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## **Uncovering the “gold-bearing rubble”: Ernst Bloch’s Literary Criticism**

Caroline Edwards

### ***Ungleichzeitigkeit* and global modernisms**

Over the last twenty-five years, the modernist canon has been significantly revised as theoretical and empirical interventions have emphasised its transnational and globalised patterns of connection through a range of disciplinary approaches. As scholarship has moved beyond Europe and the United States, the complex nature of modernism’s sociocultural matrices has become prominent, and a re-evaluation of the private and public spaces through which modernist works were disseminated – from the publishing house to the continuation of private patronage – has developed alongside a reconsideration of the way in which we theorise such activities in terms of time (Brooker et al. 1-4). In particular, the Marxist notion of “uneven development” has resurfaced in recent years as a model through which to think the overlapping simultaneities in different parts of the world of aesthetic practices, transnational dialogues, publication and dissemination of texts, institutional engagements and the oppositional, counter public spheres through which various modernisms emerged and were contested.

Patrick Williams, for instance, argues in Nigel Rigby and Howard J. Booth's *Modernism and Empire* (2000) that we need (in Johan Fornäs' words) to "delinearise history" and consider, instead, the overlapping tendencies at work in any one period. This critique of progressivist accounts of modernist historiography is levelled through combining the theoretical projects of Raymond Williams (epochal analysis), Elleke Boehmer (global transculturation) and Ernst Bloch (dialectical temporality):

In this perspective, the related but different temporalities and trajectories of modernism and modernity (and imperialism) would be 'combined and uneven' within the same social formation, but there would also be simultaneous untemporaneities, in that while at a particular moment modernism might be fully developed in Europe, it might not yet exist at all in Africa, for example (Williams 31).

Williams' tripartite intervention into the theorisation of "combined and uneven" currents within comparative modernisms offers a useful example of the significance of Ernst Bloch's thinking in contemporary modernist studies. Published in Zürich in 1935, Bloch's powerful analysis of fascism *Erbschaft dieser Zeit* (translated into English in 1991 as *Heritage of Our Times*) introduced the concept of *Ungleichzeitigkeit* (Williams translates this as "simultaneous untemporaneities" but other translations include "non-simultaneity" or "non-contemporaneity"). Combining a series of essays Bloch had written throughout the 1920s and early 1930s, *Heritage of Our Times* examined the Weimar Republic's "Golden Twenties" and the emergence of fascism through a range of analyses spanning poetry, art, film, architecture, music, popular culture and philosophy. Bloch's powerful and highly prescient analysis of fascism extended into a sustained critique of "vulgar" Marxism and the German Communist Party (KPD). Fascism, he argued, understood the importance of anachronistic and irrational myths in German popular culture, and the Left's rejection of the radical potential of large sections of the peasantry and petit bourgeoisie was extremely dangerous.

Central to Germany's conservative revolution at this time were the classes that formed the German *Mittelstand* after WWI – encompassing the professional middle classes, civil servants, farmers of small- and medium-sized farms, and shopkeepers – whose opposition to the Weimar Republic's cosmopolitan culture and political liberalism was matched by their fear of large capital and the organized industrial working class (Herf 22). This class thus epitomized Bloch's concept of *Ungleichzeitigkeit*; composed as it was of modern, capitalist as well as traditional, precapitalist elements. As Jeffery Herf argues, Bloch's analysis of German middle-class consciousness allows us to perceive the complex relationship between its selective embrace of modernity and its desire for a technological redemption in line with traditional German nationalism. The *Mittelstand* thus "lived in the cities and worked in modern industry, but the memories of small-town life and less rationalized forms of production were still vivid in Germany in the 1920s" (Herf 1984: 22-23). Bloch thus identified these social groups within the *Mittelstand* as offering resistant spaces to capitalism, since their distinctly pre-industrial cultural heritage was *not contemporaneous* with advanced

industrial capitalism and their aversion to the urban working class *qua* agent of revolutionary change was strongly articulated (Bloch 1991: 142-3).

Rather than the “contemporaneous” contradictions at work within monopoly capitalism that Marxism championed – such as the alienated proletarian worker or the unstable fetish of the commodity – Bloch saw these residual sedimentations of anti-capitalist impulses left over from earlier (and weaker) periods of capitalism as offering vital heritages for resisting capitalist exploitation. By *delinearising* time into a “multi-temporal” dialectic, Bloch’s argument is that Hegel’s dialectic is capable of being *umfunktioniert* (reformulated) into a philosophical understanding of time that cannot be synthesised and which “gains *additional revolutionary* force precisely from the *incomplete* wealth of the past, when it is less than ever ‘resolved’ at the final stage” (Bloch 1991: 115-116; italics in original). Rather than nostalgically recalling utopian “gilded pasts” whose lost perfection precludes political mobilisation in the here-and-now, Bloch argues for an understanding of a non-contemporaneous present whose “lastingly subversive and utopian contents” are contained within a past that *lives on within the present*, which is “non-past” because its utopian ambitions remain unachieved; as well as a present that is suffused with *Vor-schein*, or anticipatory illuminations of the better future. This wealth of the “never wholly become” (non-)past is what Bloch means when he refers to the “gold-bearing rubble” of the past (Bloch 1991: 116); and this rubble is aggregated out of “what ha[s] been abandoned” (Bloch qtd Phelan 100) from those cultural formations whose surface contours reveal no trace of avant-garde aesthetic experimentation but, rather, are the products of historical periods whose staid conformity is a far cry from any revolutionary momentum.

In his 2004 study of Weimar modernism, David C. Durst explicitly invokes Bloch’s concept of *Ungleichzeitigkeit* in his Introduction (it is also given a more thorough treatment in an entire chapter devoted to the theory), arguing that:

Bloch’s dialectic of nonsimultaneity implies that it is difficult to speak of a single dominant cultural formation during the Weimar period. Instead ... the specificity of ‘Weimar modernism’ lies in the successive displacement of one dominant cultural formation by another (Durst xxvi-xxvii).

