
Issues of Contemporary Aesthetics
PAMPHLET SERIES

MICK McGRATH and the Samizdat Tradition

AGAINST THE CATHEDRAL



**RECONFIGURING
LITERARY PRESTIGE**

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An Imprint of OJAL Art Incorporated

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HIGH BUTTON PRESS *Contemporary Art*, Dally Post Press: *Cowboy Poetry*,

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MICK MCGRATH AND THE SAMIZDAT TRADITION

Let the guarantee of free speech be in every man's determination to use it...

Voltairine de Cleyre

AGAINST THE CATHEDRAL

ABSTRACT

The text explores the *samizdat* tradition of publishing censored or forbidden literature, tracing its origins in the Soviet Union to its modern application in the digital age.

Historical Context: Originally, authors like Solzhenitsyn circulated self-published texts via typewriters and carbon paper to bypass state censorship.

Modern Adaptation: Today, writers like Mick McGrath, Zero HP Lovecraft, Curtis Yarvin, and the Terror House Circle adapt this tradition using PDF pamphlets and chapbooks, often under the aegis of a sympathetic established publisher, for political and cultural dissent.

Purpose: These modern "samizdat" writers prioritize unfiltered communication to challenge what they view as a monolithic academic and publishing culture, or "Cathedral" culture.

McGrath's Model: McGrath uses HOT BUTTON PRESS, an imprint of OPEN: *Journal of Arts & Letters* (O:JA&L)* and the PDF format to distribute "Contemporary Controversies" that critique academic gatekeeping.

Impact: This digital approach creates a "private-public sphere" for fostering human connection and pluralism outside of institutional control.

MICK MCGRATH AND SAMIZDAT TRADITION

Let the guarantee of free speech be in every man's determination to use it...

Voltairine de Cleyre

The samizdat tradition (Russian for "self-publishing") originally referred to the underground distribution of [censored literature](#) in the Soviet Union. Authors like Solzhenitsyn and Pasternak used typewriters and carbon paper to circulate "forbidden texts" that thumbed their noses at the state monopoly on publishing. Today, like writers **Zero HP Lovecraft**, **Curtis Yarvin**, **Bronze Age Pervert (BAP)**, and writers of the **Terror House Circle** (Matt Forney, C.B. Robertson and others), Mick McGrath adapts this Samizdat tradition for a digital age, using the PDF pamphlet and PDF chapbook, usually with the cooperation and support of sympathetic publishers, as a tool of political and cultural dissent.

MODERN DIGITAL SAMIZDAT: THE PDF STRATEGY

Unlike traditional authors who seek mainstream distribution through established conventional channels, modern "samizdat" writers prioritize unfiltered communication. Mick McGrath is an emerging voice in a specific, right-leaning counterculture that seeks to challenge what it views as a monolithic academic culture.

Although he has yet to achieve the broad cultural status of a figure like Cormac McCarthy (whom his characters frequently cite), McGrath is an important new voice, especially to those who share his profound disillusionment with the publishing industry and the broader **"Cathedral" culture**.

McGrath's Model: Through HOT BUTTON PRESS, he utilizes the PDF format to distribute "Contemporary Controversies" that

critique academic gatekeeping.

The "Electronic Archive" Connection: Scholars note that digital samizdat, much like the original, creates a "[private-public sphere](#)" where authors can foster human connection and pluralism outside of institutional control.

WRITERS IN THE WIDER SAMIZDAT MOVEMENT

While McGrath is a central figure in the O:JA&L circle, other writers and platforms mirror his use of the digital pamphlet or chapbook for dissent.

The O:JA&L/Buttonhook Circle: Writers associated with this journal often produce [pamphlet-style fiction](#) and nonfiction that critiques "woke" culture, employing the PDF document as a "counter-public" tool.

Political dissidents: Figures like Douglas Wilson and others utilize small-press and self-published pamphlets to resist contemporary social pressure and promote Christian Nationalism and political theology outside of secular academic channels.

Zine & Ezine Creators: The underground "ezine" movement continues the samizdat tradition by using affordable technology to voice [opposition to mainstream culture](#) and commercial ethos.

