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CHAPTER FOUR

GUINNESS GO LEOR: IRISH PUBS AND THE DIASPORA

KATHLEEN HEININGE

Any study of ethnicity, especially diasporic ethnicity, must somehow engage with the question of “authenticity,” and Irish studies is no different. Irish cultural identity is performed on stage (with Irish plays, dance, and music), at St. Patrick’s Day celebrations (witness the parade in New Orleans where Irish Spring soap, potatoes, cabbages, and ramen noodles are tossed from floats), in markets (where shamrock boxer shorts, Guinness hats, and Celtic cross snow-globes are sold), and in pubs. Such performances proliferate all over the world, often eliciting debate about the authentic representation of ethnicity. Is Martin McDonagh, touted as some by one of the most important Irish playwrights working today, really Irish, although he was not raised in Ireland? Does Riverdance really replicate traditional Irish dancing? Do the production values of Celtic Woman hearken back to the feis (Irish festival) or to pub music? At stake seems to be the need for members of the diaspora to align themselves with a romanticized and glorious past, one that has produced a considerable number of cultural artifacts, from James Joyce to Guinness. Because the story of Ireland has been largely one of emigration rather than immigration, the Irish diaspora can be found everywhere, not only in Boston and New York and San Francisco, but in Butte, Milwaukee, New Orleans, and Atlanta; not only in England and the United States, but in France, the Caribbean, Italy, South Africa, Hong Kong, Mexico, French Polynesia, and Croatia. Those who claim Irish connections, even when those connections are relatively tenuous or perhaps mendacious, can be found in a diversity of places far from Ireland. Consequently, how is Irishness marked? What happens to authenticity when it is exported, and how does that sense of the authentic contribute to (or detract from) participation in an imagined community, as defined by Benedict Anderson?

As is true for many ethnic groups, the markers of ethnicity often hew to stereotypes, and stereotypes about the Irish abound, although none so prevalently as the assumption that the Irish are prodigious drinkers. Some question the origin of such stereotypes, with theories proposed from a cultural preference to drink in public rather than at home, to the belief that drink was nutritious (see Porter 2002 and Barich 2009). Whatever the origins of the stereotype, its perpetuation has resulted in the association of the Irish with their drinking establishments, and the pub has spread as pervasively as the diaspora itself. Around the world, Irish pubs have become one of the ways the diaspora and others associate themselves with things Irish, and the familiar black Guinness sign proclaiming that comradery and affability can be found even when far from “home”.

These pubs, found around the world, however, do not resemble the pub found in Ireland. Those in Ireland need not self-consciously identify as specifically Irish; they are already in Ireland, and need no further identification. Once, however, the pub leaves Ireland, it requires markers to set it apart from its “foreign” surroundings, and a particular kind of diasporic Irish pub is created: the imagined community of those with connections (both physical and wishful) to Ireland. Its self-consciousness, reflecting the self-consciousness of its connoisseurs, is oddly cliquish, choosing its own stereotypes to portray Irishness. The pub, then, becomes an interesting site for the contestation of Irish identity, and a determining factor in trying to assert a strange kind of authentic historical memory.

Cultural markers are not unusual in ethnic transplanting. When a Chinese restaurant opens in Dublin, the sign will include Chinese writing, though few patrons read Chinese, and the food served differs dramatically from that found in China, especially when it is served on chips rather than rice. When an American restaurant advertises Italian pizza, one assumes it will come loaded with cheese, meat, and vegetables, with little resemblance to a pizza ordered in Rome. The Irish pub is different, however, from other translated cultural artefacts in that its global commodification is beginning to change the nature of the Irish pubs found in Ireland, so that the latter “seem” more authentic to those from the imagined community of the diaspora. I wish to examine the markers at work here, both within and outside Ireland, as they stake a particular hierarchical claim for authenticity, and as that claim grows increasingly unclear.

