

NOTE: Titles of works that are collected in *The Riverside Anthology* appear in italic type.

**Allegory:** an extended metaphor in which the essential meaning is found outside the literary work. Allegory, like symbolism, uses characters, setting, and images to suggest meanings beyond themselves, but allegorical signs, unlike symbols, are so obviously used to present religious, moral, or political ideas that they may retain little objective meaning. Allegorical characters tend to be flat and unreal personifications of the qualities they represent.

**Allusion:** an implicit reference to another work of art, a person, or an event. In making the allusion, the writer does not pause to explain the significance of the reference but assumes that the reader shares his or her experience and knowledge well enough to register the impact.

**Antagonist:** the character in a literary work who opposes or resists the action of the protagonist. The antagonist is not necessarily an evil or immoral character but merely one who directly or indirectly creates conflict.

**Apostrophe:** speech addressed to an abstract quality or an absent or nonexistent person as if he, she or it is present and listening. Usually the apostrophe involves the expression of deep emotion; it can lend itself to humor and satire; as when Lady Macbeth calls on the "spirits that tend on mortal flesh" to "unsex" her.

**Assonance:** a partial rhyme in which the vowel sounds are alike but the consonants are not alike, as in "mate" and "take."

**Blank Verse:** unrhymed iambic pentameter. See *Meter*.

**Characterization:** the creation within a literary text of persons who appear so human and alive that we are able to respond to them much as we respond to the people in our everyday lives. See *Fiction: Tales and Portraits*, pp. 4-21.

**Comedy:** like tragedy, a literary form that begins with the introduction of disorder into an orderly society and ends with the restoration of a new order. It is oversimplistic to say that tragedy always ends in death and comedy in marriage, but the oversimplification points to a useful distinction: that the new order in tragedy involves a sense of loss, while the new order in comedy suggests a world grown brighter.

**Conceit:** a metaphor that draws an elaborate parallel between two things so remarkably different that great ingenuity (or wit) is required to find the connecting meaning. The most common conceits are the Petrarchan, in which a lover might be compared to a ship or a rose, and the Metaphysical, which is more intellectual and less predictably poetic. John Donne's "*A Valentine: Forbidding Mourning*" contains one of the best known metaphysical conceits: a man and wife are compared to the arms of a compass.

**Connotation:** the set of implications and associations a word carries regardless of its *denotation*, or "objective" meaning. If the same man is referred to as a "fabulist," a "diplomat," a "flatterer," and a "har," we could say that the denotation of these words is the same and the connotation is different.

**Consonance:** a partial rhyme in which the consonant sounds are alike but the vowel sounds are different, as in "mast" and "least."

**Couplet:** a pair of rhymed lines. When the couplet is a self-contained statement, it is easy to remember ("Red sky at morning/Sailor take warning"). It lends itself to wit, as in the couplet Pope wrote for the royal dog's collar: "I am his majesty's dog at Kew./Pray tell me, sir, whose dog are you?" Though a couplet can be a self-contained poem, it more often is the basic unit of a longer poem.

**Denouement:** the point in the plot of a story or play in which the conflict is resolved and the action begins to wind down.

**Deus ex machina:** meaning "god out of the machine," a phrase that comes from a practice in Greek drama of using stage machinery to lower onto the stage a god who could rescue the hero, untangle the plot, or set the world in order before the play closed. The term now refers to any contrivance by which an unexpected person or happening is introduced to solve the conflict and lead to a neat, positive ending. The *deus ex machina* is often regarded as a device by which an unskillful writer saves a plot that has somehow gotten out of control.

**Diction:** the choice and arrangement of words. Particularly important in the English language are the *levels of diction*, usually presented in dictionaries as (1) the formal, suitable for serious books and grave public discourse; (2) the informal, suitable for most writing; (3) the colloquial, suitable for casual writing or speech; and (4) slang. See *Poetry: Oppositions and Ripples*, pp. 544-556.

**Elegy:** a formal poetic meditation on a serious theme. Renaissance love complaints, such as Thomas Wyatt's "They Flew from Me," were called elegiac, but death is the subject of most modern elegies. The pastoral elegy expresses grief over the loss of a friend and may follow the classical conventions of an invocation to a Muse, a procession of mourners, and an exaltation of immortality.

