

How does the unpublished 19th-century poem “To the memory of Mrs. Antonia Sarabia of Barrero” reflect the influence of Hispanic Romanticism?

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of my study is to analyze the unpublished 19th-century poem “To the memory of Mrs. Antonia Sarabia of Barrero” and the influence of Romanticism in Colombia it presents. Because of grammatical distinctions between the female and male voices in Spanish, it is clear that the poem was written by a female writer. My research focuses on the analysis of a single literary work that I found in The Nation’s General Archives of Colombia. The poem is archived under the “Sonnets, love poems, insults to enemies, elegies” section inside the folder called “ANTHOLOGY-POET: SCS.EOR.11, CJ.4, CR.5, D.5”. The document is under the name “Hoja 10 Recto”. The poem is part of Enrique Ortega Ricaurte’s (1893-1962) collection, former director of The Nation’s General Archives of Colombia and a member of the National Colombian Academy of History. The poem and following analysis contribute to furthering understanding of the role of women in the 19th-century, placing in the foreground a female name that, to the best of my knowledge, hasn’t been included in any major anthology of 19th-century women writers in Colombia. Thus, my study is pertinent to the fields of women's studies, literary history in Colombia, or both, as it unearths from oblivion a so-far unbeknownst 19th-century woman writer in Colombia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Because my research focuses on the analysis of a never-before-studied poem, the literature review focuses on previous studies regarding similar literary analysis of 19th-century Colombian literature. For the literary background, I used sources that focused on literary criticism and on examples that connect to both my topic and the type of analysis I strive to do. Both of these aspects give me the necessary background to build a strong historical context for my object of study, particularly in the second half of the 19th century in Colombia. I focus not

only on the literary and philosophical traits of Romanticism, tracing its European origins as an aesthetic movement in the newly-emerging nations in Latin America, but also on some of the most salient economic and political conditions of this country.

Philosophical and Literary Background

Because my research is based on literary analysis, many sources that support my project are related to the definitions and analysis of literary theories. “The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics: Fourth Edition” (Greene, Roland, et al., editors) is a source that was key to defining terms used and having an overview of various topics relevant to my project. This source defines Romanticism as a movement that is general and “connotes erotic sentiments, spectacular natural scenes, and adventurous action” (1092). This Encyclopedia of poetry has kept its relevance with the constant revisions made by contemporary professionals and used by Literary modern critics. In a similar fashion, another source that also has the function of establishing the guidelines for the literary criticism theory necessary for the New Historicism method is “Critical theory today: A user-friendly guide” (Tyson). The author explains that critical theory, or literary theory, refers to how we do literary criticism; in other words, it refers to the assumptions and values in which literary criticism rests (2). The critical theory that Tyson presents in this book covers a historical overview of the various ways in which a text can be analyzed. The author studies deeply, and with examples, the execution of each type of criticism, how we need to apply it, and its purpose for applying a specific theoretical apparatus. This source is relevant to my topic because it’s the basic and most essential knowledge I need to execute my research. Since my research object is a literary work and its relevance to a broader context, literary criticism and theory are essential for studying it and being able to make a much more informed and deeper understanding of the work.

Given the wide and eclectic array of possibilities to analyze a text, I have chosen to examine the Colombian poem under the lens of New historical and cultural criticism. This seemed to be the most pertinent approach to the poem because it considers its overall space from within its own epoch instead of adding an anachronistic contemporary interpretation of it.

To continue in this line of reasoning, another important aspect of this project is the role of Romanticism and the main objects of focus seen in “To the memory of Mrs. Antonia Sarabia of Barrero”. “Disposing of the Body: The Romantic Moment of Dying”, by Paul H. Fry, is a work that gives a fascinating insight into the representation of death in Romanticism that also references various classical and antique texts. Fry (Ph.D. from Harvard University) talks about the romanticization of death and its relationship with literature. The author writes about this idealization of the moment of death that came with Romanticism as a movement, and how it’s portrayed in its origins. Fry doesn’t take a historical approach, but rather one focused on poetry and the representation of a romanticized death. The topic of death and its glorification is the center of the poem I’m analyzing as the whole poem is about the death and mourning of a woman called Antonia Barrero. The portrayal of death in the poem aligns with the characteristics that Fry defines as part of the Romanticism view of death. Opulent and dramatic language is used, along with devices that bestow divinity upon the death of a person (8-26). In turn, American literary and university professor Garrett Stewart states that literary styles and the representation of death are intrinsically intertwined. Because death is the one thing that humans find as completely alien, its representation is something that transcends life and human knowledge. This is why its representation is so characteristic of the Romantic literary style, Stewart says (3). Writers like Woolf, Conrad, Dickens, and Hardy, the author continues, use a “verbal style charged with elusive evocation” to highlight “the very space of absence” (4). This

