

Circle Show

23



Winter/Spring 2021

23



Circle
Show

Volume 23
Winter/Spring 2021

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Cover Art

“A Black Cat”
by SitenkovaMary

David M. Alper

Another Dozen Ideas for Soul Unfurling

Irk irony as a form of worship

Unnerve medicine obsequiously

Recapitulate Canada as a diary entry

Cajole the ancient Greeks like a caveman

Get engaged to fecundity while hiccuping

Review the history of anxiety in two-beat lines

Stage an intervention for dust but only if you want to

Fail to get your point across about friendship while dancing

Conspire against spiders without concern for other people's feelings

Tell a boring story about bodybuilding as though transcribed from a séance

Shout something at Igor Stravinsky's image in wordy and convoluted language

and gradually grow more curious about moral relativism with breezy detachment

Requiem for a Homeless Woman

People remember her
the tight streets had people
versions like drygoods
seven-year-old friends
gorged the cherries
the nearby wife was integral
and the recent winter showed me
how legendary people drank a millennium.
Adversaries had flowers
circles knew footsteps
and her summer became years.

Daril Bentley

Burdock

Let the burdock go.
Let it be
at my elbow.
Let it make something like a bouquet
in triplicate on my woolen cap.

In fact, let it consume
my old desires
still clinging until
I am wearing it
to the extremities of shirt and trousers.

Those we picked at end of day
from socks and scarves
tossed to the fires
of more than fifty years ago—
make one day a cairn of them above me.

Roadside Artifacts

I confess I have a time or two along the road
collected from the cinders the bottle caps
and plastic soldiers and the metal washers and wing nuts

That scattered like bizarre blessings secure
I don't know what.
And more than once—

Nailed with the red-bandana caution rags of volition
to protruding lumber passing the dented
and fender-scraped guard rails of defiance,

And weary (deathly weary) of the petty fine points argued
by miscreants on either side
of ephemeral fixations—

I have smoked from fortune's
unholy reliquary this filthy, crumpled, secondary-highway
cigarette butt.

Robert Beveridge

Feverish with a Chance of Thundershowers

We walked not quite
far enough from the car
to cause a scandal, lit
firecrackers
in a ritual circle. We relied
on others to supply
the invocation, allowed
ourselves to sink
into a coma of pleasure,
contemplation, cordite
until the first Roman
candles mounted their
assault on Andromeda

Same Day Removals

When the dust
around your
feet settles
in new patterns
you can either
try to read
your future
in the pictures
of paths and supernovae
or you can take
another drink
from your
canteen and put
one foot in front
of the other
like you have
a hundred
times before

Steve Brisendine

chase

walk south all night or at least until
your ten-dollar sneakers give out

and you'll still never catch the moon
before the clouds take it

(probably best that way;
your garage is
full of junk
already)

Second Sunday, 34th Year

Black-ink day for florists,
restaurants, regrets;

I have written decades' worth of
what I should have said then,
and still not touched the half of it.

If I crumple and put fire to each page,
sow ash just west of your headstone,

will words creep down roots of grass,
find their way into your dreams of
the New Earth,

of roses rising through
cracks in the bones of roads?

Timothy Dodd

Getaway

How do you walk upon the earth?
In this galaxy, I dare you to look up,
away from the city, to another age,
to cross-eyed beauty limping under
transmission towers, blood diffused
in another liquid, reddening our run
through the heath. Build a little home
without piles of crushed rock, seeing
a tiny astronaut standing on the cliff
and a pulsating orb in your bandaged
hand, like eyes in cat and cataract,
time spinning in your palm. Lift it up,
see what you hold, world, in electric,
grasp, a surefire surge of the cosmos.

Man at the Kanawha

I come to the banks on the edge of the city,
sit with kingfisher, swallow on the water;

woodland surrounds, surveyed by the old
bridge arching over us, its traffic racing on

to hell. Catch the right day, time, and paths
empty of new folk, the millions momentarily

disappear. That's when I'll see him, sweeping
by: dark red marks on cheek, a breechclout,

and wampum at the wrist. He moves cat-like,
at home, the bus of history insignificant. He

knows where the heron feasts, how it waits,
but I don't have what it takes to follow him.