**Epic:** a long narrative poem about the deeds of a hero, sometimes characterized by the use of epic conventions. These conventions include action beginning "in media res" or in the middle, a catalogue or long list of warriors or characters, and a poet's or storyteller's invocation of the Muse.

**Epic simile:** a simile in which the secondary image (vehicle) is expanded until it becomes important in itself and ceases to be a mere illustration of the tenor (or meaning). In *Paradise Lost*, for example, Milton elaborately compares the movement of the serpent to that of a ship near the mouth of a river, guided by a skillful steersman who knows how to shift the sails with the varying winds. For many readers, the serpent nearly vanishes in the description.

**Exposition:** the portion of a play, preceding the main action, devoted to establishing the situation, character, and conflict. In fiction, exposition is the injection of such material into the story before or between the scenes in which the action takes place.

**Fantasy:** a literary form involving a conscious departure from reality, in which the world imitated is, at least in part, an imaginary one. Often the principles of nature are invented or distorted so that animals can take on human traits, people can become animals or superhumans, and the subconscious mind can create monsters or new worlds. Fantasy can be found as a central element in works ranging from the traditional folk tale to contemporary magical realism.

**Figure of** — see discussion of comparison in the Poetry: Oppositions and Ripples, pp. 544–556. See also *Allgory, Apostrophe, Conceit, Epic simile, Hyperbole, Metonymy, Oxymoron, Personification, Simile, Synecdoche, Understatement*.

**Foil:** a person or sometimes an object that illuminates and clarifies the distinctive features of another character by being sharply contrasted with him or her. The term originally meant a "leaf" or bright metal that, when placed under a gem or piece of jewelry, enhanced its brilliance.

**Foreshadowing:** the presentation of information early in a work that hints at events to follow. Foreshadowing can be the establishment of atmosphere, particular facts, or notable character traits, and it serves to prepare the reader both emotionally and intellectually for what is to come.

**Frame story:** a story, usually very simple, that creates a context in which a character can tell a second, more extensive story.

**Genre:** a French word referring to a type or category of literature. The genres represented in this anthology include the epic, comedy, elegy, gothic, lyric, pastoral, tragedy, and tragicomedy. Classification by genre can be useful because, when we know the elements of a certain form, we have a frame of reference that allows us to appreciate both the author's skillful adherence to some aspects of the form and his or her skillful departure from other aspects.

**Gothic:** a term first applied to literature in the eighteenth century to mean "barbaric," that which defied classical order and dignity. The term was soon associated with dark castles, strange noises, ghosts, storms, horror, and the supernatural found in literature. More recently, the distorted characters, violence, and obsession found in the works of William Faulkner and Flannery O'Connor have created a "Southern gothic" tradition.

**Grotesque:** a literary term first used consistently in the eighteenth century to refer to the bizarre or unnatural, anything that opposed the balance and harmony sought by neoclassical art. Its meaning has been narrowed in this century as more writers have become concerned with the absurdity of humankind and the lack of order in the universe. In fiction and in theater, the grotesque is represented by spiritually or physically deformed characters.

**Hyperbole:** a conscious overstatement for dramatic or comic effect.

**Imagery:** an image is a word or group of words that refer to any sensory experience. See Poetry: Oppositions and Ripples, pp. 544–556.

**Initiation story:** a story about the development of a young person from childhood or adolescence to maturity. The internal conflicts that the innocent individual has to face and resolve "initiate" him or her into the world of experience.

**Irony:** a mode of writing in which truth appears in a mask that disguises it. The mask may be *verbal*, created by an ambiguity in the meaning of an expression. It may be *dramatic*, created by the misunderstanding of a character who knows less than the audience. It may be *situational*, created by juxtapositions that suggest grim humor. Far more common are passages or whole works where the tone is ironic. An author or character says something as if with a wink or a grimace to show the discrepancy between the words and the meaning.

## LITERARY MOVEMENTS/PERIODS

**a) Renaissance:** an era that acquired its name from the French meaning "rebirth," a word that captures the creative energy and optimism of a society expanding geographically and culturally, beyond the limits of the medieval period. Harkening back to the humanism of classical time, Renaissance painting, sculpture, and literature often celebrated the beauty of humanity and the physical world. The English Renaissance flowered under Elizabeth I (reigned 1558–1603) and James I (reigned 1603–1625) and waned in the second half of the seventeenth century. It infused English literature with a range of scholarship and travel and a poetic sensibility enlarged by European as well as Classical influences. The breadth of Shakespeare's drama and Milton's epic poetry demonstrates the unlimited creativity of Renaissance writers.

