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ENCODINGS



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ENCODINGS

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From the collection of Donna Walker.

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This is the premier issue of ENCODINGS, and with it, we celebrate the establishment of our publishing company, Liaud: A Women's Press and the increased opportunity for propagating women's writing. The establishment of Liaud and ENCODINGS derives from our recognition of the fascination for language that is so characteristic of the current period of feminism.

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WHAT'S A LIAUD?

One Sunday in March, 1989, we're brunching at the Hobbit Hole, some of us from the Women's Group of Houston. I'm enjoying a conversation with Audrey Crawford who sits across from me. "Guess what we've named our press," she says. I make no attempt to guess, but let her inform me. "Liaud." I love the name, a combination of Lita and Audrey, founders of the new press. It sounds like the name of some exotic thing, or a kind of poetic form. Now, it so happens that Iris Sizemore, spirituo-physico guide for and originator of the Women's Group, loves words, and is much given to sesquipedality. So I decide to tease her.

"Iris, here's a new word for you -- liaud. What do you think it means?" She can scarcely take a break from a protracted endeavor to dazzle some new-to-the-group woman with her newest litany of mellifluous words. But eventually I get her attention. And suddenly the group is off and running. Everyone must define this spendid new word!

"I think it's something which can be heard only in intimate liaisons in the dark," says Jill.

"A beautiful break in the weather, including rainbows, soft clouds, light breezes -- especially enjoyable with a romantic companion," declares Gail.

And Lena, "A French Southern belle's pronunciation of 'loud'."

Then Catharina, one of the group's writers, insists it must be "a poetic form praising 'a fruitful connection, which solidifies the

relationship and is later transferred to a rune stone for posterity to share the excitement."

"Liaud: to decorate with flowers of speech," says Margaret.

"Dark, like Lilith's eyes," says Claudia.

"Audible, something that can be heard like a celebration or proclamation," from Joyce.

"To write at night to a lover after laddling,*" from Iris.

"To applaud a woman for her laddling technique," I counter.

Then Beth bursts into plum-colored prose. "My sweet precious Liaud -- you ask me if I'm lonely. Well, of course, lonely. As a woman driving across country, leaving behind all the little towns she could have stopped in and lived and died in, lonely." (This is an example of a liaudarism, she says.)

Very quietly Sara Jo concludes, "Liaud -- a lilting sound, the meaning of which varies by time, location, and interpersonal content, but rarely heard, except during the hours surrounding sunrise and sunset, by those who do not listen with great concentration."

We all agree, however that the real meaning is a combination of all of these, an incorporation of our excitement about the new opportunity for women to speak and to be heard.

Jacquelyn Shawh

*The combination of loving and straddling.

LIAUD

A powerful and now secret gemstone,
sacred to wisewomen,
worn either set in a headpiece
over the third eye, or
between the breasts at the heart.

Liaud: a precious stone
of translucent purple, with veins
of rich green, absorbing
to the eye. A gem which,
when worn on the forehead,
confers the power of stillness in motion,
stops the fruition of fearful thoughts
and expands the fruits
of acts performed with love.
For this reason, liauds
were exchanged as bonds
of loyalty between women
before the Burning Times.

Liaud: when worn over the heart,
a stone of great mystery, granting
the power to drink sunlight
and transform light to energy.
Thus a woman who wore a liaud on her heart
could travel great distances without food
or weariness. Such women were warriors
and healers, and their liauds
were passed on only to a young woman
who had studied and devoted herself
to the arts of transformation, courage,
compassion and endurance, and whose heart
had burned long and clean
in the fire
of the love of womankind.

Liaud: that which can never be broken
by any means. The liauds
and their wearers are among us,
hidden until the moment
they shall shine again
in their full power and radiance.
Until that time
they cannot be seen, except
by those who keep within
their silent eyes, the gift
of invisibility.
The liauds are self-revealing,
having their own wisdom,
and their own dimension.
Their presence among us will be made known
Soon.

Karen Hanson

RUNNING AT 3

To or from,
At three I couldn't be sure what drove me,
Legs pushed hard and rose high
So hungry weeds wouldn't swallow me up.
My name darted in and out of my ears
Carried on bursts of wind,
Tall grass whipped my cheeks
For being such a naughty girl.

