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**Symbolism in Selected Novels of Francis  
Scott Fitzgerald: With Special Reference  
to The Great Gatsby**

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### ملخص الدراسة

تتمحور الدراسة الحالية موضوع الرمزية في أقاصيص مختارة للروائي الأمريكي ف. سكوت فيزجيرالد: غاتسبي العظيم نموذجاً. تقع الدراسة في أربعة فصول بالإضافة إلى خاتمة.

يلقى الفصل الأول نظرة على إنجازات فيزجيرالد كروائي أمريكي رومانسي والذي يتمتع بدرجة عالية وثابتة وحادة من الوعي والتي جسدها عبره جل أحداث الماضي بتفاصيلها. يتبع الفصل الثاني إسهامات وسمعة وصيت الروائي ف. سكوت فيزجيرالد والذي يمثل أفضل حقبة تاريخية في أمريكا والمعروفة (بعصر الجاز).

يتناول الفصل الثالث فكرة الرمزية عند فيزجيرالد. أولاً: يعطي خلفية تاريخية ونقدية عن الرمزية في الأدب الإنجليزي. ثانياً: تتناول فكرة موضوع الرمزية عند الروائي فيزجيرالد. يتناول الفصل الرابع الرمزية عند فيزجيرالد في تحفته الأدبية الموسومة ب (غاتسبي العظيم).

توصلت الدراسة إلى نتائج أهمها أن الروائي الأمريكي ف. سكوت فيزجيرالد يتمتع بأسلوب ونمط غني بالرمزية وأنه يستخدم الرموز لتوضيح التعقيد في الموضوعات الرئيسية من رواياته بشكل عام وفي (غاتسبي العظيم) على وجه الخصوص.

### **Abstract**

The present study aims at examining Symbolism in Selected Novels of F. Scott. Fitzgerald: With Special Reference to *the Great Gatsby*. The study is divided into four chapters in addition to a conclusion.

**Chapter One** casts light on F.S. Fitzgerald's achievement as a romantic American novelist who possessed an "acute consciousness of the irrevocable passage of everything into the past". **Chapter Two** traces F.Scott. Fitzgerald's Contribution, Reputation and Influence. Fitzgerald was the author who best represented the historical decade in America known as 'Jazz Age'. **Chapter Three** explores F.Scott. Fitzgerald's idea of symbolism. First, it gives a general a historical and critical background of symbolism. Secondly, it gives a brief commentary on Fitzgerald's idea of symbolism. **Chapter Four:** examines symbolism in *The Great Gatsby*.

Finally, the study ends with conclusion that Fitzgerald's style is richly symbol. He uses symbols to complexly illustrate the major themes of his novels in general and in *The Great Gatsby* in particular.

## Chapter One

### Introduction

F. Scott Fitzgerald, is a romantic American writer who embodied the decades between the two wars. His personal life, which always rivaled his fiction in public interest, epitomized the Jazz age style; innumerable college proms, marriage to a beautiful southern debutante, widespread fame and sudden affluence made Fitzgerald not only an observer of the society but an important member of it. The dual nature of his role, as Malcolm Cowley (2006:78) points out, allowed few other writers:

*The sort of understanding that Fitzgerald showed when writing about the 1920's. He combined intimacy with distance; he seemed to be standing inside and outside the period at the same time.*

Those who belittled him, alleged that Fitzgerald had been given, in this context Wilson (2005:45) points out:

*Imagination without intellectual control of it, had been given the desire for beauty without an aesthetic ideal, or that he had been given a gift for expression without very many ideas to express.*

Other critics considered Fitzgerald just another fashionable writer a la mode. They reckoned that he submissively assumed the moods and the temperament of his times. He thereby risked being forgotten when they passed away. These critics maintained that since the thirties Fitzgerald had become in the eyes of readers an anachronistic acrobat of a flashing futile epoch.

Mizener (2005:56) wrote that Fitzgerald was a "romantic writer" who possessed an "acute consciousness of the irrevocable passage of everything into the past". Both Keats and Rupert Brooke, are idols for the young Fitzgerald, influenced him in their work and in their lives, becoming by their respective premature deaths embodiments of the romantic philosophy they preached. Fitzgerald would come to resemble them in many ways.