**b) Neoclassical period:** an era of reaction against the unrestrained energy and humanism of the Renaissance. During the eighteenth century, the neoclassicists stressed the imperfections and limitations of humanity. They imposed a new order and decorum on life and art. Art was valued for its exaltation of reason and its restraint of emotion and the imagination.

**c) Romanticism:** a movement that began when William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge published their *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798. Reacting against neoclassical order and restraint, the English Romantic poets enthusiastically embraced supernatural themes, the wildness of nature, imagination, and self-expression. In diction and poetic form, their verse often resembled impassioned prose or folk balladry. In England, William Blake, William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, John Keats, and Percy Bysshe Shelley were the leading Romantic poets. In America, fiction was equally influenced by the movement. American Romanticism tended toward symbolic and gothic elements while maintaining the imaginative qualities of the early romantics. The movement in America was led by Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, Edgar Allan Poe, Walt Whitman, and Emily Dickinson.

**d) Realism:** an attempt to reproduce the actual world in literature. It arose in the nineteenth century as a reaction against the sentimental, supernatural, and optimistic elements of romanticism. Realists generally choose the common or ordinary for subject matter, and they focus on the presentation of character instead of on plot. In drama, Henrik Ibsen and Anton Chekhov are responsible for the turn to realism onstage; Guy de Maupassant, Henry James, and Edith Wharton are forerunners of realism in fiction.

**e) Naturalism:** an outgrowth of realism around the turn of the century. Although related to realism, naturalism moves beyond literary principles to scientific ones that govern both human nature and the order of the universe. Scientific determinism leaves characters defeated by both the natural world and their own animalistic nature, neither of which they can understand or control; social and economic determinism takes from them the power to direct their own destinies. Although Maupassant preferred not to be labeled, he is associated with the naturalistic tradition.

**f) Symbolism:** a movement beginning in France during the second half of the nineteenth century as a reaction against realism. The symbolists believed that the

objective world was not the true reality but rather a mere reflection of an absolute one with which the artist was closely attuned. Art revealed reality by re-creating the emotional response of the artist, but because emotional states cannot be shared directly, the symbolists believed a system of symbols was necessary to express what they experienced. They also relied on the musical and connotative qualities of words to evoke a response in a reader. Charles Beaudelaire was a primary force behind symbolism, especially in his use of synesthesia, the description of one kind of sensation in terms of another ("... odors succulent as young flesh" from "*Correspondances*"). The influence of the movement is apparent in the poetry of William Butler Yeats and Louise Bogan.

**g) Imagism:** a movement initiated in 1909 by American and English poets as a response to symbolism. To counteract the loosely defined images of the symbolists, the imagists set out to give poetry a new concreteness. Influenced in part by Japanese haiku, the Imagists used precise language to create solid, sharply defined representations of objects. Their ideal was a visual creation that would appeal to the intellect while its sound evoked emotion. Imagism continues to influence poets; its traits are seen, for example, in William Carlos Williams's "*The Red Wheelbarrow*."

**h) Modernism:** a broad term that refers to a direction in style and attitude taken by twentieth-century literature. "Modern" refers less to a specific time period than to a conscious break with traditional forms. Rejecting objective truth as a source of meaning, the moderns believe that the individual creates meaning by perception, action, and imagination. Symbolism and personal myth-making become the means of self-expression. Yet the glorification of the inner being leads the modern to alienation and a sense of loss and despair. William Butler Yeats, T. S. Eliot, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, William Faulkner, and Samuel Beckett are among the many modern writers.

**i) Impressionism:** a movement in literature in which things are portrayed as they would be perceived by a particular consciousness and point of view rather than as they objectively appear. Taking their method from the impressionistic painters of the nineteenth century, such as Renoir and Monet, the literary impressionists attempt to imitate the delicate brushstrokes and varying patterns of light created in such art. The result is the reproduction of a fleeting impression upon the mind of how something momentarily looked or felt. Although impressionism is like expressionism in that it uses objects merely to portray the human consciousness, it differs in that it does not consciously distort or abstract them.

