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PETER DE
VRIES

I don't think that the comic and the serious can be separated in talking about human reality, any more than you can separate hydrogen and oxygen and still be talking about water.

RALPH
WALDO
EMERSON

After thirty a man wakes up sad every morning excepting perhaps five or six until the day of his death.

CHUCK
SMITH

(*Ampersand*)
His thoughts tumbled in his head, making and breaking alliances like underpants in a dryer without Cling Free.

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Ballast is an acronym for Books Art Language Logic Ambiguity Science and Teaching, as well as a distant allusion to *Blast*, the short-lived publication founded during World War I by Wyndham Lewis, the Vorticist artist and writer. *Ballast* is mainly a pastiche of astonishing passages from books, magazines, diaries and other writings. Put differently, it is a journal devoted to wit, the contents of which are intended to be insightful, amusing or thought provoking.

The purposes of *Ballast* are educational, apolitical and noncommercial. It does not carry advertisements, nor is it supposed to be purchased or sold. It is published approximately every three months, beginning in October (more or less) and ending in June.

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PETER PARKER (*A Reader's Guide to Twentieth Century Writers*) On hearing of [Ernest] Hemingway's suicide he [William Faulkner] is reported to have quipped: "I don't like a man who takes the short way home." In his last years many felt that Faulkner was taking the long way home with the assistance of the bottle.



LEFT Logo for fictitious firm by Ryan McAdam, graphic design student at the University of Northern Iowa (1996).

[A Gillette Razor Company executive named Hickey and his wife went to Europe in 1934] and being Catholics, sought an audience with the Pope. Mrs. Hickey approached His Holiness [Pope Pius XI] with great reverence, and was almost shocked out of her wits by what the Pope said. Speaking in English, he began: "I am glad to welcome you both to Rome, first because we are all children of the same Holy Mother, but also because I understand, Mr. Hickey, that you are the General Manager of the Gillette Razor Company, and, you know, I have used a Gillette razor for many, many years and I think it is a wonderful invention. But tell me, what *is* the matter with the blades?"

H. L. MENCKEN in Charles A. Fecher, editor, *The Diary of H.L. Mencken* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), p. 75.

GERALD
BRENNAN
Works of art and literature are not an entertainment or a diversion to amuse our leisure, but the one serious and enduring achievement of mankind—the notches on the bank of an irrigation channel which record the height to which the water once rose.

VLADIMIR
NABOKOV
My pencils outlast their erasers.

E. J. KAHN, JR. (*Year of Change*) There was a piece in the [*New York*] *Times* yesterday about a chap who teaches CEOs and others how to remember. He himself once purportedly remembered the names of all 644 people in a room (sounds more like a convention hall), and he can memorize *Time* or *Newsweek* in an hour. I would like to get hold of him, for a lesson or two, but the paper got thrown out and I can't remember his name.

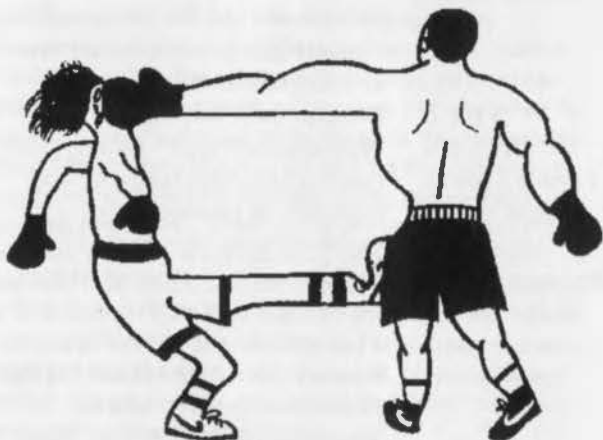
ROY
ASHLEY
(*Ampersand*)
From the attic
came an
uneearthly
howl. The
whole scene
had an eerie,
surreal quality,
like when
you're on vaca-
tion in another
city and
"Jeopardy"
comes on at 7
p.m. instead of
7:30.