THE DEPLORABLE: A NOVEL OF RESISTANCE

The Deplorable by Mick McGrath is a serialized novel that debuted in 2023 through the [Open Journal of Arts & Letters \(O:JA&L\)*](#).

The work is presented as a multi-installment series, with the first installment released in September 2023. Through a series of increasingly fragmented and intense installments, *The Deplorable*

explores the psychological breakdown and moral crisis of a writer within an academic and literary setting.

The book was released in installments throughout 2023 rather than as a single traditional volume. It is categorized under prose discourse with elements suggesting a blend of historical and flash fiction.

Formal mainstream reviews (such as from major newspapers or established book critics) are currently limited. Most coverage and critical engagement have occurred within literary journals like O:JA&L, where McGrath is a frequent contributor and associate. Mick McGrath is also a co-founder of the journal *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*, which also launched in 2023. His work often appears in academic and arts-focused digital pamphlets.

Find the full sequence of installments and related literary analysis through the following platforms:

O:JA&L Archives: The journal hosts the [Mick McGrath archives](#), where the serialized chapters of *The Deplorable* are available.

Buttonhook Press: This imprint often handles the physical or pamphlet-style distributions of works serialized in O:JA&L.

THE DEPLORABLE: PLOT OVERVIEW

The Academic Setting: The story is centered around the University of Tennessee campus and its creative writing program. The narrator, Brock, reflects on his time there, describing the environment as a "horror story".

The Central Conflict: Much of the narrative focuses on the narrator's bitterness toward the modern literary establishment. He critiques what he perceives as a "hostile" environment for conservative or non-conformist writers, at one point stating that conservative students at the university "just about have to wear arm bands".

A Catalytic Act of Violence: The plot is grounded by a shocking event from 2018: the murder of a student by a radical youth organization called "We Are Not Asking". The narrator uses this "gory" event to explore themes of political extremism and institutional failure.

The Rivalry with "Alec": A recurring thread involves the narrator's obsession with a peer named Alec. He views Alec as a "victorious" figure who will successfully leave a "genetic legacy," while the narrator predicts he himself will eventually "die from loneliness".

Literary Disillusionment: The narrator frequently references literary "hoaxers" like James Frey, pondering the nature of truth and whether "lies are acceptable... to tell the truth about the way it felt".

THE DEPLORABLE:
KEY THEMES

"Anti-Woke" Sentiment: The book explicitly positions itself against what the author describes as a "deplorable" state of modern academic culture.

Violence and Redemption: The narrative often shifts into dark, violent territory, with the narrator contemplating manifestos or even self-immolation as a way to "start a conversation" about the state of the Academy.

THE DEPLORABLE:
SOCIAL AND INSTITUTIONAL CRITIQUE

In *The Deplorable*, Mick McGrath uses the backdrop of a university creative writing program to critique modern American political and cultural shifts. The novel's political themes are centered on the friction between traditionalism and what the narrator perceives as a hostile, modern academic establishment.

1. The "Hostile" Academic Environment

The novel portrays the university—specifically the University of Tennessee—as a place where political conformity is enforced.

Marginalization of Conservative Voices: The narrator, Brock, claims that conservative students are so isolated they essentially "have to wear arm bands" to signal their status.

Gatekeeping in Publishing: Through Brock's bitter dialogue with "Guam," a fellow writer, the book argues that conservative perspectives are systematically excluded from the publishing industry, with Brock warning students not to "write anything conservative" if they hope to succeed.

2. Radicalism and Institutional Failure

McGrath uses a specific (fictionalized) act of violence to anchor his political critique: the 2018 murder of a student by a radical youth group called "We Are Not Asking".

Critique of Extremism: This plot point serves as a "gory" example of how political discourse has devolved into radical action.

Loss of Institutional Faith: The narrator suggests that institutions like the university have failed to provide a safe or balanced space for diverse thought, instead becoming breeding grounds for extreme ideologies.

3. Truth vs. Narrative Control

The novel explores the "political" nature of truth itself within the literary world.

The Utility of Lies: Brock references famous literary hoaxers to argue that "lies are acceptable" if they reveal a deeper "truth" about one's feelings of alienation. This mirrors contemporary debates over "subjective truth" versus objective facts in political discourse.

