



Sound and Vision

*A TopTweetTuesday / Black Bough Poetry
Online Edition – Spring 2023*



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NIGHTFIRE

Behind the foothills,
before the stifle of light,
the hot copper of a dropped sun swills
in a sooty brazier

and,
for a moment,
the molten sky tastes of apricots;

trickles of black ink run
into slabs of trunk,
their tapers buoying
the puffball moon,

and in the tempered douse
of the burnished clouds
a speckle of bats
vanish
like ash
and the last fragment
of day.

Helen Laycock

Adagio

You'd listen like a child for the silk of closing time,
hiding between rain and indolence,
thin shadow, just shy of a mimicry,
waiting to break like all the worlds you've known.

Always the voyeur cutting a chance from dusk,
through every Chartres cathedral window,
wine and solidarity passed around the great *tableaux vivant*.
How things between us are slowing.

The time lapse of a Paris street;
its quiet women with loud minds,
architectures like blueprints, waiting to be rebuilt from dust,
old light and myth pillaring what you can no longer carry.

And in the saga of greyscale fields – no train, no war today,
the peace of stone horses falling out of focus,
one last blue hour on our lips, your breath
stealing excuses to become elegiac.

Vikki C.

Strandline

the cold croup tide recedes
with its fevers, and
I'm bladderwrack burst
into the strandline's
sullen silver, wounded,
wheezing, at my knees
a clump of salted net-nylon
the silt's wind-whisper
will twist and fashion into a
broad haul-cord
to anchor my battered barge
against the sunset, glimpsed green
through the surf, where
all the girls and the gulls
blaze, like the tarry driftwood's
flaming, emerald aurora
shimmering beneath my feet

James McConachie

Strangers

A plume of blue smoke, the heron drifts
mercurial through deep elm shade.
Where did you come from?

Brushstroke wings, reed-thin legs
have brought this ghost bird here.
Scanner eyes search verdancy for shelter.
You're not from here.

Dust bed drought – lagoon's evaporating sky mirror,
bullrushes turn to rust, quicksilver fish extinguished.
Umber is inlaid with bleached skeletons.

A singe away from bushfire, this furnace air could take us both.

My cheek is flame raw but I won't burn.
I am here with the ghost bird, in the place I've found to land.
For so long, so far from where I've been.

Phillipa Trelford

The Lighthouse Remains Unvisited

The house is left to itself, shutters closed. Dust
settles, lends rooms a patina of abandonment.

The garden puts out leaves and stems and flowers
that grow, die and grow again, daffodils, gentians, roses.

They edge the path to the place where the lighthouse
grips the rocks. Salt flavours the air and gulls clamour.

Seasons pass, spring, summer, autumn, winter.
No one comes to open the house or tend the garden

but all the while the beam of the beacon's light sweeps
across the ground, searches the emptiness,

and in the distance, from across the water
comes the boom and crump of shells.

Beth Brooke

Cobblestones

over ancient, buried things,
pink, grey, white, polished smooth
by storm-slung seas and fished from riverbed.
Stones laid atop oyster shells crushed into sand,
space holders, like me, carrying trace minerals from stars,

and beneath frieze, and framed by brick,
my reflection winks in the wavy glass and at the ghosts nearby,
never truly gone. Tessellations of time, in shifting layers,
set randomly like cobblestones.

Merril D. Smith

FOREST

Find your tree. Put your hand
on the bark. Push inside,
shoulder your way
into your soft city
flicking with upwards light.
Listen. We whisper messages.
We move quiet as the moon
on the leaves above. Sit there a while.
If you sense a threat send
a bitter missive out to your skin.
Stay away. Spores pulse
between our branches like stories.

Nia Broomhall

Norwood Grove

There's no reason to be nervous, walk on up
go in through the gate towards the old white house,
paint peeling only slightly, a nursery today, here
at the common's scrawly edge.

Home to a giant of a holm oak, complete with
concrete post wedged tight and pushed high inside,
as if it grew within the trunk. Whatever else you do,
though, don't bring in a dog.

They're barred from this iron-fenced, shrubby garden,
except for one, which may be seen if you glance left
on entry, before you reach the rose beds – a beast at lurk
beneath a cedar.