This wholly Blochian critique of fixity, grasping modernism in the Weimar period as a “dynamic process of unfolding possibilities for cultural expression” (Durst xxix), renders progressivist periodisations of capitalist modernisation and its sociocultural impact in interwar Germany extremely problematic. This, after all, was the period during which Berlin became the hub of European avant-garde culture, the “golden ages” of towering architectural ambition, explosive mass entertainment consumed by an emerging salariat, and a heady mobilisation of capital; yet also a time of entrenched inequality at the hands of a feudal bureaucratic system, the wholesale commodification of life under monopoly capitalism, and the consolidation of anti-Semitism as fascism strengthened its grip on popular German consciousness. As Bloch succinctly notes in the 1962 postscript to *Heritage of our Times*: “Golden twenties’: the Nazi horror germinated in them” (Bloch 1991: 8).<sup>1</sup>

In addition to Durst's study, other recent investigations of global modernisms after the so-called "transnational turn" have drawn on Bloch's concept of *Ungleichzeitigkeit* in their theorisation of the "combined and uneven" temporalities of modernity. Teasing through the theoretical challenge of approaching Irish literary and cultural production through the historical lens of modernism – with its European and American metropolitan zones of capitalist modernization – Joe Cleary refers to Bloch's concept in order to acknowledge the sociohistorical particularities of Irish modernism (Cleary 80-1; 92). Similarly, observing the uneven experience of modernity in the early twentieth century in semi-imperial China, colonized India and rapidly industrialising Brazil, Harry Harootunian references *Ungleichzeitigkeit* in his investigation of Japan's "co-eval modernity" (Harootunian xvi-xvii). Meanwhile, Tace Hedrick draws on Bloch's concept in his theorisation of "mestizo modernism," expanding the disciplinary boundaries of (new) modernist studies by reading such Latin American artists and poets as César Vallejo, Frida Kahlo, Diego Rivera and Gabriela Mistral as modernist (Hedrick 25).

Despite the obvious impact and theoretical usefulness of Bloch's concept of non-contemporaneous temporal experience for a transnational approach to comparative modernisms – or what has been called "new modernist studies"<sup>2</sup> – there has been little written either about Bloch's notion of *Ungleichzeitigkeit* or his wide-ranging writings on modernism.<sup>3</sup> As Tim Armstrong notes, "the *dynamization* of temporality is one of the defining features of modernism" (Armstrong 9), and as an ever-evolving and highly unstable category, modernism – with its uneven temporalities – would benefit greatly from a sustained engagement with Bloch's thought. Moreover, Bloch has already responded to Martei Calinescu's call for a reformulation of the philosophical category of utopia in order to consider the complex modalities of time that emerge within (and against) modernity:

To account for modernity's complex and dramatically contradictory time consciousness, however, the concept of utopia has to be broadened to comprise its own negation. Born as a criticism of both Christian eternity and the present (insofar as the present is the product of the past, which it attempts to prolong), the utopian drive involves modern man in the adventure of the future (Calinescu 66).

It will be my argument in this chapter, then, to assert two interrelated claims: firstly, that an attention to modernist aesthetic practices can help us understand Bloch's philosophy more fully since his dynamic engagement with modernist forms is a crucial aspect in the development of Bloch's thinking that is often overlooked in secondary scholarship; and, secondly, that a more in-depth reading of Bloch's concept of utopian temporality as developed in his analysis of fascism needs to be central to any comparative and/or post-colonial reading of (geo-)modernisms concerned with the uneven, contradictory and even reactionary formal and political articulations that "effloresced" during the first decades of the twentieth century.

## **Utopia: Something's Missing**

Central to Bloch's analysis of the rise of National Socialism in *Heritage of Our Times* (referred to as "dust," "staleness" or "mustiness") is the notion of a "multi-temporal and multi-spatial dialectic" (Bloch 1991: 115), which builds on his critique of philosophical fixity through theorising a processual understanding of utopia. Bloch's immense philosophical recalibration of utopia throughout his long career was begun in *Geist der Utopie (Spirit of Utopia)* in 1918; a text which, as Adorno observed in a public discussion with Bloch in 1964, was "responsible for restoring honor to the word 'utopia'" (qtd Bloch 1988: 1). Tracing Bloch's conceptualisation of utopia across some 18 dense philosophical works presents scholars with a daunting task. As David Gross comments in a review of Bloch's monumental three-volume utopian project, *Das Prinzip Hoffnung (The Principle of Hope)*, much of Bloch's subject matter is "highly arcane":

It is unthinkable that anyone could now sustain, for 1400 pages, a literary style combining the enthusiasms of Romantic and Expressionistic prose, with the rigor of Classical philosophical argumentation, the convolutions of dialectical thought, and the intensities of medieval eschatology (Gross 189-90).

Chief among those "convolutions of dialectical thought" are Bloch's scattered (non-)definitions of utopia and his use of the philosophical coinage of the *Noch Nicht* (Not Yet). Fascinated by Jewish mysticism and the Cabbala, Bloch "discovered" the concept of the *Noch Nicht* in 1907 at the age of 22, which formed the foundations for the philosophy of anticipatory consciousness that he was to develop over the rest of his long career until his death in Tübingen in 1977 (Traub and Wieser 300; Hudson 6). The fullest demonstration of Bloch's "Not Yet" is comprehensively mapped out in his magnificent three-volume Marxist-utopian project, *The Principle of Hope*, written in exile during the 1930s, published in East Germany between 1954 and 1959, and translated into English between 1986 and 1995. *The Principle of Hope* elaborates in astonishing detail an open process of utopian anticipatory consciousness, strictly opposed to any closed, lumbering philosophy of class struggle as system. Blending German Idealism, Romanticism, Marxism and psychoanalysis, Bloch develops the "warm stream" of Marxism's human face of emancipatory desire as opposed to its "cold stream" of dialectical-materialist historical analysis (Bloch 1986: 209). For Bloch, a Marxist understanding of utopian temporality – directed towards a universally-shared, futural goal of emancipation already in process – rescues the rational element of utopia from Romanticism's preoccupation with antiquarian, Medieval and Classicist mythographies. Bloch is not uncritical in his treatment of utopia, however, and the utopian "Real-Possible" latent within everyday life and aesthetic output remains anticipatory and diffuse without political organisation, and can just as easily dissipate as contribute towards a progressive social movement.

