

JAMES JOYCE, ROMAN CATHOLICISM AND ITS PRESENCE IN *DUBLINERS*

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Proem

James Augustine Aloysius Joyce is one of the greatest writers of the twentieth century. Joyce's production is not very large in number; it includes only three books on poetry, one on short stories, one in theater, and three novels. These books are all masterpieces, copious and profound in content. It is also a notorious and recognized fact today that any contemporary writer has been one way or another, influenced by this Irish writer.

When either the scholar or the ordinary reader confronts this author's work, there are many things that call hid attention: the beauty of the language, the creation of new terms, the autobiographical data omnipresent in the entire production, as well as symbols of all sorts that make his books quite difficult to read and understand. In relation to this, Harry Levin states that:

*The technical and psychological paradox is that Joyce, as his comprehension or ordinary humanity increased, became less comprehensible to the common reader.*¹

It should be stressed that there is a rather large net of themes associated with profound sentiments of man, from friendship to passion, and from passion to frustration,² which is an obsessive leitmotiv in Joyce's books.

¹ *The Essential James Joyce*, p. 8.

² For the aims pursued in the forthcoming reading, the writer makes his Dr. James D. Whittaker's definition of *frustration* James D. Whittaker *Psicología*. trad. por Vicent Agut Armer (Plexica: Nueva Editorial Interamericana, S.A., 1977, p. 532).

It is an accepted fact today also, that when an individual reader deals with a written text, the only thing that really matters is this *one and only* text,³ but in the case of James Joyce, the frequent help and use of reading guides, maps and other data, oftentimes serves to clear the picture and to reinforce the understanding of his writing.

As a man, James Joyce was annoyed in the social, religious, political, economical and conjugal fields. The ever-present atmosphere of religious elements can be found in his entire work.

Due to the nature of this analysis, it is approached mainly in one particular work, *Dubliners*, a collection of fifteen stories.⁴ This work masterly portraits multiple facets of human existence, frustration in all fields, being religion one of the most important ones. Harry Levin, a Joycean critic and editor's words, resume this idea very well:

*He [Joyce] is commonly remembered not as a mature creator-forging, in mingled arrogance and piety, 'the uncreative conscience of his race' – but as winged figure posed for a break with the dominating forces of his background. Language, religion and nationality were envisaged [...] as a series of nets to restrain that initial impetus... For the irreducible substances out of which Joyce created his monumental achievement were nationality, **religion**, and language [bold by the writer of this article].*⁵

³ As modern literary criticism states today.

⁴ *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* will be mentioned oftentimes.

⁵ Idem pp. 8-9. Joyce is Stephen in *The Portrait*.

Introduction

In relation to the methodological approach, this reading⁶ follows some of the principles stated by Bernard Gicquel's with *las dimensiones del texto*; and Gaston Bachelard's *el lenguaje y lo imaginario*.⁷ These authors' particular lineaments on the subject have been taken and developed into a particular syncretic method of analysis.

The general plan for this article is to present the religious matters in *Dubliners*. This begins with the mentioning of James Joyce's strong religious Jesuit upbringing, as the members of the Company were the ones that cultivated him spiritually and religiously, they became the yeast of Joyce's interest in learning, which finally led him to the fine art of his writing. Following there is Joyce's use and coining of two terms, *epiphanies* and *epicleti*, considered⁸ key to the understanding the stories and much of his work. One fact worth mentioning is that the external world of the characters in the book, that is the setting, coincides with the real city of Dublin, with its streets, small roads, government buildings, churches and real people become the real geography in the book, and where these personages live and evolve. It is precisely here where the omnipresence of Catholic religious elements, are found. Finally, the detailed analysis of the religious content of the stories will be presented.