Eternally about to pounce, until six steps in it lets you down,
reveals itself a trick of angles, a false wolf, a fallen branch,
quite obvious once you know, except what's not
so clear, is if you could ever trust it after dark.

Matt Gilbert

Steep Terrain

keeping time on the whiskey-savage mountain
where shadows gather under imaginary clouds

hawks glide overhead on parchment wings
driftwood settles on landed seas
and the last red of the day falls from cliffs
like old fires

from the deep of the hills
coyotes cry out with their violins
death leaves behind its hollow bones

and darkness circles like fell horses
gaining ground

Regine Ebner

Be More Gatekeeper

Gatekeeper butterflies know how to close at rest and turn
so that sun-slant will not show their consumable bodies,

copper wings as windvanes, landmark signposts on the breeze.
No shadows leave their sides, shuttering up against avian risk,

leaving mere suggestions of insect wisp till they're ready
to restart our game again of mixing offence and defence,

flickering into erratic flight, fake eyes staring in lines
from the tips of their wings, expendable.

Although unable to survive by staying still alone,
their little revolutions outwit sun. Brambles keep on brambling.

Susie Wilson

Richmond Park Sound Map

Begin in the Isabella Plantation where the mallards are.
Skating and bickering like cartoon ducks on the thin ice.
At the willow notice the long-tailed tits are strangely silent,
so follow the calls of the parakeets – satirising from all angles.
Turn left through the iron gate until the first solitary oak.
Ignore the decoy pigeon which flies the wrong way
with its soft song of feathers, and keep straight ahead.
The sparrowhawk rising from the ground is giving nothing away.
When you near Pen Ponds listen for the first clues.
The uxorious calls of the Egyptian geese and then the splash
of their companionable bathing. Wings moving like waterwheels.
Skirt the front of the Royal Ballet School and enter the wood.
At last the jackdaws, telling out their names in the treetops,
and below thrusting their beaks eagerly into the crisp leaves.
Down the hill and across the Beverley Brook to the café.
There the great tit, invisibly, roaring out a reminder that,
though small, he is a tiger on every garden feeder.

Ian Tattum

Mesmeric Lullaby

I used to think the wind was sexy in her chaos.
How she swished my hair in cyclonic waves
mimicking the magnetic pulse of the universe.
How, all night, she battered bits of earth
against my bedroom window – a quavering
that morphed into soporific white noise,
my mesmeric lullaby.

Now, I forsake the wind and her madness.
I'd rather my hammock be still
with the only movement of my hair
from your breath against my neck,
the only rattling of my window
from your fingers rapping
Let me in. Let me in.

Marie Marchand

Remaining Geese

a prompt from poem titles of Shotetsu

Stood in a field growing
greener, they look around
as if to say 'Who stole the map?'

ふんふん

I love flying North —
arriving in snow, guarding
the sphagnum pools
against foxes,

I love flying South—
to bean fields,
meres,
and starlit estuaries kept moist or muddy
with the breathing of the sea.

ふんふん

I would remain a goose
after my wings measure
earth not wind.

Dave Garbutt

Frontiers

Clouds hulk like tanks
along nursery-blue frontiers.

The heron's a wing-span
away from despairing.

In this seizure of cold I know
nothing but what I'm not told –

lies seed to lies, spreading
bitterly, brazenly.

The night turns on its own
complacency,

its heedless sleet,
its lids closed to history.

In absent magic I pen
my own weakness: each

sentence a trench where a fire
should be leaping,

reinforced by my own digging,
far from the front line.

Kitty Donnelly

Off Shore And On The Edge

I think there's a squall coming
swift and angry.

There is something out there
a haze in the sky, and
low over the water
ripples ruffling the
calm.

Yes. There's a squall coming.

And yet – I saw an angel in the clouds today
bugle high,
and almost stucco.

And it is so cold with a quartering sea,
or beating into the wind.

Out here we can see the rain on the land
and we, while cold, are dry.

And when the thick air clears,
the high blue mountains
show beyond the shore

green in the gap in the weather.
So much

on the edge of the world
it takes your breath away.

Rosie Barrett

I Am Not Light

I am not light-fast but fading at the edges –
sun-bleached like memory disputed by time.

Life leaches brilliance from fibres
of urgency – bright ochre flames,
doused in gin and midnight.

