Dance

Run Time: 92 minutes

Rated: PG-13

Dracula Untold, directed by Gary Shore, is a 2014 take on the Dracula story. The film is nothing like Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), but remains popular among audiences, ranking #2 its opening weekend. When watching *Dracula Untold*, it is essential to remember that the story is not supposed to be a faithful adaptation of Stoker's novel, but rather a narrative tracing out how the character Dracula came to be. Many of the negative reviews the movie has received were from disappointed and avid *Dracula* fans. If you're looking for a film adaptation of the novel, look elsewhere.

Protagonist Vlad the Impaler, prince of Transylvania (played by Luke Evans), was once a feared warrior, but gave up his life of violence to rule

Transylvania and raise a family in his castle, called Dracula (which makes him the Count of Dracula, if you follow my lead). Vlad becomes unable to protect his family and small army from the invading Turks. In desperation, he solicits the aid of a vampire dwelling in a cave nearby. He learns from a monk that a vampire is a man that made a pact with a demon to gain supernatural powers. As Vlad drinks the vampire's blood, he is warned that he will only return back to his human self if, after three days, he is able to resist drinking blood. With this warning, Vlad races off into battle and defends his people for another day.

The movie follows Vlad in his attempt to distinguish right from wrong, protect his family, and maintain his humanity. In the midst of this balancing act, his people turn against him when they realize he has made a deal with the devil and has become a vampire. They try to kill him by trapping him in a burning building, during which time he screams "DO YOU THINK YOU ARE ALIVE BECAUSE YOU CAN FIGHT?! YOU ARE ALIVE BECAUSE OF WHAT I DID TO SAVE YOU!"

Though lacking a strong female (director Gary Shore locks women in the film into stereotypical roles, rendering them helpless), the film was incredibly entertaining. Luke Evans seems made for the strong, male, patriarchal role. Although he chooses damnation and the life of a vampire, Evans makes his character admirable and easy to sympathize with. Running only 92 minutes long, its hard to make a case for why anyone SHOULDNT watch this movie. The muted color scheme, with glimpses of vibrant red, made the film a little more gothic, and the

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'Dracula Untold' film review cont. from p. 5

vampire characters helped with that, as well. The film is packed with troubling ambiguities, such as a hero that is also technically a villain. All of this is tied together with an incredible message from a child narrator that "Sometimes the world doesn't need a hero. Sometimes it needs a monster."

Excursion to Concord Past

by Rachel MacKelcan

On a beautiful Sunday afternoon in October, students and faculty from the English Department took a trip to the Old Manse and Walden Pond in Concord, Massachusetts. Lured by the opportunity to experience the place that once shaped writers such as Bronson Alcott, Thoreau, Fuller, Hawthorne and Ripley, our group piled into a College van and ventured out into a world beyond the pages.

The Old Manse was built in the late 1700s for minister William Emerson. According to a website sponsored by The Trustees of Reservations, the house changed hands many times over the years (<http://www.thetrustees.org/places-to-visit/greater-boston/old-manse.html>). Through the stewardship of this organization the Old Manse has and will continue to be maintained in a way that is accurate to the time period.

Recalling the tour, I picture the piano, worn by the years, a conch at the base of the fireplace, two dragon candelabras, one for each side of the mantel, as keepers of the fireplace, and love poems etched into tempered glass by a single diamond ring.

Walking through the house I hear tunes the piano played, the floors creaking beneath my feet and suddenly I can't help but wonder how many secrets are hidden in the walls or beneath the floorboards. Around the house panes of glass preserve the etchings left to be read, first person accounts from a time long passed.

English professors pose with student inside Old Manse



I can hear her, his wife; I can remember his name, Hawthorne, but I have forgotten hers now. I watch as she scratches marks into the glass with her diamond. What the notes mean I don't know distinctly, but they remain. Light passes through

them, filtered by glass, sending messages gently, like leaves blowing in the wind, and like the sounds of the wind whispering in my ears.