intriguing form in which an abstract and unknown concept to humans is shown connects directly to the mission that the author of the poem under study had.

Another work that serves as literary analysis and historical reference is "El diario epistolar de dos amantes del siglo XIX, Soledad Acosta y José María Samper"¹ by Carolina Alzate, former director of the Literature Department at Los Andes University in Bogotá. In this paper, Alzate studies the private diaries of Soledad Acosta (a major writer from 19th century Colombia) and her spouse, José María Samper (future spouse at the time of the diary). The author dives into the historical context and implications of these diaries: this autobiographical record of Acosta is extremely valuable, as this was a very uncommon form of writing for women during this time. This is because for 19th-century women, writing about themselves alone was more difficult than building a writing career. Alzate explains how the diaries of both writers can be useful, as we get both male and female perspectives. Still, the author explains, these written records show how Acosta helped Samper adapt writing techniques of her own, again presenting her literary influence and importance. This source is very valuable to my research not only because it provides a wide historical context of the place and period I require, but because it presents important writing and stylistic characteristics of women during this time such as opulent language, and over-descriptive imagery. Because Acosta was such an important Colombian writer, these literary traits may provide clues and necessary information for understanding my poem. Additionally, these records are all from the 1850s, the exact same decade as my poem of study. This source also provides an example of what I want my research paper to be since Alzate analyzes a literary work through the historical and social context, thus serving as a replicable model to conduct my study.

¹ "The epistolary diary of two nineteenth-century lovers, Soledad Acosta and José María Samper".

Cultural, Political, and Economic Background

Following the trend of New Historical Criticism, I focused on research regarding the historical, economic, and social context of the time of the poem. Jaime Uribe's "El Pensamiento Colombiano del Siglo XIX"² serves as a guidebook for referencing critical thinking and its connection to the historical context of the period mentioned. The thematic approach of this work is more focused on understanding the influences of the main political currents of the last part of the 19th century. The years between 1850 and 1870, which saw the emergence of the lush political literature of a radical romantic and utopian character in New Granada, were marked by Colombian thought in the nineteenth century and a rising French influence in the national culture (278-279). At the same time, in "Concise History of Colombia (1810-2013): A Guide for Unsuspecting Readers," Larosa and Pavony explain that a huge part of the second part of the 19th century revolved around political conflicts. The political excesses of the fifty-year period between 1830 and 1880, characterized by confusion, the conservative leadership, the political reaction of the liberals, the emergence of Mosquera as a regional leader, civil wars, and revolts, occurred within the framework of a written and recognized constitution, and respected elections, even if they were scarcely universal or representative. This is one of the fascinating ironies that comes to light when studying the history of Colombia during the 19th and 20th centuries: violent conflicts have tended to occur in conjunction with the regulations inherent to constitutional procedures and processes (107-108). The author grew as an academic in this context: surrounded by complicated political situations, the literary piece reflects the dramatic and elaborate Romanticism literature that accompanied Latin American countries in their search for a national identity.

² In English: "The Colombian Ideas of the 19th century".

