

A FREUDIAN ANALYSIS OF INDIVIDUAL AND THE CHURCH IN THE MONK BY MATTHEW LEWIS

*Matthew Lewis'in Keşiş Romanında Birey ve Kilisenin Freud Bakış Açısıyla İncelenmesi*



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Abstract

Depicting the existence of social, ethical, and religious problems in institutional church and aristocracy, many of the novels written in Gothic tradition are critical of the aesthetics of the neoclassical period. Not only did gothic novels emerge as a reaction to the values and dynamics of the neoclassical period, but they also depicted a realistic panorama of the Romantic period with its usage of supernatural and mysterious elements. In this respect, Gothic tradition is a mixture of reality and hidden feelings that individuals and society had at that time. Being an anachronistic representation of the period, *The Monk* (1796) by Matthew Lewis is highly critical of the Medieval representation of the Church covering incestuous villains, oppressed religious characters like a villainous monk, seducing demon and evil nuns, the plot structure is an extensive presentation of the dark side of the human and problematic issues taking place in and around the Church along with the presentation of aristocratic life. Lewis presents not only what is visible but also highlights contradictory applications of the Church. This deep and dark relationship is one of the main issues of the Medieval period portrayed by Lewis in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. In this context, this study intends to shed light on this interwoven and complicated relationship from a Freudian perspective by highlighting connections, especially between the id and superego to reveal hidden and deeper feelings inside human beings.

**Keywords:** Gothic novel, villain, Freud, id, superego

Öz

Kilise ve aristokrasideki var olan sosyal, ahlaki ve dini problemleri resmeden Gotik roman neoklasik dönemin estetik anlayışına eleştirel bir tutum sergiler. Gotik roman türü sadece neoklasik döneme bir tepki olarak ortaya çıkmamış, aynı zamanda doğüstü ve mistik unsurları kullanarak Romantik dönemin gerçeklerini yansıtmıştır. Bu bağlamda, Gotik roman o dönemin bireylerinin ve dolayısıyla toplumun içinde barındırdığı gizli duygularla gerçeğin harmanlanmasıdır. Yazıldığı dönemde bir zaman kayması yaşayarak Mathew Lewis *The Monk* (1796) adlı romanında orta çağın kötü insanlarını, baskı altındaki din adamlarını, yoldan çıkmış şeytani ve günahkâr rahip ve rahibeleri konu alır ve olay örgüsü de kilise ve aristokrat toplumlarında yaşayan insanların karanlık ve problemleri yanlarına odaklanır. Lewis sadece görüneni değil aynı zamanda kilisenin hastalıklı ve çelişkili yanlarını da gözler önüne serer. Orta Çağ kilisesinin en sorunlu ve en karanlık yanlarını 18 yy okurlarına anlatmaya çalışır. Bu bağlamda, çalışmamız bu sarmal ilişkiyi Freud'un psikanaliz teorisi kapsamında insanın derin ve karanlık yanlarını ortaya çıkarmak için id (bilinçaltı) ve süper ego terimleri kapsamında inceleyecektir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Gotik Roman, kötü karakter, Freud, id, süper ego

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## Introduction

The last three decades of the 18<sup>th</sup> century initiated a sort of transformation in terms of the social milieu. It was the time when the French Revolution in a social context and the rise of Evangelic movements in a religious sense had a paramount impact in Europe. From the collapse of the feudal land-owning system to the rise of the middle-class bourgeoisie, British society experienced a range of changes in terms of social, political, and religious developments as well as scientific discoveries. Establishments of Tory and Whigs as separate parties in the political arena, Erasmus Darwin's most prominent book *The Botanic Garden* (1789) in terms of scientific progress, and the rise of middle-class society as a reaction to land-owners marked a new beginning in the late 18th-century society in Europe and Britain respectively. Scientific developments sparked skepticism towards the superiority of the Bible and Evangelical romanticism was supported against reasonable Christianity (Garfinkle, 1955). Last but not the least, Industrial Revolution had a domino effect first in Britain and in all European countries and then over the rest of western countries and continents alike. In that sense, the rise of the middle-class is tough to be attributed merely to the emergence of The French Revolution since the Industrial Revolution also had a great share to account for the emergence of a new class in the European countries. As a result of all the above-mentioned development, the novel as an intellectual genre emerged as a realistic depiction of social observations.