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED
Quentin Bell, *Bloomsbury Recalled* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995). ISBN 0-231-10564-9. The Bloomsbury section of London, which includes the British Museum and University College, is famous in literary circles as the former stomping ground of "the Bloomsbury group," a handful of Cambridge-educated intellectuals, most notably Roger Fry (who started the Omega Workshops), E.M. Forster, Lytton Strachey, Virginia Woolf, and Woolf's sister, Vanessa, who was married to the critic Clive Bell (remembered for having invented the phrase "significant form"). The author is an artist, writer, and the son of Clive and Vanessa Bell, who was born at Gordon Square in Bloomsbury in 1910. More than 60 years later, he published a two-volume biography of his aunt, *Virginia Woolf*; and now, at age 85, he has written an often amusing memoir of her, his parents, and other eccentric literary celebrities who resided or commonly visited there.

[The American writer Dijuna Barnes had come back to the U.S. from England during World War II, and while she was away, the poet T.S. Eliot paid for the storage of her furniture. In return, she sent him rice, macaroni, and other food that was short in England. Having returned to London from a trip to France in May 1948, Eliot wrote Barnes to thank her for some new parcels she had sent and to tell her about his trip. In that letter, he said] I have just come from France drinking pastis with the mayors of villages in the Basses-Alpes, but it was really work as I had to lecture and speak, too, and I am very hoarse because it is difficult talking French with false teeth when you are not used to it.

T.S. ELIOT quoted in the *New Yorker* (24 June 1996). Suggested by Carol Stevens.

PETER DE VRIES "Stop looking at my legs," says a woman to a parson, who replies: "Don't worry madam, my thoughts were on higher things."



HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

Peter Parker, editor, and Frank Kermode, consultant editor, *A Reader's Guide to Twentieth Century Writers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996). ISBN 0-19-521215-0. This is an 825-page compendium of the lives and accomplishments of more than 1000 fiction writers, poets and playwrights; and a companion volume to the authors' *A Reader's Guide to the Twentieth Century Novel* (1995). As a reference book, we planned only to sample it, but were compelled to read every last word because the biographical entries were so interesting, amusing, or scandalous. For example, we had no idea that William Saroyan (and his cousin) wrote the Rosemary Clooney hit song, "C'mon-a My House"; that Nashville, Tennessee, was named after Ogden Nash's great-great-great uncle; or that Flannery O'Connor was featured in the Pathé News in movie theatres, at age five, for having trained a chicken to walk backwards. We were as well surprised to learn how many writers confirm the stereotype of artists as alcoholics, suicides, or melancholic loners. On the other hand, one way or another, all of society is far more "deviant" than is usually admitted.

ABOVE

Drawing of kickboxers with the shape of Iowa in the background, by Ryan Putnam, graphic design student at the University of Northern Iowa (1995).

SHERWOOD ANDERSON
(*Diaries*) Sunk deeply into the blues—the black dog constantly on my back, hating the summer's end, feeling my own inefficiency. It seems to me that I have done nothing. Still cold but the skies clear. Why do I always feel I must be accomplishing?

FRED
ALLEN

I don't have to
look up my
family tree,
because I know
that I am the
sap.

PETER AND LINDA
MURRAY (*A Dictionary of Art
and Artists*) [19th-century French
artist Adolphe William
Bouguereau] painted
"Renaissance-type" nudes, rather
cloying religious subjects, and
portraits of photographic
verisimilitude: this probably
explains why [Auguste] Renoir,
on being fitted with a new pair
of glasses to correct his myopia,
threw them on the floor, crying:
"Bon Dieu, je vois comme
Bouguereau! [Good God, I see
like Bouguereau!]."

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED Ellen Lupton and J.
Abbott Miller, *Design Writing Research: Writing on
Graphic Design* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press,
1996). ISBN 1-56898-047-7. Lupton is a curator and exhibi-
tion designer at the Cooper-Hewitt, National Design
Museum, while Miller, her husband and frequent co-
author, is director of the New York firm they founded in
1985, called Design/Writing/Research. Working together,
sometimes separately, they have produced some of the
finest, most insightful essays ever written on graphic
design (17 of which are collected in this book) and several
provocative volumes about design and culture (*The
Bathroom, the Kitchen, and the Aesthetics of Waste: A
Process of Elimination*; *The ABC's of ▲■●: The Bauhaus
and Design Theory*; and *Mechanical Brides: Women and
Machines from Home to Office*). Deservedly, in 1993, they
received the Chrysler Award for Innovation in Design. Two
things set their work apart: The tenacity of their writing;
and the playfully suitable manner in which they
present it.