*At maiorem Dei Gloriam*⁹

James Joyce: A renegated catholic

The Joyce family, very fervent Catholics, was once a healthy, upper-middle class with some money. They raised their children in Catholic schools run by the most intellectual order in the Church, the Jesuits. Around the year 1889, while attending Clonglowes Wood,¹⁰ James excelled the other classmates in religious instruction,¹¹ and it is at this precise moment when Joyce begins to be interested in the Church and its ritual. Richard Ellmann, his best biographer, points out, that

*the majesty of the Church excited him and never left him (J. J., 30). Ellmann also says that Belvedere College did very well for Joyce by giving him excellent training in theology, English and three foreign languages (J. J., 57).¹² Nevertheless, Joyce decided to separate from the Church while he was still attending Belvedere College, though he did not tell anyone¹³. Around the year 1902, James began learning about other philosophies, such as theosophy, but in the end he was a skeptical about it, also. But in spite of his separation from the Church, Joyce kept a tacit defence of the sanctity of the Church, this becomes quite obvious when, in relation to some converts in Joyce's city, known as the Dublin mystics, who had left the Church to become latter-day saints; Joyce ironically says about them to his brother Stanislaus, that these people *do not compare either for consistency, holiness, or charity with a fifth rate saint of the Catholic Church.*"¹⁴ In *The Portrait* Joyce-Stephen is asked by Cranly, another character, if he would become Protestant. Joyce reacts to this by replying:*

*—I said that I have lost the faith ... but not that I have lost self-respect. What kind of liberation would that be to forsake an absurdity, which is logical and coherent, and to embrace one which is illogical and incoherent?*¹⁵

During Joyce's early years at Clonglowes Wood, he felt a deep admiration for the Jesuits, as he was truly impressed by the blind allegiance and obedience, internal and external, similar to the obedience of soldiers, which Jesuits kept for their superiors and the Pope. He almost gave the Company his own allegiance in *The Portrait*, when Stephen Dedalus, the protagonist of the novel, thinks of himself as the Rev. Stephen Dedalus, S. I. It is understandable that Joyce felt attracted to the Company, as it meant order and stability, opposed to the chaos in his family life. Later on, as Stephen-Joyce grows up and matures a little, he realizes that he can no longer continue admiring his professors and accept their blind obedience. He thinks of this blind obedience as degradation to their humanity, a destroying of the soul, and mortification to the spirit. If he had accepted this moral passivity of the Jesuits, the rejections of personal

⁶ Reading is sometimes used in this article as a synonym of analysis.

⁷ The available texts are translations from the French.

⁸ The Roman Catholic mass considered here, is no other but the Tridentian.

⁹ The Jesuits motto.

¹⁰ A Jesuit primary school.

¹¹ After his confirmation, that year, he wrote a hymn to the Virgin Mary, which his mentors praised as very good.

¹² Greek, Latin, French.

¹³ Another Jesuit secondary school, very prestigious.

¹⁴ *My Brother's Keeper*.

¹⁵ *The Portrait*, electronic version, p. 801.

responsibility for the sake of a religious community that would have been very much against the development of himself an artist. For him this was similar to an abdication of the mind, and James Joyce-Stephen Dedalus could not accept this.¹⁶

Scholars today aim at explaining and understanding Joyce's particular behavior in relation to the Catholic Church. He apparently hated it, but he kept admiring it, very much. Richard Ellmann recalls this fact, as he mentions that among the first open statements Joyce makes about leaving the Church is found in a letter to Nora, his wife, dated August 29, 1904:

Six years ago I left the Catholic Church, hating it most fervently. I found impossible for me to remain in it on account of the impulses of my nature. I made secret war upon it when I was a student and declined to accept the positions it offered me. By doing this I made myself a beggar but I retained my pride (J. J., 175).

Another important historical fact refers to the moment when his son Giorgio, was born: Joyce said that there would be no baptism,

[...] thanks to the Lord Jaysus, no gopeller has put his dirty face within the bowl of an ass of him yet (J. J., 212).

Joyce's words, dramatically contrast with the testimony on the subject of religion by Mme. Maria Jolas, the wife of Eugène Jolas, both close friends of James Joyce's and his family, who openly spoke about the subject during the Fourth International James Joyce Symposium, held at the University College, Dublin,



from June 11 through June 1973. Following, there is a verbatim transcription of Mme. Jolas' words:

Talk about religion? And how! In fact, my problem was that my husband was also Catholic. The two backgrounds were very much the same; both men were eldest sons and destined for the priesthood. But of course, Joyce made a much more radical break with the Church that Eugène Jolas, who broke away from in for a short while—I should say about ten years of his life—and then sort of ease back.