Homi Bhabha, in *The Location of Culture* (1994), questions the very concept of authenticity, claiming the site of transculturation, where cultures rub together and influence each other, is where we find culture becoming “more transnational and translational” (Bhabha, 1994: 5), and

that concerns about authenticity are irrelevant in a global world. He would argue, then, that Irish pubs across the world are merely reflective of the cultures in which they find themselves, and have been "translated" in a sense. Agreeing with Benedict Anderson in the idea of an imagined community, one in which "the members ... will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the mind of each lives the image of their community" (Anderson, 1983: 5), Bhabha notes that culture must also be rooted in something, and that the "recognition that tradition bestows is a partial form of identification. In restaging the past it introduces other, incommensurable cultural temporalities into the invention of tradition" (Bhabha, 1994: 2). Believing we ought to celebrate the result of such hybridity as tradition is being invented, he argues, "The borderline work of culture demands an encounter with 'newness' that is not part of the continuum of past and present. It creates a sense of the new as an insurgent act of cultural translation" (Bhabha, 1994: 7).

While such a description helps us to understand Chinese restaurants in Dublin, it only goes so far, I would argue, to explain the particular nature of Irish pubs abroad. The pub, in its association with stereotypes of Irish identity, becomes the locus for the Bakhtinian carnivalesque, where riotous behaviour reigns for a time, but all is put right in the end (Bakhtin, 2009). The pub is a site where the stereotype of the Irish drunkard can be found, performed, interacted with, played upon, and then left behind. As Homi Bhabha notes in *The Location of Culture*:

The stereotype is at once a substitute and a shadow. By acceding the wildest fantasies (in the popular sense) of the colonizer, the stereotyped Other reveals something of the 'fantasy' (as desire, defence) of that position of mastery. (Bhabha, 1994: 82)

The fantasy is to become Irish, to align oneself with a stereotype that, because of its spatial location in the pub, can be adopted temporarily.

To maintain the illusion, then, of authenticity, there appears to be considerable investment in perpetuating the traditional pub, and all that it means. Long a symbol of Irish hospitality, a pub requires a certain aesthetic, and comparisons of various houses are common. As an example of one especially provocative salvo in the exchange, architect Ben Davis, concerned with what he saw as the degradation of the true pub, wrote what he believes is the definitive text, *The Traditional Pub: A Way of Drinking* (1981), responding to an earlier architectural study of the Victorian pub by Mark Girouard (1978). His argument epitomizes the concerns with pub devotees. Despite the generally caustic and opinionated tone of the book, the instructions given therein to preserve the perfect pub are quite

thorough. Davis, fearful about a movement in the 1970s to modernize older pubs, aware of what he considers to be the damage that such modernizations did in the 1930s and then in the 1950s, decided to publish some fundamental guidelines on what a pub ought to be. The level of his specificity is telling: he gives the necessary height for bar stools to attain maximum comfort (450 mm), the dimensions for the perfect footrail (50 mm), the material of which counter facings ought be made (wood is wasteful because in a good pub, the facing would be obscured by the crowd of people standing at the counter) (Davis, 1981: 24), the colour of the countertop (never green because of the "unfortunate" effect on the appearance of beer) (Davis, 1981: 30), the purpose of lighting, screens, alcoves, dadoes, anaglypta, and so on (Davis, 1981: 18-42). His opinions about the elements of a quality pub are very specific, including his blatantly stated prejudices against finding in pubs women (Davis, 1981: 98), children (Davis, 1981: 99), homosexuals (Davis, 1981: 100), televisions (Davis, 1981: 58) and Formica (Davis, 1981: 32).

Davis evaluates pubs first for their social impact and then for their architecture, although he assumes they are nearly inseparable, as the appropriate architecture should preserve the social experience. He insists that a man goes to a pub seeking a number of factors: He likes to feel welcome, as if he were at home. To that end, a pub should provide a sense of seclusion, of refuge from the world, with cozy alcoves and privacy; it should not have wide open unoccupied spaces, or large windows that would allow a customer's eyes to be drawn to the outside (Davis, 1981: 48). Ideally, the alcoves should be enclosed with screens of a sort, but those screens should never extend to the ceiling, as a customer does not want to feel he is in a cave; he wants to be secluded away; he wants to be a part of a whole, and likes to feel informal (Davis, 1981: 14). A pub with too much frippery will never succeed, as a man does not want an excess of curtains or carpets or flowers (Davis, 1981: 48). In fact, Davis points out that a move to feminize pubs would not be welcome by women any more than by men, since women like the masculinity of pubs. Indeed, according to Davis, the feminization of pubs would only draw homosexual males, and women would certainly not want that either (Davis, 1981: 100). (Women were only allowed in Irish pubs beginning in the 1960s, and even then, up until 2000, it was legal for a licensee to refuse to serve "on grounds of gender, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, religious belief, age, disability, race or membership of the Traveller community" (Molloy, 2002: 90).) In fact, argues Davis, the general pub-goer would not be comfortable around evidence of riches, and so the simpler the pub, the happier the customer. The simple decor will, in turn,

foster friendliness and ease amongst the customers, and the more the customer feels at home, the longer he will stay (Davis, 1981: 8).