This is my displacement, watching the cycle
repeat: a shift in the ruin. Across the river

another group of coolers has arrived, candy
wrapper luxury already tossed into the water.

My mind works to float with it, but away,
into deeper, mystery, quietus, until forgotten

appears, wind stirring the branches. I lift
my hand, find dark red marks on my cheek.

Under the Relics

Ilha de Moçambique: January, 15, 1997

There is the language from Lisboa,
and perhaps the hats and hammers,
concrete and church crumble, slow
sealing of centuries, pottery shard's
land lingering and patchy evidence,
a lost lot in light of lamppost ruin,
wall wilt, the bit by bit decade drain.

Buildings decay and our generations
dissolve, leaving chapel char, cannon
rust and remnants, fortress fragment,
particles and pieces, a simple shred
of bazaar, warehouse sway, capital
stench, and an empty alley folding in
on itself from moonlight. We are all

but vestiges, and what remains, don't
forget, is cellular: sea animals evolve,
streaming our history from the inside,
a form of preservation, energy transfer,
and in the fuzzy foam of ocean edge,
arrival sits in brief, the longer fade
of pure flickers without goodbye, tight

binding of terrestrial atoms left to dry
in flecks of gold and ivory, her spices
swallowed in tortoise shell, on fabric
worn by new beetle, weed, wildflower,
winding down in the mouth of a fish
and an old man's sleep vowing never
to waver. Anchors oxidize deep down

in waters that gleam with tomorrow,
a brilliant washing away for next song,

bird beak, sky fix, clam, coral colors,
a propulsion of navigation from some
sacred source, and the monsoon winds
bringing new dhows, a gliding with—
that something reluctant to leave.

Jane Glasser

Because Each Day Is Fragile

Sip
sunlight
through a cracked
window.

Inhale
lemons
when magnolias break
open.

Touch
among detritus
the velvet
of a lamb's ear.

Fill
at dusk
with whip-poor-will's
plaint.

Watch
night fall down
through a cracked
window.

Time's Erasures

I am disappearing bit by bit.
My hearing retired years ago,
the little pillows between
spinal discs have flattened,
and memory stumbles
backwards through a forest
searching for bread crumbs.

I am disappearing bit by bit
under the comforter of dreams,
in the graveyard of high heels
and running shoes, on the clean
pages of an appointment book,
in my Toyota's low mileage
and love's cancelled reruns.

I am disappearing bit by bit,
cleaning house by getting rid
of tyrannical clocks, mirrors
with their facile judgments,
evicting boarders, Should
and Must, until the only one
left to please is me.

Ann Huang

The Gift

You have already known that the gift is not yours
you have solely
random power, all to unite or tear down the humanity
your flesh bartered out, in mass, splitting over
the red desert, you harness what you stole
everything to be burnt under the eye of *raison d'être*
everything to be kept inside the gate, only black flames
these bones and more you have to desist, to re-carve the way with
that imminent soul, when it's time to be tied up, your rock formation
as you underlie its place, remembering rouge
in between lives

Partridge in a Pear Tree

Where the eagles flew last was in his memory.
He saw their struggles of leaving the labyrinth.
The summers were minutiae minimal and black
and by September, magical. He wandered and was
pleased in that thought. Then the south sea raised
to lure under his wings, irresolute yet vast to the sight,
embellished by his falling cousin. That cliff he had
survived from taught him a lesson of betrayal,
beloved by an awestruck moon: salt, ice, pears,
tree. His forgiven acts were to make a trade, he
became what his uncle envied most: possessed the wings
his cousin fell hard from. As for his new being:
human device and design were bathos. Clever works
could never replace a pair of real bird's wings, or
humility. Under the moony lagoon, Athena in hindsight,
Icarus & Perdix. The shades failed to draw a line.

Alison Lubar

a prize for the gladiator in the midst of an earthquake

Seismic moments shift
the soul's tectonics.
I'll never see them again

like this, regarding Heraclitus:
you can't ascend the same
staircase twice. But really,
*what does any philosopher
know about love?*

Plated oysters are still alive:
split by teeth, gnawed to pulp
or swallowed half-whole
like the loser's heart

at the coliseum. Even
the pearl, rolled once

in a palm, is never
the same.

After Camus: Life as rebellion against mortality

They say he was a keeper, focused on proper
footie and turned to philosophy upon injury,
journalism and wisdom, but his first love
was physical, that intuition
moves even heavenly bodies.

