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THE WORST FATE: MALE RAPE AS MASCULINITY EPIDEIXIS IN JAMES DICKEY'S *DELIVERANCE* AND THE AMERICAN PRISON NARRATIVE

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Epideictic, rhetoric of praise and blame, addresses perception of goodness, shame, honor, and dishonor, and remains an excellent method to formulate, maintain, and solidify ideas concerning virtue and vice. According to Lawrence W. Rosenfield, “Epidictic’s understanding calls upon us to join with our community in giving thought to what we witness” (489-496). It is with this conception of epideixis that this article looks toward literature and film, to critique the representation of sexual assault, its causes, its consequences, and most importantly, its effects on the apperception of masculinity. Early novels, like Rousseau’s *Emile* and Richardson’s *Pamela*, only barely shrouded literary conventions that reproduced acceptable gender identities as fiction, literature that, like the courtesy book before it, served as a call for normalization. The novel called for normalization by creating sympathy for some characters and scorn for others. Victorian authors, such as Charlotte Brontë, Charles Dickens, and (notorious for his depiction of “The Angel in the House”) Coventry Padmore, appealed to readers for generalized acceptance or rejection of particular behaviors and gendered identifications. The Victorian marriage plot can be read as a coded epideictic where the characters who met the anticipated gender materialization—those who conformed to “gender obedience”—were rewarded with praise, while those who did not meet the anticipated gender materialization were penalized with blame. Chaim Perelman and Lucy Olbrechts-Tyteca say of epideictic that, “The speaker engaged in epideictic discourse is very close to being an educator. Since what he is going to say [promotes] values that are shared in the community . . .” (52). Therefore, the only way that the marriage plot could function as an epideictic is if the reading members of the audience already ascribed to the heteronormative patriarchal imperative. This method worked until the late nineteenth century when the Emma Bovarys, Edna

Pontilliers, and Anna Kareninas began drinking poison, drowning, and walking headlong into moving trains. The Realist novel, ending with the heroine's death rather than her wedding, interrogated the customary narrative and opened the door for the audience to question assumptions concerning "successful" gender representation. With the expansion of proto-Feminisms, Freudian psychoanalytic theory, continued industrialization, and decolonization, ideas surrounding gendered identities lost some of their hegemonic durability.

Just as each culture (and each era within each culture) decides what feminine characteristics support its ontology best, it also decides what masculinities are most useful; that culture in turn supports those masculine "useful" characteristics. It seems natural and it seems to function organically; however from a Foucauldian standpoint, we have to consider the docility of the body that causes it to manifest characteristics based on discipline. In Foucault's model (which intends to demonstrate how meticulous "discipline" of the human body in turn develops a social discipline where functioning collectively ends in greater utility) collective action is the objective. Like interchangeable parts of the industrial age, such standardization of gendered action presumably ends in a greater utility to the ideology it supports: "useful masculinity." What's more, there are penalties for failing to meet these standards; in other words, men become categorized as "manly" in order to avoid the punishment of becoming "unmanly." But this still begs the question, how do we determine what is "useful" masculinity? Judith Halberstam states: "although we seem to have a difficult time defining masculinity, as a society we have little trouble in recognizing it, and indeed we spend massive amounts of time and money ratifying and supporting the versions of masculinity that we enjoy and trust" (1). In our contemporary mediated culture, the images of masculinity that characterize the expectations of the male body are significant. In a society where gendered individuals are, from a very early age, bombarded with images of "proper" gender materialization in commercial advertising, action films, and music videos, men and women formulate ideas about who they should be, and what they should want; this, unfortunately, circumscribes the limits of their potential. The visual nature of how we come to understand, interpret, and perform gender is part of how our culture defines norms for masculinity and femininity. Western culture uses fiction, on the page or on the screen, to create gendered realities. Our acceptance of these fictions requires that we consider ways in which our notions about consent, coercion, dynamism, passivity, retribution, and acquiescence formulate our ideas about real men. What's more, the perpetuation of these fictions suggests that our culture has

become so ingrained with ideas concerning male rape that we have established and accepted a system of rhetorical formulation for the violable male body.