Class and Legacy: Political undertones appear in the narrator's resentment of his peer, Alec, whom he views as a "victorious" member of the elite class who will leave a legacy, while he is left in a state of "deplorable" isolation.

4. Intentional Use of the Term "Deplorable"

The title itself is a direct reference to the "Basket of Deplorables" comment from the 2016 U.S. election. McGrath reclaims the term to describe the socio-political status of the narrator as well as the "deplorable" state of modern arts and letters, which the author (through the [O:J&L platform](#)) presents as being in a state of crisis or decay.

THE DEPLORABLE:

MICK MCGRATH'S RELATED WORKS

Mick McGrath's short stories often function as extensions of the themes found in *The Deplorable*, focusing on academic friction, cultural critiques, and feelings of social alienation. Most of these works are published as pamphlets or chapbooks through imprints associated with the [OPEN: Journal of Arts & Letters \(O:J&L\)*](#).

PRIMARY COLLECTIONS & PAMPHLETS

People with Whom I Am Quite Pissed (2025): A collection of short stories released through the [HOT BUTTON PRESS Contemporary Controversies](#) series. These stories often feature embittered narrators and critiques of modern social norms.

Woes Innumerable (2024): A work of "Americana-based fiction" released in the [Buttonhook Press Pamphlet Series](#). It explores the narrator's experiences in Knoxville and his alienation from the local literary community.

NOTABLE INDIVIDUAL STORIES & SERIALIZED PIECES

"The Future is Mao": A short story that continues his critique of what he describes as "woke" academic culture and radicalism.

"Perseus with the Head of Medusa": Part of his "Contemporary Issues" series, often focusing on gender dynamics and classical imagery.

"Democrats Be Trippin'": A provocative piece that directly engages with contemporary American political divides.

"Let's Talk About Female Academics": A story or essay-hybrid that critiques the power structures within university English departments.

"Diversophiles Everywhere!": A satirical or critical look at institutional diversity initiatives.

SHORT STORY COLLECTIONS (PDF PAMPHLETS)

Several of his recent short story collections are hosted as downloadable PDFs:

People with Whom I Am Quite Pissed: A more recent collection (2025) exploring social and political frustrations.

Woes Innumerable: This PDF pamphlet includes fiction centered on themes of Americana and literary alienation in Knoxville

OTHER SITES

McGrath also contributes to alternative literary platforms that focus on "anti-woke" or counter-cultural themes:

Terror House Magazine: His fiction and commentary occasionally

appear here, often following similar themes of academic critique.

The Thieving Magpie: Another venue where his shorter literary prose has been featured.

DISTINGUISHING THE AUTHOR

Be careful to distinguish this Mick McGrath from other authors with similar names:

Michael McGrath (Irish Writer): Author of *All About Town* (2019) and *The Clock Tower* (2017), which focus on life in Limerick, Ireland.

Michael J. McGrath: A professor at Georgia Southern University known for academic works on *Don Quixote*.

* ***OPEN: Journal of Arts & Letters (O:JA&L)*** does not define itself as a publisher in the samizdat tradition, though it shares specific philosophical goals with the historical movement, such as providing a platform for voices and aesthetics that might otherwise be marginalized.

INSTITUTIONAL NATURE VS. SAMIZDAT TRADITION

While the original [samizdat tradition](#) refers to clandestine, underground self-publishing used to evade draconian Soviet-era censorship, O:JA&L is an established, above-ground institution.

It is a multi-platform journal that operates openly through its [official website](#), social media, a Youtube channel, and print media and digital imprints. Its stated ambition is to popularize contemporary writing and promote contributors to an international audience.

Despite its formal structure, O:JA&L adopts several "independent" practices that mirror the spirit of samizdat including non-traditional distribution.

Its several imprints release pamphlets as free PDFs and "subscriber premiums" without ISBNs, emphasizing accessibility over commercial standard tracking. It then licenses these publications at no cost back to the submitters who are then free to produce printed versions for their own purposes.

The journal and its imprints voice a claim to an eclectic aesthetic. The journal specifically seeks "arresting art and writing of nearly every stamp and style," often focusing on contemporary controversies and "personal aesthetic" outside mainstream commercial interests.