Meanwhile, what Bloch calls the "Novum" precisely as something unknown, is usually resisted: "the New is most easily, even most heartily mocked. Its bringers disturb, because supposedly man gets used to everything, even to what is bad" (Bloch 1986: 432). Contra Freud, Bloch argues that models of the unconscious are thus historically limited in their exclusive class

focus on the bourgeoisie as well as their regressive orientation towards the past. He turns Freud's conception on its head by arguing for a *preconscious* rather than unconscious web of emotional-psychological needs, predicated not on repressed childhood trauma but rather expressing a nascent, embryonic complex of desires oriented towards the future, straining to grasp the "Novum." This *Noch-nicht-bewusst* ("Not Yet Conscious") character of the daydream is therefore the birthplace of new or progressive social tendencies, revealing a consciousness "which has not yet become wholly manifest, and is still dawning from the future" (Bloch 1986: 116). The "forward dawning" (Bloch 1986: 137) of the *Noch-nicht-geworden* ("Not Yet Become") thus invokes a shift in temporal perspective. Rather than merely disclosing itself as a residual manifestation of the still active, latent or oppositional reverberations from the past that can be conjured into fruition through dedicated remembrance, Bloch insists that the "Not Yet" reveals how emancipatory *futural possibilities are germinative within the present* through a utopian hermeneutics of longing, expectation and hope. As Bloch quotes his friend Bertolt Brecht, "something's missing":

This sentence, which is in *Mahagonny*, is one of the most profound sentences that Brecht ever wrote, and it is in two words. What is this "something"? If it is not allowed to be cast in a picture, then I shall portray it as in the process of being (*seined*). But one should not be allowed to eliminate it as if it really did not exist (Bloch 1988: 15).

Bloch's *Auszugsgestalt* (processual figure) of the "Not Yet" is therefore materially rooted in the present moment as a concrete-possible wish or longing "that does not involve any transcendence" but, rather, offers up a "spectral givenness": neither empirically visible nor mythologically invisible (Bloch 1995b: 1372-3). As Wayne Hudson has shown, Bloch conflates various temporalities within his concept of the "Not Yet" (which means both "not yet" and "still not"), deconstructing its relationship with the past, present and future. The concept, therefore, at once lays emphasis on the present ("not actual now" and "present now in a problematic manner, but still to come in its actual realization"); highlights past non-occurrence ("still not"); stresses the role of the future ("not yet, but expected in the future"); as well as focusing on the objective conditions that prevent the realisation of the "Not Yet" ("conceivable now, but not yet possible") (Hudson 19-20). Bloch's concept of the "Not Yet" is thus crucially grounded in a philosophical notion of flexible, simultaneous utopian temporalities; at once revealing latent, residual and emergent potentialities that act *within the present*. This simultaneity – as expressed through individual, subjective daydreams and utopian "expectant" emotions – provides a vehicle in which the future and the past are articulated in the present, collapsing linear notions of chronology through an understanding of time as subjective, utopianly mediated, and suffused with hope.

### ***Expressionismusdebatte***

Between 1910 and 1918, Ernst Bloch and Georg Lukács developed a close intellectual and personal friendship that would later define their respective positions concerning modernist experimentation. The two men were part of the Max Weber Circle, centred around a *Schiur* (private seminar) held every Sunday afternoon at Weber's house in Heidelberg. Bloch and Lukács shared a strong interest in Jewish messianism, with its gnostic utopian and apocalyptic dimensions, and their radical *Zivilisationskritik* expressed a romantic anti-capitalism whose *Weltanschauung* was explicitly directed against decadent, bourgeois Western civilization. Against the *Phantasiemord*, or murder of the imagination by technological "coldness" that Bloch and Lukács perceived as pervading modern human experience (Löwy 1997: 290), the "unlost heritage" of utopia's "cosmic function" offered a secularised messianic phenomenology of everyday experience capable of reversing the psychic damage wrought by advanced capitalist industrialisation (Bloch 2000: 2-3).

Bloch and Lukács' "mutual apprenticeship" saw Lukács introducing Bloch to Kierkegaard and German mysticism, whilst Bloch revealed the complexities of Hegel to Lukács. As Bloch recalled in 1974:

We quickly discovered that we had the same opinion on everything, an identity of viewpoints so complete that we founded a 'wildlife preserve' (*Naturschutzpark*) for our differences of opinion, so that we wouldn't always say the same things (Bloch qtd Löwy 1976: 35-37).

It is extraordinary to recall the erstwhile closeness of these two "symphilosophers" (Löwy 1997: 288) in the context of their disagreement concerning Expressionism; what has become known as the *Expressionismusdebatte*. The first Expressionism debate took place in the pages of Bloch's *Geist der Utopie* (the 1918 version; the text was revised in 1923); and was continued with the second debate in 1938. Responding to Lukács's denunciation of Expressionism in an essay published in *International Literature*, "Größe und Verfall des Expressionismus" (1934) (Greatness and Decline of Expressionism) – as well as to Lukács's Stalinist colleague Alfred Kurella's polemic against the Expressionist poet and essayist Gottfried Benn in 1937 – Bloch critiqued his former friend's insistence that the subjectivist technique of Expressionist writers revealed their bourgeois solipsism and inability to confront capitalism as a unified whole.<sup>4</sup> For Bloch, however, reality could only be apprehended through its protean discontinuity; and the so-called "fascist" tendencies of Expressionist writers and painters in actuality revealed their understanding of the popularity of non-contemporaneous, archaic images for ordinary people. "What," he asks, "if authentic reality is also a discontinuity?" (Bloch 1977: 22).<sup>5</sup>

In "Discussions of Expressionism" (1938) published in Moscow in the German expatriate journal *Das Wort* (*The Word*) (and later revised for inclusion in *Heritage of Our Times*), Bloch argues that Lukács's position is derived from secondary material on Expressionism and considers only a small selection of Expressionist novelists, poets and dramatists. Of those who are mentioned by Lukács – including Franz Werfel, Albert Eisenstein, Walter Hasenclaver and Ludwig Rubiner – only their pacifism during the First World War is commented on (Bloch 1991: 243).<sup>6</sup> Bloch also rejects Lukács's criticism that Expressionist writers were bourgeois bohemians, practising an escapist

ideology with what Lukács had called “fanfare-like arrogance” and “tinny monumentality” in the “impotent rebellion of the petit bourgeois” against capitalism (qtd Bloch: 1991 244). Whilst the pacifism of the Expressionists rendered them obsolete after the War had ended, during WWI, Bloch argued, these writers were “thoroughly revolutionary”: their shared project “was partly composed of archaic images, but partly also composed of revolutionary imagination, of a critical and frequently concrete kind” (Bloch 1991: 245). This revolutionary attitude is thus crucially oriented towards the Not Yet of futurity, recasting reality as processual and incomplete, so that it becomes shot through with anticipatory glimpses or “secret teleotropisms” (Bloch 2000: 32), straining towards their final meaning. Thus, as Bloch writes, “[t]here is no realism worthy of the name if it abstracts from this strongest element in reality, as an unfinished reality” (Bloch 1995a: 624; italics in original).