But if our novelists have (perhaps) finally abandoned the “smart girls marry rich men” paradigm of Austenian literature, how does American culture represent and therefore begin the hegemonic sorting out of men who are perceived to be manly and men who are not? More importantly, how does American culture encourage masculinities believed to be “proper” and discourage what is believed to be “unmanlyness”? Since we cannot deny them the marital hand of the Mr. Darcys, what happens to male characters who do not measure up to cultural expectations of masculine materialization? For the answer to this we must look to the circumlocutious systems of power knowledge and materialization where that which is supported is replicated and that which is replicated (correctly) is supported. We identify manly-men when we observe them and recognize their endorsement by culture (often the only way we recognize endorsement is by a lack of punishment); likewise, we identify unmanly-men when we observe them and recognize their condemnation. This cultural dialectic of approval and disapproval is a dance, negotiating values and beliefs. To impersonate naturalness, the dialectic “dance” must be subtle; in order for it to thrive it must remain a masked ideological struggle. What’s more, it must be kept under surveillance; such surveillance serves to not only monitor actions, but to reinforce values for the viewer. By observing praise and blame, the onlooker is “taught” a culture’s value system.

Such “visual epideictic” strategy plays an important role in cultivating cultural mores and understanding. The dialectic of approval and disapproval can increase an audience’s disposition to act in accordance with an ethics that informs judgment and behavior within a culture but it can also encourage the adoption of an altered opinion (which Kenneth Burke calls an “incipient act”). The assignment of praise and blame is further engaged in constructing both individual subjectivity and culturally articulated identities. Most importantly, epideictic rhetoric strives to reduce the occasion for resistance or debate by veiling itself as customary praise or blame by presuming—or simulating the assumption—that the rhetor and the audience already assent to the same ethics. Epideictic rhetoric, therefore, is an effective forum for rigorous, although often opaque, ideological struggle. In the case of masculine identities, epideictic rhetoric works toward constructing a persuasive image of accomplishment and evolution that solidifies patriarchy’s aspirations for masculinity. At this point, I begin my investigation into the cultural epideictic of the male body

represented in contemporary literature and film. In literature we can see that male characters who subscribe to accepted norms are praised as “heroes.” In this article I will discuss the representation of male rape as part of a system of coercion: not just physical coercion but a coercion of materialization. I neither intend to present a psycho-sexual analysis of rape (male or female) nor to map out every textual treatment of violent sexual behavior. Rather, I will briefly discuss the function of male rape within power structures.

In “Rape: On Coercion and Consent,” Catherine MacKinnon—who is often criticized for her deductions—makes the argument that all sex is rape (43). Even when there seems to be consent, acceptance of male initiatives toward women is, according to MacKinnon, actually about avoiding rape; all assumptions of consent are actually about avoiding violence. MacKinnon goes further to argue that it is not necessary for all men to rape or for all women to be raped; but the fact that some men *do* rape and some women *are* raped establishes the possibility of rape and therefore creates fear. It is in this line of reasoning that MacKinnon concludes that all sex is coerced—there is no such thing as consensual sex under male dominance. On a PBS talk show, *Think Tank* MacKinnon explains: “I think . . . there are forms of force that involve authority, power, where something can be rape, but it isn’t always violent at that moment. But there’s always an element of force and domination going on in it and there is—in which a sexual interaction is coerced without the person who is having it wanting to have the sex” (Wattenberg and MacKinnon). We can take MacKinnon’s ideas and apply them across the board. In other words, this phenomenon is not restricted to heterosexual encounters. As a matter of fact, when asked by host Ben Wattenberg, “Do men also discriminate against other men? . . .” MacKinnon answers, “Based on race, you bet they do. . . . And based on class and a lot of other things.” In regard to male on male rape, MacKinnon’s argument holds true. In regard to both literature and film which involve the threat of male rape we can see that while some sexual encounters between male inmates appear to be outwardly consensual they are as bound up with intimidation, coercion, and the size and strength of the aggressor as they are in MacKinnon’s heterosexual representation. This is to say that in the narrative surrounding the American prison system, not all inmates have to be raped—the possibility alone creates enough fear for all encounters to be coerced. There is another component to male on male rape in America which is not altogether unaccounted for in MacKinnon’s argument: the threat of feminization. Given that MacKinnon’s argument hinges on the coexistence of misogyny and patriarchy, feminization becomes perceived as a

negative consequence. Were it not for those concomitant factors, the dynamics of male / male rape would change completely.