Under the harsh influence of all sorts of turbulent developments, Matthew Gregory Lewis wrote *The Monk* (1796) at a time when there was social, political, and religious unrest within British society and the neighboring countries. The novel gave rise to a great controversy amongst the reading public and writers of the time alike. With its extraordinary plot and reflection of the gothic machinery-supernatural, vaults, incest, horror, terror- the novel deals with the skillful use of social and religious issues such as corruption in the Church, class consciousness, and hypocrisy in both society and the individual. Gothic machinery in the hands of Matthew Lewis "*becomes a fiction of unconscious desire, a release of repressed energies and antisocial fantasies*" (Botting, 1996, p.19). As Botting accentuates, such desires, energies, and fantasies find their expression mainly in the character of Ambrosio, a so-called reliable religious figure of the Church. Matthew Lewis uses this scandalous account of goings-on in monasteries and the prison of the Inquisition to sensational and horrific effect (Hennesy, 1978). His story is built on the traditional themes of Faust and Wandering Jew, personified through the narcissistic Spanish monk Ambrosio. Lewis describes "*the subversion of the religious man as the work of Satan, who induces the powerful sermonizer Ambrosio to abandon church-mandated celibacy and commit sensual atrocities*" (Snodgrass, 2005, p.235), which forms the very essence of the novel and the intricate web of events throughout the plot structure. In an attempt to highlight the negative influence of the Church over the individual subconscious by fostering repressed sensations and natural human desires, this article will deal with Matthew Lewis' *The Monk* from the perspective of Freud's id, ego, and superego. As it will be clarified later, the id is represented by the character of Ambrosio, and the superego is represented by the Church. However, the representation of ego is disputable and remains vague throughout the main plot of the novel.

At the very beginning of the novel, Lewis gives a short but vivid description of the corrupted church and hypocritical aristocrats and middle-class people in Madrid's Capuchin Church. It was Lewis's metaphoric presentation of the setting as he "*provides a social panorama of both Spanish society and, by extension, his own culture. The Spaniards are a metaphor for English people*" (Koç, 2005, p.107). The choice of Spain as the setting is an escape route from the further reaction of British society. The Capuchin Church seems to appeal to the tastes of people rather than moral values. Lewis's depiction of the atmosphere "*[d]oes not encourage the idea that the crowd was assembled either from motives of piety or thirst for information. ... The women came to show themselves, the men to see the women*" (Lewis, 1987, p.7) shows how the church distanced itself from its primary function. This scene is given deliberately by Lewis as a flash-forward for the upcoming events taking place in and out of the monastery in the course of the novel.

This study intends to go deeper into the human psyche through a Freudian perspective. Through the representation of internal conflicts of characters due to the conflict between the id, ego, and superego, the novel blends the darkness of the Middle Ages with the reasonable atmosphere of the late Neo-

classical period and the sentimental mood of the early Romantic period. Ethics of the time conflicts with human nature while romance is replaced by horror and terror caused by the human psyche. In this sense, this article will clarify all kinds of social, psychological, and moral conflicts that the writer narrates through the characters. However, the focal point will be the representation of id and superego; namely the 'pleasure principle' and the 'morality principle' both of which haunt the human psyche all through the main plot and sub-plot structures.

### Highlighting Psychological Binaries: Conflicting Individual *id* and Institutional *superego*

Matthew Lewis clearly depicts the conflicting atmosphere apparent between human nature and the church as a social institution. Presenting this chaos in his attempt to clarify both ethics of the society and impulses of human nature, Lewis uses tragic and romantic elements by making them recognizable not only in the main plot but through the sub-plot. *The Monk* uncovers the centuries-long tyrannical obsessions of the church in the name of different characters throughout the plot structure. Human needs and basic instincts are obsessed by the harsh doctrines of the religious lifestyle of monastery life. Hence, Lewis' depiction of the social and psychological dimensions of society presents a mosaic of dualism: religious/secular, human needs/obsessed feelings, romance/reason, and surrender/rebellion. Intentional representation of natural and supernatural blends well with the gothic elements simultaneously undermines the institution and ethics as well as human psychology. Highlighting perverse sexuality through the plot structure, all the twisted relationships between the characters serve against the religious institution by reflecting the mindset of the new Age of Enlightenment.

