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Wilfred Owen: An Anti-war Georgian Poet

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Abstract

The objective of this paper is to address if Wilfred Owen can be classified as a Georgian with reference to his poetic style and the topics in his poems. His poems deal with subjects which were closely related or considered with the subject of Georgians. The phase of this particular era lies between Victorian till Modernist attitude followed by Modernism: an outright sceptic approach to the existing ideologies. It also explores to address emphatically whether he should be considered only as a war poet. Apparently, the period of existence coincided with the publication of books or there is much more to his account. Moreover, in his writing style the reflection of romantic, sentiments and features that showcases hedonism. Eventually, the argument takes back into then history to discover the position of the poet and bring realization to the fact if he could be addressed as a Georgian. To establish the argument, a sharp contrast and comparison is brought to readers knowledge and left for the readers to decide.

Key Words: Romance, sentiments, hedonism, Georgian Poets, modernism, Georgian poetry-War poet-Wilfred Owen- Harold Monroe

Introduction

It is interesting to know that "Georgian Poetry" has an undeniable origin in the history. To look at its commercial aspect it might be discovered that it emerged as an attempt to publicize poetry reading and increase sales of English poetry books. With the end of the reigns of the great Victorian masters, English poetry received little recognition and reception from the general public. Indeed, there was realisation regarding its lack of interest wherein, public neglected poetry in the first decade of the twentieth century, and new poetic works rarely had market or commercial prospects. Moreover, poetry appeared to have little chance of survival in the face of the increasing popularity of fiction and drama. In the light of this bleak outlook, a group of young poets set out to resurrect modern English poetry and bring it to larger audience, and boost sales. They realized the significance of public appreciation of poetry outside of their intellectual circle. As a result, a plan was devised to publish an anthology of poems written by various contemporary poets. Therefore, a volume titled Georgian Poetry, 1911-1912 was published in December 1912, less than two years before the outbreak of the First World War. Edward Marsh edited this anthology, which was published by Harold Monro's Poetry Book Shop. After the first volume of Georgian Poetry was published, four more volumes were released over the course of the next decade, Some of the poets who appeared in the same period were not classified as Georgian poets simply because the name was not mentioned in the five anthologies, one among such is Wilfred Owen Although the name of Wilfred Owen has not been mentioned in the anthology of the Georgians, the poet's launch in the same period raises the question about the possibility of including his name among them, or considering him a war poet.



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Consequently, the Georgian poetry plays a great role in developing Post-Victorian poetry and paving the way to modern poetry. However, one can't specify with precision regarding the period of its flourishing as roughly it falls between 1910 and 1922. Moreover, this period witnessed many social and political changes, especially as it was the period of the outbreak of the First World War. One of the most chaotic periods in terms of art production is often referred to. Society in this period was exposed to many dramatic changes that necessitated the need for writers to find a type of literature that keeps pace with these changes.

Contrast and Comparison

The term "Georgian" has two connotations. It first identifies a particular time period in history, and then it characterizes a particular group of poets who emerged during that time. The reign of George V is considered the Georgian era (1910-1936). Moreover, fair intentions of the Georgian poets wanted to rekindle the public's interest in poetry. Tennyson's death in 1892 was largely regarded as a death knell for English poetry. Georgians sought to affirm their individuality while also hinting that they were equal to the great Victorians who came before them in terms of accomplishments and achievements.

However, critics did not accept Georgian poetry, but at the same time they recognized the importance of Georgian poetry in the development of post-Victorian literature. For critics, Georgian poetry was crucial for change and to keep pace with political and social changes Therefore, we may justify Stead who propounds: "describing Georgian poetry as an indicator of modern poetry" (81). Stead considered Georgian poetry a revolution against Victorian poetry. Stead cited some of the poems of Lawrence, Gosse, and Graves. Whereas, some critics believe in the limitations of Georgian poetry, believing that Georgian poets are limited to talking about their personal experiences only. John Press proposes: "that the more one studies Georgian poetry, the less one admires it" (88). On the contrary Stead proclaims: "that if a critic admires a writer from the Georgian era, it is certain that this poetry did not belong to the Georgian poetry, the idea of its limitation to the poets' personal experiences, others might consider it an advantage as being a kind of private and limited poetry to focus on the horrific outcomes of the war.