Once, I stopped, choking air,
Looking back to see my mother,
A fly on the screen door,
Her wings wildly waving.
I saw her suddenly grabbing my name
And riding with the wind
Just atop the tall grass toward me,
But I was in a sea, far from shore
Drowning in my sudden freedom.

Turning, I ran
Until my name couldn't find me.

Marie Catherine

WHISPERS ALONE IN THE DARKNESS

If I were there
I'd hold you with my eyes
and caress you with my breath,
See you with my hands,
Taste you with my heart.
I'd kiss you with my skin
and glide in your excitement.
My fingers'd listen to your moves
and talk to your mouth,
Lashes nibble your breasts.

If I were there I'd hold you
With my eyes.

Marie Catherine

AN ENEMY WORLD

Her brow furrowed
keys hit the mantelpiece,
spitting sighs from her spirit.
My eyes trace circles
around the cloak of light
hugging my shoulders
and book.

She doesn't see.

I don't look up.

The carpet crisp and groomed
cringes before her step
and the baking chicken

hisses -- shshsh,

Chilling vegetables quiet.

Papers rustle,

A drawer slams,

"Damn!"

I hear her shoes crash
in the closet.

My eyes rise to watch
a shadow brisk
and brusque
and brutal

jerking clothes.

Pipes scream

as water gushes forth ... icy
then warming.

Steam floats through the doorway.

Minutes and minutes pass
until I am sure she has melted
and washed down the drain.

The shower stops abruptly.
I don't look, hearing
bare feet
crunch the carpet.
Silence.
Slowly I rise up
Stiffly moving,
page unturned.
Quiet steps, softly
I peer into the warzone.
She has collapsed,
face down, arms outspread,
cockeyed across the bed.
Centuries later she emerges
eyes puffy and soft,
Cheek sleep embroidered.
"Hi, Love."
And arms wrap themselves
around me.
Soft and soothed
Renewed.

The war forgotten.

Marie Catherine
(October 1988)

AMERICAN DAUGHTER-IN-LAW IN BOMBAY

The first word I learn to catch is panee, water. Quickly understanding the comfort and luck of having an extra barrel stored to flush and wash, I'm forced to note the needs I never used to notice. Before the sun's assault, I wake to think of my bath: the pain

in the ass of doing it fast, taking pains to wash without waste before the water runs out at nine a.m. Though the ruthless sun undoes my washing all too soon. Comfort winks at me -- a priceless jewel! But needs more snarling than mine are everywhere, stored

in bones that block the doorways at night, stored in mass flesh, built into the city. Pain jangles like loose change in a pocket. I need to turn away, go home. There is no water or food enough to make a difference. Comfort's a rag in shade, a cloud passing over the sun.

Tasselled silks with twice the shine of sun, bangles of ruby, pearl, and gold are stored and locked in a teak wardrobe, gifts that discomfit me. The family warns -- almost, it seems, on pain of death -- keep your wardrobe locked! Do watery eyes watch my keys? I think I need

suspicion, to divert my notice of the needs of servants who sleep on stone, wake with the sun to bathe, dress, and fill our barrels with water; who squat on stone, paring and chopping; who store their hunger as we dine, enduring the pains til eleven p.m.; who live to ensure our comfort.

Later, in monsoon, a weathered woman comforts
three small girls. Their tears don't dry. The need
for shelter remains a need, and I envision pain
swelling like tumors throughout the city. The sun
has released its sky to clouds. Driving to the store
for sweets and silks, I watch the curbside flooding
of water.

Months later, I fly in comfort, over the waters,
back to a storybook town, a salubrious sun.
My journey is painless; everyone sees to my needs.

Jacquelyn Shawh

SONG FOR A SEPARATION

Don't give me history
I don't want it
your idea of our time
partially observed
imperfectly remembered
loudly described
your too personal attack
on the past dragged before me
like the first shot or caught
a boy drags in, expecting
pride and praise.

I don't want your bloody history
reeking of your booze
clad in tweeds or drabs or jockstraps
echoing your WWII blues.

Let me just sit here awhile
in the hard dry present
and dream, for once, of a future
cool, clean, and fertile.