When I spent last night
crying every bodily shame
onto your sheets you held every atom in regard,
seeded wildflowers in every wound— warmed
the surface for habitable joy again, for spring
under my skin, and you are my invincible summer.

The Local Crisis: Never Ask the Question

Neighborhood robins respond
to the sun, the dogs' incessant
vacillation: war to play to war—
I forget to give you one of the four
yellow tulips I cut yesterday
[before I knew your mother was dying].

Four is an unlucky number. These metaphysics
sway the gods; the dogs respond in whining panic
when you pack. I do not finish your water this time.
This alchemical equation never conjures, satiates,
pacifies, calms, palliates. [Who do I pray to now?]

Divine vanity is echoless. The narcissus
blooms first, emblazons spring, just as
every day still ends. This morning she
asks, "How much more can I handle?"
[and there is no equation. There is no limit.]

Cosmic calculus is no course—it's luck,
another word for absurdity that just happens
to fall in your favor [this time].

Steven Ostrowski

He's on His Way, I Guess.

When's he due? she asks.

I don't know.

He never commits.

I'm at the window, of course,
but not waiting. Why would I
wait?

I'm watching
the yellow grass shiver like a sheet of paper
on which handwritten words have faded
--though not before they rampaged a life or two.

*

It's true, even after all the damage, we love him.

Of course we do

in that biblical way: brokenhearted,
obligated, fretful and afraid.

We would not have predicted things with him
could go this way.

*

See the Farmer's Almanac lying in shrink-wrap
on the floor near the doorway?

We still get it delivered every year.

Who knows why?

Nobody reads it.

What is Forgiveness?

I don't know.

The way the woods moved closer to the house every spring?

An adolescent's note on a kitchen counter, the word they're spelled there?

The small mirror that loved the scar more than the makeup?

What is Love?

I don't know.

The atomic structure of a boulder and a rose?

A rainstorm like metallic bits of flame?

A boy with sticky honey fingerprints?

Gus Palmer, Jr.

god or angels

they are loved, too.
in the grief-stricken
earth they passed
over. in other stories
we know this by
rags falling out
of the sky.
every stranger's
mouth is a hole that
must be filled. this
day some part of us
dies only to reawaken
during night. something
chases us without
conscience, an empty
house we have driven
past perhaps.
beside some peaceful
lake let's rest that we
may recover, not
deepen the wound
but heal it, hardly
having felt it anymore.
its jagged edges
burning bright as
blake's tiger.

i enter this land

that will to work fields bursts
apart when i think of this coming
and going. there is so much of it
in my body i will know and follow

with zeal. i take possession of it
when i enter the land alone but lack
the voice to say how or why. you,
on the other hand, feel clean air

enter and divide grass the whole
tugging action as it is laid over and
muffled to a whisper that means
moisture is articulated in one

motion. now i long for wind to blow
a hole through the electrified light.
my hands throb with memory of
people who invoke old names
only the earth remembers.

within hearing

all trails of rock lead to tall grass
and the slow approach of cartwheels.
listen for the unknown fruit within
this garden of place. brutally moist
shadows ignite a fire in our breasts
of belief and rattle home thoughts
green with wonder, every part asleep.
people have scaled this cliff facing
the sun. to adorn this day, someone
has scaled to the top, has sung his
death song without fear. he is regaled
in bright clothes. this man hides
behind a boulder holding his sacred
pipe in hand like a child. between the
junipers and tipis i see warriors coming
home. the enemy has slipped through
the even rocks and we are facing
speechless trees, tired from running.
we are keeping company with the doe
and her brood in a full field of light, far
behind a hill of sunny cliffs where we
stir awake and wild. you may know
where to begin this day and write an
ending to this poem that's growing
paws and a keen sense of itself.

Seth Rosenman

By Numbers

Every room in the office is decorated
with photographs of space. Stars rise, are eclipsed
as he nods his head like a slow metronome,
listening to my answers.

“Your symptoms are strange. There are no other times
when you feel this pain?”

He’s sitting back, fingers locked
around a crossed knee. I know NASA has a specialist
who colors the images of bodies
its telescopes can reach, want to know
if he had a hand in his, to lie to him
like I lie on surveys and questionnaires,
ask about his hobby, childhood.