ARTEMUS WARD [referring
to Geoffrey Chaucer] Mr. C. had
talent, but he couldn't spel. No
man has a right to be a lit'rary
man onless he knows how to
spel. It is a pity that Chawcer,
who had geneyus, was so unedi-
cated. He was the wus speller I
know of.

ANON Bad spellers of the
world, untie!

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED Celeste Brusati, *Artifice and Illusion: The Art and Writing of Samuel Van Hoogstraten* (University of Chicago Press, 1995). ISBN 0-226-07785-3. This is a scholarly biography, well-written and beautifully illustrated, of a curious but neglected figure in art history. A pupil of Rembrandt, Van Hoogstraten was a 17th-century Dutch artist and art theorist who is mostly remembered for his astonishing *perspectyfkas* or "perspective boxes." These are miniature distorted room interiors, painted in excruciating detail, which appear normal only from a designated peephole. The best example is in the National Gallery in London, another in the Detroit Institute of Arts. In addition, he was also a superb *trompe l'oeil* or "fool the eye" painter, a poet, playwright, and author of a treatise on perspective and other "hard and fast rules" of the art of painting.



LEFT Portrait made of letter parts by Brad Tierney, graphic design student at the University of Northern Iowa (1996).

We are shut up in schools and college recitation rooms for ten or fifteen years, and come out at last with a bellyful of words and do not know a thing. We cannot use our hands, or our legs, or our eyes, or our arms. We do not know an edible root in the woods. We cannot tell our course by the stars, nor the hour of the day by the sun. It is well if we can swim and skate. We are afraid of a horse, of a cow, of a dog, of a cat, of a spider. Far better was the Roman rule to teach a boy nothing that he could not learn standing.

RALPH WALDO EMERSON
in E. Aldo Emerson and W. Emerson Forbes, editors, *Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1909-14).

PAUL AUSTER
What I try to do is leave enough room in the prose for the reader to enter it fully. All the books I've most enjoyed, the writers I most admire, have given me the space in which to imagine the details for myself.

PETER PARKER (A *Reader's Guide to Twentieth Century Writers*) For [the Jewish-American writer George] Steiner the revelation of the Holocaust was that "man can read Goethe or Rilke in the evening, that he can play Bach or Schubert, and go to his day's work at Auschwitz in the morning."

Art clearly has much in common with the rest of the liberal arts—whose central purpose, when you think about it, is to increase ones attention span.

REBECCA BAILEY "What Is There To Teach About Art?" in *Dartmouth Alumni Magazine* (May 1996). Suggested by George F. Day.



HIGHLY RECOMMENDED James Park Sloan, *Jerzy Kosinski* (New York: Dutton, 1996). ISBN 0-525-93784-6. This is a biography of the controversial Polish novelist, best known as the author of *The Painted Bird*, who took his own life in 1991, partly because of the growing debate about the autobiographical basis of that novel. Some argue that there is no controversy, since all novelists are liars by definition and, factual or not, the book is a powerful novel. To others, he was a literary con man, an unprincipled fraud who belittled the Holocaust, and wrongfully exaggerated Polish anti-Semitism during World War II by falsifying an eyewitness account. At the very least, he had a complex and unusual mind. More persuasively and in greater detail than previous accounts, this book documents Kosinski's alleged life-long tendency to represent fiction as if it were fact.

BERNARD KOPS (*The World Is A Wedding*) Fate is a weird bitch—for my father, who came here [to London] to escape poverty, also escaped the gas chambers; and those who were well off, and stayed in Amsterdam, perished in Auschwitz.