After the first volume of Georgian Poetry was published, four more volumes were released over the course of the next decade, until 1922. There was a brief resurgence in the glories of English poetry, indicating that poetry had not lost all hope. Thus, Georgian poets, or simply Georgians, refer to the poets who have contributed to volumes of Georgian poetry, A total of forty contemporary English poets, whose work can be found in a variety of anthologies, are represented in the five volumes of Georgian Poetry. Daiches proposes: "Edmund Blunden, W. H. Davies, Walter De La Mare, Lascelles Abercrombie and Harold Monro. Additionally, the volumes feature contributions from John Masefield, Gordon Bottomley, James Elroy Flecker, W. W. Gibson, Ralph Hodgson, Sir John Squire, and several other notable authors. mentioning a number of names to these anthologies does not mean that there were no other poets in that time, but perhaps March, the editor, was able to collect the contributions of some poets and neglected others (323).

Eventually, Edward Marsh is notable since he was the editor of the anthology and the poet Rupert Brooke was the one who initially suggested publishing a collection of poems the pseudonyms of twelve different writers, six men and six women to pique the interest of the public in poetry. This was done so that there would be an equal number of male and female poets represented in the collection. The book accomplished its goal of arousing the general

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public's fascination with poetry with lightning speed and to a decent degree of success. A.C. Stead makes the following observation in relation to this topic: "However little attention may be paid to the neo-Georgians of 1912-25 in the future, they did drive the public to buy and to read poetry, even before the war put mankind back onto elementals that can only be expressed in poetry" (81)

Although Georgians' styles and approaches to poetry are not all the same. Actually, the Georgian poets' association is more anthological than temperamental or literary, and their individual poetic qualities, views, and patterns are easily discernible throughout the works that make up the volumes of Georgian Poetry. Thus, it has been discovered that the poets who are collectively referred to as Georgian poets share several interests and tendencies, despite the fact that their literary styles are rather different from one another. Their rejection of the ideas of the decadents, their search for beauty, their love for natural elements such as moonlight, rivers, hills, flowers, buds, and birds, their attachment to the English landscape in particular, their realistic sense, their simplicity in poetic technique, and their adherence to the primary tradition of English poetry all give the impression that they are somewhat similar. However, their poetry, of course, reveals very little comprehension of the problems of the industrial world or of the global discontent that surrounds them.

This demonstrates absolutely no concern whatsoever for the political, economic, or social state of the country. A number of Georgians have fervent love for all things esoteric, including dreams, fantasies, and mystical visions. They appear to be escapists in their own way. Nevertheless, it has been discovered that human miseries and helplessness are what drew them here and there and that these things occasionally brought out an agonizing sensation, a sense of despair in their creative representations. In point of fact, the Georgian poets hold a significant place in the annals of English poetry history pertaining to the previous century. They rescued English poetry from the shackles of decadence and nursed it back to full health and development. In addition to this, several of them have demonstrated exceptional literary abilities, such as the ability to strike a balance between idea and diction, fantasy and realism. Those poets have, in fact, contributed significantly to the development of modern English poetry, kept the hope that this could happen, and secured a place for themselves in the canon of English poetic heritage. Some anthologies include some war poems which indicate the ironic mode while the war is still in progress. Daichi's propounds that: "in the 1961-1971 volume of Georgian poetry, three war poems by Wilfred Gibson appear and others by Sassoon (323)

Some critics as Stephen Colbourn, think that Georgians grew out of war. Stephen Colbourn proposed in his essay "The Georgian Poets and The War Poets" that among Georgians, there are some poets who discuss the horrors of war as Brooke. He writes: "English verse altered under the impact of mass murder in the trenches 1914-1918 and ceased to be cosy" (1). He believes that the poetry that appeared a short period before the war was called Georgian poetry, adding that this type of poetry is dreamy and romantic far from the cruelty and outcomes of war. But he mentioned that Flecker is among the more realistic Georgians who, like Robert Brooke who talks about the war.