Through its "Hot Button Press" imprint, *OPEN: Journal of Arts & Letters* (O:JA&L) actively solicits "articles, editorials, and position papers concerning contemporary controversies," fostering the kind of open intellectual discourse central to the later samizdat movements.

SOURCES AND LINKS

AUTHORS/INDIVIDUALS

Voltaire de Cleyre: An American anarchist and feminist writer and speaker.

- [Wikipedia Page](#)
- Works on Marxists Internet Archive

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn: A Soviet-era Russian author and dissident who helped raise global awareness of the Gulag system.

- [Wikipedia Page](#)
- Official Website

Boris Pasternak: A Russian poet, novelist, and translator, best known for DOCTOR ZHIVAGO.

- [Wikipedia Page](#)
- [Nobel Prize Biographical Page](#)

Mick McGrath: A writer associated with the Buttonhook Press and the co-founder of HEYOKA, an online journal welcoming "anti-woke" content.

- Articles via Open: Journal of Arts & Letters

Zero HP Lovecraft: A pseudonymous internet writer known for experimental fiction and a neoreactionary Twitter account (@0x49fa98).

- [Substack](#)

Curtis Yarvin: Known online as Mencius Moldbug, a political commentator who writes about "neoreactionary" or "NRx" theory and uses the pseudonym "Gray Mirror".

- [Gray Mirror Substack](#)

Bronze Age Pervert (BAP): A pseudonymous far-right internet personality and author of BRONZE AGE MINDSET, active on Twitter (@bronzeagemantis).

- [Wikipedia Page](#)

Matt Forney, C.B. Robertson, and others: These authors are associated

with the Terror House Circle/Press.

ORGANIZATIONS/PUBLICATIONS

Buttonhook Press: An imprint of OJAL Art Incorporated, a nonprofit organization that publishes chapbooks and pamphlets, often in PDF format.

- [Open: Journal of Arts & Letters Website](#)

Terror House Press: A publishing house founded by Matt Forney that aims to publish "outsider literary fiction, literary nonfiction, poetry, artwork, and cultural criticism/analysis".

- [Publisher Information Page](#)

BUTTONHOOK PRESS PAMPHLET SERIES

2020

[Safe Spaces: A Pretty Lie](#)

Editorials on Issues of Poetic Practice by Rachel Custer

[Against Art as a Radical Subjectivity](#)

Editorials on Issues of Poetic Practice by Rachel Custer

[Songs on the Way to God: A Theory of Poetics](#)

Editorials on Issues of Poetic Practice by Rachel Custer

[The Artistic Power of Silence: On Letting Art Speak for Itself](#)

Editorials on Issues of Poetic Practice by Rachel Custer

[Special Edition: Experimental Discourse](#)

...are serious offenses, and...

A closet drama in two acts by Anthony Hamilton

[How to Love a Headstone](#)

Poetry by Sloane Asakura

[The Last of the Gallants](#)

Poetry by Atar Hadari

2021

[Salt](#)

Poetry by Amanda Leal

[Deer in Fog at Twilight Near Squalicum Lake Road](#)

Poetry by Richard Widerkehr

[Democracy has Lifted Up Its Voice](#)

Poetry by Mike Puican

[2YC Review: The Works](#)

Poetry and prose by members of the Two-Year College Caucus at AWP

[Promises](#)

Poetry by Ellis Elliott

[Home](#)

Poetry by Amanda Leal

[Study of Burkas](#)

A poem by Dana Sonnenschein

[The Open Window](#)

Flash vignettes by O.G. Rose

[Light in the Cathedral: Russian/English Poems](#)

Poetry in two languages by Andrey Gritsman

2022

[Poems for Families](#)

Poetry by Kirby Olson

Mogollon Rim

Poetry by Allisa Cherry

Hanno

Poetry by John-Michael Bloomquist

Poem scrawled on a maize-sheaf for her (last offering)