Along these big political and economic shifts, Colombian culture underwent a growth in intellectual culture. “The Genteel Tradition of Nineteenth-Century Colombian Culture” by Jonathan Brown, Colombianist Professor at the University of Texas, Austin, describes the culture of Colombia during the 19th century, going over the social hierarchies and traditions. The author highlights the importance of intellect at the time, and how cultural expressions were highly valued. Brown also stated how Romanticism was one of three important cultural movements at the time. The author demonstrates how the aristocrats at the time placed high importance on literature, and how it separated them from other classes and social concerns at the time (446). Brown mostly addresses the relationship between men and the intellectual arts, not mentioning the role of women in these cultural expressions. To fill this gap, professor, literary graduate, and author Aristizabal studies notable Colombian female writers from the 19th century and gives an excellent context of the role of women writers. The author explains that as 19th-century Colombian women (from the upper class) started to have language, painting, and music classes, the emphasis on their education increased. An interest in French fashion, literature, and culture arose. The author studies the role of Colombian women at this time, and how this connects with female writers. Aristizabal states that while some female writers developed inside the transitional literary parameter set by men, some approached what has now been denominated a “gender perspective.” The author heavily connects the theme of female writers to the portrayal of the nation and its identity. It’s also relevant that in this source we find a study by the Colombian author previously mentioned, Soledad Acosta. This helps connect and understand other sources, which deepens the understanding of female writers from this time and how this may have affected the female writer of the poem under study.

Additionally, the end of the 19th century suffered huge economic and political changes that opened the 20th century. Thomas Fischer, a history professor from the Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg, Germany, has numerous publications about Colombian history from both Colombian and German publishers. For example, the focus of “*Desarrollo hacia afuera y guerras civiles en Colombia, 1850-1920*”³ is the economic context of Colombia from the middle of the 19th-century to the beginning of the 20th-century. The author reports how the Colombian economy of the 1850s starts to have a more open market while studying the social developments that resulted from this cultural and economic shift. Fischer highlights that the higher class of the time was very receptive to open markets as a new improvement, and used this opportunity to become wealthier. This is relevant to my research because my main hypothesis is that the author of the poem under study comes from a high class, so this article helps me understand her context. To do the literary analysis of my poem I’m using New Historicism, so the economic context of the time is an essential aspect of the social background I need to research.

METHOD

The main research method used is literature analysis, where my main focus is to gather background information from a Literature Review on the topic of death and Romanticism in the 19th century and then relate it to the central argument of the study (Lin 179), as a great part of this paper depends on the literary background of this work and the implications of this discovery. The study of this poem is based on the theory of New Historicism or New Historical and Cultural Criticism where in order to achieve a connection between text and meaning, I analyze the poem based on its social and historical context and the context of the author (Tyson 281). The themes of the idealization of death and the Romanticism characteristics in the poem will be analyzed concerning the broader context of Colombian Romanticism in the 19th century. Because this

³ In English: “Outward development and civil wars in Colombia, 1850-1920”.

study is based on the analysis of a lyrical composition whose interpretation necessarily involves the subjectivity of readers, historians, and literary critics, one could argue that bias could affect its result and relevance. New Historicism as a critical tool of analysis helps prevent bias as it grounds its analysis on history.

LITERARY ANALYSIS

Using New Historicism

The objective of the New Historicism Criticism is to view history through literature while understanding literature through its historical context. It's a re-definition of Historicism — instead of viewing History in the traditional parameters we ask questions about the different interpretations and representations of historical events (Tyson 282). Using the New Historicism method for this section means analyzing the philosophical and political context at the time that the poem was written and viewing how it could be present in the text and how the text at the same time changes significance with this context.

With the formation of the Liberal and Conservative political parties around 1848 in Nueva Granada, the second half of the 19th century was defined by a battle in politics (Delgado-Álvarez, María Paula, et al. 1). Liberals and Conservatives fought for political power, which led to a current of thought from both of these wings that dominated culture. A major topic in this disagreement was the role of Religion and the Catholic Church. The institution mostly followed the political agenda of the Conservatives, which is why the institution was heavily censored and persecuted, starting when the Liberals gained power in 1849 with the presidency of General José Hilario López (Larosa & Pavony 106). As Jiménez explains in *“Intelectuales, política y religión en Colombia en el siglo XIX: José Manuel Groot y los escritores católicos”*⁴,

⁴ In English: “Intellectuals, politics and religion in Colombia in the 19th century: José Manuel Groot and the Catholic writers”.

in the 1860s the Liberal party consolidated its power with political ideas that motivated a deconstruction of the Colonial structure. This, most importantly, implied the separation between the Church and the State (297). In response, the church separated into mainly three groups: the liberal Catholics – who agreed with the reforms –, the clergy that followed relevant catholic influences – who opposed the reforms –, and the ones who wanted to negotiate an equal outcome for both sides (298-299). The author continues to explain that this period was also characterized by the funding of numerous publishing groups, but because illiteracy was still predominant and caused an absence of readers in multitude, the press didn't have a huge impact on the general population (300).