“I see. The butler was in the kitchen with Dina.
Did it with food, smoked. [I wonder if hypochondriacs
feel a pain that isn’t there. Or feel one that should be.
I wonder how far one can fall through the cracks.]
Don’t smoke and don’t drink, watch the potassium,
and we’ll see in a month. Here’s your chart.”

Motions, Gestures, Signs

Side to side: Fingering quarters in my pocket then feeding them into the parking slot box at SEPTA stations then standing by the still wrapped automated validators and thinking on a latitude Menorca, Sardinia, and Lemnos are east; Columbus, Boulder, and Beijing west.

Up and down: Reaching behind me to push down with the back of my hand the reading lamp I shine on the pages of poetry or short fiction books I read in bed before a trip to the kitchen for water or the bathroom for water before bed hoping the light will stay down before the next night.

Circular: Flipping the wok over with my left hand on the handle and scrubbing with my right after turning the water off after it wets it enough to wash off sauce or food that didn't make it into the dish I cooked for the week, the dish packed in a plastic bowl on the fridge's bottom shelf.

Sweeping: Raising my head after putting toothpaste on the brush and starting to brush and looking at my reflection as I pick up where I left off the night before with Buddhist and Stoic mind tricks as defense against consciousness. Just as dreams tangle with the past, I begin the scything of the latest present.

Obscene: Flicking my headlights at 4 way stop signs to let the car on my right who stopped when I did go, knowing it's his right by a law he might not know and knowing I could beat him through the intersection 98 times out of a 100 and knowing that 1 time I'd lose by odds and the other by rage that couldn't be stopped.

Turn: Moving to turn controls that don't need to be turned before going to bed or going out:
the lock on the door, the dial for the range burners,
the numbers on the alarm on my phone.
Unable to turn down the idea that they just might need turning and always sure of the way they are turned.

Helen Leslie Sokolsky

In the Company of Books

I sit on the other side of the table reading to her
she grasping the pages in a long good-bye
she who for so long has struggled to hold back an endless night.
Now with light beginning to abandon her as shadows move into her lens
she reaches for my hands to guide her back to a familiar landscape
that hallowed place she has created
a pyramid of nested books, many of them shelved in weathered jackets.

I look at myself in the lens of her glasses, featureless
trying to imagine what it is like in that sea of darkness
and continue reading to her believing in the power of language
letting the music of words flow into her hands
which she cups as if they were scattered butterflies.
Fragile sounds penetrate the quiet
Outside the window birdsong trill their scales across the field
the wind chases in and out of sycamore branches
like a cloud reshaping itself sounds become the new vista.

I pause for a moment, let that moment rest on my lap
nothing moves but my hand across the page.
Here in the company of books we share I keep turning the pages
applaud a smile that slides across her face
when she tilts her head to listen and inhale
the crickets just beginning their nightly crescendo
a welcome background chorus.
Sounds continue to magnify within her lens
leaving behind a filtered beam of light
as if someone had just lit a candle for her.

The Tailsman

He has this habit when storm clouds clog the corners of his mind
and pathways slip through his fingers
of burrowing his hands deep inside his pockets.
No matter how torn the lining, those pockets are still his safety net
just as they were to that child, the boy at the bus stop
mismatched socks halfway down his legs
scuffed shoes tapping a rhythm
while he waited, anxiously waited to be taken by her hand
the comfort of those fingers interlaced around his
as she strummed soothing notes.
In her singing there was a resounding glory
that brought comfort to his smallness
and so he learned to strum and shuffle strum and shuffle.
Now in his manhood keeping his hands wrapped around the talisman left
behind
he can hear from far away a clear high soprano voice
and whatever pocket he reaches into he will have that one long stretch of
happiness
so he continues to strum with his fingers and shuffle with his feet
note by note a solo ballad that has become his lifeline.