Paedestry aside, from the ancient Greeks onward, Western hegemony held to a tradition which defines the female as receptive/passive and the male as dynamic/active. In the paradigm where the female is passive and receptive, the female body is defined by its capacity to be penetrated; it is violable. Because in a dualistic system, we still only have two options for sexual identification, active or passive, even when the body violated is a male body we read sexual aggression along the same paradigm where one subject assumes the masculine while the other assumes the feminine. For a man to be raped is for him to be feminized and, in a misogynistic culture, this is a fate worse than death. Roger Lancaster, writes in "Subject Honor and Object Shame: The Construction of Male Homosexuality and Stigma in Nicaragua," the delineations between maleness and *machismo* in Nicaraguan culture—where there is no identity as "homosexual"—it is typically an *hombre-hombre* male who plays the active subject role in sexual intercourse with *cochones*, receptive object males (44). Lancaster points out that the more aggressive—even violent—the sexual encounter, the more the initiator identifies his role as *Machista*, dominant masculine. We can see the same representation of subject/object masculinity as a predominant factor in the American prison narrative. It bears stating that even male on male rape is more about power and subordination than it is about sexual drive and release. While there are components of consent imbedded in this narrative, there is also a menacing factor of violence.

"Don't drop your soap in the shower" is cliché advice given to any male sentenced to serve in a general population prison and it reveals an anxiety surrounding anal rape in prison. It is a notion derived from fear rather than veracity. In popular American culture, jokes, sitcoms, and even television commercials indicate that male rape in prison is widespread and prevalent. In fact, it appears that the average person in our culture assumes that almost everyone who fits the stereotypical victim profile *will inevitably* be raped in prison. Despite the absence of empirical data, early prison researchers declared that rape in male prisons was "rampant" and that sexual assault of inmates by inmates had become "epidemic" (Weiss Friar 4, Davis 9). However, this claim is not substantiated by the empirical data on male rape, in part due to the fact that no studies have succeeded in establish the frequency of male rape through a systematic examination of official records (i.e., incident reports or protective custody records) (Eigenberg). It seems that statistics—which are problematic for a variety of reasons (including reticence to report incidents)—show that few inmates are

ever raped at all (Kappeler). Those who are raped, report being raped repeatedly or recurrently (Alarid and Dumond). This may suggest that popular belief is true and that there is a system of “targeting” in which certain inmates are singled out for rape. Or it may be true that only “expected” situations of rape are reported or are reported more readily; it could also be true that authorities find expected scenarios more believable and accept the veracity of reports more readily. Either way, the situation represented in film is supported by the case reports available; in American movies, perpetrators tend to be physically hyper-masculine inmates while targets tend to be described as “slight-built” and therefore identified as effeminate and therefore violable or penetrable. Even in the lexicon of prison rape there is an imbedded system of feminization. Consider the rhetoric: the recurrent victim, the inmate who resorts to acquiescence in order to avoid violence, in prison jargon is called a “punk,” he is someone’s punk—a possession. When a man is raped, it is said that he has “been punk’d,” he’s “getting punk’d.” The action occurs to him—on his body; he is passive, therefore feminized. To continue the antifeminine rhetorical connection, he is said to be “made someone’s bitch” or “made someone’s wife.” On the other hand, the aggressor is active and maintains his status as subject and therefore masculine. The initiator/rapist is called a “jock” or “jockey” he is said to “jocky;” he is rhetorically active. Also, as with the Nicaraguan *Machista*, the more violent the encounter, the more feminized the victim, the more the aggressor can therefore retain his status as masculine.

To illustrate, I now turn to an exploration of four major motion pictures set, at least partially, in prison. All of these films include the subject of male rape, even when the plot does not necessitate the action. In *The Hurricane*, though there is no perceptible rape, the screenwriters included dialogue which alludes to inmate rape; I will argue that rape in *Midnight Express*, though pivotal to the plot, is represented in a peripheral yet menacing manner; in *The Shawshank Redemption*, the repeated rape of the main character, part of the main plot, is menacing and the character is developed in relation to assault. Though we must extrapolate this argument to encompass an overarching theme, the claim remains intact. Because prison itself is not a strong enough deterrent to some Americans, the threat must be heightened. (The classist and racist implications of this phenomenon are staggering, and not something I will attempt to address here.) Nevertheless, the prison narrative is constructed, not as a narrative of truth, but rather a narrative of deterrence. Prison may not be perceived as “so bad” but rape, on the other hand is represented as “the worst fate.”