I claim these thinning gowns
and wear them crowned in gold;
there is no daylight without erasure –
and though sunshine has worn me away,
I welcome its heat on my face

but only on occasion –
a lucid illumination of age.
Forgive me, I am not light
but a palette of colour-washed darkness
trying to preserve what little I have left.

Louise Machen

Sun Burn

Make an altar. It might help. Place on it:
all the insects you've ever eaten whilst
asleep. The caterpillar you trod on
when you were six. The red eyes of a dead
wagtail you put in your neighbour's hedge. Wild
raspberry worms. Sour brambles you spat out.
Every houseplant you've ever killed, whether
over or under serviced. The water
-pistol you shoot dogs with to teach them 'No'.
An incinerated corpse of an ant.
The magnifying glass you used on it.
Make a song and dance. Put on your swimming
goggles and torch the lot. Just one sun-burn
raises the risk by twenty five percent.

Susie Wilson

Sun-bleached Baleen

we see a whale's ribcage on the shore
flesh stripped off her bones
seagulls, sand crabs, and beach-hoppers
even cleaned out the joints
made the mammal a hearth
for barnacles, seaweed, and clams –
a dwelling we canvas now with coastal sprigs
of rosemary and strands of blue oat grass

Karen Pierce Gonzalez

New World

It's late and there will be no
slow gloaming tonight. A full
moon has commandeered
the summer sunset, whose last
glow lines the hills of Cowal.

My hill is silhouette black, moon
leaning on its muscular shoulder.
Constellations re-draw themselves
in finest chalk on art-class poster
paper. And I will follow the bombers

in this negative light, back down
the path to where a far-off dog
barks in a neon street. Close by
a rustling in the ferns. Near enough
to a static owl growing from a witch's

branch. Around the flowing marsh
and through the stunted wood
where the shallow stream relaxes
after its skelter down the glen. To
the barbed wire where people begin.

Ronnie Smith

Sallix

She filled the house with hyacinths -
blue and white and Delft -
fat and waxy in bowls.

She talked viola
translated winter pansies
her floral arrangements were commended and her
beds prized.

Willows remind me of my mother
she named them and
she named me.

Along the banks of the Wye we
picnicked beneath their fronds.

She said,
the willow hangs its head for shame – some myth or other.

She named me.
she named the tree,
she named the birds,
she named the leaves and
planted me among my dead kin,
who named me too;
then shaped me as I grew.

Chopped back,
stumped:
she pruned herself

out of this world.

Anne Phillips

Loughrigg

The lough of summer skies –
Lily tarn – her eye on wild geese,
autumn's grey beard where at the death
of a year I clung to icy waves up and all the way,
my mother yards ahead at the rigg
where we anchored to sluice the ropes
from around our hearts. A fell, full sail, our ship
of sundew, fern and basking vipers,
the broken route we took daily
from here to there.

Kerry Darbshire

Cillín

For the children buried at The Rockies, Westport, Co Mayo

this is now your mother
she'll never imagine a word from your first sound
she is rain settling around you,
wept from birch boughs

this is now your father
he'll never sing your cries to sleep
he is wind, his lullaby
chilled by wild sea breath

this is now your grandmother
she'll never pause to smile,
tuck a soft curl behind your velvet ear
she is layers of bracken blanket

this is now your grandfather
he'll never imagine you growing old
he is yellow mittens of gorse flowers
spiked across your burial ground

these are now your cillín siblings,
because no cross adorned
your foreheads
you remain unmarked

Terri Metcalfe

Dead Tree

Instead of mourning, watch
how lichen blooms lace
on my old and storied limbs,
how aphids gather for feasts.
Remember the storm that opened
a fissure?
Some bats, they darken leather there
and in the day, while they sleep
each inside their closed umbrellas,
a small and tailless coppersmith bird
stops and calls
and calls to dissolve your sorrow,
taps me to find the portholes
I have hidden away for lovers.