The *Monk* is not a mere novel written in gothic tradition; however, it presents the events in harmony with the outstanding ethical, social, and cultural as well as historical facts along with background developments in the society. As a satirical novel in its tone, Lewis is critical of all institutional developments represented by different individuals. The story's two different plots serve to satisfy readers while the events in the course of the plot and subplot serve to prepare the downfall of Ambrosio, the anti-hero of the novel. Ambrosio is restricted by the rules, norms, and doctrines of the Church as he was raised there and had never been outside the walls of the monastery. Within this limitation by the monastery, Ambrosio is alienated from social relations, the very basic human needs. This alienation is a kind of isolation the society with repressed human desires and drives. In other words, it was, to great extent, "*cloistering in which flesh, body, and nature are repressed*" (Kilgour, 1995, p.143). Lewis clarifies that "[h]e (Ambrosio) is now thirty years old, every hour of which period has been passed in the study, total seclusion from the world, and mortification of the flesh" (1987, p. 14). This is not the case for Ambrosio throughout the novel. The naïve and seemingly most religious character at the beginning turns into a villain due to his education in the doctrines of the Church. He is a product of unnatural discipline, unnatural religious repression, including bodily, natural desires. Hence, his downfall from a prestigious position to an evil one constitutes his tragedy. As it is the case, it would be appropriate to examine his downfall from a Freudian perspective, as Freud describes the human psyche using the terms id, ego, and superego. Such terms serve to clarify the situation in which Ambrosio finds himself unwillingly but naturally.

Freud divides individual psychology into three basic components: id, ego, and superego. Our unconscious mind triggers our actions and thoughts predetermined by our instincts and pushed by the activities of life. The id as the utmost primitive part of the human psyche and personality covers and dominates all our instincts and innate impulses. "*The id is the mind we are all born with, a seething mass of wholly selfish desires and the impulses aimed at the immediate and complete gratification of those desires*" (Rennison, 2015, p.38). Depending on the pleasure principle, it aims to achieve pleasure that "*dominates the operation of the mental apparatus from the start*" (Freud, 1989, p.23). The id as the source of spiritual energy provides the power necessary for the operation of the other two systems that differs it from the latter two dynamics of the human psyche. It favors subjectivity rather than objective facts. As stated in psychoanalytic theory, pleasure is the psychic energy compelling people to satisfy their instinctive or libidinal drives such as sexuality, hunger, thirst, etc. The pleasure principle, which is valid for the id, in particular, operates intensely in childhood. The term 'unconscious' coined by Freud makes it clear for complexes that emerge with certain obsessed feelings (Kağit, 2020). "*But Freud had no doubt that these childhood attitudes were the genuine precursors*

and originating points for the adult concepts" (Fancher, 1998, p.35). In other words, these impulses that arise in childhood form the foundation of an adult's psychological problems because the drives of the id come from the unconscious mind. The main purpose of Freud's psychoanalysis is to make the unconscious conscious so that it tries to recover from mental disorders. The unconscious mind, namely the id, is completely incompatible with reality and logic. In this case, the feelings and thoughts here in this stage do not recognize the concept of time, place, harmony with the outside world (Çalrak et al., 2000). The main thing is the satisfaction of the impulses (the pleasure principle). The id uses the ego to satisfy these impulses, it puts pressure on the ego. Within the framework of this psychological motivation, *The Monk* as a gothic novel presents verisimilitude of the production of sexual intercourse through a process that clarifies the relationship between the components of the human psyche.