The pub-goer likes to feel a sense of goodheartedness in his watering-hole, and Davis defines this as the difference between gossip and spite (Davis, 1981: 24). He wants to be able to discuss with his friends all the news of the area, but to do so in a way that conveys news rather than nastiness. Consequently, the only appropriate seating in a pub is a backless stool, in order to encourage drinkers to sit forward and engage in conversation rather than lean back and distance themselves from their friends. Davis even argues that the only appropriate position for sitting in a pub with friends is to have one hand around a drink (preferably a pint, but a whiskey is acceptable), and the other elbow on the table to facilitate leaning in eagerly (Davis, 1981: 50).

Pervading all of Davis's recommendations is the suggestion that the pub-goer likes to feel a sense of tradition and continuity. He insists licensees and owners avoid following the fads of younger people, claiming the younger people will ultimately appreciate their time in pubs more if they are made to feel part of an on-going tradition, part of the continuity pubs represent. Davis acknowledges the benefits of occasional change, but urges pub owners to attempt such change in the Lounge section of the pub, where the clientele would be more amenable to updates (Davis, 1981: 79).

Although Davis fails to distinguish between English and Irish pubs, he does comment that the Irish are the only ones smart enough to leave intact the glorious pubs given them by the English, revealing a bias which points to the colonial history of the Irish pub, but which also suggests that the history of the pub reflects the same radical changes that other cultural artefacts experience as the political, social, and economical environment shifts. Writing in 1981, he addresses a pre-Celtic Tiger economy, one still tied to a nationalist rather than a global discourse. He would have been unable to imagine the effects of a booming high-tech industry or of an influx of immigrants as well as a return of many emigrants; he would have been still more startled by how abruptly that boom could turn around again. His unifying concern is in sustaining tradition and authenticity, but it is a battle that cannot be sustained.

Davis is of course also attempting to set the standard for the exportation of pubs around the world, an exportation which bewilders considerations of the authentic. The transported pub, while being a recreation of the original, must also define itself in terms of its environment; in doing so, it becomes something else, something that rings both true and false in comparison to pubs in Ireland, a hybrid in the sense that it is neither one thing nor the other. The specific markers of these pubs

present a kind of nationalist narrative, identifying whether a pub is marketed for those with a rather indistinct attraction to Ireland, or for those native to Ireland who are either exilic or vacationing. Literary symbols, such as photographs of renowned authors like James Joyce, William Butler Yeats, Samuel Beckett, and sometimes even Lady Gregory, are common to both kinds of pub. The ubiquitous Guinness signs, both old and new, seem almost a requisite. A map, someone's coat of arms, street or county signs from Ireland, menus in Celtic script, old jugs or bicycles, battered furniture, and other such items suggest the country cottage feel, clearly attempting an association with the "auld sod." Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) memorabilia strikes a different chord, often occurring in sports pubs, and the performance of "traditional" music is yet again different. A flag of Ireland, photos of the Easter Rising, Bloody Sunday, the Belfast murals, and other key icons announce political affiliation designed to strike a particular affinity in a particular customer, appealing to those more comfortable with Irish history than with Irish kitsch. Shamrocks and leprechauns attract those nebulously Irish members of the diaspora, those who have a loose affiliation, or those who simply like the idea of an Irish pub. As Kymberly Porter (2002) also notes, customers are rarely attracted to both the kitschy and the political or country kinds of Irish pub, each group harbouring completely different sets of expectations. Regardless of the nuances, the pub must proclaim itself as definitively Irish, unique in its foreign surroundings.