Jacquelyn Shawh

MAGICIAN AND ASSISTANT

Thirteen and already he has a saw in his hand.
His mother has a wooden spoon. Snap!
and Mother runs to the box. She adores the wand.

When his magic, black and growing, causes a flap,
she makes excuses, conjures his baby image,
forgives the little prince his pranks and scraps.

He says, "Fuck off!" She disregards the sacrilege
and plans a standing roast, a pie. And prays.
Boys will be boys -- their privilege!

He lives to eat, sleep, and dream of ways
to spend ten bucks. He's never seen a farm,
never made a bed, or worked, but always

procures money from some silk hat. Harm
just doesn't come to him, he's like Houdini:
he wriggles out of every spot. The charm

is in the boxing. Arrogant as Cellini,
he shouts his "Me, Me!" and in the box
his mother begins to bloom, incurable genie.

Aproned and ready for the latest pox
of demands, she doesn't hear his belly-laugh.
Her love wears on, so orthodox.

A wave of wand, and Presto! He saws her in half.
An earthworm, she regenerates, doubling
efforts. No need to write an epitaph,
Mother, rusty cauldron, goes on bubbling.

Jacquelyn Shawh

KEYBOARD BLUES INTO BLUE

Stumbling block, o black, white,
mute, o mute, so mute
under frozen fingers.

Fumbling fingers on black, white
notes, male notes, male tunes,
male-made, o block.

Bumbling in black, white
straits, time-trapped in bars,
male bars, o block.

O black and white devil of labor
division, feats block music,
music mine. Compose or perform.

No! O blue out of black, and blue
out of white, things as they are
can be changed.

Things as they are can be made
woman's own tone,
come out of black, white.

White and black, o wild tunes,
my own runes, O J, play me,
just me, moments, music

I choose to play, I choose
to stop, pause, o blue babies,
mine, I give into air.

Jacquelyn Shawh

TOE SHOES

Scuffed satin and a whorl of worn ribbons:
her shoes still hang from the closet knob. Dreams
have hardened into artifacts. As robins
usher in the spring, so do extremes
escort awakening. She used to dance,
on point, in sequins and tulle, her pageboy pulled
to a smooth chignon. I was new to elegance,
brought up in braids and jeans, a tomboy, hobnailed.
Dazzled, I watched her practice échappé
on point, and wore my own black leotard
like love, whispering magic words: jeté,
développé. Development was hard:
she offers canapés; I sit, compose
images of échappé on bloody toes.

Jacquelyn Shawh

THE METEMPIRICS* OF YOU AND ME

A concept barely construed --
conjugation of roses,
essence redolent as champac,
the fragrance sacred to Vishnu,
protector of the world.

A being like you
awash in my consciousness so long,
then the flesh and bone of presence,
enigmatic florescence of conflux
out of angle, stance, sound, and movement.

We crush
to that essence,
so many bruised petals,
from an urgency sprung from stata,
bedrock built for years.
Like ooze of oil the novel flow
of self out of self into other,
returning to self --
a conjugation related to
and yet beyond
our separate understandings
of self and other.

Breathing into each other,
we know intuitively to protect our nighttime
world of roses.
We murmur our mysterious incantations.

Jacquelyn Shawh

*Study of concepts and
relationships conceived as beyond and yet
related to knowledge gained empirically.

PUFFER AND WHALE

With you, I'm a little fish,
puffer used to being belly-up
BB eyes bulging.

You're a beached whale, with me,
bleaching in our winter glare,
fat sides going all dry.

I try to see us as people.
After all, we eat and drink
and try to talk. We think

we have to talk.
Me, born-again globe
swimming a tiny orbit,

I feel your old whale bulk
as we try to talk. Dead fish
stink up our heads. We haul

them to the surface,
toss them at each other.
It's loneliness, you say. Yes,

even a whale is small in the palm
of loneliness and I worry

that my jewel, solitude,
might be a fancy fly hiding

a hook. So we talk, talk,
posing as people. Forever
puffer and whale.

Jacquelyn Shawh



Mirror Lake, Storrs, 1976, photograph.

BARBARA ENTMAN



Hyatt Bridge, Houston, 1982, photograph.