Bloch's ontology of the Not Yet thus leads him to view the “confusion, immaturity and incomprehensibility” of the Expressionists in a fundamentally different light from Lukács' denunciation of “bourgeois decadence”: Might they not equally, he asks, “belong to the transition from the old world into the new? At least to the struggle for this transition?”:

[Expressionism] definitively contained anti-capitalism, subjectively unequivocal, objectively still unclear. It contained objectively archaic shadows, revolutionary lights all mixed up, darks sides from a subjectivistically unmastered underworld, light sides from the future, wealth and undistractedness of human expression. [...] The pictures themselves were in fact ... hauled up with a mixture which is only possible in Germany ... *from archaic and utopian material simultaneously, without one being able to say precisely where the primeval dream stopped, the light of the future began* (Bloch 1991: 247, 236; my italics).

Expressionist poetry and painting thus provides Bloch with a concrete example of some of his key philosophical concepts: the titanic play between lightness and darkness that he identifies within a vast ambit of cultural heritage, from Hegel and Marx to detective novels and the advertisements in travel agent's windows; appeals to the importance of archaic images and archetypes in Medieval and Romanticist mythographies, and to literary figures such as Faust and Don Quixote as those “Venturers Beyond the Limits” who transcend the social protocols of their time defying, even, their own mortality.

Bloch's sensitivity to the ruptural, processual nature of human experience – his insistence throughout his life that “[t]he only interesting part of ontology is the ontology of the ‘not yet’” (qtd Landmann 175) – is thus fundamentally at odds with Lukács' study of the fissures within literary experimentalism as subversively mediating what remains an essentially coherent capitalist social reality. In this respect, Lukács has been criticised in his reading of Expressionism for rejecting “the sort of modernistic, avant-garde literature that allows the ruptures and gaps of reality to show through in the fragmentary nature of the work itself” (Schulte-Sasse in Bürger xxxiii-xxxiv).

## The literature of the disinherited

Bloch's critique of Lukácsian realism serves, then, as an early articulation of his processual understanding of utopia. The utopian potential of Expressionist avant-garde literature and painting was clear for Bloch: with its trenchant critique of the bourgeois ideology of Wilhelmine society, aesthetic rebellion, desire for spiritual renewal, ecstatic emotional outpourings, or *Ekstase*, and its impulse towards the stimulating *Lebenssteigerung* (rush) of dangerous or destructive experience (Murphy 49-50). However, as R. S. Furness observes, Expressionism (whether understood as an independent movement or merely referring to modernism as it developed in Germany) was not quite so radically new as it purported. Rather, it exhibited certain continuities with the late eighteenth-century *Sturm und Drang* movement, the Baroque, the Gothic, and with Weimar classicism (Furness 76). Similarly, although his philosophy can accurately be described in its structure, subject matter and form as "the philosophy of Expressionism" (Adorno 58), Bloch also retained – as Jürgen Habermas famously complained – an "undoubted fondness for German idealist aesthetics" (Geoghegan 62; Habermas 241) and, like many intellectuals of his generation, was the embodiment of the *Bildungsbürgertum*: "the incarnation of all the bourgeois liberal ideals of the nineteenth century, [in which] he placed great stock" (Zipes xi).

In keeping with the vociferousness with which he defended his connections with the proletariat (unlike Lukács who, as he sardonically pointed out, "was born in a villa in the elegant upper middle class district of Budapest") (qtd Löwy 1987: 40), Bloch thus straddled the uneasy demarcation between communist politics, low-brow pulp literatures, Hegelian philosophy, medieval chiliastic literatures, and a passion for such canonical literary giants as Goethe and Shakespeare; seeking to rupture what he saw as a stultifying bourgeois tradition from within. Thus, for instance, what he referred to as "the bourgeois writers of decline" – among them, Graham Green, Marcel Proust and James Joyce – offer their representations of the "mixed darkness and bleakness" of the age to the Marxist literary critic, whose uncovering of their "crypto-dialectics" refunctions this latent utopian surplus in the construction of a revolutionary cultural politics (Bloch 1988: 157-8). As Oskar Negt writes, Bloch challenges the guardians of socialist cultural heritage who cherish periods of revolutionary ascent as the only moments in which cultural surplus can usefully be extracted, and defiantly asserts that utopian ciphers can be distinguished not only in periods of bourgeois decadence (Joyce, Kafka, Proust), but even in the calm and order of the Gothic "static great age of cathedrals" (Negt 60).

Grasping this restless search for those anti-capitalist moments of *Ungleichzeitigkeit* that lie scattered in the cultural mélange of traditional articulations of continuity and decorum – as well as the ruptural, anticipatory *Vor-schein* secreted within their harmonious forms – is crucial to understanding Bloch's literary criticism and his relationship with modernist literary experimentation. This is a formidable task since Bloch's literary analyses range across the vast ambit of written literary output within the Western tradition (his primary, but by no means exclusive, field of cultural material). In *The Principle of Hope* alone he offers frequently nuanced interrogations of Edgar Allan Poe, Hans Christian Andersen, the *Arabian Nights*, Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis*, Balzac, Edward Bellamy, Brecht,

Campanella, Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, G. K. Chesterton, Cicero, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Euripides, Goethe, the Brothers Grimm, Hebel, Hölderlein, E. T. A. Hoffman, Homer, Ibsen, Gottfried Keller, Lessing, Christopher Marlowe, Molière, Thomas More, William Morris, Novalis, Offenbach, Ovid, Alexander Pope, Rilke, Sartre, Shakespeare, Shelley, George Bernard Shaw, Tolstoy, Jules Verne, Virgil, Horace Walpole, H. G. Wells and Walt Whitman.<sup>7</sup>