The reproduction of the pub as a site of identity construction, however, is fraught with difficulty. Walter Benjamin notes:

The authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced. Since the historical testimony rests on the authenticity, the former, too, is jeopardized by reproduction when substantive duration ceases to matter. And what is really jeopardized when the historical testimony is affected is the authority of the object. (Benjamin, 1968: 221)

Consequently, Irish pubs abound in places like Rome, Corfu, Paris, Taormina, Dubrovnik, Tahiti, Haifa, and Malta. The easiest way to find them is to look for the Guinness sign protruding from the building; the marker is so reliable that in Rome, the Guinness sign alone is posted on several major streets, with smaller signs indicating that the Trinity College pub is a mere three blocks away. The owner (as of 2004), a young man who also owns another Irish pub in Rome, is not of Irish descent and expressed some puzzlement over the pubs' popularity. He had bought the

pub from someone else who sold despite its commercial success, and said the hardest part of running the pub, for him, was that he had to perfect his English since so many of his customers are English-speaking. The vast majority of English-speaking customers buy Guinness, as it is part of the continuity of experience for which they come; the few locals who frequent his pub only occasionally buy Guinness, but do buy other European beers and cocktails. The pub has a distinctly cosmopolitan feel, perhaps because the majority of people present on the off-season night I was there were not English-speaking, but there are, upstairs, the stock pictures of Yeats, Joyce and Padraic Pearse, as well as the requisite Irish tomes.

A number of Irish pubs in Paris, especially along the Rue St. Denis, offer something for both the kitschy pub-seekers and those seeking a more "traditional" experience: some are quite ostentatious in their symbolism, and some are less so. In every pub we explored, the clientele was definitely English speaking, and nearly everyone was drinking beer, most often stout. The James Joyce Pub, near the Arc de Triomphe, is owned by the man who began the chain of Kitty O'Shea pubs that are now found throughout the world, from Boston to Brussels. These pubs tend to define the type that attracts the diaspora, filled with symbols of Irishness: in the Paris pub, the owner's own Gaelic Athletic Association championship awards (from the late 1940s) are on display, as well as a remarkable collection of James Joyce editions. All of the furniture is built of wood, according to the style Davis extols, and the multiple levels help make the pub seem small, with discrete areas to either socialize or segregate in. Along with many of the other Irish pubs in the area, such as McBride's, this pub provides the illusion of home for those away from Ireland. But even so, these pubs have to identify themselves with outward, very distinct signs that mark them as Irish, very unlike pubs in Ireland which don't need such signs. Those familiar with the genre throughout the world outside of Ireland find themselves quite at ease in these pubs, despite the disparity between an "authentic" Irish pub in Ireland and those found in the rest of the world. There will be no chrome, no high beamed ceilings, no marble or granite or anything that appears modern.

The point here is that the "authentic" Irish pub is coming to be redefined because of the very mechanics of reproduction about which Benjamin speaks: when the historicity and context of the original are severed from the reproduction, the authority is affected. Bhabha notes:

It is only when we understand that all cultural statements and systems are constructed in this contradictory and ambivalent space of enunciation that we begin to understand why hierarchical claims to the inherent originality or 'purity' of cultures are untenable. (Bhabha, 1994: 37)

The significance of this impulse to be "authentic" lies in its complications. Speaking with a number of Irish pub owners, I find that many Irish-Americans, for example, have learned what to expect from an Irish pub based on the models they have most often seen in the rest of the world, and they find themselves disappointed to find "real" Irish pubs are nothing like that. The pub owners, eager to provide the *faillte* (welcome) sought by the diaspora and other tourists, are torn between the market forces and the commodification of Irishness, turning finally, in a strange twist, to produce pubs that look more like those in the United States, as can be seen in several pubs in Dublin's Temple Bar, or in cities such as Killarney. What, then, becomes of "authenticity"?