BARBARA ENTMAN

LAGNIAPPE

I could have loved you.

We would have kissed through smiles and
cried each other's tears.
Burned, breath to breath.
Bound minutes into memories.

I would have carried scent, taste and touch of you.

Instead I carry the sense of you.
Distill my passions to a glance.
We'll stand on distant poles,
and come no closer than
this touch of hands.

I could have loved you --
and perhaps I do.

Annise D. Parker
(4/25/89)

PAST PERFECT

I touch your hair --
and feel her hair against my hand,
the texture crisp and soft
as clover in the sun.
The scent of clover rises from my mind,
and almost fills the air.
Your lips are warm --
but in their kiss another's lips
meet mine and trace my sighs,
an echo of the past.
Remembered passion burns but leaves no mark,
no trace but vague regrets.
We speak no words --
that have not heard their silence read
in midnight whisperings,
or the voice of shared dreams.
These phrases come because they are the best,
and meant in present tense.

Annise D. Parker

G-I-R-L

Woman.

You ask my thoughts.

First, can I spell it?

Woman ... g-i-r-l.

Yes. I heard you.

I said g-i-r-l.

You say that I am confused.

No. I've been taught well.

I also listen and read well...

"nice girls don't act like that."

...girls and men.

...lunch with the girls.

...girl friend.

...that girl.

..."Music to watch girls by"

...cover girl

...glamour girl

...show girls, nude girls,
girls, girls, girls

...you're such a good girl good girl
good girl.

Yes, I heard you. I said g-i-r-l.

My thoughts? I should know?

My age? I should know by now?

Yes, I do.

I heard you.

I've been taught well.

I'm such a good girl good girl good girl.
g-i-r-l.

K. Noel Gregory

BENT

(I was bulimic for 11 years. One day I was able to find the words that perfectly describe how I often felt living with bulimia. I tell you this because it is important to me for you to know what this poem is about.)

Another small room,
 Just large enough.
But then again, nothing is ever too small.
Staring bent into the pool of reflection.
It smells of waste, of rot, of guts.
A cesspool can smell of nothing more.
With time, reflections fade and odors are sweet.
 A feeling of being at home.

Sometimes I enter through that door
 reluctantly hating ... myself?
 the cesspool?
 myself the cesspool?

A dumping ground of acid washing away white enamel.
A hollow of earth stripped naked
 of valuable materials.
Invisible pieces of flesh dissolve
 steadily unnoticed.
Fragments of my heart splash,
 swirling round and round ... sinking.
The soul shrivels and curls
 defeated by the gradual emptying,
 It lies fetally paralyzed.
Pieces of my brain bob rhythmically.
My head hangs loosely in numbness of no weight.

K. Noel Gregory

WAKING

Waking in the morning
after the purely symbolic ringing
of the alarm clock
30 minutes earlier:

I turn to your warm, bundled body,
twisted in the sea of sheets
like driftwood,
feel your warm breath on my face
like fine ocean-spray,
sunlight from the window above the bed
deepening the shadows
under your still-closed eyes.

Again last night
there were the little moans
drifting in your sleep,
the agonized drowning sounds,
soft, terrified whimpers
escaping your clenched teeth.
I reach across your chest
and pull myself quietly
closer to you:
When you wake
let it be in the bay
of my arms.

M. Laurita (Lita) Fike

WHEN ADRIENNE SETS THE STANDARD

And you ask for my response
I become bereft of speech.

Words puff up and disappear
Beneath my tongue like cotton candy,

While hers are agile and elegant
Life-sculpted, and honed to the point.

Where does my silence come from?

I search the pocketbook of my conscience
for guilt like a scrupulous nun.

From envy? Or jealousy?
(Poets and penitents draw fine distinctions.)

Sixteen years ago you read my poetry
And I was proud.

Now you read Adrienne
As kindred, sister, self.

And I, neglectful of the muse,
Feel clumsy before you.

So now, not face to face,
I tell you:

Last night's poem bled from my brain
into the synovium of every joint.

Is every woman discard?
Do all girl children stand in memory
With backs against the wall,
Dry-eyed and defiant?