[...] One night we were talking about that [bringing children up as Catholics] and Joyce was holding forth against the Catholic Church. I said, 'Oh, you know I have to bring my children up as Catholics. You scare me to death.' And he said, 'Yes, but you are in France, I am talking about Ireland, where it is black magic.'

There is another funny story in regard to religion ... that went to Mass without her husband's knowledge. Now when Stephen the grandson was born—Mary and Padraic Colum, as you remember, were very devout Catholics, so there was in the near family circle Eugène Jolas, Catholic, Mary Colum, Catholic, Padraic Colum, Catholic. In other words there were enough to get him baptized and give him a godfather and a godmother. So they did this very thing.

When James Joyce found out he said: 'What! They baptized him? He called the next morning to confirm.'¹⁷

The testimony speaks for itself in relation to the author's religious attitudes. Nevertheless, in his mind, in his conception of the world, and in his writings, as much as in his solid theological background, James Joyce remained solidly a Catholic. Dr. Francesca Romana Paci says that Joyce left the Church, but he did not lose faith, which he turned into life and art.¹⁸

¹⁶ Fco. Hernández. *James Joyce's Dubliners: A Reading*.

¹⁷ Francisco José Hernández. *The Frustration in James Joyce's Ulysses*. pp. 93-94.

¹⁸ *The Feeling of Frustration*, pág. 95.

James Joyce built his own aesthetic theory, and to do so he borrows the idea from Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologica* as he chooses a dictum out of context, *Pulchra enim dicuntur ea quae placent*.¹⁹ Joyce-Stephen Dedalus, in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, says that the essential qualities of supreme beauty are three: *integrity, symmetry, and radiance*. This is referring to Saint Thomas' *integritas, consonantia, and claritas*, that Joyce called *quidditas* (Romana Paci, p. 73).²⁰

Epiphanies and epicleti

"By an epiphany he [means] a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or of gesture or in a memorable phase of the mind itself. He [believes] that it was for the man of letters to record these epiphanies with extreme care, seeing that they themselves are the most delicate and evanescent of moments" (Stephen Hero).

A very important aspect to be considered is the terms *epiphanies* and *epicleti*, frequently found in Joycean criticism as a result of the author's frequent and emphatic use of them.²¹ They are key terms to the understanding of many passages in *Dubliners*. The word *epiphany*, *epiphania* in Latin, comes from the Greek, which means revelation. In Greek drama it is equivalent to a *deus ex machina* moment, as the god appears and imposes order on the scene before him. In the Christian tradition, the feast of Epiphany is the revelation of Christ's divinity to the Magi. James Joyce used the term in a related but special way. In the theory of art he was working on in 1904, Joyce employs the term *epiphany* to moments in which things or people in the world reveal their true value or their essence (Romana Paci, p. 139). James Joyce collected about seventy epiphanies, from which only have survived.²² He used the terms in other works such as *Stephen Hero*, and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.²³ In *Stephen Hero*²⁴, Joyce worked

the notion of epiphany into his aesthetic theory to describe the climatic moment in the apprehension of the beautiful. Parallel to the *epiphanies* Joyce uses another term *epicleti*, which also comes from the Greek. Joyce explains that there is a resemblance between the mystery of the mass and what he tries to do that is, to give people some sort of intellectual pleasure or spiritual enjoyment by *converting the bread of everyday life into something that has a permanent artistic life of his own... for their mental, moral and spiritual uplift* (Brother's pp. 103-104). Dr. Romana Paci²⁵ says that there is no crucial difference between *epiphanies* and *epicleti*, because *son dos momentos de un mismo proceso* (Romana Paci, p. 139). R. Bruce Kibodeau (*J.J.Q.*, XIV. 1, pp. 90-91) says that every story in *Dubliners* "concludes at a sharp crystalline point where a character or the reader is aware at a flash of the import of the story." He also points out that these endings comprise a series of tableau-like images that when combined outline and illustrate the book in its entirety. Most important of all is Kibodeau's differentiation between these two terms in relation to the conclusion of the stories; he explains,

Strictly speaking, epiphanies belong to characters in the book, but when they occur for the reader, it is a result of epicleti, Joyce's magnificent metaphor for the artistic process. As with the Mass, Joyce requires faith and insight, both inside and out, and the rewards are proportionate to the fervor of the believer. He offers us the sacrament, the creative process (p. 91).