So as we can deduce, the philosophical ideals of the Conservative party strongly rely on Catholicism. Author Perozzo supports this assumption by stating that the Conservative party strongly relies on Christian morality “and its civilizing doctrines against the immorality and the corrupting doctrines of materialism, rational freedom against oppression and despotism” (241). So, Perozzo continues, the main ideology of the conservative party in its purpose was to create an institutional environment that would allow the emergence of a unified state. On the other hand, the Liberal party does not align itself with any particular religion, as it believes in religious freedom and a non-secular government (Jiménez, 297). National Overseer of the Colombian Liberal Party (2007-2013), Full Member of the Colombian Academy of History, and author of eleven History books, Isaza states that Liberals believe that the State has a role to play in the pursuit of equity, believe in tolerance, reject dogmatism, and aspire to a civil and secular state (13-14).

This context is relevant as we need to take into consideration the philosophical and religious ideology prevalent at the time when the poem under study was composed. “To the

memory of Mrs. Antonia Sarabia of Barrero” presents a lyric voice that dwells on the death of a loved one. The poem demonstrates a high level of spirituality as it mentions religious elements and a clear concept of death and the afterlife. As Fry states, the Romantic representation of death seeks to leap beyond the discourse of dying — it tries to relieve that ache that the dead leave behind, to come into terms with that desire that words cannot lessen (26). This Romantic representation also connects with the resurgence of the Classical world seen connected with Catholicism. In “*Wie die Alten den Tod ge*”⁵ Lessen reintroduces the mentioned idea of the portrayal of an idealized Death: dying “was a handsome youth standing with his feet jauntily crossed and his torch inverted and snuffed out” (183). Catholic historian and writer Dawson supports the relationship between Romanticism and Religion in “Religion and the Romantic Movement”, stating that Romanticism, at its highest, “aspires to the ideal of religious mysticism” (586). All of this leads us to believe that Romanticism in nineteenth century Colombia is not only heavily influenced by Catholicism, but that the author of this poem is part of a context that motivates a strong religious background and a poetic appreciation of death and life.

There is not much recorded about life in the second half of the 19th century in the recorded place of the poem, Samacá, in the county of Boyacá. The most prominent fact about this time is that in 1855, Martín Perry and Santiago Bruce, former employees of the Pacho Forge, established a forge in Samacá intending to transform the iron discovered in the subsoil of one of the town's villages. The population, according to Inés Pinto Escobar, was considered “a backward, ugly, and poor village, but rich in iron and coal mines” (18). From this, we can deduce that life in the provinces was not as culturally and intellectually developed as it was in the capital, Bogotá. And as it was previously mentioned, literacy, in general, was still not popularized (Jiménez 300). This makes the author much more intriguing: a woman with this

⁵ In English: “How the Ancients Represented Death.”

level of prose and academic excellence must have come from a wealthy background and rich religious education. The family may have been part of the capital and of ones seeking to do business in Samacá. Nevertheless, although from a new historicist approach these interpretations are legitimately validated as they are derived from a corpus of sources that are deemed as other interpretations as well, the accuracy of these inferences is still to be proven through documents that have not yet been found and, therefore, it remains an open field for further investigations.

Besides the image of Antonia Sarabia of Barrero roaming death among the “fair” and the portrayal of her soul as an aura of light and blessing, the lyric voice spends a lot of time reviving the feelings of absence that her death has caused her. The feelings of loss and memories from the past are strongly emphasized. Additionally to the portrayal of the afterlife, the spectrum of what death means is explored in more depth. It’s interesting that for the author, death is much more than a soul flying majestically to heaven or a religious encounter with God. It’s also the physical absence of the person. It’s the recounting of time passed and time lost. The author dwells on the moments shared — there’s an emphasis on the things lost forever that will never come back: “Never will I forget the placid hours / That by your side elated I enjoyed, / (...) Oh, never again what was then will be!”. There is a duality between highlighting the beauty of transcending life and an inescapable need to clutch on the reminder that they were left behind. In the final verse, after wishing the person lost to have a peaceful rest, the author can’t help but ask her to not forget them. The poetic voice ends by saying, “But turn your eyes to those who cry you / and to God, for them, evoke your prayer.” This focus on the less religious aspect of death and instead on the human experience of loss breaks away from the Hispanic American Romanticism that was characterized by a focus on representing the nation.