Poetry and art by Arturo Desimone

The Curve of the Open Page

A poem by Bruce Bond

Murder in the House: The "Nutshells" of Frances Glessner Lee

Poetry by Jessica Purdy

War and Riff

Haibun by Keith Polette

Family Photo of America

Poetry by Lynn Potts

Chester River Reverie

Poetry by Priscilla Long

Salton Sea

A short story by Mike Murray

The Fiddler

Poetry by Tim Hunt

A Balloon Called Young America

Poetry by Jennifer Clark

High Fashion

Featured Collaboration

Poetry by Adjei Agyei-Baah & Fine Art Photography by Jerome Berglund

2023

Rain Comes to the Central Valley

Poetry by Adrienne Pilon

DECIDUOUS

Poetry by Jean Kane

Potter's Valley Road

Poetry (Americana) by Richard Widerkehr

Old Barn *or* How Things Go On

Poetry by Penelope Schotte

Nothing To Be Sorry For

Poetry by Lynn Cohen

Small Lantern

Featured Haiga Collaborations

Haiku: Hassane Zemmouri and Photography: Megali Bretou & Bea Bauer

A Sport and a Pastime

Haiku (Americana) by Ron Scully

Night Train

Haiku by Jerome Gagnon

The Aquarian Foundation

Poetry (Americana) by Jeffrey Gray

Once There Was a Way

Poetry by Steve Myers

Local Habitations

Poetry by Edison Jennings

Occasions for Listening (Excerpts from a WIP)

Spencer Silverthorne

2024

Needful Things

Micropoems by Ronald J. Scully (Americana)

Designation

Poetry by Wendy Taylor Carlisle

California Summer

Poetry by Michael Lee Johnson

Once Is Enough

Formalist poems by Peter Austin (Americana)

Garden

Poems by Jianqing Zheng (Americana)

Let Me Say This Up Front

Poetry by David James (Americana)

GEMS

Poems by Larry D. Thomas

BESTIARY

Poems by Larry D. Thomas

2025

WEST Toward Squalicum Mountain

Poems by Richard Weiderkehr

Mississippi River Delta: A Bestiary

Poems by Larry D. Thomas

A Week Late...

Haibun & Tanka Prose by Carolyn Martin



BUTTONHOOK PRESS
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HOT BUTTON PRESS *Contemporary Issues*

2023

Lamentations: Icons of War

Arab-Israeli Conflict image-as-poem collection by Tony Brinkley

[In Praise of Columbus](#)

Poetry by Kirby Olson

Perseus with the Head of Medusa

Editorials on Issues of Contemporary Aesthetics by Contributing Editor
Mick McGrath

[Democrats by Trippin'](#)

Editorials on Issues of Contemporary Aesthetics by Contributing Editor
Mick McGrath

[Let's Talk About Female Academics](#)

Editorials on Issues of Contemporary Aesthetics by Contributing Editor
Mick McGrath

[Diversophiles Everywhere!](#)

Editorials on Issues of Contemporary Aesthetics by Contributing Editor
Mike McGrath

The End of the "Black Victim" Narrative?

Editorials on Issues of Contemporary Aesthetics by Contributing Editor
Mick McGrath

2024

Woes Innumerable (HOT BUTTON PRESS)

Based Fiction Mick McGrath (Americana)

2025

[The Future Is Mao!](#) (HOT BUTTON PRESS)

Short Fiction by Mick McGrath

[Musing the Crossroads](#)(HOT BUTTON PRESS)

Poems by Larry D. Thomas

[SUPERFLUOUS SUPER LOUIS](#) (HOT BUTTON PRESS)

Winner of the 2025 WEITZ PRIZE for Counter-Revolution Writing

Short Story by Perry Genovesi

Rule & Innovation (HOT BUTTON PRESS)

Short Fiction by Mick McGrath

DALLY POST PRESS: *Cowboy Poetry*

2025

Manhunt in Mossy Creek

Traditional Ballad by Doug Stoiber



DALLY POST PRESS

An imprint of OPEN: Journal of Arts & Letters

FIREFIGHT PRESS: *Trench Art*

2025

ODE TO A GUNNER'S MATE

Poem by LT. Kalireyna Streeby

OPEN: Journal of Arts & Letters
EXPERIENCE/REFLECT/CELEBRATE



FIREFIGHT PRESS:
Trench Art Series

AVAILABLE NOW FROM O:JA&L'S BUTTONHOOK PRESS

FLASH FICTION: Alive in the Flicker *A Portable Workshop*

PAMELYN CASTO

"Pamelyn Casto's *Flash Fiction: Alive in the Flicker* is insightful, comprehensive, and brimming with inventive prompts and exercises to make your flash truly leap off the page."