The most significant thing about Fitzgerald and his contemporary writers, then, was their shared conviction that it was possible for an American, writing directly out of American experience to produce major novels. When Fitzgerald was an undergraduate at Princeton in 1916, he said to his fellow undergraduate, Edmund Wilson, "I want to be of the greatest writers that ever lived, don't you" (Meyers, 2001: 13). If this remark was almost ludicrously brash, it was also quite serious, as the persistence of this impulse throughout Fitzgerald's career show. He really believed that it was possible for him as an American to be a great writer.

Fitzgerald was writing about the young, but a new tone, a new mood, has appeared in his work:

*All the stories that came into my head had a touch of disaster in them—the lovely young creatures in my novels went to ruin, the diamond mountains of my stories below up, my millionaires were as beautiful and damned as Hardy' peasants. In my life these things hadn't happened yet, but I was pretty sure living wasn't the reckless, careless business these people thought,— this younger generation just younger than me.*

An important influence in Fitzgerald's writing is Joseph Conrad. Fitzgerald said that he had learned a lot of from Conrad and had consciously imitated him in *The Great Gatsby*. Conrad's influence can be seen in Fitzgerald's evocative symbolism (the green light at the end of Daisy's dock, the desolate wasteland of the Valley of Ashes, the God – like- judgment of the eyes of Doctor T.J Eckleburg), in his resonant style, the revelation of the story by moving forward and backward in time, the themes of romantic illusion and corrupted idealism. Fitzgerald's confidential narrator Nick Carraway, like Conrad's Charlie Marlow in *Heart of Darkness* and *Lord Jim*, provided distance and credibility by retrospectively telling a story that he, a character in the novel, had personally observed. He combined disapproval of and sympathy for Gatsby just as Marlow did for Lord Jim.

In his most fully realized artistic achievement, Fitzgerald creates a rich pattern of evocative language and some provocative symbols to carry the weight and meaning of his ideas. Some, such as the novels' symbolic geography and the many references to time and death, will be discussed in chapter three of the current study. Other equally important poetic devices resonate with meaning in *The Great Gatsby* and provide further evidence of the degree to which Fitzgerald crafted his novels to achieve his purpose.

## Chapter Two

### F. Scott Fitzgerald's Contribution, Reputation and Writing Career

#### 2.1 Fitzgerald's Life at A Glance:

F. Scott Fitzgerald was born in 1886 into Fitzgerald an upper – class family. He attended Princeton University, due to the outbreak of the First World War, he interrupted his studies and joined the army. After his discharge from the army he moved to New York City, where he started working on his first novel entitled *This Side of Paradise*(1920) in which Fitzgerald portrays the temperament of his generation:" here was a new generation, shouting the old songs, learning the old creeds.... Growing up to find all human beings dead, all wars fought, all faith in peace shaken" Fitzgerald, 1963: 253). In 1921, Fitzgerald married his fiancée Zelda, a young socialite from a wealthy background and embarked with her on a high life of big spending and party-going. To support such a lifestyle Fitzgerald, had to keep turning out large amounts of work, so he started writing stories for popular papers. The appearance of his second novel, *The Beautiful and the Dammed* (1922), consolidated his fame as a brilliant writer.

In 1942 Fitzgerald and Zelda moved to Europe and settled on the French Riviera. The following year Fitzgerald published what is widely considered his finest novel, *The Great Gatsby* which is Fitzgerald's triumph. It is, in fact, an American masterpiece. The novel captures in a work of conscious artistry all the yearning desire and anguished disappointment of its haplessly romantic hero. (Brucoli.1981:220)

For the next five years the Fitzgeralds travelled back and forth between Europe and the United States. In 1934 Fitzgerald published *Tender is the Night*. Most critics praised it, although with some reservations, possibly due to the long years of waiting that had raised expectations extremely high. The sales were a big disappointment-even if they were quite good considering it was published during the severest depression- to Fitzgerald whose income had drastically declined from the mid- twenties.(Brucoli,p.,267). He tried working on another novel, stories and films but much of the material was wasted, and he got deep into debt. In 1935 Fitzgerald suffered a breakdown of his own, while living alone in a small hotel room trying to save money, realizing he was unable to write. In the end he began writing about his inability to do so, articles that were published as the (crack-up)-essays, portraying his humiliation. (Brucoli, p., 405).