Zea highlights that what Hispanoamerican Romanticism sought was the identification of these lands as a new nation (53). There is a concern for founding culture, literature, grammar, and philosophy (55). Literary critic Franco supports this statement as about how during half of the 19th century, after the Independence from the Spanish regime, the prominent ideas were those of originality and nationalistic wit (80). While being consistent with the religious ideas that were most popular at the time that the poem was written, one could think that the author did not have a huge concern for following patterns of the Literary trends at the time if we only take into consideration this generalization of the movement.

Yet, Brown states how critics consider that this period in Colombian literature is not characterized by having a national identity—in contrast to the other countries in Latin America—, but rather to lack in forming an interpretation of the Colombian experiences and sticking to the “genteel tradition” that the aristocracy maintained to reinforce their social status (446). This author also explains that a common practice in Bogota during this time was the *tertulias*, social gatherings from the high class that allowed literature to become more advanced (449). While Brown states that these gatherings were formed by men, it’s not hard to imagine that in an aristocratic society, where literature and erudition become a social weapon, this fascination reaches the women of these families. Additionally, authors Rodríguez and Filer explain more clearly the different aspects of Hispanic Romanticism. Critics have defined two clear periods of this movement: the first one in the years between 1830 and 1860 and the second one between 1860 and 1880 (115). The first one, where our poem would be located, is characterized by a fervent passion for politics and the need for freedom (115). The second one, the authors continue, had a more intimate attitude and expressed the feelings of the author in a more delicate manner. The poem was written just at the end of the first period but exhibits

important characteristics of the second period. While it's not strictly within the parameters dictated by critics, we have to remember that Literature is not a hard subject that always follows the same rules. The poem, which comes from such peculiar circumstances, still represents the peak of Hispanic Romanticism.

While this poem serves as an amazing door to the life of a Colombian woman from the high class during the 19th century, it clearly marginalizes a big part of the Colombian experience. The author's education, literacy, and advanced knowledge in Literature was a privilege that was rare in 1859 for anyone. Considering that it does not show a portrayal of other aspects of society (or the views on the exterior of the author's social circle), readers can only imagine all the things unsaid that will, perhaps, always remain a mystery.

CONCLUSION

Discussion, Limitations, and Implications

Rescuing this poem from passive archival hibernation is a win for critics and historians interested in Colombian literature in the 19th century and the role of women. The poem approaches the fascinating subject of death in a style that reveals a lot of the context of the author and the intellectual environment that surrounded the writer. The poem exhibits a high level of prose, intellect, and eloquence, and serves as a magnificent example of the Hispanic Romantic movement. With a profound idealization of death and an exploration of the feelings of loss and grief, the poem shows a strong influence from European literature, specifically English Romanticism. This is not surprising considering that, as mentioned by Brown, the high Colombian class was exposed to European erudite education. The implications of this project are principally the impact on our current knowledge of Colombian literature of the 19th century. It means that there is a field of study open to Literary expansion yet to be explored. The poem is