Analysis on Wilfred Owen's poetic approach

Apparently, some of the poets who appeared in the same period were not classified as Georgian poets simply because the name was not mentioned in the five anthologies, such as Wilfred Owen Although the name of Wilfred Owen has not been mentioned in the anthology of the Georgians, the poet's launch in the same period raises the question about the possibility of including his name among them or considering him a war poet. Wilfred Owen is one of the

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poets influenced by the poet Brooke and Sassoon, especially his launch in the same period. If Colbourn considered the discussion of war among the topics dealt with by Georgian poets, then could Wilfred Owen be considered a Georgian poet. Georgians are not a school but a group whose interest are nature, commonplace things, and everyday experience.

Wilfred Owen, who was some twenty-five when he died as a war martyr, is the most well-known of the war poets. His poems are filled with bleak realism, anger, compassion, and a high level of technical skill. Later in his career Owen agreed to work as the vicar's assistant in Dunsden, which is near Reading. Soon, he moved to France and got a part-time job at the Berlitz School teaching English. On August 4, 1914, Germany attacked Belgium, which led to the start of World War I.

Moreover, in the beginning of his poetic journey he considered himself a romantic poet and was influenced by John Keats. As his early poems are pompously archaic, full of Romantic and Decadent themes, formal, and lacking in creative vigor. They had an influence, however. Keats' thoughts and language are their most prominent features. The poems chase Keats, reach out to him, embrace him, and show their affection. First few poems written when he was 16 and addressed "To Poesy" (not poetry), it opens by placing its author among the "thousand suppliants [who] stand around thy throne/Stricken with love for thee" and beseeching "help" in undertaking the various "tasks" of learning and watchfulness he must undertake before being granted "vision". Motion proposes that: "words of involvement are derived from Keats, who had numerous early poems on poetical self-application, as is the poem's yeasted-up diction—the hot descriptive language, in which sensuality becomes a kind of appreciation and analysis (258-273)

Moreover, Owen later when he participated as a soldier in the war, he could relate with the soldiers and fighters. When the critic Arthur Lae called the poet Rupert Brooke a "Georgian classic" for being educated (59), Owen quickly considered himself a Georgian classic because, like Robert Brooke, he was also educated. Owen did not hesitate to send his mother a letter in 1917 to tell her that this year he considered himself the "poet of poets" (collected letters, 96). it may be thought that the poet considered himself 'a poet of poets' in a period when Georgian poets ignored writing about the tragedies of the war that broke out.

However, critics often propounds that despite Owen's desire to involve himself with a poetic movement or a group of influential poets, but when this intention overlaps with his war poetry, he strongly denies his connection to romantic influences in form and content. Sandra Gilbert argues that Owen becomes an "anti-Keats", (119). It seems that the poet Owen did not want the influence of his Romantic predecessors to conflict with the poetry of war. Stallworthy proposes that: "Owen mimics Keats in a cynical way" (186) also as Kendall proposes that: "Owen often said that Shelley's poetry was outdated and could not be described as war poetry" (58). It seems that Owen owes much to his romantic predecessors, as his works were not a parody of Keats or Shelley, but on the contrary, he benefited, through his good reading of their works, to produce for himself a unique poetic style of his own and indeed not parody of them. Purkis propounds: [h]e took advantage of the lively Georgian themes to cast them in a sensual, emotional, and romantic template (117). Some critics proclaims that Owen rejects the Romantic inheritance as Jon Silkin, D. S. R. Welland. Sven Bäckman on the other hand argues that: Owen's 'A Terre' rejects his Romantic influences as he criticises Shelly's philosophy in 'Adonais'" (44-7). For instance: Owen's parody of oneness with nature puts the speaker in a critical position:

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Shelley would tell me. Shelley would be stunned: The dullest Tommy hugs that fancy now. "Pushing up daisies" is their creed, you know. ('A Terre', 44-47)