Keep in mind that the characters who fall victim to rape in film need not be the literal equivalent to the “target type” indicated by case studies; authors use popular belief to draw rhetorical parallel between characters and the supposed target type. The purpose of this is to serve, as Perelman says, as an “educator.” Because few of us have experience in male high-security penitentiaries, we must be taught what to suppose about the interior goings-on of prison life; more importantly we must be taught which actions and reactions earn praise and which warrant blame. Of course, none of this is to say that cinematic representations are in any way true and accurate. Movies are, of course, movies. They are a cultural construction and serve to represent a fictive circumstance; however, film has the unique ability among texts to make people believe what they see. As I stated above, mediated culture formulates ideas about who we should be, and what we should want; and the visual nature of gender hermeneutics often creates (false) gendered realities.

Many prison films suggest that “real men” can courageously bear great adversity, including rape. *The Hurricane* represents the main character, Rubin “Hurricane” Carter, an African American boxer who is, despite his innocence, convicted of murder, and his capacity to endure with his masculinity undamaged, with dignity, and with his self intact in spite of his circumstances. Though *The Hurricane* contains no visual scenes of either overt or suggested rape, the film dialogue contains two vague references to rape. In the first reference, Carter explains that he “had to fight to survive” which seems to imply that he had to “fight” to avoid sexual assault. In the second reference he states: “I’m free in here [indicating his “inner” personhood]. . . . This place doesn’t allow you to be human. The only contact you get in here is being stabbed in the back or gang raped in the shower.” These remarks are not uncommon in prison films but are particularly noteworthy here because the crux of the movie concerns Carter’s self imposed isolation. Often, without being necessary to plot development, characters refer to rape, threaten rape, engage in or are victims of rape. This phenomenon seems salacious; it only serves to give the impression of the inevitability of male rape in prison. It also serves to reinforce the relationship between two equally ruinous states of being: going to prison is “bad” and being feminized is “bad.” The cultural epideictic “teaches” men to avoid both. Unfortunately this method of epideictic does not teach men not to become rapists. The opposite may even be true. Within the prison narrative, there is punishment for the male rapist but that punishment is never shame. While male rape victims are often portrayed as being so full of shame that they commit suicide, the perpetrators of male rape must be punished in other

ways; he is never sorely ashamed of what he has done. (If one can imagine a scene where the typical male prison inmate rapist breaks down in tears crying, "What have I done," one is more likely imagining a satire than a drama. It is not until the *Dead Man Walking*, based on a true story, that, to my knowledge, a rapist expresses remorse in a prison film—and Poncelet was convicted of raping a woman, not a man. What's more, female rape victims typically have to seek justice for themselves in film. Consider the string of rape-revenge films: *I Spit on Your Grave*, *Sudden Impact*, and *Straw Dogs*. Films that do portray the justice system for female rape victims regularly portray the "victim on trial" paradigm: *The Accused* and even *A Time to Kill*.)

Several other prison movies contain rape as a central theme; in these films, the hero must typically endure great humiliation in order to maintain masculine dignity. Such characters who cannot preserve their manhood under these circumstances inevitably die during the film. This functions as a rhetoric geared toward reinforcing the body/mind dichotomy for audiences: as Carter stated, "I'm free in here." The audience is supposed to agree that it is superior to be sound in the mind than whole in the body. This is reinforced in *Midnight Express*, also based on a true story, a film which uses an attempted rape as a plot device: the attempted rape of Billy Hayes instigates his escape from a Turkish prison. Though the scene was represented as a nonessential event (most of the film is about the injustice and conditions of the Turkish prison system), it is critical to the storyline as it enables Hayes to escape. He attempts to bribe a guard which ends in the rape attempt; he resists and accidentally kills the guard. What is most interesting about the scene is Hayes' reaction to the threat. At the end of the film, Hayes is a broken man; physically exhausted and barely able to communicate, and his sanity is questionable. Given Hayes' deteriorated physical and mental condition, his forceful resistance suggests that he can withstand anything except rape.