As the "philosopher of the utopian function of literature" (Zipes xxxviii), Bloch investigated those genres and literary forms which expressed for him the desire for a better mode of life and posed provocative questions concerning class and political action. "Stage and story," he once said in an interview, "can either be a protective park or a laboratory; sometimes they console and appease, sometimes they incite; they can be flight from or prefiguring of the future" (qtd Landmann 184-5). Chief among those literary genres that both "console and appease," as well as "incite" a qualitatively different future in which exploitative class relations would be abolished, is "colportage." Etymologically combining the French verb *comporter* ("to peddle") with a pun on the word *col*, derived from the Latin noun *collum* ("neck"), colportage refers to the portmanteau that a traveling salesman of serialised pulp stories, devotional literature and religious tracts would carry, held in place by a strap around his neck.<sup>8</sup> Writing for the *Frankfurter Zeitung* in March 1929 (reproduced in the chapter "On Fairytale, Colportage and Legend" in *Heritage of Our Times*) Bloch discusses the popular German writer Karl May, whose "Red Indian" adventure novels featuring the protagonists Winnetou, an Apache, and his companion Old Shatterhand, initiated a German fascination with native Americans and were produced into 11 successful films (Fixico 220).<sup>9</sup> Bloch reflects on May's lack of experience in terms of the American topography he only eventually visited after many of his stories had already been published, writing that:

Although Karl May never did what he related of himself, was never at the place where he professes to know every bush, every boy still finds him correct. So there must be something in the lie, namely the genuine wish for distant lands which it fulfils (Bloch 1991: 154).

May's utopian "wish for distant lands" thus speaks to the basic human desire ("preconscious") for utopian fulfilment, whilst simultaneously de-reifying bourgeois ideals of "good" literature. May, Bloch writes "is one of the best German story-tellers," and would perhaps be acknowledged with a place in the German literary canon "if he had not been a poor, confused proletarian" (Bloch 1991: 155). Bloch's analysis of the impact of class relations on canonisation contributes to his analysis of fascism and trenchant critique of those classes who contributed to its rise: from the conservative, nationalist *Mittelstand*, to the KPD and Marxist orthodoxy. Thus, "the wild and confused Irratio of freedom" expressed in colportage could not have been more favourable to National Socialism: "[t]he grim fantasy of the Nazis has only become possible ... because the lastingly revolutionary tensions and contents" of proletarian struggle were denied within bourgeois culture, which attempted to appropriate colportage for its own sanitised ends (Bloch 1991: 163). Identified as dangerous trash – it demanded, after all, the "justice of the lowly who were granted their avenger and happiness" (Bloch 1991: 162) – colportage

became fashioned in the late nineteenth century into the adventure of individualistic youth in the world, and its communitarian and class aspects were elided. In contradistinction to petit-bourgeois appropriations of the utopian-revolutionary class allegories of colportage, Bloch's analysis attempts to reclaim the genre by asserting its place within a tradition that stretches back to Edgar Allen Poe, the travelogues of Charles Sealsfield, to Joseph Conrad and Robert Louis Stevenson:

the region in which colportage has *its truly literary enclaves* is not the petit-bourgeois guardian literature in which it becomes trash [...] if colportage always dreams, it nevertheless ultimately dreams revolution and lustre behind it; *and this is, if not actual reality, then the most real thing in the world* (Bloch 1991: 164; my italics).

This "literature of the disinherited" (Bloch 1991: 164) thus proclaims, for Bloch, the powers of the imagination in its call-to-justice for the "little man" and his conception of the futural Not Yet offers a literary methodology through which to identify the utopian *Heimat* (homeland; a word he (re-)appropriated from fascism) towards which characters ceaselessly journey.

Bloch's championing of colportage reveals his project of rescuing utopian surplus through the process of refunctioning (*umfunktioniert*) cultural activities as well as philosophical traditions. As Jack Zipes notes, many colportage works were of "dubious ideological character – often sexist, militaristic, and sadistic," but Bloch refused to "dismiss them as reactionary because they addressed the hunger of the imagination of people whose wants he felt must be respected" (Zipes xxxvii). Rather, these popular texts offered Bloch "a serviceable refuge" in which – despite the hostility of Marxist theory to genre literatures whose populist adventure narratives were a far cry from revolutionary avant-garde experimentation – their colourfulness and social tensions "can become troops" (Bloch 1991: 168). Bloch cheerfully contradicted conventional Marxist literary analysis, blithely ignoring the chasm in German cultural production between *E-Kunst* (*Ernst* or serious, elite art) and *U-Kunst* (*Unterhaltung*, or entertainment) (Ross 100), extending his critique of conventional canonical literary elegance in an essay entitled "Songs of Remoteness." "[O]nly lyric poetry, epic poetry, and drama are supposed to be literature," he complained:

not so the novel of 'writers'; for only the gardens and forests of lyric poetry hold ancient water, only epic rocks, dramatic flashes of lightning from days of old are supposed to be above it. [...] Is it for this that language almost speaks like utopia – and is nevertheless only one of escape, of self-enjoyed frenzy, of polemically ruffled, of purely antithetical, and hence insubstantial demonism? (Bloch 1991: 181-2).

Bloch's scathing attack on what he called "this enormous corset" (Bloch 1998: 7) of bourgeois literary criticism with its bastions of canonical literature centres around a bitter struggle over the meaning of utopia: *abstract* utopian escapism, in this formulation, offers merely nostalgic dreaming for a prelapsarian past of plenty and is completely divorced from *concrete*

historical content in the form of a collective utopian mobilisation towards transformative social change. These “South Sea quotations without a South Sea world” (Bloch 1991: 182) thus exhibit the powerlessness of the utopian imagination if it is not rooted within political struggle. Bloch's insistence that the human endeavour to achieve what he referred to as *der aufrechte Gang* (the upright gait or upright carriage, which signifies the subject's goal of unshackling itself from exploitation) therefore returns us to the centrality of literature within a concrete cultural politics in which the innate utopian desire for change permeates every level of human activity.