Predominantly, little of Owen's letters refer to William Wordsworth and Samuel Coleridge but many of his letters refer to Keats, Shelly, and Byron. Despite the fact that O'Neill compares Owen to Woolworths in the idea of consolation by comparing Wordsworth Elegiac Stanza to Owen's 'Strange Meeting', 'Exposure', and 'Mental Cases'. He concludes his discussion that on the contrary of Wordsworth, Owen's consolation is helplessness and Wordsworth's consolation "is not tenable in the midst of the First World War" (p.). O'Neill propounds that: "even in experimenting sonnets, Owen is keen to experiment with formal tradition in his early sonnets to open up new generic possibilities (93). By working in an elegiac mode, Owen challenges what Michael D. Hurley and Michael O'Neill describe as 'the expected consolation associated with the volta'. While Keats finds the sonnet a liberating space, Owen's decision not to work wholly within any single established style of the form challenges the traditions of poetic apprenticeship, as he attempts to balance the density of a concise, closed form with the absence created by loss". (93) Owen shares Byron's suspicion of the traditional rhetoric of war and heroism, and similarly concerns himself with the pursuit of truth undertaken by the Romantic poet. However, Byron and Owen differ significantly in their approach to such subjects. Moreover, the nature that Romantics escaped into, is the place that Owen escaped from because it is a part of human's weariness and pains as he puts in 'Exposure' and 'Spring Offensive'.

Owen existence and Georgians

It seems that the beginning of the influence of the Georgian movement was when Owen bought Monroe's book, which collected the poems of the Georgians. Perhaps Owen wished his name had been included in this book. Hibberd propounds that: "the poet Owen quoted Monroe's book in one of his letters (29). Hibberd discovers similarities between Monroe's *The Dead Beat* and Owen's *The Sentry* and many other poems written in 1913, and some other poems which are written after Owen had met Sassoon. (32). Douglas Kerr also argues that: "reading Monor's book had a great impact on Owen's poetic ironical style and directed the poet to a book that was more realistic, smoother, and simpler. Moreover, Kerr also proposes that: "Owen learned from the Georgian poets to adapt the style of the Romantic poets to meet the requirements of the modern era (247).

Consequently, Owen went to visit Sassoon at Craig Lockhart hospital, where he met the poet Graves. The latter had praised Owen's poem's "The Disabled", and he was asked to continue writing this kind of poems. It seems that the Owen impressed some of the Georgians as Monor, Sassoon, Graves. Robert Ross, Arnold Bennett, and H. G. Wells In 1917, at Craig Lockhart hospital also, he contributed to the editing of Hydra magazine, which was published by the same hospital, and in which he published a collection of poems, including the "song of songs". In the same magazine, Sassoon wrote a number of war poems. Two poems by Owen and four poems by Siegfried Sassoon, were published in *Hydra*. He established the foundation for his enduring friendship and professional partnership with Sassoon. Sassoon's 'trench drawings' in his newly released book *The Old Huntsman and Other Poems* had a lasting impression on Wilfred Owen. Sassoon encouraged Wilfred and gave him the tools he needed to write about his experiences in the war. Since the young Owen had previously shown the romantic flourishing and rich imagery, one would anticipate from someone who loved Keats and Shelley.

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Owen as a war poet

At Craig Lockhart hospital, when Owen gave Sassoon copies of unedited poems, the latter found that there was a direct influence of the Romantic ancestors in these war poems. He encouraged him to continue writing such works in this unique Romantic form. These poems that Owen gave to Sassoon while suffering from shellshock were written after he joined the military service in 1917. Petersen proposes that: "[o]ne of Wilfred Owen's unedited poems from World War I is "Dulce et Decorum Est" creates a great deal of drama and progression by contrasting the shared pain of the community on the one hand, with the individual's subjective experience of his own brutal death on the other" (143-163). It has drawn attention to the fact that there is a great similarity between some of Owen's poems and the poems of Georgian poets such as Brooke, Flecker and Masfield, such as: "Purple", "Long Ages past", and "The Fates". Daichi's argues that according to some critics as Kerr and Hibberd there are some similarities between Owen's 'Voices' and Monore's 'Before Dawn: Poems and Impression'. He adds that more than fifty percent of his poems had been written after he had met Monore (39).