In the last year of his life Fitzgerald worked on a novel about Hollywood, wanting to prove himself and the world that he was still a first-rate novelist. (Brucoli, p., 477). In 1940, before completing his final novel, *The Last Tycoon* (published in 1941), he died, at forty-four, of heart attack.

## **2.2 Fitzgerald's Contribution, Reputation & Career.**

Fitzgerald was the author who best represented the historical decade in America known as the 'Roaring Twenties', or 'Jazz Age'. Fitzgerald was not, however, a detached observer of the period- he experienced it first hand and was an expression of its aspirations, drams, and excesses. All his novels are autobiographical to some degree. *Tender is the night* (1934), for example, tells the story of a psychiatrist who

marries one of his patients and reflects the author's experience as the husband of the mentally unstable Zelda.

During a professional career which lasted twenty years, Fitzgerald wrote three of the best American novels. In forty years, since his death, Scribner, his publisher, has sold out at least eight million copies of his books-twenty-seven new volumes of his writings have been published together with some fifty biographical and critical books and pamphlets. His works have been translated into thirty-five languages. *The Great Gatsby* has become a class-room staple, and sells some 300.000 copies a year in America. (Brucoli, p., 277).

Fitzgerald had a clear understanding of the craft of fiction and its application to his own work and the work of others. His ability to see the value in works from various periods and genres is evident in comments he made throughout his careers in letters , notebooks, reviews, articles, reading lists , and passages in his fiction(Fussel.2001:56).

Fitzgerald came to literature with as sense of wonder and a sense of what was of value. Trilling (1995:43)observes in *The Liberal Imagination*:

*It is hard to overestimate the benefits which came to Fitzgerald from his having consciously placed himself in the line of the great..... to read Fitzgerald's letters to his daughter.... And to catch the tone in which he speaks about the literature of the past, or to read the notebooks he faithfully kept..... and to perceive how continuously he thought about literature, is to have some clue to the secret of the continuing power of Fitzgerald's work.*

Without that critical sense, Fitzgerald could not have become the great writer that he was.

Fitzgerald's clear, lyrical, colorful, witty style evoked the emotions associated with time and place. When critics objected to Fitzgerald's concern with love and success, his response was: "But, my God! it was my material, and it was all I had to deal with." The chief theme of Fitzgerald's work is aspiration the idealism he regarded as defining American character. Another major theme was mutability or loss. As a social historian Fitzgerald became identified with the Jazz Age: "It was an age of miracles, it was an age of art, it was an age of excess, and it was an age of satire," he wrote in "*Echoes of the Jazz Age*"(Brucoli,p.,377).

In his own way, Fitzgerald uses the themes and plots of his novels to lay bare the American way of his life and expose some of its social hypocrisy and shallowness. He discloses the manner in which Americans exhibit their beliefs and disillusionment. He projects America as a ruthless, highly competitive, absolutely individualized society. His themes direct our attention to the American ardent spirit for gain and possession. He manifest their fervent and sometimes wildly barbaric -like infatuation of contest, completion and rivalry, often kindled by purely narrow self-assertion and self- assumption for superiority over others. The desire to win the first prize, to secure the first place regardless of anything makes one heedless of considerations of justice and fair- play. ((Geismar.2000: 50).

Fitzgerald was indeed a thinker, sometimes rational, and sometimes intuitive, whose lifelong concern with the craft of fiction

helped to make him a critic of both his own work and the work of others. Aware of the of accusations that he had "fatal facility" in his early work, he said that he then" labored like a slave over every sentence so as not be like that" (Fussel, p., 34).

To conclude, in the obituaries, most remembered Fitzgerald as the representative of the Jazz Age, and some referred to him as a writer who was broken by his early success (Geismar, p. 71). In the forties, the public opinion seemed to be that Fitzgerald never fulfilled the promise of his early talent. Fitzgerald began to attract the public again in the fifties, when collections of his short stories, as well as two biographies, one by Sheilah Graham, were published(Meyers, p.339). His literary reputation rose gradually after his death with the interest in his life and work and today Fitzgerald is widely regarded as one of the most important writers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century America.