A prime example of this complication is the Irish Pub Company (funded by Guinness), who manufactures and markets Irish pubs, pre-built and decorated, and sells them all over the world (see Grantham 2009 as well as the Irish Pub Company website (www.irishpubcompany.com)). In order to maintain the "continuity" of tradition, to mimic the appearance of cozy and intimate pubs, heavy wooden furniture is built and then purposely distressed with chains and hammers so the furniture appears to be old and used. According to The Irish Pub Company brochures, you might choose between "Victorian Dublin Style" (in the style of the more lavish Dublin pubs with polished hardwood and etched glass), "Gaelic Style" (designed to demonstrate the "merry-making, music and craftsmanship" of the Gaelic people), "Traditional Style" (as in the old "corner of the grocery store" pub), "Country Cottage Style" (to reflect the days when a pub was simply someone's house which was open to the "public" for hospitality), or the "Brewery Pub" (designed with memorabilia from the brewing process, including wooden casks and drays). Other companies compete, such as The Celtic Dragon Pub Company, which can build a replica of an Irish pub in your own home, and which sells "pub mirrors, sepias, Guinness signs, historical posters, Guinness posters, Irish art work, bodhrans, Celtic prints, pub tabletops, flags and prints, personalized license plates," etc. Subscriptions to computerized "traditional" music are promoted as well, programmes devised to manipulate customers to desired behaviour; U2 plays during the bustling lunch crowd, and Enya plays during the mid-afternoon lingering crowd (Grantham, 1009: 259). Guinness also intermittently runs contests, primarily marketed in the U.S., in which the prize is a pub in Ireland, although the benefits of this are unclear, since the contest rules specify that there is no need for someone to actually live in Ireland to "run" the pub. Clearly Guinness itself is aware of the impulse within the diaspora to maintain this continuity of tradition. One of the questions, therefore, is how much the Irish pub represents a

diasporic association with tradition and how much is Guinness's attempt to expand its own empire throughout the world by first ensuring the need for the world to drink its beer.

The influence of the tourist industry, guided by the push for the "authentic" experience, is changing the very face of pub culture in Ireland. These strange trends illustrate what Françoise Lionnet calls "transculturation," two cultures which rub off on each other, each wielding so much influence that it is impossible to separate the two into their origins. The concept is useful, she notes, because

the prefix 'trans-' suggests the act of traversing, of going through existing cultural territories. . . [and] corresponds more accurately to the notion of 'appropriation,' a concept more promising than those of acculturation and assimilation, and one that implies active intervention rather than passive victimization. (Lionnet, 1996: 326)

Thus, the American version of the Irish pub cannot help but have an effect on the Irish version. With all their modernity, today's pubs can be said to subvert tradition in Ireland, not reinstate it. From decor to beverage choice, all is not as it once was, as pubs cater to an expanding demographic. People, concerned about their health, drink less; in 2004, nationwide smoking bans took effect; the laws against drinking and driving have become much stricter; people have less ready money. Many pubs have large televisions, often loudly airing sporting events, changing the very nature of the pub as social network. Brass and glass are as commonly seen as wood, and wide open spaces are replacing the snug. In city pubs, and in some country pubs, cocktails and wine may be found, choices virtually unheard of as little as ten years ago. Even in the country pubs, well-populated by the rural population, the drink of preference is more often Budweiser than it is Guinness, particularly among the younger generations. The change has been gradual: when I first visited my cousin's rural midlands pub in 1982, the men drank Guinness almost exclusively, and the women were expected to drink a glass of shandy, half lager and half lemon-lime soda. By 2000, Budweiser was the drink of choice for many because, according to a number of my own informal surveys of both pub owners and drinkers in Ireland, it was more expensive, and therefore more exotic. Budweiser, I was told, is American, and is therefore obviously a better beer, which of course is the reverse of what one finds in American bars, where any imported beer is more expensive and is thought to be, thus, better. (These conversations took place, for the most part, before the 2009 economic troubles began; the willingness to pay extra to appear more exotic may very well be different now.) The majority of U.S.

Americans and other foreigners, however, largely preferred Guinness or Harp. They didn't, as they explained, travel all this way to drink the very same thing they could get at home.