**j) Expressionism:** a term coined at the beginning of the twentieth century to describe art and literature that emphasize the artist's internal emotions and experience. External objects merely transmit the artist's psyche and are not significant in themselves; therefore they are often substantially distorted. Expressionism in drama is characterized by symbolic and antirealist staging and in fiction takes the form of stream-of-consciousness narration and dreamlike situations, as in Franz Kafka's "*A Hunger Artist*."

**k) Surrealism:** a movement in art and literature that began during World War I in France. Influenced primarily by the psychology of Freud and the poetry of Charles Beaudelaire and Arthur Rimbaud, the surrealists believed that the illogical and uncontrolled thoughts and associations of the mind better represented objective truth than ideas controlled by convention and imposed rationally.

Presenting a dreamlike world through free-form writing and leaving it... pre-  
tation to the reader alone, surrealists asserted their freedom from reason and moral  
purpose. Although the movement ended at the beginning of World War II, surre-  
alism continues to influence contemporary writers.

**Lyric:** a relatively brief poem that expresses the personal emotions of a single  
speaker, usually love or sorrow, longing or tranquility. Many of the early and  
memorable lyrics in English were written to be sung, as popular song lyrics are  
today. Some later and more "literary" lyrics are still at least nominally songs for  
music. Lyric is opposed to dramatic and epic as one of the three major genres of  
poetry; it is the genre of a single voice presenting a single mood or impression.

**Melodrama:** a term that literally means "a play with music" and that originally re-  
ferred to a type of musical play popular in England in the nineteenth century.  
Today the term no longer implies that songs and music will be part of the perfor-  
mance. What is implied is a heavy-handed appeal to emotions: characters who are  
unrealistically good are pitted in a dire and apparently futile struggle against char-  
acters who are unrealistically bad. When the audience's feelings of horror and  
pity have been sufficiently exercised, the plot usually turns (often via a deus ex  
machina) and the audience feels a rush of joy as the play comes to a happy end-  
ing.

**Metaphor:** a figure of speech in which one thing is described as if it were another  
thing, thus forming an implicit comparison between the two things. We speak  
metaphorically when we call someone who stays up late a "night owl" or someone  
who rises early a "lark."

**Meter:** the rhythmic pattern of a poem that has a regular rhythm. In some cases,  
this rhythmic pattern is established by including a fixed number of stresses in a  
line. In some cases, the pattern depends on a fixed number of syllables per line.  
More often both stresses and syllables are considered. The most common metrical  
pattern in English is iambic pentameter, so named because it contains five metrical  
*feet*, or sets of stressed and unstressed syllables. This line, from Shakespeare's  
Sonnet 73, "When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang" is written in iambic  
pentameter:

The other principal feet in English are the trochee (/ -), anapest (- - /),  
dactyl (/ - -), spondee (/ /), and pyrrhic (- -). These may be aligned in  
monometer, dimeter, trimeter, tetrameter, pentameter, hexameter, or heptameter,  
according to the number of feet per line.

**Metonymy:** a figure of speech in which an idea is replaced by an object usually as-  
sociated with it. For example, "the pen" represents written persuasion and "the  
sword" represents force in the statement "the pen is mightier than the sword."

**Oxymoron:** a figure of speech that links terms that seem to contradict each other.  
The Latin term "festina" ("hasten slowly") is a good example, as is our expression  
"the silence is deafening."

**Pastoral:** a poem or play dealing with life in the country, or rustic life, in a con-  
ventionalized, artificial way.

**Pathetic fallacy:** a term coined by John Ruskin in 1856 to refer to the practice of

**ascribing**: an emotions to inanimate objects. Though Ruskin used the term pejoratively, it is now used neutrally to indicate a form of personification created when the speaker's emotion is so powerful that he or she seems to see it echoed by the natural world.

**Persona**: the voice (literally, in Latin, "the mask") that the author of a work speaks through. It is often naive to identify the persona too closely with the author. "The persona may be a created "self" inside or outside the work.