Eric Fisher Stone

Dear Razorback Musk Turtle

*Sun butters your carapace, ridged
in a gothic arch. Did you know the sun
is a star? – a nuclear fusion foundry
smelting elements, hellscapes soothed to grass.*

*Basking, your eyes' poppyseeds
blotted with caution from my approach.
I didn't mean to drive you back
to water, dark cologne steaming from your scutes,*

*sweet brother of ruptured stars. Where you live,
downy woodpeckers hack live oaks, troves
of ruby crowned kinglets spatter the blue
with wings. Can you hear the chickadees?*

*I don't know what you think of anoles
flaunting their throats' pink flags. I'm sorry
milk jugs and beer cans spoil your waters.
I only hope you bite fat apple snails,*

*you want nothing besides mossy pleasure
with love pure as rain sowing willows
in teary seeds, and alone you aren't lonely,
shy dinosaur, my tender moonrock.*

*Can you hear the nightly trains rambling
over the creek bridge, calling into
this same hatched universe, this star-born body?
Where are we from? Where are we going? Home.*

Brian Yapko

The Day I Grew Feathers

Eighteen that day, finally ripe-ready to be captured at the club by Jo, the aspiring actor who quickened my pulse with hawk features, carnivore eyes, feral intent. We circled, carnal-landed, throat-whispered, exchanged songs, brushed mustaches, rubbed wings. In the morning, the cold shoulder, the autograph, the free ticket to his show.

That first chewing into my heart discovered me my cold gift for coveting the qualities of others, the hungry urge to break away, to graft myself to the canniest of predators. Falcons, hawks, condors – the battle for carrion, the muscle-duel for freedom and release, to be more than just me, a yearning to fly, a lust for burrowing into souls.

Jo never realized what I took from him, me the eager fledgling desperate to master the sky, using him to grow my own raw power, to be edified in flight. I was glad he left. Alone again, I vowed next time to be the reason the nightingale sings. That was the day I learned from stubble feathers may grow. That the infinite sky was open to me.

This is the World

I've seen the world – through binoculars,
mucky windows, reddened eyes.
Don't fear it, they said. Don't dislike it.
Hmph. Now I live here.
Truly here. I'm no hallucination. Prod me.
Cut me to strips with scissors.
Maybe I'll bleed. Maybe not.

In this world poems are rocks --
God, but they hurt when they hit you.
Hear the splash, hear the splash,
sinking joy like a torpedoed ship.
Damaged, one must float onward, thrashing
as the brain turns to sponge, absorbing.
I lay the contents out to dry in the fallout.

The media shouts advertisements which
shriek at inconvenient intervals,
haunting me with tin claws. Buildings
sway like drunkards, weaving in the wind.
I won't lie: they make me nervous. The storm
flashes on and on and off, a celestial
streetlight - merciless and incoherent.

Once I pressed my nose to the glass –
I crashed through and landed on the lawn.
My fly-eye turned red from the grassy smells.
No more! Now I stay put, weeping
into photo albums, resisting the world's
attempts to pull me in further and
further. I have drawn my line.

In the end, people are heartless but necessary.
They light matches under you, then sell you
things to fix your posture and banish headaches.

Then they leave lest you toss them away like
dirty rags. As for myself, I soak them in
hard-earned me. Few survive.
But that is hardly critical.
This is the world.

Contributor Notes

David M. Alper is a high school AP English teacher in New York City, residing in Manhattan. His work has appeared in *Thirty West Publishing House*, *OPEN: Journal of Arts & Letters*, *Sheila-Na-Gig online* and elsewhere.

Daril Bentley is the author of several books of poetry and has published poems in numerous journals nationally and internationally. He has been a semifinalist for the Yale Series of Younger Poets Award and a finalist for the New Mexico Book Award for Poetry, among other honors. Mr. Bentley is also editor of *The Bentley Guide to Poets & Poetry in English* and is founder of PARS (Poets of the Area Reading Series) and POST (Poetry Outreach of the Southern Tier) in southern-central New York State. He makes his home in Elmira, NY.

Robert Beveridge makes noise (xterminal.bandcamp.com) and writes poetry in Akron, OH. Recent/upcoming appearances in *cat-tails*, *Ellipsis...* and *Ample Remains*, among others.

Steve Brisendine is a writer, poet, occasional artist and recovering journalist from Mission, Kansas. His poetry has appeared in the most recent volume of the *365 Days Poets anthology*, as well as *Grand Little Things* and *The Rye Whiskey Review*. His first collection of poems, *The Words We Do Not Have*, was published in spring 2021 by Spartan Press.