### Venturers Beyond the Limits

Despite Bloch's passion for the inscrutable Not Yet expressed in Expressionism, then, his insistence in locating the “gold-bearing rubble” contained within the *Hohlraum* (hollow spaces) of bourgeois decadence signals his unorthodox commitment to unearthing utopian traces within each aspect of cultural and historical life, no matter how seemingly retrogressive. This makes Bloch a distinct forerunner of cultural studies as well as a fascinating figure in terms of genre criticism, training his penetrating philosophical gaze on some seemingly unlikely literary sources. As Jack Zipes writes, Bloch in many ways prefigured Jacques Derrida in ignoring distinctions between literature and philosophy: “He did not try to treat literature and art as philosophy, but rather treated philosophy as a kind of “work” motivated by the same principle as artistic creation” (Zipes xl).

In accordance with his lifelong passion for music – the most utopian of all art forms, with its “deep historical nonsynchronisms” ringing like the language of “a vanished age” (Bloch 2000: 40) – one literary genre in particular that arouses Bloch's interest is the subgenre of the *Bildungsroman* known as the *Künstlerroman* (“novel of the artist” or “artist-novel”). In his 1965 essay “A Philosophical View of the Novel of the Artist” Bloch argues that as readers our sympathies with a protagonist not only offer a vicarious substitute for our real lives, but “can also jar readers and prepare them for something” through the use of certain “catalytic factors” (Bloch 1988: 265, 270). Bloch's primary analysis discusses those novels which feature fictional prodigies, including: E. T. A. Hoffmann's *Johannes Kreisler* novels (1815-1822),<sup>10</sup> Jakob Wassermann's *Gänsemännchen* [*The Goose Man*] (1915), Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* (1820) and Henrik Ibsen's *Rosmersholm* (1886) and *Hedda Gabler* (1890); as well as novels concerned with historical composers: Freidrich Huch's *Enzio* (1911) (a novel about Wagner), Franz Werfel's *Verdi, Novel of the Opera* (1924) and Romain Rolland's mammoth ten-volume *Jean Christophe* (1903-1912) (featuring Beethoven). With characteristic humour, Bloch introduces his argument in this essay with a rather generalising piece of social commentary: “In former times the wives of self-important industrialists liked to read such books at holiday resorts, and they could read about tenors who were like Apollonian gods” (Bloch 1988: 265). His astuteness, however, lies in his delineation of the genre's evolution: from the unnamed poet of *Nibelungenlied* to the lack of public characters in art prior to the collapse of estate society in the Middle Ages as capitalism emerged, artists had been elided from aesthetic representation until the cult of genius crystallised with Romantic poetry and the *Sturm und Drang*

movement (in particular, the writings of Goethe). At this point, artistic *Wunschgrauen* (“romantic wish-terror,” a typically Blochian compound) became combined with “the demonic aspect” so that such previously absurd figures of fantasy as goblins, literary eccentrics and “spooky places” were reformulated into something positive: “something volcanic deep underneath and into a light on top of the mountain that could not be missed” (Bloch 1988: 267-8, 269). The artist protagonists of the *Künstlerroman* thus became exemplary figures of erotic and poetic expression, crucially oriented towards the Not Yet of utopian futurity. Unlike the structure of the detective novel (another of Bloch’s favoured genres) which gathers evidence to illuminate crimes that occurred in the past, the novel of the artist thus “brings out something new” in its straining towards the future (Bloch 1988: 267).

The exemplary figure here is Thomas Mann, whose 1947 novel *Doktor Faustus* transcribes the powerfully utopian desire to articulate “that which has never before been heard.” Mann’s relentlessly ambitious composer Adrian Leverkühn thus exhibits the *Vor-schein* of the artist’s imagination, whose totalising will to form projects his “next existence before [him]” (Bloch 1988: 275). As with earlier texts in the Faust tradition – from the *Faustbuchs* of the 1580s and 1590s to Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus* and, the ultimate Faustian text, Goethe’s two-part tragic play *Faust* (1808)<sup>11</sup> – Mann’s novel of the artist articulates the originary human desire “to break new ground, with knights, death, and the devil, [and] to head for the envisioned utopian castle” (Bloch 1988: 277). The Austrian psychoanalyst Otto Rank identified this ceaseless impulse to artistic creativity as expressing the “urge to eternalization” (qtd Beebe 12); similarly Maurice Beebe outlines one of the defining characteristics of the *Künstlerroman* as the defiant refusal by its protagonists to be trapped within chronological (“clock-”) time:

To escape death and become immortal, the artist-self would somehow remove himself from the bonds of chronological time which drives him relentlessly from cradle to grave. [...] What the artist tries to do is to capture lost time and imprison it in the form of his art-work. The man must die, but the artist in him can achieve immortality in his works (Beebe 11).

This subjective protest undertaken by the artist-protagonist against linear temporality – in Johan Fornäs’ formulation, this *delinearisation* of time via creative subjectivity – finds its ultimate expression for Bloch in what he refers to as “Venturers Beyond the Limits.” Goethe’s *Faust* is one of two key examples here; the other being Cervantes’ deluded knight, Don Quixote.

In *The Principle of Hope, Vol. 3*, Bloch devotes a lengthy discussion to the question of utopian “venturing beyond,” identifying these two literary archetypes as examples of the residual cultural surplus of fictional-historical images that express the utopian “Novum.” The unconditional dreams of literary characters like Don Quixote thus offer their readers the “conviction that the given cannot be the illuminatingly true” (Bloch 1995b: 1044). The simultaneous utopian rejection of the given world and invocation of the “pre-world” that these “Venturer Beyond the Limits” archetypally express reveals an attempt to think the temporal conjunction of the “this-world” with its “other world of the wish” (Bloch 1995b: 1044, 1033). As the utopian adventurer *par excellence*, Don Quixote – despite his folly and his comedic

idealism – is, writes Bloch, “clearly the patron saint of honest-abstract social idealists” such as Fourier and Owen (Bloch 1995b: 1043-4). This “archaic-utopian” element of Don Quixote’s utopian dream thus articulates “the anachronism of a future world”: at once *not*-anachronistic because of its genuine desire for a more egalitarian, better world; and yet also expressing the *Ungleichzeitigkeit* of a “more noble and more colourful” mode of pre-capitalist chivalry (Bloch 1995b: 1038).

