

JANE WHERE

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Abstract: The title JANE WHERE brings together a feminine first name and a relative adverb, which sum up the argument of this paper: Charlotte Brontë's famous character, Jane Eyre, which is the portrait in the homonymous novel of the author, is a persuasive example of social change through attractors which introduce a new type of information into the system changing it in time. Jane Eyre, as the representative of a new class – female middle-class professionals - stirred discontent among the conservative aristocrats, but the British society of the nineteenth century proved remarkably open to reform and progressive, democratic ideas. That explains why Jane earned her creator the reputation of a heroine of the time, capable to force open the doors to public career for categories of people who had been traditionally marginalized and muted. The same type of character, however, may have just met with a tragic end in locations which sociologists call postfigurative (living according to their ancestors, opposing change). The pronunciation of Jane Where, sounding similar to Jane Eyre, suggests this determination of space over human lives. This is an interdisciplinary study which applies Philip Anderson's theory of localization, impurities and attractors to literature.

Keywords: social construction of character, impurities, attractors, localizations, feminism.

Space has been given less importance than deserved throughout literary history and criticism because it was assumed that the place where the events happened was simply a décor having no specific significance on its own. Starting from Shakespeare, who considered that “All the world's a stage/ And all the men and women merely players [...]” (Shakespeare, 2000, p. 124), it was obvious that the stage in itself had no proper significance, the setting being unimportant comparatively to the drama and the force of the unfolding events. Many years it has been considered that the magnitude of the events, historical aspects and feelings of the characters are what counts most. Space was seen as a facilitator, the basis on which the author laid the story. Henri Lefebvre defined the void regarding the perception of space: “Not so many years ago, the word 'space' had a strictly geometrical meaning: the idea it evoked was simply that of an empty area.” (Lefebvre, 1991, 1) The idea of space as a container is rejected by Lefebvre and the necessity for conceiving space as a dynamic possibility, a fertile terrain is settled for the spatial turn. According to Laura Chiesa,

“[...] for a few decades now, the “spatial turn” has mobilized the critical debate to renew the articulation of the discourses of not only human geography and urban studies but also the broader field of cultural studies. One key aspect of the spatial turn is that it fosters researches that explore a sense of locality combined with a sense of hybridity and mobility, implying the necessity of experimental fieldwork and a quest for the meshing of the theoretical with the ordinary and the outside, in their manifold margins and temporalities.” (Chiesa, 2016, p. 1)

Phillip E. Wegner too believes that “[...] space itself is both a *production*, shaped through a diverse range of social processes and human interventions, and a *force* that, in turn,

influences, directs and delimits possibilities of action and ways of human being in the world.” (Wegner, 2002, p. 181)

Thus, the Bakhtinian idea of chronotope (Bakhtin, 1981), the connectedness of time and space becomes of present interest and the experience of time and space is perceived as an important part of the whole when talking about literary production. Bakhtin (Bakhtin, 1981) mentions the gothic castle as an example of a space filled with significance in contrast with the idea of dead space, emptiness and spatial void. In his *Poetics of Space* (Bachelard, 1994), Gaston Bachelard also presents his interest in space and spatial archetypes. Contemporary criticism concentrates on the diverse, lively relationship between spatiality and literary expression. The exploration of spatial representations in literary works offers new possibilities of interpretation. For instance, the investigation of space and place in Robert Louis Stevenson’s *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* offers the possibility to analyze the development of the atavistic self in an appropriate décor for the unfolding of the strange events. The neighbourhood, the house, the laboratory cannot be perceived as empty containers, merely the stage on which the events unfold; the dynamics of the space being obvious in the downward spiralling of the events. Another example of the importance of space can be discussed in Thomas Hardy’s *Tess of the D’Urberville’s* where the setting is not only a means of vivid description of a place, but space reflects the main character’s experiences and feelings. The setting at Stonehenge, for example, cannot be perceived only as a basis upon which the drama of the heroine is brought to an end, the place in itself is being full of meaning and symbolical relevance: “Thus space may be said to embrace a multitude of intersections, each with its assigned location. As for representations of the relations of production, which subsume power relations, these too occur in space: space contains them in the form of buildings, monuments and works of art.” (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 33)

Lefebvre (Lefebvre, 1991) also argues that each society has the ability to create its personal space. Furthermore, the author believes that:

“In reality, social space ‘incorporates’ social actions, the actions of subjects both individual and collective who are born and who die, who suffer and who act. From the point of view of these subjects, the behaviour of their space is at once vital and mortal: within it they develop, give expression to themselves, and encounter prohibitions; then they perish, and that same space contains their graves. From the point of view of knowing (connaissance), social space works (along with its concept) as a tool for the analysis of society.” (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 34)

Space, social space and society become thus dynamic constitutive aspects of literary analysis, as well. A suitable understanding of literature will not be possible for the contemporary scholars and critics unless considered against its social, historical, cultural background. Moretti (Moretti, 1998) believes that mapping literary works and finding the geographical spaces they represent is not the objective of the work, it is the starting point of a mental journey in which the observer understands the given patterns of the geographical space and through this, the interpretive act, the understanding of the events and the plot might become clearer. Literary maps, as proposed by Franco Moretti have a double role: one in underlining the

“place-bound nature of literary forms: each of them with its peculiar geometry, its boundaries, its spatial taboos and favorite routes. And then, maps bring to light the internal logic of narrative: the semiotic domain around which a plot coalesces and self-organizes. Literary form appears thus as the result of two conflicting, and equally significant forces: one working from the outside, and one from the inside. It is the usual, and at bottom the only real issue of literary history: society, rhetoric, and their interaction.” (Moretti, 1998, p. 5)

While focusing on the relationship between society and culture, Margaret Mead (Mead, 1970) distinguishes three different types of culture: post-, co- and prefigurative cultures. Postfigurative cultures are characteristic for primitive societies, where ancestors and the past are the source of information, cofigurative societies postulate interdependence between the elements, while prefigurative understanding refers to the authority of the young. Some societies are postfigurative and almost closed, meaning that they hardly accept change and even when/ if it occurs, it is a slow process, because the past of the elder is considered to be the basis of the present and future of the young. A postfigurative society refers to a traditional culture, where the elders impose their own beliefs and traditions and, as we can read in *Culture and Commitment*:

“The child's basic learning was conveyed to him so early, so inarticulately, and so surely, as his elders expressed their sense that this was the way things would be for him because he was the child of their bodies and their spirits, their land and their tradition, particular and specific, that his sense of his own identity and his own destiny were unchallengeable.” (Mead, 1970, p. 1)

In this sense, we can observe a certain determinism, the child is born in a given time and space and there is not much liberty for him to develop in any other direction than the one in which he was born into.

Drawing a parallel between Mead's post-figurative society and Anderson's ideas (Anderson, 1972) about changes in a system, we can say that a closed system, which does not receive information from the outside, will eventually decay and vanish by using all its energy and information. Regarding superconductivity, Anderson reveals that an impurity can change an entire system, bringing “the new symmetry- now called broken symmetry because the original symmetry is no longer evident.” (Anderson, 1972, p. 395) Correlating this idea to the postfigurative societies, an impurity might be a character who disobeys the rules, a personality different from the societal norms and accepted behaviour: a person who, in some of his/ her characteristics, is unlike the whole and who can change the system, which thus, as Anderson expresses it, becomes: “not only more than but very different from the sum of its parts.” (Anderson, 1972, p. 395) In a dynamic system or a dynamic society, the impurity becomes an attractor which creates a cluster capable of changing the entire system. Further on, we shall examine “literary impurities” capable of changing structures.

The first case to be analyzed is that of the Victorian women writers, Charlotte Brontë and her sisters, Jane Austen, Elizabeth Barrett Browning and George Eliot. Women writers writing primarily in the nineteenth century Victorian England were to some extent considered to be more than usual women. Victorian social institutions regarded women as limited to raising children, taking care of their husbands, having no

or very few rights. A woman leaving the limitations of her home and entering the public sphere was unusual and it was dangerous in the sense that there were several expectations as to what a woman should write and do. This is the reason why many of these women had pseudonyms under which their literary works appeared: Currer Bell (Charlotte Brontë), Acton Bell (Ann Brontë), Ellis Bell (Emily Brontë), George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans). The explanation was given by Charlotte Brontë herself: “we did not like to declare ourselves women, because-without at the time suspecting that our mode of writing and thinking was not what is called ‘feminine,’—we had a vague impression that authoresses are liable to be looked on with prejudice” (Brontë, 1850, as cited in Gaskell, 2005, p. 278)