Apparently, Owen, who was directly affected by war, writes poetry that conveys its sadness. The disillusionment and dehumanization of war are recurring themes in his poetry. The recruits were so young that they had not yet developed an understanding of the idea of war. As children, they were indoctrinated to think exclusively on achieving glory. The strong relationships of brotherhood and understanding that form among soldiers reflect in Owen's poetry. Away from their families, these young men can only depend on each other. Nawar proposes: "Owen argues that this kind of brotherly love may have an even greater impact than romantic love. When compared to the harsh noises and visuals of battle, which serve as the cruel setting in which troops form camaraderie, nothing can compare to roses, crimson lips, and soothing voices (92).

Owen forces the reader to face the horrors of war and the humiliations of everyday life. He shows readers warriors who have lost limbs and become victims of poison gas, young men who are grieving for their colleagues, horrific dreamscapes of the battlefield, a cacophony of noises that are horrifying in their repetition, and the fury of nature. He demonstrates the mental and physical toll borne by the young men who serve their country in battle. Mills in an online article published in 2014 propounds: "[t]hose males who make it through the ordeal develop a tolerance for violence. Their cause is unclear, and they are only terrified or desensitized young guys battling for it. Despite the fact that the Georgians were not interested in politics or economics, they are sensitive to all that troubles people. They hate everything that affects their lives. What preoccupies people is what preoccupies Owen, as well as his dreamy picture of war.

Wilfred Owen echoes the gloomy picture of war in a very sensual Romantic way. The disturbing outcomes of war are mixed with a king of romanticism being touched by an admiration for the soldiers. Brophy argues that: "[t]he war-torn soldiers who are actually victims of war are perceived as heroes in Owen's Romantic template" (22). The realistic and logical description of the terrifying image of the war is realistic and at the same time portraying the fighters as martyrs in the eyes of the reader also expresses a realistic picture because everyone who defends the homeland and protects the citizens and then gets killed must be a hero martyr.

Owen and Georgians: Similarities and Influences

Hibberd propounds in "Wilfred Owen and the Georgians" that: "there is a clear influence of Monroe's' poems on Owen's poetry as More clearly Owen uses Monroe's **Res Militaris**, vol.12, n°4, December Issue 2022

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"Revolt of Islam" in "Strange Meeting" and Monroe's "Inferno" in "Mental cases." He also echoes Monroe's 'Impression' in 'Impressionist'. Owen imitated Monroe's Puritan approach and view of life and humans and his rejection of immortality, his poem 'Unreturning' echoes Monroe's 'God' as in the "I named and called/ By they were all too far" which echoes Monroe's "I called upon his name/ He was not there". Moreover, Hibberd argues: "Monroe's Puritan view his "Before Dawn" as its influence in Owen's "The Time was Aeon" (33). Hibberd also proposes that: Owen's "Imperial Elegy" enlarges Brooke's personal view of war. "Imperial Elegy's" the narrower idea of death in war is enlarged in this poem which supports the idea of sacrifice as a kind of glory. Undoubtedly, Brooke' war poetry was a model for Owen's one. Brooke's "All Sounds have been must" was imitated in "The Great Lover". Subsequently, in this poem, Owen adopts the Romantic template to call the attention to the idea that particularities of love do not suit the soldiers in the battlefield who face the horrors of war. One may think that the horrors of war do not match the Romantic style but Owen tries to put soldiers in war in an admired place.

Eventually, it's worthy to say that when Owen met Sassoon in the hospital. The latter gives him a copy of "The Daffodil Murder". Owen highlighted some lines from the poem which pleased him. Owen, later on, imitates some of Sassoon's lines in his 'Disabbled'. (35). Owen could successfully imitate Sassoon's angry, compassionate, and short verse style in his 1917's poems as "Conscious", "The Letter", "The Chances", and "Inspection" are written after he has met Sassoon in the hospital. All the poems tap the theme of blood. The four quatrains divided into two stanzas with a regular rhyme scheme is a structure is an influence of Sassoon.