Intriguingly, Bloch’s analyses of those texts which have become canonised as utopian literature reveal his critical attitude towards utopian representations he considers to be abstract or false; without connection to any genuine movements of revolutionary struggle (specifically, for him, socialist or communist struggle). He argued that Williams Morris’ “neo-Gothic Arcadia” in *News From Nowhere* (1890) was the last original – if “backward-looking” – utopia and criticised the “diluted modernization” of those “peepshow images of a better future” that attempt to recreate Thomas More’s originary 1516 text, *Utopia*. He was scathing, for instance, about the liberalism of H. G. Wells’s visions of the future, denouncing *Men Like Gods* (1923) as “a frolicking life like that of naked piano-teachers in Arcadia” and asserting that “it would be totally inconceivable to want to improve the economy in such a particularly silly way” (Bloch 1995a: 617). Bloch considered Wells’ 1895 novella *The Time Machine* to be “much more effective as a story than [his] later lemonade-like liberal fairytales of an ideal state.” He was similarly disenchanted with the “reactionary” ending of Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* (1932) in which, as he writes, Huxley’s “idiotic wishful image” reveals the writer’s own non-progressive class position and articulates the way in which “the liberal bourgeoisie has become incapable of utopian humour” (Bloch 1986: 440). Bloch’s harsh critique of those “utopian novels set in the future” by William Morris, H. G. Wells and Aldous Huxley (he is more charitable in his reading of Bellamy) might seem surprising given his claim that “even the most rotten optimism can still be the stupefaction from which there is an awakening” (Bloch 1986: 446).

### **Conclusion: Bloch’s narrative philosophy**

What we witness in Bloch’s mordant critique of utopian novelists contains, it seems to me, the strength and the limitations of Bloch’s literary criticism. His commitment to excavating the utopian surplus within repressed class antagonisms by and large leads him to denounce liberal bourgeois utopias as examples of abstract escapism, whilst his championing of the processual, active utopianism of the “bourgeois writers of decadence” such as Joyce, Proust and Kafka reveals “gold-bearing rubble” in some unlikely places. In contradistinction to the “horror and stupidity” he finds in Huxley, Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1922) thus offers Bloch “something clearly viewed” amid the stream-of-consciousness “monkey chatter”:

The cellar of the unconscious discharges itself in Joyce into a transitory Now, provides a mixture of prehistoric stammering, smut and church music [...] Primeval caves, with babbling and speaking in tongues inside them, are thus conjured up in day-fantasies and these are then lowered down again; a continual

merging of grotesque night-faces and outlines develops (Bloch 1986: 101-2).

In a manner comparable to the “time of collapse” represented in Surrealism and Expressionism, *Ulysses* thus offers its readers an “overlap of the black and the blue hours,” or a concatenation of the utopian desires secreted within night-dreams (unconscious) and day-dreams (preconscious). Indeed, the blueness of utopia is a leitmotif running throughout Bloch’s work: he describes it in *The Principle of Hope* as the “colour of distance” that “designates in a graphically symbolic way the future-laden aspect, the Not-Yet-Become in reality” (*PH* 1, 127).

The motif of blueness which Bloch identifies in *Ulysses* – articulating the utopian desire for that something which is missing within everyday experience – reveals several important points concerning Bloch’s own style of narrative philosophy. Expressionism left an indelible mark on Bloch’s writing style in terms of formal innovation, aphoristic fragmentation, and the refusal to ignore the latent mysteries that underpin our experience of reality-as-process.<sup>12</sup> However, to read Bloch through the lens of this paradigmatically modernist investment in experimental form without acknowledging his reformulation of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literary styles would be a misreading of Bloch’s literary criticism and of his philosophical project more generally. As Johan Siebers has recently observed, texts like *Spuren* (1930) (*Traces*) reveal Bloch’s sustained interest in the Jewish Chassidic tradition of storytelling, as well as exemplifying his use of Johan Peter Hebel’s diction of *Alltäglichkeit* (everyday life).<sup>13</sup> This narrative style of philosophy is also inherently utopian, drawing on Hebel’s “double temporality of chronology and redemption” in his use of the calendar Story (Siebers 63).

This utopian mode of narrative philosophy, however, leaves Bloch’s mode of thinking vulnerable in the face of criticism since, as Adorno notes, in Bloch’s writing “[s]pecific analyses are few and far between” (Adorno 51). Rather, there is a celebration of all that is subcultural and “openly trashy” in Bloch’s highly unorthodox Marxist thinking, a crude “jungle-like quality” that, like the Expressionists, “protests against the reification of the world”:

Because he does not conceive of utopia as a metaphysical absolute, but in terms of that theological manoeuvre in which the hungry consciousness of the living feels itself tricked by the consolidation of an idea, he is forced to think of it as something which manifests itself. It is neither true, nor is it non-existent (Adorno 56, 58, 60).

The difficulties of interrogating a processual understanding of utopia whose intervention into reality as an unfinished phenomenological experience is matched only in its unrepresentability by the centrality of the futural Not Yet, reveals Bloch’s greatest challenge in terms of reception. Meanwhile, although his literary criticism is dedicated to the uncovering of (glimpses of) proletarian struggle within even decadent bourgeois periods of literary production, Bloch neglects specifically proletarian literature in his analysis (Hudson 182). More pertinent perhaps, his efforts to unearth the “gold-bearing rubble” within non-modernist forms such as nineteenth-century aesthetics arguably leaves his

unorthodox Marxism unable to break with these traditions through a successful process of *umfunktionieren*.

Despite these criticisms, however, Bloch remains one of the first thinkers, in Sándor Radnóti's words, "to give a philosophical basis to avantgardism" (qtd Geoghegan 62). Moreover, Bloch's own style of writing – particularly in his 1918 text *The Spirit of Utopia* which is fragmentary, dialectical, poetic, and at times Gnostic, at others resoundingly materialist – remains a striking study in Expressionist thinking. However, Bloch continued to argue that historical literary forms contained the "gold-bearing rubble" of utopian anticipatory consciousness, or the "Not Yet," waiting to be unearthed by the fastidious Marxist literary critic. Whilst this continuity between those experimental forms central to modernism's literary avant-gardes and the genres of bourgeois literary decadence or colportage might seem, perhaps, surprising at first glance, Bloch's literary analyses present us with different moments of a tantalisingly sketched but resolutely unsystematic and processual literary methodology. Read alongside his theory of *Ungleichzeitigkeit*, Bloch's literary criticism thus asserts the importance of what Martei Calinescu refers to as "the struggle for futurity" (Calinescu 95) that came to prominence in modernist representations of the subjective encounter with a violently ruptured and increasingly disjointed temporal world of globalised modernisation. But Bloch's lasting achievement, as his essays on literary form reveal, was to rescue the centrality of utopia within literary and cultural life as a crucial catalyst for political agency; shaping interventions into a social reality that he saw as fundamentally unfinished, and thus capable of being recalibrated in a more egalitarian fashion. To find the rational hope (*Docta spes*), as Bloch insisted, is our greatest undertaking; the hope that is "surrounded by dangers" (Bloch 1988: 17).