Timothy Dodd is from Mink Shoals, WV, and is the author of *Fissures, and Other Stories* (Bottom Dog Press, 2019). His poetry has appeared in *The Literary Review*, *Chiron Review*, *Rust + Moth*, *Roanoke Review* and elsewhere. Also a visual artist, you may sample his paintings on Instagram [@timothybdoddartwork](https://www.instagram.com/timothybdoddartwork), or follow his writing on his “Timothy Dodd, Writer” Facebook page.

Jane Ellen Glasser's poetry has appeared in journals, such as *Hudson Review*, *Southern Review*, *Virginia Quarterly Review* and *Georgia Review*. A first collection of her poetry, *Naming the Darkness*, with an introduction by W. D. Snodgrass, was issued by Road Publishers in 1991. She won the Tampa Review Prize for Poetry 2005 for *Light Persists* and *The Long Life* won the Poetica Publishing Company Chapbook Contest in 2011. *The Red Coat*, (2013), *Cracks* (2015), *In the Shadow of Paradise* (2017) and *Selected Poems* (2019) are available from FutureCycle Press. Her work may be previewed on her website: www.janeallenglasser.com.

Ann Huang is a Chinese-born, Mexican-raised and US-based author, poet, and filmmaker who published four award-winning collections, most recently *A Shaft of Light*. Her lyrical poetry speaks of a dreamy state of being by melting present into its past and future, with surrealistic gestures permeating space and time across multiverses. Visit her poetry site at www.AnnHuang.com; and her film site at www.Saffron-Splash.com.

Alison Lubar teaches high school English by day and yoga by night. They are a queer, nonbinary femme of color whose life work (aside from wordsmithing) has evolved into bringing mindfulness practices, and sometimes even poetry, to young people. Alison currently lives outside of Philadelphia; you can find their work at <http://alisonlubar.com>.

Steven Ostrowski is a poet, fiction writer, painter and teacher. His work appears widely in literary journals, magazines and anthologies. Steven is the author of five published chapbooks--four of poems and one of stories. He and his son Ben are authors of a full-length collaboration called *Penultimate Human Constellation*, published in 2018 by Tolsun Books. His chapbook, *After the Tate Modern*, won the 2017 Atlantic Road Prize and is published in 2018 by Island Verse Editions. He is a Professor of English at Central Connecticut State University.

Gus Palmer, Jr. (pànthai:dê ‘White Cloud’), member of the Kiowa tribe, is professor emeritus in linguistic anthropology from the University of Oklahoma. He has published two books, *Telling Stories the Kiowa Way* (2003) and *When Dream Bear Sings* (2018). In addition to language work in his native Kiowa, he has published poems and stories in anthologies and literary magazines. He worked with son, filmmaker Jeffrey Palmer, on the 2018 PBS American Masters documentary film, *N. Scott Momaday: Words from a Bear*.

Seth Rosenman lives in the Philadelphia area. He has taught high school English in the city and the English language in China. He currently does a little bit of this and hopes to move on to some of that. His poems have appeared in *Change Seven*, *Brush Talks*, *Fleas on the Dog* and elsewhere.

Helen Leslie Sokolsky’s poems have appeared in a number of publications including *Confrontation*, *The California Poetry Quarterly*, *Poet Lore*, *The Poetry Review* (PSA) and *The Meridian Anthology of Contemporary Poetry*. Recent publications include *The Ekphrastic Review*, *Poetry Quarterly*, *POEM*, *The Aureorean* and *Adelaide Literary Magazine*. Her chapbook of poems *Two Sides of a Ticket* was published by Finishing Line Press in 2014 and she is a three time nominee for the Pushcart Prize.

Eric Fisher Stone is a poet from Fort Worth, Texas. He received his MFA in creative writing and the environment from Iowa State University. His first collection of poems, *The Providence of Grass*, was published by Chatter House Press in 2018. His second collection, *Animal Joy*, is forthcoming from WordTech Editions in 2021.

Brian Yapko is a lawyer whose poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Prometheus Dreaming*, *Sparks of Calliope*, *Gyroscope*, *Cagibi*, *Penumbra*, *the Society of Classical Poets*, *Chained Muse*, *Abstract Elephant*, *Poetica* and a number of other publications. He lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico with his husband, Jerry, and their canine child, Bianca.

In This Issue

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