Hibberd propounds: "Sassoon and Graves' war experience helped Owen to stand on his feet as a mature (33). Sassoon, himself, gives Owen some of Graves's poems in his new collection "Fairies and Fusiliers". One of Owen's poems "Mental Cases" and Graves's "Recalling War" are similar in theme which is the effects of war on soldiers. Moreover, both poems deals with the nature of war and its effects on fighters and soldiers, but the images Owen provided were so terrifying and accurate that they describe the mental state that the war caused on soldiers, and this is what Graves did not address. Graves himself wishes to include Owen's name in 1916-1917's Georgian Poetry so he would be the fourth poet besides Sassoon, Graves, and Robert Nicholas. In a letter Graves sent to March, Graves writes: "I have a new poet for you, just discovered, one Wilffred Owen" (499). Graves believes that adopts Sassoon's style: "Too Sassonish in place, Sassoon to him a god oh highest rank." (529)

Owen was very interested in Gibson and Drinkwater. In 1917's poems as "Disabled", "A Tere' 'The Sentry' echo Gibson's Fires. Both poets portray images of darkness in forests and fires. The images of injured soldiers and the setting of the battlefield are repeated. John Drinkwater's poetry pleased Owen to the extent that he sent Drinkwater's 'Tide' as a present to his mother. As an editor of Crack hospital magazine, Owen includes Drinkwater's "Reciprocity' in one of the issues, it may seem to the reader that the difference between the Georgians and Owen was the realistic view of the war and the detailed picture that makes the reader realize what the soldiers were living through, as the reader sees the war as the warriors see it.

Consequently, critics have argued with one point of difference between Owen and other Georgian poets, which is the point of realism. Geoffrey Matthews pointed out in his article that most Georgian poets have difficulty distinguishing between realism and idealism. In summarizing his speech, he stated that the focus of Georgian poets is to include beauty in

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everything, even in images where ugliness is present, such as dusty streets and roads. He said Owen was the good guy who recognized this problem and got rid of it when he was directed to talk about the horrors of war (30). Matthew included Owen's name in talking about the Georgian poets and the point of distinction between realism and idealism.

Dennis Well argues in: Wilfred Owen: A Critical Study, that the poet Owen cannot be considered a real Georgian poet if we touched on the point of realism. Owen alone among them [who] realised the ultimate impossibility of this" (43-45). The difference between the Georgian poets and Owen was that the Georgian poets' view of life was positive and idealistic in the sense that they see life as their emotions are witnessed. C. K. Stead propounds why Owen might be regarded a Georgian despite having no work published in a Georgian anthology. He summarizes the whole idea by highlighting the big difference between Owen's poetry and the Georgians which is Owen's 'rhetorical language':

"....The work of a poet like Wilfred Owen flows naturally out of the Georgian method... And poets like Sassoon, Owen, and Sorley carry on the honest gentleness and open-mindedness of the liberal intellectual movement, which gave rise to the Georgian anthologies. When they saw suffering that they thought could have been avoided, they attacked stupid patriotism, not with abstract arguments, but with a true presentation of the facts".(88)

Owen avoided the plain Georgian style and borrowed the Romantic style instead. In short, he was able to put the Georgian content in the romantic mold to match the modern era and fascinate us with a unique poetic production of his own.

Conclusion

Wilfred Owen's poetry resounds the dark practicalities of war and its effect on soldiers and their loved ones. While his images are routinely morbid and somewhat disturbing, they are neatly juxtaposed with a sense of romanticism for the war-torn hero soldier. Therefore, one cannot be considered one of the modern Romantic poets who flirted with nature and applauded its beauty. His association with the romantics was only in his adaptation of the romantic template by depicting the bitter reality of war to bring the picture closer to the reader. Just as Georgians whose innovative approach to nature and genuinely lyrical tone he greatly appreciated. Wilfred Owen cannot be ignored as a Georgian poet because he was present in the same period as the Georgians, even if his name is not included in the anthology. He was concerned with war, a topic that most of the Georgians dealt with, especially that he met some of the main Georgians and presented them with his poems and they won their approval. Owen ignored the poetry of the minor Georgians and drew his strength from the poems of the major Georgians. But as an inventive poet, he took the basic idea to expand it in his intelligent, detailed and realistic way to make it close to the hearts and minds of readers. Owen was successful in creating poetry that reflected reality without embellishment or exaggeration. If Owen should belong to a particular group, he should belong to the major Georgians as Monroe, Sassoon, Brooke, Graves, and Gibson.

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