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## Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Bloch considered Berlin "extraordinarily 'contemporaneous': "a constantly new city, built hollow, on which not even the lime becomes or is really set" (Bloch 1991: 195).

<sup>2</sup> For discussions of the increasingly global nature of comparative modernism and definitions of "new modernist studies," see: Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz, "The New Modernist Studies," *PMLA* 123 (3) (2008): 737-748 (p. 737); Andreas Huyssen's discussion of "alternative modernities in "Geographies of Modernism in a Globalizing World" in Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker (eds), *Geographies of Modernism: Literatures, Cultures, Spaces* (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 6-18; Stephen Ross, *Modernism and Theory: A Critical Debate* (London: Routledge, 2009) (p. 243); William Jefferson Tyler, *Modernism: Modernist Fiction from Japan, 1913-1938* (Honolulu, Hawai'i: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008) (pp. 14-18); and David James (ed), *The Legacies of Modernism: Historicising Postwar and Contemporary Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) (pp. 3-5).

<sup>3</sup> Arno Münster observes this surprising lack of scholarship on Bloch's writings about Expressionism, as well as his own Expressionist style of philosophical writing: "Paradoxically ... Ernst Bloch's name appears rarely, if at all, in a variety of secondary literature on Expressionism and it is only recent research – such as, e.g., that of H. H. Holz and J. M. Palmer – that has an apparent emphasis on the obvious affinity with the content and style of

Bloch's early writings as directed towards the expressive content of the Expressionist movement" (Münster 181-2) [my translation].

<sup>4</sup> For reasons of brevity I cannot recount the *Expressionismusdebatte* in its fullness in this chapter. For several excellent accounts of the debate, see: Neil H. Donahue, *A Companion to the Literature of German Expressionism* (Rochester, New York: Camden House, 2005); "Presentation I: Introduction" in *Aesthetics and Politics: The Key Texts of the Classic Debate within German Marxism*, trans. ed. Ronald Taylor (London: Verso, 1980), pp. 9-15; Hans-Jürgen Schmitt, *Die Expressionismusdebatte: Materialien zu einer marxistischen Realismuskonzeption* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1973); Stephen Eric Bronner and Douglas Kellner, *Passion and Rebellion: The Expressionist Heritage* (New York: I. F. Bergin, 1983); Thomas Anz and Michael Stark (eds), *Expressionismus. Manifeste und Dokumente zur deutschen Literatur, 1910-1920* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1982); and Walter H. Sokel, *The Writer in Extremis: Expressionism in Twentieth-Century German Literature* (Stanford, Los Angeles: Stanford University Press, 1959).

<sup>5</sup> This quotation is taken from Rodney Livingstone's translation of "Discussing Expressionism" in *Aesthetics and Politics: The Key Texts of the Classic Debate within German Marxism* (London: Verso, 1977). The translation by Neville and Stephen Plaice in *Heritage of Our Times* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991) reads: "perhaps genuine reality is also – interruption" (Bloch 1991: 246).

<sup>6</sup> This brief discussion of pacifism signified a particularly personal aspect to the Bloch-Lukács *Expressionismusdebatte*. During WWI Bloch was a pacifist and fled to Switzerland to escape conscription, whilst Lukács volunteered for military service in Budapest (see Löwy 1976: 37).

<sup>7</sup> Despite this, very little has been written on Bloch's literary criticism, either in German or in English. Exceptions include: Hermann Wiegmann, *Ernst Blochs ästhetische Kriterien und ihre interpretative Funktion in seinen literarischen Aufsätzen* (1976); Tim Dayton's chapter on crime fiction in *Not Yet: Reconsidering Ernst Bloch* (1997); Johan Siebers' chapter on Hebel and Bloch (2011); Liliane Weissberg's article "Philosophy and the Fairy Tale: Ernst Bloch as Narrator" (1992); Jack Zipes' "Introduction" to Bloch's *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature: Selected Essays* (1988); and Vincent Geoghegan's chapter on "Culture" (Geoghegan 46-78).

<sup>8</sup> In Germany, colportage distribution flourished after a series of reforms in the 1860s liberalised publishing (Ross 12).

<sup>9</sup> Indeed, Bloch borrows the title for his philosophical text *Durch die Wüste* from Karl May's 1892 travel story.

<sup>10</sup> *Kreisleriana* (1813), *Johannes Kreisler, des Kapellmeisters Musikalische Leiden* [*The Musical Sufferings of Johannes Kreisler, Music Director*] (1815), and the satirical *Lebensansichten des Katers Murr nebst Fragmentarische Biographie des Kapellmeisters Johannes Kreisler in Zufälligen Makulaturblättern* [*The Life and Opinions of the Tomcat Murr, Together with a Fragmentary Biography of Johannes Kreisler on Random Sheets of Waste Paper*] (1822).

<sup>11</sup> For a good introduction to the Faust tradition in Germany, see Philip M. Palmer and Robert P. More, *The Sources of the Faust Tradition: From Simon Magus to Lessing* (London: Routledge, 1966).

<sup>12</sup> For a useful discussion of Bloch's Expressionist style, see Jörg Drews's discussion of "the beginning of a new metaphysics" in Bloch's thinking: "*Geist der Utopie*," writes Drews, "is a manifesto against the emptiness, incredulity and hollowness of its time" (Drews 25) [my translation].

<sup>13</sup> Hebel's almanac of everyday stories garnered from late eighteenth-century rural German life, *Schatzkästlein des rheinischen Hausfreundes* (1811) (*The Treasure Chest of the Rhinelander Family Friend*), was such a popular text that it was often the only reading material in ordinary German households besides the Bible and Hymn or Prayer Book (Hibberd xviii).

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