**Personification**: a form of metaphor that compares animals, inanimate objects, or abstractions to humans. Often the personification is only implied, as when Alexander Pope writes in "The Rape of the Lock" that the "sun obliquely shoots his burning ray," thereby indirectly comparing the sun to an archer.

**Plot**: self-contained "action," a chain of causes and effects that begins with an event that needs no explanation; this event leads naturally to the next event, which leads to the next, and so the events tumble like dominoes until the last domino falls. See Fiction: Tales and Portraits, pp. 4-21, for a more complete discussion of plot.

**Point of View**: the perspective from which the events of a story are told. See Fiction: Tales and Portraits, pp. 4-21, for a more complete description of the dramatic, limited, and limited omniscient points of view.

**Protagonist**: in a play or story, the principal actor or character whose pursuit of a goal provides the work with its plot. The protagonist is not necessarily a hero and may even be a villain.

**Quatrain**: a four-line unit of poetry, often with a fixed rhyme scheme to give it definition.

**Rhyme**: a term that generally refers to the matching of both vowel and consonant sounds at the end of words, *moon* and *spoon*, for example. Variations on rhyme include double-rhyme (*plaster/master*) and triple rhyme (*admonish you/astonish you*). Poets since Emily Dickinson have often substituted assonance (*wave/sail*) or consonance (*wave/saw*) for true rhyme, a practice called half-rhyme, near-rhyme, or slant-rhyme. See Poetry: Oppositions and Ripples, pp. 544-556, for a discussion of rhyme and sound in poetry.

**Rhyme Royal**: a seven-line stanza in iambic pentameter that rhymes ababbcc. The final line may be in iambic hexameter. The following stanza from Auden's "The Shield of Achilles" is a rhyme royal:

- A ragged urchin, aimless and alone, (a)
- Loitered about that vacancy, a bird (b)
- Flew up to safety from his well-aimed stone: (a)
- That girls are raped, that two boys knife a third, (b)
- Were axioms to him, who'd never heard (b)
- Of any world where promises were kept, (c)
- Or one could weep because another wept. (c)

**Rhyme Scheme**: a set pattern of end-rhymes that helps to define a poem's form. Ballads are traditionally rhymed abab, as in this stanza from Wordsworth's "She Dwelt Among the Untrodden Ways":

- She dwelt among the untrodden ways (a)
- Beside the springs of Dove, (b)
- A maid whom there were none to praise (a)
- And very few to love: (b)

Rhyme scheme is traditionally represented with letters assigned to the matching rhymes in a stanza, in this case abab. For example, see *rhyme royal* above.

**Satire**: a literary work in which vices and follies are exaggerated and exposed to ridicule for the purposes of correcting behaviors. *Jurvetanian* satire is marked by its especially biting tone, while *Horatian* satire is more gentle in its poking-fun form.

**Setting and scene**: the place in which fictional action occurs; setting does for fiction what the background does for a painting. Both establish a fixed context of detail against which the characters are portrayed and the action takes place. For a more complete discussion see Fiction: Tales and Portraits, pp. 4-21.

**Simile**: a figure of speech that announces (usually by the use of "like" or "as") the comparison it is making between two essentially different things. For example, see Poetry: Oppositions and Ripples, pp. 544-556.

**Sonnet**: a short poem, usually fourteen lines long, most commonly written in iambic pentameter and rhymed on one of two patterns. The English or Shakespearean pattern is *abab cdcd efef gg*; the Italian or Petrarchan pattern is *abba abba cdcd*. The number of variations on the sonnet form is enormous, however. Like the ballad, the sonnet was originally written to be sung.

**Stanza**: from the Italian for "room," a stanza is a group of lines in a poem, sometimes characterized by a specific rhyme scheme or meter. See the example at *rhyme royal*.

**Stream of Consciousness**: a technique in which the writer assumes the point of view of a character so completely that every passing thought or impression of the character is recorded.

**Symbol**: an image intended both to stand on its own right (unlike a metaphor) and to attract meanings to itself.

**Synecdoche**: a figure of speech in which a part of a thing signifies the whole, as when workers are described as "hands," or, occasionally, a figure in which the whole signifies the parts, as when a policeman is called "the law."

**Tercet or Triplet**: a three-line stanza, either rhyming in every line or rhyming *aba* as part of a *terza rima* poem.