Finally, Harry Levin, in relation to epiphanies, says that:

*In calling his original jottings epiphanies, Joyce underscore the ironic contrast between the manifestation that dazzled the Magi and the apparitions that manifest themselves in the streets of Dublin; he also suggested that those pathetic and sordid glimpses, to the sentient observer, offer a kind of revelation. As the part, significantly chosen, reveals the whole, a word or detail may be enough to exhibit a character or convey a situation.*²⁶

¹⁹ Santo Tomás de Aquino. *Summa Theologica*. Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1974. p. 94.

²⁰ This aesthetic theory is fully developed in an article titled *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man: A Reading* by Francisco José Hernández.

²¹ Francisco José Hernández. *The Feeling of Frustration in James Joyce's Dubliners*.

²² Joyce tried to burn the manuscript, but his sister Eileen saved it from the fire.

²³ Stephen Hero is the first draft of the work which was eventually to be published as *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Its survival is due to quick action of Joyce's sister, Eileen, who rescued it from the fire where it was thrown by Joyce during a crisis, James Joyce *Stephen Hero* (London: Triad Panther, 1977).

²⁴ Joyce's draft for *The Portrait*.

²⁵ Francesca Romana Paci. *James Joyce* (Barcelona: Ediciones Península, 1978). Any further mentioning to this book will be Romana Paci, followed by the page number.

²⁶ *The Essential James Joyce*, p. 354.

In regard to all epiphanies, it should be stressed that the world Joyce reveals is neither beautiful nor exalting; in *Dubliners*, it is weak and invalid, stricken by aphasia. Joyce's epiphany, even though it retains the quality of a spiritual revelation, expresses a realistic intention that the young artist had learnt from Flaubert and Ibsen. It is the culmination of the process of cognition and a moment of all-inclusive truth that the writer has to record objectively.²⁷

The concepts of *epiphany* and *epicleti* are today considered basic to the understanding of *Dubliners* and the rest of Joyce's literary production.

Political changes offer relative freedom for Irish Catholics

It becomes important to present some of the religious changes that the city of Dublin and its people underwent, after the signing of this Act of Union. The starting point will be January 1st, 1801, when the Act was signed with England.²⁸ This was accurately described as a legislative union, between Ireland and England, and the Irish Courts and some Irish government departments, which continued to function much as they did before.

*The Act was engineered by a good deal of bribery and skullduggery and against the bitter opposition of much of Catholic Ireland and of many Protestant leaders. Several Catholic bishops supported the Act of Union in the hope, which proved ill-founded, of achieving Catholic Emancipation as the price of their support.*²⁹

After this Act, many changes in the educational and religious life of Ireland, especially in Dublin, took place. In the educational and religious matters, institutions, which were mainly Anglican, such as the Trinity College, opened all positions after 1873 and, except for those connected with the Divinity School, were opened to all people without religious tests. In 1851, John Henry, Cardinal Newman, founded the University College, the first Catholic University in Ireland, which in 1909 became a constituent college of the National University of Ireland. By the year 1874 Protestant

predominance in professional and social life was disappearing slowly. In 1861, when the first religious census was taken, Protestants comprised about one quarter of the population of Dublin and suburbs. The rise in the status of Dublin Catholicism over this period is reflected in the Catholic churches and religious institutions constructed since the emancipation in 1801. The Pro-Cathedral on Marlborough Street, the first large nineteenth-century Catholic Church in Dublin, impressive in its Grecian simplicity, was placed just a little aside from the full stream of the city's life. It was build as a substitute for the metropolitan cathedral as the Protestant Church of Ireland used the traditional one, Saint Patrick, and Christ Church. Two decades after, other Catholic churches were built such as St. Paul's on Array Quay, St. Audeon's on High Street, St. Andrew on Westland Row, and the Jesuit Church on Upper Gardiner Street.