In *The Shawshank Redemption*, an adaptation of a Stephen King story, "Rita Hayworth and the The Shawshank Redemption," Andy Dufresne is convicted of murdering his wife and sentenced to a life term. When Andy arrives at the gates of Shawshank with several other prisoners, they are greeted by scores of inmates who taunt them by crooning "fresh fish," taunting that lasts through the night: "Hey fish, fishy, fishy, fish, . . . You scared of the dark? . . . They's gonna be queers later. . . . Poke your ass out and give me a first look." And in a reference to the film version of *Deliverance*, one of the inmates jeers, "I want me a pork chop." This too is not uncommon for prison films. Most prison films depict a sort of distorted "welcome wagon" on inmates who goad, taunt, and threaten incoming inmates—often

placing bets on the first to “get punk’d.” What’s more, the “pork chop” comment is clearly a reference to James Dickey’s infamous scene in the film version of *Deliverance*, a scene which has become so ingrained in the American psyche that we are still able to recognize the allusion despite the lexical shift. Further, the welcome wagon phenomenon reinforces the myth of “type-targeting” discussed above. In rhetorical terms, this is a method of discouraging men in the audience to disassociate themselves with a violable “type.” It sends the message, “I should be able to look at you and tell if you are an impenetrable man or if you are a ‘punk.’” In *Shawshank*, Andy is immediately targeted for rape by a group called “The Sisters.” During the rape, Andy throws punches, fighting back; the camera shows the fight but fades away from the rape as Red offers the following narration: “I wish I could tell you that Andy fought the good fight and the sisters let him be. I wish I could tell you that, but prison is no fairy tale world.” Interestingly, Stephen King is able to portray Andy in a positive light despite his rape victim status. Andy’s masculinity is intact because he fights back—even to the point of almost getting killed.

In a majority of films that take place in prison, rape scene occur early, almost immediately after the inmates enter the facility (*American History X*, *An Innocent Man*, *Sleepers*, and *American Me*). This serves to reinforce the idea that rape is prevalent and inevitable. Rape innuendos also are common and, as I pointed out in regard to “pork,” intertextual. Actual rape scenes are, for the most part, quite short, lack detail, and employ obscured camera angles. This is not so for the typical female rape scene (*The Accused*, *The General’s Daughter*, *Sudden Impact*, even Alfred Hitchcock’s *Frenzy*) which does not shy away from depicting female rape. Consider *American Me*, a film which contains various instances of both male and female rape; the female rape scenes are far more graphic than the obscured prison rape scenes. Though there are these occasional variances, rape is always and clearly portrayed as an act of power; once the protagonist bests his aggressors, they lose their standing and no longer commit rape or threaten rape. In these cases, the rapists typically meet with misfortune and are killed in an act of retribution.

There is one film which depicts male rape in a way that has captured and tormented the American male imagination more than any other. In 1972, John Boorman directed a film based on the poet James Dickey’s novel, *Deliverance*. Beyond the eloquent language of Dickey’s prose, more than the messianic imagery which has the hero, Ed Gentry, “nailed” to a cliff like a crucifix, more striking than the class bigotry and the political tension of the Tennessee Valley Authority’s exercise of eminent domain, one image lingers in the mind’s eye of

those who have seen the film or read the novel. Astonishingly, the image is equally recognizable to those who have not had direct contact with the text. This image is not Lewis Medlock's / Burt Reynolds' hyper-sexualized body in a scuba suit, it's not Ed Gentry's / Jon Voight's body at risk climbing a perilously steep cliff; it's not Ronnie Cox's / Drew Ballinger's dead and mangled body floating in the mystic river. All are powerful images, but at the mention of *Deliverance* or the sound of "Dueling Banjos," Americans picture Bobby Trippe's / Ned Betty's feminized body bent over a log with a toothless man behind him cajoling, "I want to hear you squeal like a pig."