I can see their graves, the messages family members left: father, son, daughter, mother and friend but none of it matters now. They are the departed; they are the forgotten, the ones who must lie at rest, as their stones and names and stories fade. We soak in their legacy, as we sit

and eat our lunches with them; they tell us the stories only stones can tell and in that moment they complete the cycle they started at birth, the somber act of retiring in silence.

I was struck by the same mood as the group made its way around Walden Pond. There was a certain majestic beauty to the way the light hit the water, the trees turning yellow and red and orange as the path crackled under our feet. Grains of soft, yellow sand, moist from the rain, clung to the bottoms of our shoes. I carried a single pebble in each of my hands, an offering of remembrance to the past and to the writer who walked there before me.

I thought about rocks being moved from their original places, soon turning to dust. I felt as though I were standing on a doorstep, the entryway to a collision of past and present. A destination: a house, stones, and a pond that has become as widely known as the author that inhabited the place and, as the trees sway, we realize why the place, the literary destination, is almost as famous as Thoreau himself.



Group gathers around professors

I toss a rock, forge a memory and walk away. There is something truly beautiful about the remains of a place where someone once lived. How times have changed since the days that Henry David Thoreau walked the path around the pond, but could he have imagined that his legacy and the remains of his house would continue to coexist so peacefully through the passage of time?

As we walked away droplets of rain fell across the pond. It occurs to me that there is nothing more magical than the movements of a pen on paper, or the way droplets of water penetrate cool sand in the brisk autumn air, or the way our footsteps align with those of our predecessors.

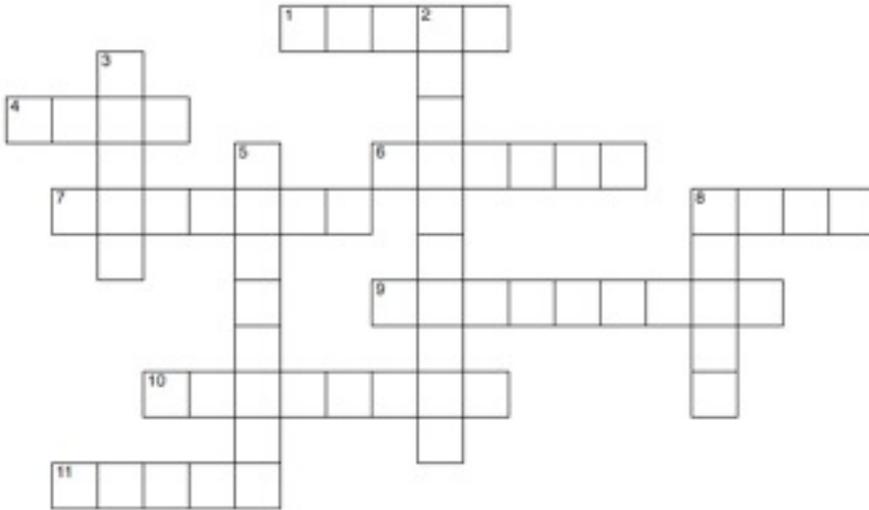


Students pause for photo in front of Walden Pond

Merry Christmas & Happy Holidays!

Crossword

The Broadsheet staff challenges you to a holiday crossword puzzle!



ACROSS

1. "Not a creature was stirring, not even a _____!"
4. What are Frosty the Snowman's two eyes made out of?
6. "_____ drummers drumming"
7. Charles _____, author of *A Christmas Carol*
8. Character in Disney's *Frozen* that "let's it go"
9. "...and a _____ in a pear tree"
10. _____ Scrooge
11. Christmas story by Chris Van Allsburg, _____ *Express*

DOWN

2. "No two _____ are alike."
3. Star of _____
5. "Grandma got run over by a _____"
8. There are _____ nights of Hanukkah.

Answer key:
 ACROSS
 1. mouse
 4. coal
 6. Twelve
 7. Dickens
 8. Elsa
 9. partridge
 10. Ebenezer
 11. Polar
 DOWN
 2. snowflakes
 3. David
 5. reindeer
 8. eight

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