Religious scenario of the stories

Religion is a very important aspect in the life of all Irish, especially Dubliners. The Roman Catholic Church is fundamental to the idiosyncrasy of Irish people, and, above all, a symbol of national unity against Protestant England. The Irish Church with its rules is felt in all aspects of Dublin life, from education at all levels –of which James Joyce is a vivid example– to domestic things such as marriage and separation. In Joyce's short story *The Sisters*, the boy protagonist learns from Father James Flynn, a paraplegic priest *the meaning of the Eucharist and the secrecy of confession*. This priest studied in the Irish College in Rome, which is an Irish-sponsored foundation for the training of Irish clergy. The protagonist of the story learns more of the Catholic doctrine and the gravity of the sin from the sick priest. Other religious references in the same story are well marked, such as the meaning of the Extreme Unction, the chalice, and the correct pronunciation of Latin, as well as the Maynooth Catechism and the breviary that are also mentioned there. In *The Boarding House*, the local priest grants Mrs. Mooney's separation from her husband and the care of her children. In *An Encounter*, there is also some religious irony, the *Pigeon House*, which is the Dublin electricity and power plant mentioned here. The dove, the traditional symbol of the Holy Ghost (Matthew 3:16, John I: 32) is ironically substituted here by a close relative, the *pigeon*. The influence of the Church is also felt in the prohibition of

²⁷ Francesca Valente. Joyce's *Dubliners* as Epiphanies.

²⁸ It is also called *The Union Act*.

²⁹ Gifford, *Joyce Annotated*, p. 19.

contraceptives subtly alluded to by one of the Misses Morkans in *The Dead*; as she refers to the rubber *galoshes* made in the continent out of gutta-percha, when she says with an ironic tone *you wear over your... over your boots, isn't it?* (*D.*, 164). A Roman Catholic school probably Belvedere College, is found in *An Encounter*, and a Jesuit school for boys that the author attended after leaving Clonglowes Wood, when the Joyces moved to a poorer side of Dublin. In *Araby*, another school is mentioned, the Christian Brothers School, operated by a lay order. The Joyce children attended this institution for a short time in 1893, but James never referred to this break in his Jesuit education, as it was mainly a school for sons of the poor and working class. In *Ivy Day*, Jack, the old caretaker's drunkard son is sent there for a short time, but he drops his attendance. In *Eveline*, there is also another priest mentioned, it is Eveline's father classmate, who now lives in Melbourne, Australia. When it comes to Catholic devotions, a very important French saint, Blessed Margaret Mary Alacoque canonized by Pope Benedict XV in 1920—is mentioned in *Eveline*. This saint was responsible for the establishing of the devotion to the Sacred Heart. This saint was paralytic, apparently Father's Flynn's counterpart (in *The Dead*) as she was chaste. In *The Boarding House*, the bells or Saint George's Church ring, as if they were foretelling the wedding plot set up by Polly Mooney and her mother. Tommy Chandler's little baby-boy is called by his mother *lambabaum*, Irish dialect, for lamb-baby, lamb-child.³⁰ In addition, the mother also calls the baby *lamb of the world*, which counterparts him with Christ called *Lamb of God* in the Scripture and the Catholic liturgy.³¹ In *Counterparts*, little Tom Farrington vainly calls on Mary the Intercessor to save him from the wrath of his father who is definitely not in heaven. Maria, the protagonist of *Clay*, attends mass, though she lives in the Dublin by Lamplight Laundry, which is run by a society of Protestant unmarried women, widows and childless women. She also visits the Donnellys on October 31, the eve of All Saint's Day. In *A Painful Case*, James Duffy, who *has no creed nor church*, (*D.*, 99) has a copy of the Maynooth Catechism *sewn into the cloth cover of a notebook*, (*D.*, 98) this is the standard catechism for Ireland, ordered by the National Synod of Maynooth, Dublin 1883. The Royal College of Saint Patrick is in Maynooth, 15 miles away from Dublin, and it is the chief seminary, and the clerical center of