Suchi Govindarajan

Cicada

dun grub of the grebbled bark
the headsplit ring of your *canto*
searing, singeing under the merciless sun
I cannot near you, hear you
nor breathe through the pine haze
but pass beneath your branched
wing glint, your
silenced concession long
buried under the mould,
the snow, the suckling sap
of the root-bound
blinded worm years
these days are yours now
for the raking, and this is right
your scream-clicked
metronome marks time
and the passing, of
August's pulsing, withering, pitiless light

James McConachie

Featured Poet - Julian Day

Lunar Snaps

After midnight, gulls drop ghosts
off the Sussex coast. Pull dark tricks
of now you see us now you don't.
Above twin piers, they thicken like clouds.

Another freight of dreams is shipped
to the shore. Listen closely. Call and call.
Watch as their gaze tilts the ribbed navy
horizon. Sprinkled with salt and pepper,

over a plate of moon. Always looking
for where a slant window may open a meal.
You wonder what Artemis brings
to those dreams, those landslides.

Masts break like matchsticks.
Not easily salvageable in a life at sea.
Clouds spill over the living room as you
reach for the cardigan of night. Drawing

it over shoulders that might be yours
or mine. I wish only to drop off as
bath taps play games with loud and
quiet sound. You agree when you snore

intermittently. Here, on the edge
of a lounge, you can hear an ocean roar
of lost curses. We will, in time,
make candy floss of moon white ears.

Freak in Rain

Your heart held a jar
of unphotogenic storms

and never forget me
brimming nots.

I was once an ugly
telephone box,

hanging off my own
receiver – a network of electric

signals pulled across a loneliness
of much blushing. Like a nothingness

wrapped in the moist pelt
of the moors. Once you drove past

the crackle of my caged interiors,
you had me all to yourself – sticky

on a clammy summer
break, like a freak

flash storm,
bringing the future.

Julian Day

Meg-Time

Sit tight child, before colossal darkness
takes the frame. Swallows
you whole. Disappear
down a deep trench
of teeth. Feasted
like time, on your own
coastal table,
like so many
ghostly mandibles, tearing past
your disappearing fin.

For millions of years, you never saw
this one coming.
How hunger tears you up
in a rage.
A razor tooth held aloft
by a boy on a pebble beach.
The very last of you.

Julian Day

The Deer

The split pupa in her rib cage
flaunts its wings in an erratic flutter.

Gone's the timid heart that fears disclosure,
her hoof prints in the herd's grooves,
anxiety she poses as composure.

Gone are nights abraded with dread,
her russet haunches greying each October.

She pauses, letting all her blessings count.
Birches quake, Orion's candles gutter.
The deer has broken cover: she is out.

Kitty Donnelly

Evening Song

(After Anna Akhmatova)

Those words were never easy
no matter how true
we wanted them to be
in the room where memories
hung like the musk
of forgotten lilies
and the old woman's lamps
glowed dim like the stars
in the neon tainted sky
our declarations echoed
above the music of distant cars
the quiet refrain
a scratched record
a damaged love song,
playing, just playing along.

Eileen Farrelly

I Open and Close

Like an old book lying on a wet
forest floor, pages flitting in the wind,
breathlessly telling its story to no one
until the cover slams.

Like a tulip, in tune with the tides
of the day, limbs spread wide
to the sun, but in the cold folded
in and clenched tight above its head.

Like the valves of a heart,
that seal the chambers
once filled, to keep the blood
from flowing backwards.

The first and second sounds of a heartbeat
are the valves closing. They open quietly.

Eoin Cahill

STILLNESS

I know you still speak to me
like willows speak
to their growing and blackbirds
to their flight,
unwittingly, the way
intravenous longing,
the last of bottled hope,
speaks
to ailing blood.

I still listen.
I hear you out.

Radka Thea Otipkova

Despite everything, you're still that boy...

with the battle-damaged X-wing in his hands, orange Luke in the cockpit, heading for the steel canals of the Death Star on a torrid ride with the words of the force overtaken by a reverie of Alec Guinness as a blue hologram

Despite everything, despite such confusion, this hurtling, headlong hyperdrive of time, obliterating cores of memory, wrecks of space-junk drifting, you're still that boy with the Ewok figures in the forest moon of your garden talking feverishly, as your father digs, double digs, and the bonfire crackles and smoke drifts across gardens.

Despite everything, you're still that boy at night, hurtling through sleep and planted on your feet in a cape gripping a sabre with Gamorrean Guards advancing towards you in a vault in that palace echoing with the deep-bellied reverberations of Jabba amidst the cacophony of the Max Rebo band.