I saw myself as in a mirror
Thirty years younger,
And you at three and six and ten
All one, superimposed,
Agreed:

We are more
than the sum
Of the shared and different damages
Done to us,

Splendid beyond even Adrienne's words:
Strong in love not finite
Even though
Our origins were.

M. Laurita (Lita) Fike

SHE WANTED HIM

Dead.

She was afraid he wouldn't die soon enough.
She was afraid he would die before
She could tell him
She wanted him dead.

Curled up at night in bed
Her hands tucked carefully in her armpits
She fantasized her favorite deaths for him:
She saw him, skin stripped away,
Covered in blood;
She saw him skewered over a bonfire,
Writhing and dripping above the hissing flames.
She wanted his pale charred bones
Heaped before her.
She wanted him dead.

She did not want to share life
With him any longer.
She did not want him to breathe the same air,
Walk the same earth,
Inhabit the same universe.

She wanted him dead,
This man who had taken her child body
Against her protests
And probed every orifice
With his fingers, his tongue, his penis;
This man who had tortured her,
Humiliated her,

Who had claimed to love her and lied;
Who had probed and poked and licked
And sucked and rubbed
Until, exhausted, she would explode
And disappear
Into a coerced and painful orgasm,
Confusing pain and pleasure,
Leaving her adult reality
With no more consistency than a cobweb;
She wanted him dead.

She wished wasting diseases upon him --
Cancer to eat in his belly like a rodent
And syphilis to invade his brain
Like termites.
She wanted him nowhere near her
But she wanted to see him die.

And just before the fantasies
Put her to sleep
She would curse him:
She called him monster
Beast, devil.
She called him
Daddy.

M. Laurita (Lita) Fike

POETS

(For Jacqui on her birthday)

There is a life beneath the surface
Like a sunken ship,
Alternate existences float
In mysterious underwater streams,
Almost intelligible voices,
Like the song of whales,
Insistent as they beckon.

There is a life beneath the surface,
Murky and mysterious,
Which floats, alternately beckons,
Insistently song-like,
Dark streaming voices,
Not without danger,
Flashing silver ripples,
Promising promises.

We blink and open our eyes
Wide and hard above the surface,
Think, hope,
Perhaps it is a dream
This other life,
These other sounds,
This dark light just beyond
Our sight,
That pushes, slaps, repeats
Insistently,
On the beaches of our consciousness.

We look away, we close our ears,
We seek any ship to sail,
To turn our thoughts,
To keep our minds afloat.

Until we find
That we've grown gills
And there is no choice
Except to
Dive.

M. Laurita (Lita) Fike

UNDER YOUR SKIN

Under your skin
some inner river flows
fear like lava from volcanic memories
burning skin and fat and muscle
down to bone
until uncovered and unconnected
I fear you will spill
into that molten pond
of yesterday's terror

A blue pulse in your throat
speeding up
precedes the pallor
and the flush
as the river surges
your skin burning
your bones click clicking
your bones falling

You cast a Xanax on the river
like a tiny purple dam
and for today
that inner torrent
slows and cools

But in my dreams
sometimes I walk behind you
in storm-damaged harvest
gathering your bones.

M. Laurita (Lita) Fike

UPON MY TONGUE

Years ago, our love
like new beaujolais,
we made pilgrimage to Sonoma,
where wineries like monasteries
hide among the hills.
By night, our windows pulled open,
the fragrant breeze blowing in
over the balcony,
we wrapped soft sheets around us
and I lay in your arms,
your deep kisses like
rich port wine
upon my tongue.

By day we walked cool halls,
smelled the tang-filled air
above the casks,
handed each other small glasses
of sample wine, our fingers gently touching.
At one vineyard cafe we sat
in bright sunshine,
fruit-heavy vines
as close as shadows to our table.
You plucked two grapes
and put one in my mouth,
the sudden spurt of juice
surprising me,
hot and dark and sweet
as your orgasm
upon my tongue.

M. Laurita (Lita) Fike

Clear liquid
glistening drops on soft skin
reflecting and absorbing light
running down her thighs
over my breasts.

We are as a river gurgling, chortling, laughing,
running up and down and over and under
my body as a wave of desire
moving up and down and over and under
and up and down and over and under
and up and down and over and under
and over and over and over
and d

o

w

n

the waterfall
into the tumultuous waves
into the sun and a place
of bright light and of peace.