According to Freud's maps of the mind, "*the battle between conflicting conscious and unconscious desires causes the repression which leads to neurosis*" (Thurschwell, 2000, p.79). Ambrosio appears to be the one suffering from neurosis which has originated from his repressed desires. In his essay, Barry Doyle (2000) explains that oedipalized desire is based on Freud's theory that sometimes a crisis of repression is brought about by the sexual impulses that a son feels towards his mother and jealousy of his father. This seems to be the case that best accounts for Ambrosio's posture that he has never experienced such a feeling because he has been abandoned by her mother at a very early age. In Freudian explanation, the id serves within the direction of the unconscious, and "*id wants and desires in the here and now, it does not make plans for the future. Freud often claims that the unconscious (which is id) knows no time but present, no answer but Yes*" (Thurschwell, 2000, p.82). When we look deep into the case of Ambrosio, it is his unconscious that serves his sexuality. His seclusion from bodily needs and desire and also natural drives drifts him into being a perilous character who tries to satisfy his worldly desires under the pressure of heavenly restrictions. Ambrosio finds himself somewhere in-between his id- his desires and repressed drives- and the superego that prevents him from satisfying his natural needs. Superego is a kind of mechanism that "*judges the conscious and unconscious decisions of the id and the ego and the superego is allied with the sense of conscience and for it, the individual lives as a part of a community, responding and respond to others*" (Doyle, 2000, p.91). Ambrosio is deprived of his ego which is associated with human reason and sanity. Ambrosio's situation throughout the novel proves the essentiality of ego for humankind.

The Catholic Church, namely the Capuchin church, and Inquisition are representatives of the superego that controls, represses, and restricts the unconscious desires and bodily impulses Ambrosio feels towards Madonna, Matilda, and Antonia respectively. It is the Church that "*exercises equally through physical and ideological constraints, can work against basic human needs and desires- presented directly in the story in sexual terms- creating oppressive and violent character*" (Watkins, (1986, p. 121). Another violent character tied to the sanctions of the church is Mother St. Agatha, the prioress. Upon Ambrosio's wish to punish Agnes on account of her confession that she has been impregnated by Raymond, the prioress locks her in the sepulcher where she was left to die for her crime. Ambrosio demonstrates hypocrisy by punishing Agnes for something he is experiencing with Matilda, the so-called Rosario, who is in collaboration with Satan. Matilda enters the monastery in disguise as a novice and upon Ambrosio's realization that Rosario is female; he lets Matilda live in the monastery instead of expulsing her from the monastery. Ambrosio:

I will not compel you to quit the monastery: you have received my solemn oath to the contrary. But yet when I throw myself upon your generosity when I declare generous you the embarrassment in which your presence involves me, will you not release me from that oath?... I shall separate from you with regret, but not with despair. Stay here, and a few weeks will sacrifice my happiness and the altar of your charm (1987, p.53).

It is Ambrosio's id that cannot withstand Matilda's pleas, and this is the turning point in Ambrosio's monastery life. He is under the pressures of the monastery's sanctions that repressed his worldly desires and bodily drives. Ambrosio seems no longer to tolerate the pressures of the Church that plays a restrictive role in the believers. Lewis criticizes Church harshly for a lifestyle full of repressed feelings, totally dependent upon heavenly practices and distanced from the realities of genuine human requirements. Church, as the representative of the superego especially for religious characters, has a profound influence on the unhealthy development of characters. Lewis deliberately puts Matilda on

stage in collaboration with Satan. His intentional creation of Matilda, in disguise of Rosario, is Lewis's wish to demonstrate the repressive, tyrant, and cruel face of the Church. Matilda's first entry into the monastery seems very naïve and well-intentioned: *'Who is there?'* said Ambrosio at length. *"It is only Rosario," replied a gentle voice. 'Enter! Enter, my son!'*" (Lewis, 1987, p.33). Matilda tries to seduce and manages, in the end, to destroy the holy virtues Ambrosio has and Matilda also serves to demonstrate that homosexuality is another issue within Church life. Matilda's temptation scatters the effect of the superego, the Capuchin church, over Ambrosio in his way to keep on seducing, raping, and even murdering Antonio and Elvira.

The representative of the superego, the monastery acts as *"a self-styled stronghold of virtue, is made a repository of sin"* (Koç, 2005, p.123). The so-called virtue becomes a place where worldly desires are satisfied and torture, murder, incest, and terror are commonplace. Lewis' deliberate move to corrupt a respectful institution at that time derives from his wish to liberate those under the unfavorable impact of the monastery. Experiencing these unfavorable impacts of the monastery, Ambrosio becomes a villain, descends from a hero to an anti-hero, and finally, readers witness his downfall along with his being a raper, murderer, seducer as a result of the repressive and oppressive manners that the monastery imposes on him. His unconscious mind never leaves him alone and, on the contrary, serves to force him to satisfy his desires. In this sense, he never keeps a low profile that an ordinary monk is supposed to do. Ambrosio's lust for Matilda is expressed as follows by Lewis:

She started a sound and turned towards him hastily. The suddenness of her movement made her cowl fall back from her head; her features became visible to the monk's enquiring eye. What was his amazement at beholding the exact resemblance of his admired Madonna? The same exquisite proportion of features, the same profusion of golden hair, the same rosy lips, heavenly eyes, and majesty of countenance adorned Matilda (1987, p.62).