While these changing predilections may look like the simple attraction to all things foreign, they are related to the push of globalization and, for better or worse, the desire of the Irish to align themselves with the United States (and vice versa) as the two cultures continue to influence each other. The tradition of the Irish pub in Ireland continues, but it changes to accommodate the new influences of a globally aware clientele. As Bill Barich notes in his book, *A Pint of Plain* (2009), it becomes harder and harder to find the quaint pub portrayed in *The Quiet Man* (1952). Instead, cropping up in the cities are larger and brighter bars, such as those found in Rathfarnham or Dun Laoghaire, Galway and Cork. They have more floor space than those in a more distinctively tourist area such as Dublin's Temple Bar, and they have a more industrial look. Largely populated by a younger crowd, these pubs are indistinguishable as specifically Irish pubs, and look more like up-scale bars. The same crowd that goes to these, however, often finds itself, later in the night, in a more traditional pub, perhaps seeking the very things that Davis enumerated, despite the continued consumption of Budweiser.

There are other signs that Ireland's pub scene is migrating towards a more globalized version of bars. Anecdotal, in my cousin's small town in County Westmeath, "everyone" has always known that Mike pours a better pint than Murphy (I have changed the names), but that Murphy's is a tonier establishment (Murphy's regulars, of course, disagree.). For special occasions, people go to Murphy's for a pint (and always on Sunday after church), but for a more casual time, to bet on the horses or to watch the match, most people go to Mike's. Around 2000, Guinness decried this disparity in "pints", insisting a Guinness ought to be a Guinness no matter where it is ordered. The debates about who pours a better pint, what the temperature ought to be, how thick the head should be, have formulated part of pub ruminations for generations, and are inseparable from the debates about aesthetics. The true connoisseur could tell the difference between a fresh tank and an older one, or the benefit/tragedy of cleaning out the pipes often. Guinness embarked on a mission to regulate every pint of Guinness that was poured, not just in Ireland but in the world. Gone, they opined, would be the detectable differences between Mike's pint and Murphy's pint. A person could actually feel secure in getting that pint in any pub around the world that displays the Guinness sign.

According to many of the people to whom I spoke in Ireland, this uniformity of pints contributed greatly to their switch to Budweiser. After

they cleaned the pipes, Mike's pints tasted different, and no one liked the new temperature at Murphy's, even on a Sunday morning. Apparently Budweiser (especially in a long-necked bottle) isn't so fickle a character as Guinness, and the younger drinkers especially are more concerned with getting a decent pint of anything than with continuity of tradition. Rumour has it, now, that Guinness isn't sending out quite so many representatives, having "successfully trained" everyone in the country, at least, as to how Guinness ought to be poured, and so many establishments have returned to the way they formerly poured it. Guinness, in fact, appears to be conflicted about its message. On the one hand, the desire to regulate a pint suggests a desire for a consistent and authentic Irish experience anywhere in the world where Guinness is poured. It is a product on which one can rely. On the other hand, the construction of a new and impressive tourist centre, the opening of a relatively new Guinness store (not to buy Guinness but to buy Guinness-related souvenirs, the "true" symbol of Ireland), encourages tourism to Ireland in order to experience the real culture. This other strategy is in keeping with the tradition of GIGFY ("Guinness Is Good For You"), insisting that its stout will keep one healthy, as well as with the claims that the stout is superior in Ireland because of the water (a story perpetuated at the Guinness brewery itself for many years). Visiting Ireland will always be more desirable as it allows one to taste the difference between stout brewed in Ireland and that brewed elsewhere and bottled under the Guinness name. Guinness's marketing seems to straddle the competing interests of ethnic identity and globalization.

The competing interests are, of course, the urge for people to identify with the continuity of tradition that legend tells us is Ireland, versus the hybridity and transculturation that must necessarily occur if such identification is acted out the world over; the desire to have an experience that has been anticipated through cultural representations such as film and literature, versus the desire to have an experience with which we are already familiar through example; the proliferation of the pub ambience and experience, accessible anywhere and anytime because of such dynamic expansion, versus the hope for that unique and intimate experience that a pub seems to proffer. If, as Bhabha notes, "in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference" (Bhabha, 1994: 86), the Irish pub in the world is effective. The slippage lies in the notion of an originary authentic community of pub goers, reproduced at the very moment that it loses its authority in Ireland. But if Irish pub clientele, whether in Ireland or not, whether of Irish descent or not, whether savvy about issues of authenticity or not, is so

conflicted about the desired product/experience, perhaps Guinness is less muddled than it appears in its marketing approach, as it targets everyone, transcending all the competing interests. As the ultimate marker for an Irish pub, the Guinness sign extols: Guinness Is Good For You.

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