## **Chapter Three**

### **F. Scott Fitzgerald's Idea of Symbolism**

#### **3.1 Historical and Critical Background of Symbolism**

The word symbol is derived from 'symballein', meaning 'to throw together', from the Greek 'symbolon' and Latin 'symbolum', which meant token, sign" (Webster, 2003: 1190). Although the school of symbolism appeared in France in 1880, but one thousand year before appearing this school, people used symbols for expressing their feelings and thoughts about phenomena, life and death. "The founders of school of symbolism were three great poets, Stephan Mallarme, Poul Verlaine and Arthur Rimbaud, who used symbols for expressing their thoughts" (Farshidvard, 1373: 4). Symbol is defined in the online 'Encyclopedia Britannica' as "a communication element intended to simply represent or stand for a complex of person, object, group, or idea." It is a kind of figures of speech used for increasing the beauty of the text and has figurative meaning besides its literal meaning. Shaw (1881: 367) presents the following definition for symbol: "(Symbol is) something used for, or regarded as, representing something else. More specifically, a symbol is a word, phrase, or other expression having a complex of associated meanings; in this sense, a symbol is viewed as having values different from those of whatever is being symbolized.... Many poets have used the rose as a symbol of youth and beauty; a flag is a piece of cloth which stands for or is a symbol of a nation

As Perrine (1974) states, "a literary symbol is something that means more than what it is. It is an object, a person, a situation, an action,

or some other item that has a literal meaning in the story, but suggests or represents other meanings as well" (211). Here are some universal symbols in literature:

**Tree:** It is the symbol of growth and the sign of immortality (Gostaniong, 1377: 10). The symbol of tree in myths has an important role. For instance, "forbidden tree" of paradise or Moses talking with his interlocutor by the use of a tree are of this kind.

**Sea:** It is the symbol of purity, innocence and sacredness of man (Gostaniong, 1377:10). In myths, most of heroes and prophets in their childhood were overthrown into the sea to become purified and Moses.

J.A. Cuddon (1999:884) classifies the meaning of the word; symbol" and tries to indicate its origin:

*The word symbol derives from the Greek verb 'Symballein', 'to throw together' and its noun symbolon, 'mark', 'emblem', 'token' or 'sign'. It is an object, animate or inanimate, which, represent' or 'stands for' something else... Actions and gestures are also symbolic. The clenched fist symbolizes aggression, beating of the breast means remorse. Arms raised denote surrender.*

### **3.1.1 Types of Symbols:**

Symbols are of two types:

- a. **Private and personal symbols:** They are like those symbols which recur in Fitzgerald's fiction, e.g., green light, moonlight, stars light, Gatsby's car... etc.

- b. **Transcendent symbols:** They are the concrete images used as symbols to represent a general **or** universal ideal world of which the real world is just a shadow. E.g., issues associated with psychic matters such as self and anti-self, history of human life, and Unity of Being.

Symbols are classified into further categories, emotional and intellectual:

- a. Emotional symbols are the ones which evoke emotions a lone.
- b. Intellectual symbols are those which evoke ideas a lone, or ideas mingled with emotions.

### **3.1.2 Elements of Symbolism**

Symbolists and critics define the term symbol in various other ways, such as the following one Carlyle which was widely circulated in France:

*" an embodiment and revelation of the infinite"* (Kermode, 1976:123).

Elements of symbolism are found in all the different modes of art such as poetry, music, dance and sculpture, They are the substance of the symbolic style. Furthermore, symbolism displays substantial and unsubstantial elements, natural or supernatural. There are different types of symbols known as mythological and historical ones. They deal with the psychic matters of human nature. Every image symbolizes and conveys certain tangible or intangible concepts. Images like bird, beast, tree, fire, water, and blood have specific symbolic meanings which differ

from one situation to another according to their contextualization. For example, fire symbolizes something which burns and destroys but from another perspective it symbolizes passion and love.