~ Dinty W. Moore

co-editor of the *Best of Brevity: Twenty Groundbreaking Years of Flash Nonfiction*

"Pamelyn Casto has been the most useful person in flash for years. This "portable workshop" proves it. *Flash Fiction: Alive in the Flicker* is an amazing flash compendium of everything for anyone who is interested the form. It's also a writers' workshop from prompts to where to send flashes. What's not to like?"

~ Robert Shapard

co-editor of many Flash and Sudden Fiction anthologies, the latest are *Sudden Fiction Latina: Short Stories from the United States and Latin America* (2010) and *Flash Fiction International: Very Short Stories from Around the World* (2015)

"Pamelyn Casto's valuable book *Flash Fiction: Alive in the Flicker* is an astonishing illumination—a total history of the form with essays, strategies and exercises; lessons, examples, how-to's, markets, marketing, contests, anthologies, prompts, advice from pros, new directions (flash film!), reader psychology even—it is all here, with hundreds of internet links. There will never be a fuller single resource, with a good teacher's encouraging tone about it, to boot. You can say flash fiction begins with Aesop; with Casto you can begin anew.

~Kent H. Dixon

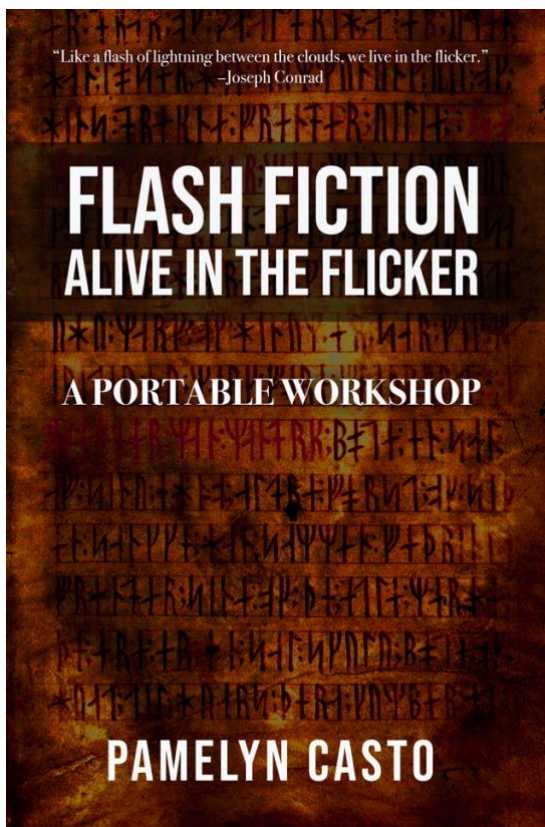
translator of *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (2018) and co-editor of *Stone Wall Book of Short Fictions* (1976)

“Pamelyn Casto is a deep font of flash knowledge, and this portable workshop is a thorough, indispensable resource for writers and instructors who want to know more about what this thing called “flash” is, how to write it, and more important, how to read and understand it.”

~ Tara Lynn Masih

editor of *The Rose Metal Press Field Guide to Writing Flash Fiction* (2009)
and founder of *The Best Small Fictions* (founded 2015)

Buttonhook Press titles on Amazon
available now



AMAZON REVIEWS

for Pamelyn Castos's *FLASH FICTION: Alive in the Flicker*

Daniel J. Nicholas

Reviewed in the United States on August 26, 2024

Verified Purchase

If I were to teach a class, this book would be required reading or a course outline for discussion. Bravo, Pamelyn! In addition, I look forward to your monthly blog to start up again.

David Lignell

Reviewed in the United States on November 23, 2022

Verified Purchase

Pamela Casto's new text, *Flash Fiction: Alive in the Flicker*, is a must have "portable workshop" workbook for anyone who desires to learn and practice the many forms of flash fiction.

W.R. Rodriguez

Reviewed in the United States on October 5, 2022

Verified Purchase

An authoritative overview of the genre, combined with practical advice on the writing process and an abundance of writing prompts.

Norman Jensen

Reviewed in the United States on April 2, 2024

Reading is great but hands-on prompts are even better.



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