Despite everything, figures stand on a shelf, here, fading, incremental plastic degradation and it feels like this is the way, the only way.

Junk spins, drifts; blue holograms sing against static. And some things keep and some things turn. In waste, we envision resurrection as Boba Fett rises from the Sarlacc pit, clawing at sand, fistfuls of grit upwards, and we cheered all these years on.

Matthew M. C. Smith

Procession

Sit with sadness for a moment —
reserve this ancillary cavity
in the mad ongoing volume.

Presently you will be back outside
with calls to make, with scuff marks
on your shoes,

But here, you are carried
upon a subtle vector,
everything is suppressed —

The laughter outside
is far away, the bitterness
that attends your sessions is
barely a whisper,

And for a moment, your sorrow
will speak itself bigger
than all the gathering thunderheads
that shade your heart,

That whisper subtle warnings
in your ear.

Jesse Miksic

Illumination

Scarlet striped lighthouse
punctuates a blue as fierce
as wolf-eye. And the width of it
dazzling, dazzling as stars

a galaxy of blue shot through
with white. And colour, colour sings
in veins, tickles throats with strange
lust to drink the rolling ocean dry.

Lesley Curwen

About the artist

Giuseppina Brandi has a Master's Degree in Comparative Literature, with a dissertation on the European poetry of WW1 and lives in Naples, Italy. She loves reading, painting and dancing the Mambo, the Cha Cha Cha, the Foxtrot and similar dances. Twitter: @geppy80 Insta: josephinegeppy

About the Authors/ Contributing Editors

Rosie Barrett lives in South Devon. She cherishes family, watery views and travel. She's been published in magazines and anthologies, *Called To The Edge (crafty little press)*, *April Skies (Hedgehog Press)*, *Beautiful Dragons*, and others. She has been shortlisted in the Bridport Prize.

Beth Brooke is a retired teacher. She lives in Dorset. Her debut pamphlet, *A Landscape With Birds* was published in 2022 by *Hedgehog Press*. She tweets as @BethBrooke8 and is on mastodon as @BethPoet@mastodon.ie

Nia Broomhall is studying for an MA in Creative Writing. Currently Head of English at a comprehensive in Surrey, she has been teaching for 22 years. She was Highly Commended in last year's Winchester Poetry Competition.

Vikki C. is a British-born poet whose surrealist works are inspired by science and existentialism. Her poetry and prose appear or are forthcoming in *Black Bough Poetry*, *Acropolis Journal*, *Loft Books*, *Literary Revelations*, *Across The Margin* and *Dark Winter Literary Magazine*.

Eoin Cahill is from Cork, Ireland. A husband and father of two boys, his poems have appeared in *Cork Words 3*, *Dreich Magazine*, *Drawn to the Light Press*, and *Green Ink Poetry* among other places. You can find him on Twitter @eoinspoems

Lesley Curwen is a broadcaster, poet and sailor living in Devon. She was shortlisted for the Dai Fry Award and has a forthcoming pamphlet with *Nine Pens*. Other poems found homes with *Broken Sleep*, *The Storms*, *Arachne*, *Ice Floe* and *lamb*.

Julian Day is an emergent poet, based in Surrey. His background is in the fine and creative arts before long-term work within NHS mental health services. Julian's literary background includes being mentored by the late Matthew Sweeney.

Kerry Darbishire lives in Cumbria. Her poems appear widely in anthologies and magazines. She has won or been placed in many competitions. Kerry has two pamphlets and three full collections published, the most recent, *Jardinière*, by *Hedgehog Press* in June 2022.

Kitty Donnelly has had two collections published by Indigo Dreams: *The Impact of Limited Time* and *In Dangerous Hours*. She was nominated for a Jerwood Compton Fellowship in 2021 and won the Hammond House International Literary Prize for poetry in 2023.

Regine Ebner is a teacher and writer living in the American Southwest. Her work has been published widely by *Black Bough Poems*, *The Storms*, *Acropolis Journal* and others. She is continually inspired by the desert landscape and its surrounding mountains.

Eileen Farrelly's poems have appeared in *Marble*, *Atrium* and in anthologies. Her chapbook, 'Some things I ought to throw away', was published in 2021. She is also a songwriter, and can be found singing in pubs around her hometown, Glasgow.