If symbolism, by definition, is to see things with double sight or by juxtaposition, then it is necessarily ambiguous and implicit. The style of this phenomenon leads to symbolical language. Therefore, symbolists claim that symbols are visible so that the object can only be drawn in the mind's eye. Nevertheless,

*A literary symbol combines an image with a concept (words themselves are a kind of symbol). Cuddon. 1988: 765).*

To sum up, works of literature can lead us to see deeply into and beyond things through the use of symbols which are usually objects, characters or even actions. The characteristics of a symbol are usually related to the abstractions it represents. An idea related to an area of major concern in the work, can also be a symbol. A literary symbol as an object, character or action that is both part of the story in a literary work, can be seen, touched, smelled, heard, tasted, encountered, or experienced by people in the story, poem or play, suggesting abstract meaning beyond itself. The image and meaning of a symbol conveys far more than mere words.

### **3.2 Fitzgerald's Idea of Symbolism**

Fitzgerald's approach is entirely different, but no less effective in its critique of modern society and his disappointment in society's moral decay. Fitzgerald's chosen symbologies in the selected works emphasizes the manner in which he delineates complex class hierarchies though

interesting symbols , and this reciprocity forms- implicitly or explicitly- an aesthetic critique of the dominant social order. Fitzgerald favors the use of rhapsodic engagement in his narrative and dialogue becomes a vehicle by which he reveals character and inspires revulsion for the moral dearth apparent in his careless representatives. He employs symbolism and foreshadowing throughout his fiction to drive his moral critique and to enrich the theme of moral responsibility. (Segal,2001:78).

Fitzgerald enhanced and multiplied the meanings of his fiction by the effective use of symbols. Literary critics have analyzed such elements as color imagery, clothing and cars, as well as the valley of ashes with its connections to T.S. Eliot's *the Wasteland*.

According to Segal, p. 45:

*Linking the Eggs with new York city is an equally important geographic features, the Valley of Ashes. A symbols of the modern wasteland that T.S. Eliot had so powerfully dissected in his 1922 poem The Wasteland, the Valley of Ashes is a place of poverty and desolation, a vast nothingness that mocks the efforts of the people who inhabit and traverse it daily.*

To conclude that Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* is built around East, West Egg, by doing so, he creates a symbolic geography that clearly evokes the novel's mythic landscapes, and he uses houses to reveal the lives and values of the people who inhabit each territory.

## Chapter Four

### Symbolism in the Great Gatsby

#### 4.1 The Story of the Novel

*The Great Gatsby* tells the story of Jay Gatsby, a mysterious man who lives in a magnificent villa just outside of New York. He is famous for giving great parties, rumored to be a spy and or a criminal, but no one really knows anything about him. The narrator is Gatsby's neighbor, Nick Carraway. He meets his beautiful cousin, Daisy, and her husband, Tom Buchanan, who live in the same area. They are rich and have a child but something seems to be wrong in their life. Nick finds out that Tom is having an affair with a married woman, Myrtle Wilson, and he is shocked to realize that Tom seems to feel no guilt about it. Through Daisy, Nick meets Jordan Baker, a famous golfer, and gradually falls in love with her. One day Gatsby approaches Nick through Jordan and asks for help.

Nick finds out that Daisy and Gatsby had been lovers in their youth. They had lost contact when he had been in Europe during the war, and in the meantime Daisy had married Tom. Gatsby had then gained wealth, bought his house near Daisy and organized his parties for the sole purpose of attracting Daisy back. Nick agrees to set up a meeting, with the results in Daisy and Gatsby resuming their affair. During a hot day in New York Tom eventually finds out everything. After the ensuing argument, Daisy rushes out and drives off with Gatsby. She passes Myrtle Wilson on the way and she, mistaking the car for Tom's, runs toward it. Daisy hits Myrtle, fatally injuring her, and drives away. In the end Tom leads Myrtle's husband to believe that Gatsby had been her

lover and responsible for her death. Gatsby still expects Daisy to come back when Myrtle's husband finds him and shoots him. Nick is disgusted to realize that Tom and Daisy are going on as if nothing had happened. Disillusioned with the East, Nick decides to return home.