So let us go then, you and I, when the evening is spread out against the sky like a pigeon poised upon a nickel. Let us not get into a pickle. Or, finding ourselves already deep in the briny pickley flesh, let us find there the seeds of our poetry.

LES COLEMAN (*Unthoughts*) It becomes unsettling to stay in one place too long.

MARVIN BELL "Three Propositions: Hooley, Dewey, and Looney" in *A Marvin Bell Reader: Selected Poetry and Prose* (Hanover NH: Middlebury College Press, 1994), p. 212.

ABOVE A new twist on cat and mice by Matthew Freund, graphic design student at the University of Northern Iowa (1995).

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED Barry Sanders, *A Complex Fate: Gustav Stickley and the Craftsman Movement* (New York: John Wiley, 1996). ISBN 0-471-14392-8. Influenced by William Morris, the Shakers, and Frank Lloyd Wright, Stickley was publisher of *The Craftsman* magazine and a leading figure in the Arts and Crafts Movement in America. He had initially wanted to be a clergyman, and his simple solid oak furniture (stained with tobacco, then sealed with shellac) was called "Mission Style" because of its resemblance to the austere furnishings of Spanish missions. Appearing to be hand-crafted, but die cut by machines and mass-produced, his durable furniture was both plentiful and affordable. A chair that he designed was used as the standard electric chair. As documented by this biography, he was enormously wealthy for about 20 years, until his work and life collapsed in 1915 when the entire enterprise went bankrupt.

G. C. LICHTENBERG A book is a mirror: if an ass peers into it, you can't expect an apostle to look out.

The distinguished art historian E.H. Gombrich likes to tell of a scene in which a woman visiting Matisse's atelier complained that "surely the arm of this woman is much too long," and Matisse replied: "Madam, you are quite mistaken. This is not a woman, this is a picture."

OTTO FRIEDRICH *Oblique: Paris in the Age of Manet* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992). Suggested by Allan Shickman.



LEFT Portrait made of letter parts by Brad Tierney, graphic design student at the University of Northern Iowa (1996).

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED Brady M. Roberts, et al., *Grant Wood: An American Master Revealed* (San Francisco: Pomegranate Artbooks, 1995). ISBN 0-87654-485-5. During his lifetime, *American Gothic* (recreated in butter this summer at the Iowa State Fair) and other Grant Wood paintings were often regarded as controversial in his home state. Now that he's been dead for more than a half century, everybody thinks he's the cat's pajamas—or at least that he's not controversial like today's artists. In the words of the current governor, a champion of hog lots and the death penalty, "I'd like to keep art focused on the more positive, wholesome—the Grant Wood type of things—because there are just a lot of good things to celebrate in the state of Iowa." As a result, a person could easily start to feel ill at the mere thought of another Wood retrospective, which this wonderful book is the catalog for. An exhibition of 62 pieces, including many rarely shown, it is now at the Davenport Art Museum until September 8, then moves to the Worcester Art Museum in Massachusetts from October 6 to December 31. The generous color reproductions in this catalog are superb, but even more valuable are the refreshing, atypical essays about Wood's Modernist influences, his methods of composition, and scientific studies of his painting techniques.

As confidence and sympathy began growing between us, my Aunt Li and I took to wandering round the countryside together. Li was a small woman, hardly any bigger than me. She would wet me with her tears, and I would listen to her sad ravings and sometimes stroke her hand. One day she must have come to the grand decision to tell me what lay at the root of her sorrow. We climbed a stile and went into a field and, fixing her glistening eyes upon me, she said, "What I am going to tell you now you will remember every single day of your life." But whatever she revealed must have been so startling that memory rejected it, for not a word of what was said remains in my mind.

NORMAN LEWIS *Jackdaw Cake: An Autobiography* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1985), pp. 7-8.

ANON Old bricklayers never die. They just throw in the towel.