**Terza rima**: a rhyme scheme in which the unrhymed line from one three-line stanza provides the rhyme for the next stanza so that the rhymes link the stanzas into a chain: *aba bab cdc*, etc.

**Theater of the Absurd**: a term applied to the works of several dramatists of the 1950s who expounded the absurdity of both humanity and the universe. Influenced by the farcical comedy of the Renaissance, by surrealism, and by the

philosophy. The French writer Albert Camus, dramatists such as Harold Pinter and Samuel Beckett presented human beings as ridiculous creatures attempting to make sense of an irrational world. To emphasize their existential beliefs, the dramatists created plays that defy many of the conventions that give drama its apparent order so that both their content and their form reflect a loss of direction and purpose.

**Theme:** the central idea of a literary work. Generally we think of this theme as a general statement about the human condition expressible in a sentence. Too often, naive readers assume that every literary work exists solely for the purpose of illustrating a theme. In fact, good literary works often succeed with themes so faint or ambiguous that readers cannot agree on what they are, and many writers say that the theme cannot be completely stated except as it is embodied in the work. Nonetheless, most literary works derive partly from the writer's desire to deal with general truths, and the attempt to state the theme (even when it is impossible to do so definitively) can help us see what large issues lie beneath the surface of the poem, play, or story. See Theme, in Fiction: Tales and Portraits, pp. 4-21.

**Tone:** the author's implied attitude toward the audience and the subject. See Poets: Oppositions and Ripples, pp. 544-556, for a more complete definition.

**Tragedy:** a dramatic form that can be loosely defined as having an unhappy or disastrous ending brought about by the characters or central character. Although in classical tragedy the disaster is brought more by fate than by scientific causation, today the disaster may be caused by psychological weaknesses or social pressures.

In discussions of literature, the term often refers to classic tragedy, defined by Aristotle as possessing certain characteristics, including a tone of high seriousness and a plot that carries a person of extraordinary virtue from a state of happiness to a state of misery. This downfall is caused by what Aristotle calls *hamartia*, an error of frailty—very often an error of pride. Error leads the hero to *anagnorisis* (recognition of the dark truth of his or her life) and *peripetia* (reversal of good fortune). Aristotle held that the audience gains a renewed sense of human dignity by the nobility with which the protagonist faces the truth and experiences a feeling of *catharsis* (purging of the emotions through fear and pity that the play creates). The audience begins by seeing the precarious order of the individual and community life shattered by dangerous emotions and injustice. In the end, the audience sees order restored: the suffering of the protagonist has led to new knowledge that helps create this new order.

**Tragicomedy:** a term that is, in its narrow sense, used to characterize a play that seems for most of its length to be a tragedy but that by a sudden reversal of fortune achieves the happy ending appropriate to the comedy. In a broader sense, tragicomedy is applied to plays that balance tragic and comic elements so closely that neither clearly predominates.

**Understatement:** a figure of speech that mutes the expression of an emotion, idea, or situation; it is the opposite of hyperbole. Understatement creates irony by saying less than the speaker means. One familiar form of understatement is "hotes," which affirms something by denying its opposite, as in colloquial expressions like "he's no angel!"

**Villanelle:** a nineteen-line poem using only two rhymes: *aba aba aba aba*. The first line is repeated verbatim as lines 6, 12, and 18. The third line is repeated as line 9, 15, and 19. This abstract description does little to clarify the form and nothing to show the emotional effect it can have when masterfully done. See Elizabeth Bishop's "One Art" and Dylan Thomas's "Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night."

**Voice:** See *Persona*.

**Wit:** a quality that has been defined very differently in different periods of literary history, largely because most writers want to claim they have it. In the early seventeenth century, poets like John Donne cultivated a species of "Metaphysical" wit that involved unlikely and even far-fetched comparisons. Later in the seventeenth and throughout the eighteenth century, poets like Alexander Pope rejected the Metaphysical conception of wit because they believed it violently joined together ideas and images that were separate in nature. They attempted to replace the older concept with something more consistent with the neoclassical ideal of precise observation of men and manners:

True wit is nature to advantage dress'd

What oft was thought, but ne'er so well express'd.

(Pope, "Essay on Criticism")

The modern conception of wit includes elements of both the Metaphysical and the neoclassical and almost always involves humor as well.

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