Written in 1970 and filmed in 1972, *Deliverance* has an enduring quality; aside from the intensely disturbing rape and subsequent murders, the novel as well as the film is filled with Dickey's beautifully poetic melancholy. The basic plot involves four Atlanta businessmen who make a canoeing expedition down the Cahulawassee River which runs through the isolated Georgia wilderness but the plot turns to a terror film when the foursome's canoes are separated. The occupants of one canoe (Bobby and Ed) run across a pair of mountain men wielding a loaded shotgun. It is at this point that Bobby is forced at gunpoint to strip naked before being brutally raped while Ed, tied to a tree and held at gunpoint, helplessly looks on. After humiliating and torturing Bobby, the two turn to Ed saying, "He's got a real purty mouth, ain't he?" Before the stranger is able to force Ed to fellate him, Lewis relocates his friends and kills the rapist with an arrow. The rest of the film is occupied with hunting down and killing—all while trying not to be killed by—the other man. It is necessary to kill the second rapist for many reasons. Overtly Lewis argues that he and his friends would be arrested for murder and would never receive a fair trial if the jury were composed of the dead man's kin. What is not spoken, but is nevertheless communicated, is that neither Bobby nor his friends want what had happened in the woods to be known. In *Deliverance*, there are plot elements of justice, vigilantism, property rights, and ecological consequences. Nevertheless, this one scene overshadows the legacy of *Deliverance*.

What happens linguistically in the novel cannot be portrayed in the film without heightening the aggressive taunts spewed by the rapist. Interestingly enough, the phrase, "I want to hear you squeal like a pig" does not appear in the novel and was added to the screenplay of *Deliverance*, serving to intensify the humiliation of Bobby's rape in the back-woods of Georgia, and this one line has become a stock referent to male anal rape. In the novel, however, Dickey is able to use language to feminize Bobby in way that cannot be portrayed visually. In dialogue the rapist uses feminized words like "panties" and Dickey

uses descriptors like “pink” and “hairless” to portray Bobby’s body and therefore represent him as feminized; Dickey also describes Bobby’s modest posture, “like a boy undressing for the first time in gym,” “thighs shaking,” “wincing,” “head bowed,” and “legs close together.” While receiving instructions from the rapists, Bobby keeps his head bowed and he is silent. He seems to consent to this act; he does what he is told, he removes his clothes, leans over the log, and submits to rape—but, as Catherine MacKinnon points out about female rape, his consent is only out of fear of greater violence. In both the novel and the film, the men are positioned so that Ed is compelled to watch Bobby’s molestation; though he is tied and cannot help Bobby, he is vertical while Bobby is bent over a log. This rhetorically lessens Ed’s humiliation in comparison to Bobby’s. Further the audience’s gaze is directed at Bobby. We can read the subject and object of this scene easily along a Mulvian paradigm: we are looking at Bobby, the men are looking at Bobby, Ed is looking at Bobby, and we are looking at Ed looking at Bobby. The woodsmen are the subjects and Bobby is the object of the gaze—Ed is a secondary object, he is in the liminal space between subject and object. He is the woodsmen’s secondary object as well. Also, consider Bobby’s name; he is not called Rob, Bob, or Robert, but “Bobby.” This is Dickey’s way of letting reader know that this character is more “boy” and less “man.”

We can take the feminist philosophies concerning visual pleasure and consent to this scene, not in an attempt to usurp feminist theory or to claim that male rape is the same problem as female rape, but to point out that a dualistic ideology inevitably leaves one subject in power and one object without. As Lancaster points out, men can assume object masculinity. Because this position is regarded as feminizing, it perpetuates female oppression and should be critiqued as part and parcel of a hegemony of sexual subjugation. The philosophy of dualism is profoundly compelling; it seems uncomplicated to be able to break the world down into either/or, this or that. But when we examine the consequences of, the limitations of, dualism, we begin to uncover a system that not only allows oppression based on gender—biological, rhetorical, or otherwise—but sets a precedent for it. It is easy for us to relegate male rape to a position of triviality or freakishness to be gazed upon uncomfortably because it doesn’t fit into our *a priori* schema of sexual practices and we know that it doesn’t quite fit with theories of queerness and consensual homosexual intercourse. When it becomes integrated into a rhetoric of passive versus active, we say; “Oh, that I understand. It’s really, male/female, just with two male bodies.” This stance is problematic; to suggest that simply because we recognize that it is acceptable for sexual representation to

fall along two parallels—male/female, subject/object, active/passive, power/substance. This relegates us forever to a struggle to achieve an ethics in sexual relations, to find consent in desire.

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