#### **4.2 Symbolism in the Novel**

Fitzgerald elaborates on the nature of *The Great Gatsby* world and its inhabitants by making the automobile a major symbol in the novel. As Cowley (1982:22) points out:

*The characters are visibly represented by cars they drive; Nick has a conservative Old Dodge, the Buchanans, too rich for ostentation, have an "easy-going blue coupe", while Gatsby's car is a "rich cream color, bright with triumphant hat-boxes and supper-boxes and tool-boxes, and terraced with a labyrinth of windshields that mirrored a dozen suns"*

The symbol of car in the novel functions in two ways. It is first a status symbol, revealing the social identity of its owner. The Buchanans, for instance, secure in their status, drive a tasteful blue coupe that George Wilson, "too poor to own any car, would like to purchase for resale" (*The Great Gatsby*, p., 130)\*. To him, it represents the promise of mobility and offers a chance to escape his no-status existence. Gatsby's car which Tom likens to a "circus wagon" (G.G,p.128), is as gaudy and ostentatious as his mansion and his parties, Gatsby takes pride in his car, as he does in all his possessions because it signifies the wealth that he believes legitimizes his claim to daisy. Yet its sheer audacity, as Tom's comment makes clear, will prevent him from moving to East Egg. He may have wheels, but they transport the wrong sort of chassis.

\*(All references to this text are from this editions and are quoted by page numbers in parenthesis).

The car also emphasizes the restlessness of those who inhabit *The Great Gatsby world*. These characters are in constant motion, moving back and forth across the landscape on journey that seem to have no real purpose other than to relieve boredom. Their perpetual motion rather than ironically leads them to no destination, no satisfaction, instead, it increases their opportunities for lethal carelessness. The car accident following one of Gatsby's parties, clearly foreshadows Daisy's hit-and-run encounter with Myrtle. Both drivers are equally oblivious to the potential power of their motion. They must simple move.

Always a characterizing device in *The Great Gatsby*, the car soon develops into a symbol of death. Fitzgerald begins to establish this pattern at the end of *Gatsby's* party. As the mass of cars leave:

*... a dozen headlights illuminated a bizarre and tumultuous scene. In the ditch beside the road, right side up, but violently shorn of wheel, rested a new coupé..... The sharp jut of a wall accounted for the detachment of the wheel, which was now getting considerable attention from a dozen curious chauffeurs. However, as they left their cars blocking the road, a harsh, discordant dun from those in the rear had been audible for some time and added to the already violent confusion of the scene (G.G, p. 54).*

*The Great Gatsby* is rich with color symbolism and light and dark imagery as well. The green light at the end of Daisy's pier, for instance, beckons Gatsby forward to her white and gold world belongs. Moonlight

and light illuminate this world and thereby suggest its dreamlike quality, while the sun's searing heat destroys.

Fitzgerald makes one final comment on what happened to Gatsby's dream. The last time Nick sees the " huge incoherent failure of a house ", (G.G, p. 112), he finds glowing in the moonlight an obscene word scrawled on the steps with a piece of brick. Romantic light on obscenity. With the strength and energy to become anything.

Nick would wipe away the obscenity, start over with a new dream. The same moon would shine, but the "inessential houses would melt" (G.G,p.182). Knowing the dream impossible, Nick believes in it. With glowing terms of understanding, he describes Gatsby's belief in:

*The green light, the orgiastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that's no matter-tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther ..... And one fine morning.* (G.G, p. 182).

Flowers also figure prominently among the novel's metaphorical patterns. Both Myrtle and Daisy, for instance, have floral names suggestive of their natures. Daisy's name combines with the novel's color symbolism to evoke the white and gold colors of wealth. Hanzo (1999:34) examines fully the evocative details and language patterns that contribute so much to the novel's central issues and aptly concludes that:

*Fitzgerald's methods of organization revolved around a series of associations between details and the idea of betrayal, repeated until the idea takes on the life of its own style*

To conclude, Fitzgerald's complex patterns of symbol ultimately forms a poetry of loss that reveals these issues.

### **Conclusion**

Fitzgerald's greatest talent as a writer was his ability to create atmosphere and characters. His rich, elegant prose style is dense in metaphors, similes and symbols, and often has the evocative beauty of poetry

Fitzgerald's style is richly symbol. He uses symbols to complexly illustrate the major themes of his novels in general and *the Great Gatsby* in particular. His layers of symbolism create worlds of meaning within the basic text that are enriched by his rhapsodic narrative and engaging descriptions. He is direct in his approach in using symbolism to depict groundlessness as well as more masterful at using these subtle symbols to imbue his novels with the sense of normal footlessness with literary subtly and engaging motif

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