Matilda pioneers the revitalization of the id in Ambrosio. *"In his dream, he kisses Matilda and then the object of desire slips away and is replaced by the image of his favorite Madonna"* (Doyle, 2000, p. 65). Matilda is associated with Madonna in Ambrosio's unconscious mind. Ambrosio's realization of peril about Matilda comes very late, and his last endeavors do not yield any results rather than harming Ambrosio's position not only in the monastery but also in the eyes of people. This situation is reiterated by Kilgour who says that *"Ambrosio's downfall begins when the portrait of Madonna he admires becomes real"* (1995, p.156). Ambrosio is tried to be reduced to a position of being a seducer, and desirous of sexuality. However, while his id- the unconscious- serves to demolish him, his superego- the monastery- refrains him from being wholly a sinful human being. He got stuck in between his id and superego. He struggles to maintain his status quo even when his desires culminate. That is what Lewis tries to reveal about Catholic Church, criticizing its values that function against human nature and in time destroy human psychology. Ambrosio's id tries to make him in the direction of his bodily needs and drives while the superego endeavors to hinder him from committing sins contrary to the sanctions of the Church. He does not think of losing his secure and prestigious rank in the church. Along with his lustful and seductive attitudes toward to opposite sex, he pretends to be an honorable monk in the Church. Lewis clarifies his pretense to be a respected monk although he is with 'his other passions lay dormant', and adds:

He continued to the admiration of Madrid. The enthusiasm created by his eloquence seemed rather to increase rather than diminish. Every Thursday, which was the only day when he appeared in public, the Capuchin cathedral was crowded with auditors, and his discourse was always received with the same approbation. He was named confessor to all the chief families in Madrid; and no one was counted fashionable who was enjoined penance by any other than Ambrosio (1987, p.176).

As for the case with Antonio, *"[A]mbrosio's desire to experience a heteronormative relationship leads him, unwittingly, to commit incest and murder his own sister"* (Brewer, 2004, p.200). Following his first sexual intercourse with Matilda, Ambrosio's desire for Antonia cannot be underestimated. In Antonia's situation, it is Matilda again who arouses Ambrosio's id by showing him the bathing scene of Antonia in his magical mirror. Distanced from Matilda, Ambrosio inclines his lustful desires towards Antonia for the sake of whom he kills her mother. Matilda's attempts to lure Ambrosio through a magic mirror deviate him from the true path of the monastery. He becomes, on one hand, the

victor in the way of seducing her, and, on the other; the victim of Satan. Matilda declares his victory against Ambrosio by convincing and prompting him in the direction to seduce Antonia.

She put the mirror into his hands. Curiosity induced him to take it, and love, to wish that Antonia might appear. Matilda pronounced the magic words. Immediately, thick smoke rose from the characters traced upon the borders and spread itself over the surface. It dispersed again gradually; a confused mixture of colors and images presented themselves to the friar's eyes, which at length arranging themselves in their proper places, he beheld in miniature Antonia's lovely form (1987, pp.199-200).

Within the direction of his id, Ambrosio's lust for Antonia ends up losing his virtue. Ambrosia is in pursuit of satisfying his unconscious from the beginning to the end. Lewis's creation of the character of this type is an indication that Church and its members work against its primary function. While revealing this reality, Lewis tries to show us the other face of the coin that the Church functions in the opposite direction of human nature.