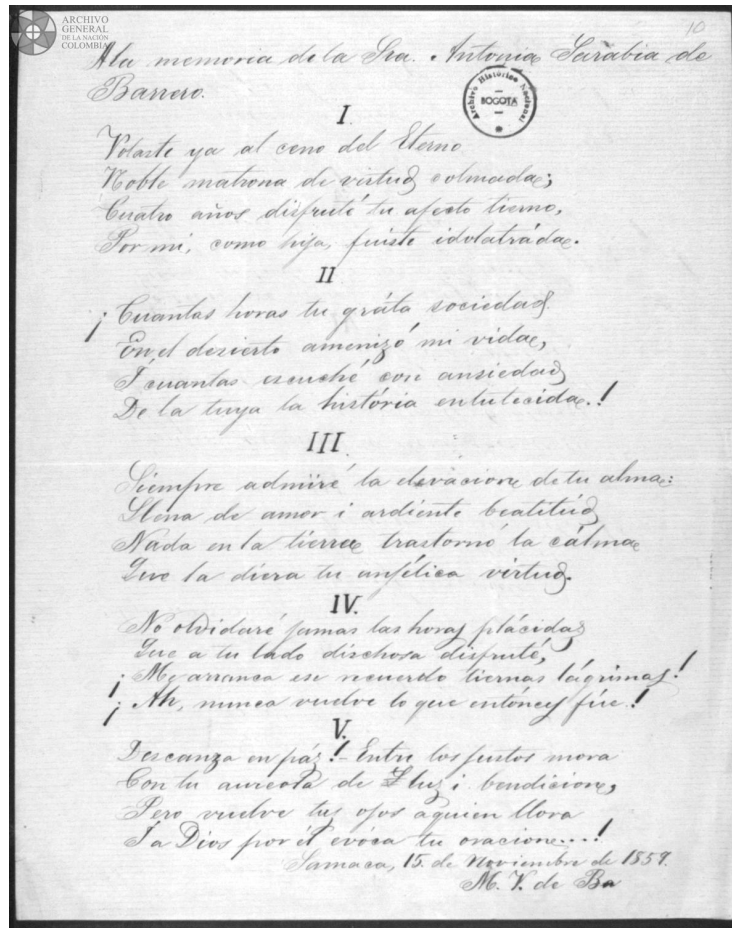
yet to be analyzed from various methods of Literary Criticism that will surely provide other perspectives. For further research, an analysis of the poem through the Structuralism and Deconstruction would be rich for further understanding. Additionally, more poems and writings can be found in the source that this was found.

From the source that the poem was found, no information about the author or any other context is available apart from what the poem itself contains. This is one of the many limitations of this project. As was mentioned, the poem is only analyzed only through a New Historicist approach which does not let readers achieve a complete level of understanding of the poem.

Whether it be a play by Shakespeare or a handwritten poem found by an unknown author, Literature never ceases to amaze us. This text is proof that beautiful writing and a spiritual appreciation for our surroundings can be found in every corner throughout history. Dickinson's poems got to us almost by casualty, just like the writings of Rimbaud or Lovecraft. This could make one wonder how many brilliant artists have we lost in the past and how many others remain yet to be explored

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Original manuscript of the poem.



Appendix B: Transcription of the poem in Spanish.

A la memoria de la Sra. Antonia Sarabia de Barrero

I.

Volarte ya al ceno del Eterno
Noble matrona de virtud colmada;
Cuatro años disfruté tu afecto tierno,
Por mi, como hija, fuiste idolatrada.

II.

¡Cuántas horas tu grata sociedad

En el desierto amenizó mi vida,
I cuantas escuché con ansiedades
De la tuya la historia enlutecida!

III.

Siempre admiré la elevación de tu alma:
Llena de amor i ardiente beatitud
Nada en la tierra trastornó la calma
Que la diera tu angélica virtud.

IV.

No olvidaré jamás las horas plácidas
Que tu lado dichosa disfruté,
¡Me arranca ese recuerdo tiernas lágrimas!
¡Ah, nunca vuelve lo que entonces fue!

V.

Descansa en paz! Entre los justos mora
Con tu aureola de luz i bendición,
Pero vuelve a tus ojos a quien llora
I a Dios por él evoca tu oración ...!

Samaca, 15 de Noviembre de 1859.
M.V. de Ba

Appendix C: *Transcription and translation of the poem in English.*

To the memory of the Mrs. Antonia Sarabia of Barrero

I.

Flew you away to the bosom of the Eternal
Noble matron, full of virtue;
Four years I did enjoy your tender affection,
By me, as a daughter, you were idolized.

II.

How many hours your blessed company
In the desert assuaged my life,
And how many times I heard with anxieties
Of yours the mourned story!

III.

I have always admired the elevation of your soul:
Brimming with love and fierce bliss
Nothing on earth disordered the calm
That your angelic virtue gave.

IV.

Never will I forget the placid hours
That by your side elated I enjoyed,
Tears of joy that memory steals!
Oh, never again what was then will be!

V.

Rest in peace! Living among the just
With your soul of light and blessing,
But return your eyes to those who cry you
and to God, for them, evoke your prayer...!

Samaca, 15 of November of 1859.

M.V de Ba.

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