Jessica O'Keefe Rothe

REBELLIOUS LEGS

Curly wild tendrils of black hair
travel unruly paths
closely hugging my curves
winding in bold black circles of rebellion.

Curly wild tendrils of black hair
draw curious eyes
astonished at the never-seen
spirals of nature.

Curly wild tendrils of black hair
so stark against my creamy skin
turbulent and savage,
yet soft, almost furry,
all thick, all black, all beautiful,
Curly wild tendrils, my hair.

Jessica O'Keeffe Rothe

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Marie Catherine is a pseudonym for a physician pursuing a career in the specialty of Family Medicine. She is currently in residency training out of Texas but wishes to return some day as she has a very special attraction to Texas and the Southwest in general. She loves to bike, camp, eat, and of course, write poetry.

Anita Louise is a visual artist whose art reflects and illuminates her spiritual path. Through images of the goddess within, she seeks the interweavings that create the circle, the web that connects all life, the ever-cycling song of life, death and re-birth: seeking visions of what we will be when we return to the circle. Anita coordinates a life-span religious education program for the First Universalist Unitarian Church in Houston.

Barbara Entman is an award-winning photographer who has participated in more than 21 group exhibitions in five states. She has had five solo exhibits and several of her photographs have appeared in literary magazines and newspapers around the nation. In addition to photography, Barbara's passions include writing poetry and prose and producing excellence in radio broadcasting. She supports herself working at KPFT-FM (90.1) as Development Director. Her show, "Jazz Therapy," can be heard Wednesdays, from 1:00 to 3:30 p.m. in the Houston area.

M. Laurita (Lita) Fike is an occupational therapist by profession, writer by preference, feminist by conviction, and publisher by serendipity. Although not a victim of incest or sexual abuse herself, she often writes on this topic for love of her sisters who are survivors.

K. Noel Gregory is a reticent Houston poet, who is also known to the editors as an artist, composer, and pianist.

Karen Hanson, CSW-ACP, is a psychotherapist in private practice, who has been writing poetry for 20 years. She has worked and participated in the women's community of Houston for many years, giving talks on therapy-related issues and occasional poetry readings. She has published a book of poetry, Spine, (Ithaca House, 1971) and has a second in manuscript form. She graduated from Cornell University (B.A., English, 1971) and Syracuse University (MSW, 1978).

Annise D. Parker is a native Houstonian and a graduate of Rice University. She describes herself as a Lesbian, a feminist and a political activist, not always in that order. Her favorite activities include reading, growing cacti and succulents, travel and collecting fetishes. She has written poetry since the age of 12. She firmly believes that it is not enough to be; one must do.

Jessica O'Keeffe Rothe (Rothe) is a Houston-area physician and feminist. Her name is a pseudonym which entwines the poet's female ancestry: Jessica is her paternal grandmother's name, O'Keeffe is her paternal great grandmother's name, and Rothe is her mother's maiden name.

Jacquelyn Shawh, poet and feminist, studied English literature at Rutgers and Drew Universities. She is co-facilitator of The Women's Group, a feminist group that has flourished for fifteen years, providing a forum for women to explore their concerns and achievements. She shares a Houston home with daughter Zarina.

University of Central Oklahoma Library, Edmond, OK



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Property of the Center

ENCODINGS

"The linguistic term lexical encoding refers to the way that human beings choose a particular chunk of their world, external or internal, and assign that chunk a surface shape that will be its name: it refers to the process of word-making. When we women say "Encoding" with a capital "E" we mean something a little bit different. We mean the making of a name for a chunk of the world that so far as we know has never been chosen for naming before in any human language... we mean naming a chunk that has been around a long time but has never before impressed anyone as sufficiently important to deserve its own name... There is no way at all to search systematically for capital-E Encodings. They come to you out of nowhere and you realize that you have always needed them; but you can't go looking for them, and they don't turn up as concrete entities neatly marked off for you and flashing NAME ME. They are therefore very precious."

(From Native Tongue, by Suzette Haden Elgin, Daw Books, Inc, New York, 1984, p. 22)

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