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED
Doyald Young, *Logotypes and Letterforms: Handlettered Logotypes and Typographic Considerations* (New York: Design Press, 1993). ISBN 0-8306-3956-X. This beautifully printed book opens with an appropriate quote from Dutch calligrapher and type designer Jan van Krimpen: "Everything that counts in typography is a subtlety." The author, an admirer of type designer Hermann Zapf, is a prolific California-based graphic designer, who, during the past 38 years, has created handlettered logotypes or trademarks for scores of prominent corporations, among them General Electric, Hughes Aircraft, Mattel, and Vidal Sassoon; and has taught lettering, typography and logo design for more than 23 years at the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena. Essentially, this is a showcase of 169 examples of the author's finest designs, supplemented by brief, insightful comments about how each was designed and why. Also featured are 6 chapter openings by various professionals, a type-related glossary, and bibliography.

RUDOLF ARNHEIM
(*Parables of Sun Light*) One does not grow or age gradually. Rather, one stays in an age-group for some time and then shifts to the next, often quite suddenly.

WAYNE GOODE
(*Ampersand*) The politician was gone but unnoticed, like the period after the Dr on a Dr Pepper can.

BERNARD KOPS (*The World Is A Wedding*) I was a shloch. My trousers always baggy. My tie always egg. My socks full of holes and my shoes hadn't seen polish for at least two and a half years. And since my experiences at the barber shop at Leeds I wouldn't get my hair cut. But apart from that I was quite presentable.

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, *The History of that Ingenious Gentleman Don Quijote de la Mancha*. Burton Raffel, translator (New York: W. W. Norton, 1995). ISBN 0-393-03719-3.

Translations are like wives, Roy Campbell once quipped; the more attractive they are, the less faithful. It would be challenging enough to interpret a complex, satirical English novel from the 17th century, but imagine the difficulties of translating it from archaic Spanish. Should the result be stiff and unattractive, yet technically accurate? or should it take liberties and thereby capture the spirit and fluidity of the original? This new, wonderfully readable translation of Cervantes's "the man from La Mancha" appears to satisfy both criteria: While historically and literally faithful, it is equally careful to try to convey, in current English, the feeling of Cervantes's action-packed writing style, its complexity, density, playful irony, and so on. This edition, by a distinguished scholar known for his translations of *Beowulf*, *Père Goriot*, and *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, has been acclaimed as better than the 1949 Putnam translation.

GEORGE HEARN [star of *La Cage Aux Folles*] One

woman was furious when I turned down her request to sing at a benefit. She said she heard that

I wasn't a homosexual but that I had sung for an AIDS benefit. I told her I belonged to the Audubon Society, but I'm not a bird.

In Mark Leyner's *My Cousin, My Gastroenterologist* (New York: Harmony Books, 1990), a fictional prison inmate, condemned to die in the electric chair, utters the following frolicsome note about Bauhaus-era furniture: "Luckily, I'd developed an unusually close relationship with the warden. Knowing how much I loved Mies van der Rohe, he had an electric Barcelona chair custom-built for my execution. And when the date finally came and I was led into the death chamber, I couldn't help but marvel at the delicate curvature of the X-shaped legs, the perfect finish of the plated steel and the leather upholstery, and the magnificent, almost monumental proportions that have made the Barcelona chair timeless."

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

Linda Simon, editor, *William James Remembered* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996). ISBN 0-8032-4248-4. Two years ago, the same author and publisher produced *Gertrude Stein Remembered*, a collection of short reminiscences by friends, literary associates, and others. In this warm and amusing sequel, the same method is used more successfully to describe Stein's favorite teacher, William James, the colorful turn-of-the-century philosopher and psychologist and brother of novelist Henry James. Brief first-person accounts by his Harvard colleagues (Josiah Royce, George Santayana, Hugo Münsterberg), former students, and personal friends offer candid and wonderfully vivid accounts of this influential and charismatic teacher ("no one could be quicker than he to see the chance for merriment"), who liked to show up in the classroom in "his favorite Norfolk [hunting] jacket, red and black checked trousers, and one or another of his vibrantly colored ties [so that] there was, his dour colleagues thought, an air of Bohemia about him."

JAMES JACKSON PUTNAM
(*William James Remembered*)
He realized also that the fire of genius is distributed widely among men, as radium is found in minute quantities among baser minerals, and his generous instinct and intellectual zeal prompted him to seek its traces out.