From the Freudian id, ego, and superego, the case is not the same for Raymond and Agnes. Raymond is a figure outside the Church, but Agnes is somewhat a member of the monastery on the way to becoming a nun. The love affair then the sexual intercourse between the two ends up Agne's breaking her vow of chastity and later she finds out that she is impregnated by Raymond. As Agnes clarifies her relationship with Raymond "[L]ong before I took the veil, Raymond was master of my heart: he inspired me with the purest, the most irreproachable passion, and was on the point of becoming my lawful husband. A horrible adventure, and the treachery of a relation, separated us from each other" (Lewis, 1987, p.58). When considering their situation from the viewpoint of id and superego, the case is not so different from that of Ambrosio's in its nature. Id- the unconscious- functions in the direction of serving for the couple to satisfy their physical and natural desire while the superego- the Church- serves to repress their bodily needs. In this case, it is Agnes, who is exposed to both physical and psychological repression, loses her newborn and is left to die in the dungeon of the monastery. The decision of persecution she is exposed to is given by Ambrosio and the Prioresses who are the so-called virtuous members of the Church. "Two of the oldest nuns now approaching Agnes, raised her forcibly from the ground, and prepared to conduct her from the chapel. "What!" she exclaimed suddenly, shaking off their hold with distracted gestures, "is all hope then lost? Already do you drag me to punishment? Where are you, Raymond? Oh! save me! save me!" (p.59). This is the way how Agnes is punished by someone who commits much more of the same crime inside the monastery. However, the situation for Raymond is different because he is the representative of ego due to his character traits. He is a passionate lover and has virtue when compared to Ambrosio.

The events in the main plot and the sub-plot reveal the very fact the natural order is restored at the end of the novel by Lewis. Ambrosio who acts in direction of id is victimized at the end of the novel. His death follows soon after he surrenders his soul to Satan to liberate himself from his sins. "The daemon continued to soar aloft, till reaching a dreadful height, he released the sufferer, Headlong fell the monk through the airy waste; the sharp point of rock received him; and he rolled from precipice to precipice, till bruised and mangled he rested on the river banks" (Lewis, 1987, p.323). Lewis's restoring the natural order is demonstrated in the cases of "Raymond and Lorenzo who regained their manhood and marry, and the novel's deviant "women" are punished. Agnes, Marguerite, and the Bleeding Nun, for instance, violate their vows or virtue and are imprisoned, raped, or killed" (Blakemore, 1998, p.535). The quotation highlights Lewis's effort to re-establish the social, cultural, and religious stability in society. *The Monk* (1987) is based upon two sequential plots achieved in the presentation of individual suppressed urges and morality of the time. In the main plot, the monk 'Ambrosio' loses his struggle against Satan, while Raymond re-unites with Agnes in the sub-plot accentuating the superiority of naivety over villainy. From the psychoanalytical perspective, in the story of Ambrosio, the power of institutional morality supersedes instinctual drives. However, in the sub-story between Raymond and Agnes, human nature along with instinctual drives overcome ethical and institutional superiority. In its ceaseless stress upon the traumas of the human psyche and the pressure of the Church's morality, the novel highlights the conflicts between the old form and the modern lifestyles. Consequently, the morality of middle-ages contradicts the modern human understanding settled on the relationships between Ambrosia and Matilda and Raymond and Agnes.

## Conclusion

Lewis's harsh criticism towards sexually repressive members of the Church finds its expression in different characters. He makes it clear that human nature never surrenders to unnatural restrictions and pressures. This repression and reaction interrelation is presented especially by the character of Ambrosio. Being a clergyman, he never prevents him from realizing his worldly desires as it is against human nature not stepping beyond the walls of the monastery for thirty years or so. Ambrosio is always stuck in between his id and the superego -the Church- the controlling mechanism over him for the period. As it is understood from the Freudian commentary of the human mind, the id functions in the direction of present desires and never cares for the past and the future. But when repressed ceaselessly, the situation turns into a neurotic fact that is a perilous level of inciting the hatred inside a human being. This is the reality for Ambrosio whose in-betweenness id and superego causes him to be a tyrant and violent character. This is the aim Lewis sets to assault the Church from this weakest aspect and he tries to expose that the repressive character of the Church destroys the human psyche. As he is stuck in between the freedom of the id and the repression of the superego, Ambrosio finds himself in such an undesired situation that his neurotic situation never recovers. Lewis seems to reach his goal in revealing the fallen Catholic church- the superego. In the middle of conflicting psychic desires and morality principle, Lewis presents a clear-cut depiction of society all through the plot structure. Twisted and interrelated incidents are based on well-established binaries represented by varied characters being involved in various events.

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