Catholic Ireland. In *A Mother*, Mr. Kearney is said to go to the altar every Friday in devotion to the Sacred Heart, which was a very strong practice in Dublin. The main exercise was the receiving of the Eucharist on the first Friday every month.³² The Pro-Cathedral is mentioned in this story for the first time in the book. In *The Dead*, the main character, Gabriel Conroy is named after one of the seven Archangels, Gabriel, which means *man of God*. In the Christian tradition, the Archangel is charged with the ministration of comfort and sympathy to man.³³ In addition, in the same story, Lily, the caretaker's daughter, named after the flower, is also an attribute of the Archangel Gabriel, who [announces] the coming of Jesus to Mary (Luke, I: 26-38) and who will announce the second coming of Christ. The lily serves as a symbol of death and rebirth at funerals and in the ceremony, which celebrates the Resurrection at Easter.³⁴ In addition, one of the Misses Morkans [Gabriel's aunts] bitterly mentions her deception for she is not allowed to sing in the church choir anymore, since November 22, 1903, as Pope Pius X with his *Motu Proprio* prohibited women from singing in church choirs. In the same story, the Trappist Order with its strict rules of life is cited as well as the generosity of the monks, who are by no means money-oriented. The story *Grace* is worth mentioning as an outstanding example of Irish religious frustration. In relation to this, this story reflects much of the ignorance and common feelings towards the Church by Irish Catholics, many of them frustrated ones. It is a vox populi fact that James Joyce was all of his life a frustrated Catholic. Harry Levin once said, in relation to Joyce that *Loss of faith for a Roman Catholic*

³² The promises of the Sacred Heart made through St. Margaret Mary Alacoque to those faithful who display in their homes a representation of the Sacred Heart and who receive the Eucharist on the first Friday of each month: I will give them all the graces necessary in their state of life.

I will establish peace in their homes.

I will comfort them in all their afflictions.

I will be their secure refuge during life, and above all in death.

I will bestow abundant graces on all their undertakings.

Sinners shall find in My Heart the source and the infinite ocean of mercy.

Tepid souls shall become fervent.

Fervent souls shall quickly mount to high perfection.

I will bless every place where an image of My Heart shall be exposed and honored.

I will give the priests the gift of touching the most hardened hearts.

Those who promote this devote shall have their names written in My Heart never to be effaced.

I promise thee in the excessive mercy of My Heart that My all powerful love will grant to all those who communicate on the First Friday in nine consecutive months the grace of final perseverance; they shall die in My disgrace nor without receiving the Sacraments. My Divine Heart shall be their safe refuge in this last moment. *Joyce Annotated*, pp. 49-50.

³³ *Joyce Annotated*, p. 13.

³⁴ *Idem*, p. 112.

³⁰ Gifford, *Joyce Annotated*, p. 72.

³¹ This is John the Baptist epithet for Jesus. Gifford, *Joyce Annotated*, p. 72.

can never mean a gradual and easy process of evaporation. In his case, it became a credo in itself.³⁵ Levin is definitely right when it comes to James Joyce. In *Grace* Mr. Kernan's family is disintegrating due to his uncontrolled alcoholism, and his wife and friends cannot help him, but Mr. Power, another character, a little skeptically, hopes the man will turn to the Church for redemption. Mr. Kernan, a converted Catholic at the time of his wedding, has not been in church for twenty years. Mr. Kernan's friends, at his bedside, in a superficial perception of religion, discuss Roman Catholicism in a misinformed, witless fashion; this conversation provokes Mr. Kernan's decision to attend a retreat in the Jesuit Church at Gardiner Street. There he listens to mass and sermon, taken from Luke 16:1-8. Joseph Davis points out that, with this sermon Joyce, as usual, employs irony to indicate that *grace* has been wholly secularized and that man, without religion, can turn only to the material world of comfort, not to God or to his fellowmen. *One can only set right his material accounts amid the personal despair of his own loneliness.*³⁶

Conclusion

This analysis has presented James Joyce's Catholic upbringing, as well as his very own perception of religion and rejection of the Catholic Church, and its after-effect upon his entire life and work. It has also established the existence of religious elements all over the fifteen stories that comprise *Dubliners*. All of this is framed in Dublin, the artistic scenario where the personages in the stories, live and die determined by this setting, surrounded by everything that involves the Roman Catholic Church. The Church is omnipresent, with its influences, meaning, buildings, masses, rites, dogmas, devotions, worship, retreats, failures and sins, but above all, faith and union against a Protestant England.



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³⁵ *The Essential James Joyce*, p. 11.

³⁶ Davis, p. 89.

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