Dave Garbutt grew up in North London (he was born less than a mile from Keats House) and lived in Reading until moving to Switzerland in 1994. He lives there still where after retirement he keeps house and walks their miniature Schnauzer while birding.

Matt Gilbert is a freelance copywriter, who also writes a blog about place, books, poetry and other distractions at richlyevocative.net. He's had poems published by *Atrium*, *Black Bough*, *Broken Sleep* and *Indigo Dreams* among others.

Karen Pierce Gonzalez's writing credits include *True North (Origami Poems Project, 2022)*, *Coyote in the Basket of My Ribs (Alabaster Leaves Press, 2023)*, *Down River with Li Po (Black Cat Poetry Press, 2024)*. Her fiction, non-fiction have appeared in numerous publications, and she has earned Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net nominations. Her 3D assemblage art has shown in several galleries and has appeared in several literary magazines.

Suchi Govindarajan is a writer and photographer who lives in Bangalore, India. She's written everything from software manuals to picture-books. Her work has appeared in several publications that she admires. Poetry is her first love; fiction is her newest.

Helen Laycock's writing has appeared at *Reflex*, *Ekphrastic Review*, *Cabinet of Heed*, *Visual Verse*, *Popshot*, *Lucent Dreaming*, *The Caterpillar*, *Literary Revelations*, *Black Bough*, *The Storms*, and imminently at *Broken Spine Arts*. *Frame* was East Ridge Review's Book of the Month.

Louise Machen is a Mancunian poet and a graduate of The Centre for New Writing at The University of Manchester. Her poetry explores the complicated relationships between people and the world. Most recently, her work has featured in *Dreich Magazine* and *Full House Literary*. Twitter @LouLouMach.

Marie Marchand is Poet Laureate of Ellensburg, WA. She has been published in *Crannóg Magazine*, *Catamaran Literary Reader*, *California Quarterly*, *The Storms Journal*, *Tikkun Magazine*, and *The Awakenings Review*. Her book *Gifts to the Attentive* was published in May 2022.

James McConachie was born in the UK. He has lived for the last 17 years in a remote farmhouse in Spain's coldest and emptiest inland province. More jobs and iterations than are worth mentioning, he likes to find himself lost, at high altitude on the back of a horse, with only the wind, the vultures and Hildegard Von Bingen for company.

Terri Metcalfe was born in Cumbria and moved to Ireland with her family in 2019. Widely published, she was invited as a featured reader for the 20th anniversary of Over The Edge Literary Events, held in Galway city library in January 2023.

Radka Thea Otipkova writes poetry in English, her second language. Her work has appeared in *B O D Y*, *The North*, *Tears in the Fence*, *Moria* and two anthologies published by *Black Bough*. In 2019 she won the Waltham Forest Poetry Competition. She cooperated on the Czech translation of Stephan Delbos' *Two Poems*, published by Literární salon in 2021. She has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and a Forward Prize for Best Single Poem.

Anne Phillips returned home after living on Ynys Môn for thirty years. She writes in both languages and has an MA in Creative Writing in Context from University of Bangor. She's been published in anthologies and magazines. She's working on her first collection.

Ronnie Smith was born in Glasgow in 1958 and was then moved to the small west coast town of Largs to grow up in what seems like a galaxy far, far away. He is a Silver Branch-featured poet and Pushcart Prize-nominated in 2022 by *Black Bough* poetry.

Phillipa Trelford is an Australian poet and freelance editor based in northwest New South Wales. Her poetry has been published in regional anthologies and she has been a recipient of the New England Award (Thunderbolt Prize for Crime Writing).

Ian Tattum is a priest in the Church of England, who writes about nature and literature- mainly for *The Church Times* and recently for *The Clearing*. His poetry has previously been published by *Spelt Magazine* and *The Pilgrim*.

Susie Wilson is a Scottish autistic poet in Sheffield, published in journals such as *Envoi*, prize anthologies (Gloucester, Winchester, Wolverhampton), and has been listed in the following competitions and prizes: Shepton Mallet Poetry Competition, The Fresher Writing Prize, *Frosted Fire*, *Indigo Dreams* and *The Rialto* nature contests). She lives with Stage 4 Melanoma.

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Sound & Vision

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