Throughout [American fiction writer Harold] Brodkey's life and work runs an obsession with greatness and standing—largely his own—in every sphere from intellectual to genital. Fortunately he is not humorless, and has related how he once lay in Central Park gazing up at the sky and thinking: "If *only* I'd been tall." After getting up to walk home he remembered that in fact he was.

PETER PARKER *A Reader's Guide To Twentieth Century Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 108.

In the early seventies, Berkeley was so full of refugees from the Iowa Writers Workshop that I contemplated printing a bumpersticker reading "Repatriate Iowan Poets."

ALASTAIR JOHNSTON "Recollections of a Picaresque Past" in Poltroon Press, *Trance & Recalcitrance: The Private Voice in the Public Realm* (San Francisco: Pacific Center for the Book Arts, 1995), p. 13. Suggested by Walter Hamady.

Driving along the highway [in 1931], I picked up a young man who said that he was from the east. He described conditions there, as he sees them, and commented on the bitterness of many of those people. Replying to his question about people here [in Iowa], I told him that the farm folks here always have something to eat and, of equal importance, we always have our minds occupied and our hands busy. Two things that help much to keep people contented.

ELMER G. POWERS in H.R. Grant and L.E. Purcell, editors, *Years of Struggle: The Farm Diary of Elmer G. Powers* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1976).

OTHER EXCELLENT BOOKS

KAREN MCCREADY *Art Deco and Modernist Ceramics* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1995). ISBN 0-500-01669-0. An unparalleled color compendium of dazzling ceramic design of the 1920s and '30s, supplemented by brief biographies of ceramists, designers, and factories.

GEOFFREY DOWDING *Finer Points in the Spacing & Arrangement of Type* (Vancouver BC: Hartley & Marks, 1995). ISBN 0-88179-119-9. As Strunk and White's *The Elements of Style* is for writers, this is a comparable manual of style for typographic designers.

JAMES FRASER, STEVEN HELLER AND SEYMOUR CHWAST *Japanese Modern: Graphic Design Between the Wars* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1996). ISBN 0-8118-0509. The latest in a series of small but magnificent titles on Art Deco-era design, this one a breathtaking album of Japanese designs, inspired by European modernists, circa 1923 to 1930.

ELLEN LUPTON AND ELAINE LUSTIG COHEN *Letters from the Avant Garde: Modern Graphic Design* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996). ISBN 1-56898-052-3. An ingenious survey of modern design consisting entirely of the personal letterheads, envelopes, and postcards of prominent modernists, among Herbert Bayer, El Lissitzky, and Kurt Schwitters.

JEREMY MYERSON *Beware Wet Paint: Designs by Alan Fletcher* (London: Phaidon Press, 1996). ISBN 0-7148-3354-1 Rich, fascinating overview of the work and thought process of one of England's senior and most influential graphic designers, co-founder of the famous firm, Pentagram.

Ballast is published in Iowa, about 60 miles from Charles City, home of women's rights advocate Carrie Chapman Catt; site of the invention of the tractor in 1896; and birthplace of novelist Robert Coover, who once described it as a "small, rural mid-American classic town—the kind that Reagan and Eisenhower were nostalgic for."

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Ballast does not have a budget as such. For more than ten years, it has operated at a financial loss. Such losses are currently offset by contributions from enlightened subscribers and generous deductions from the Dogsboddy's paycheck. If anyone is foolishly philanthropic (foolish because such gifts are surely not tax deductible), we will sometimes accept a check.

While Formalism has gone to the junkyard of ideas, some feel it should be kept for parts.

REBECCA
BAILEY
"What Is There To Teach About Art?" in *Dartmouth Alumni Magazine* (May 1996). Suggested by George F. Day.

CHARLES
KNEVITT
A snobbish Bostonian approached [James A.M.] Whistler at a party one evening. "And where were you born, Mr. Whistler?" she asked. "Lowell, Massachusetts" he replied. "Whatever possessed you to be born in a place like that?" exclaimed the lady. "The explanation is simple," said Whistler, "I wished to be near my mother."

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