Similar thoughts are fuelled into a letter to G.H. Lewes, from 1849, where Brontë assumes a self-assertive tone:

“I wish you did not think me a woman. I wish all reviewers believed ‘Currer Bell’ to be a man; they would be more just to him. You will, I know, keep measuring me by some standard of what you deem becoming to my sex; where I am not what you consider graceful, you will condemn me. All mouths will be open against that first chapter; and that first chapter is true as the Bible, nor is it exceptionable. Come what will, I cannot, when I write, think always of myself and of what is elegant and charming in femininity; it is not on those terms, or with such ideas, I ever took pen in hand: and if it is only on such terms my writing will be tolerated, I shall pass away from the public and trouble it no more. Out of obscurity I came, to obscurity I can easily return.” (Brontë, 1849, as cited in Gaskell, 2005, p. 375)

Comparing Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, Elizabeth Gaskell and George Eliot, Patricia Beer argues that:

“Sometimes the novelist was the greater rebel, sometimes the woman. Each was inconsistent in herself and there was little agreement among them. Charlotte Brontë could not see the point of Jane Austen, George Eliot could not see the point of Jane Eyre, and Elizabeth Gaskell was distressed that George Eliot was not really Mrs. Lewes. It is only in so far as their work is concerned, of course, that the dissimilarities and inconsistencies of these novelists become truly interesting. Otherwise they are merely the notions of a small sample of intelligent middle-class women with varying degrees of education.” (Beer, 1974, p. 1)

The above excerpt reveals that the greatness of these writers arose from their rebelliousness. All of them, to a greater or lesser extent, refused to accept the condition of the woman in the Victorian society and tried, with a certain amount of success, to surpass the barriers imposed by the patriarchal society. Beer also suggests that “Of the four writers in question George Eliot has the highest faith in the potential of women and the deepest distrust in the likelihood of its realisation.” (Beer, 1974, p. 175)

Because of their attitudes and outstanding characteristics, these women writers, although they were an element of novelty in their style, boldness and confidence, they accomplished in their attempt to be the change in the patriarchal Victorian society. By entering a closed system where women did not have a place as individualities, they became attractors, who, through their ideas and behaviour, modified the system and the society itself.

While Charlotte Brontë's work was generally received with positive reviews, both from reviewers of the time and her friend, Elizabeth Gaskell, who even dedicated a biographical work to her, her novel, *Jane Eyre*, was harshly attacked by a representative of the upper-class, Elizabeth Rigby, Lady Eastlake in the December 1848 edition of the *Quarterly Review*. (Rigby, 1948) She considered the characters of the novel unattractive, the narrative coarse and the overall attitude of the writer and the heroine careless and unladylike. She ironically dubbed Jane outstanding, but her distinctive features were considered to be crudeness and insolence. Charlotte Brontë was overtly attacked by this negative review, since Lady Eastlake's expectations regarding a novel about a governess must have been different: she advocated for the hierarchical society in which the governess had her own role and the surpassing of her condition was unacceptable.

Jane Eyre, the autobiography edited by Currer Bell, Charlotte Brontë's pseudonym, brings light to a character who has the characteristics of the impurity analyzed by Anderson (Anderson, 1972), as Lady Eastlake perceived it quite well. She is definitely an element of novelty in the postfigurative Victorian society, where the status of women was an illustration of limited rights, domestic obligations, obedience and yet, women were used as workforce without any financial privileges in front of their husbands. In the traditional Victorian society any rebellious disobedience is to be punished and still, Brontë, in the novel she herself called an autobiography, defined the role of women in a highly untraditional manner:

"Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women *feel just as men feel*; they *need* exercise for their faculties and a field for their efforts *as much as their brothers do*; they *suffer* from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, *precisely as men would suffer*; and it is narrow-minded in *their more privileged fellow creatures* to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags. It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex." (Brontë, 2001, p. 93)

This excerpt from the text clearly expresses the point of view of Brontë/ Jane Eyre regarding the emancipation of women and their rights to be equal to men. The similes "*feel just as men feel*", "*they need [...] as much as their brother do*", "*they suffer [...] precisely as men would suffer*" can be considered a manifesto of the need to have equal rights to "*their more privileged fellow creatures*". In the context of these beliefs, Jane Eyre's *Bildungsroman* is the journey of an impurity which becomes an attractor and changes the society in which she refuses to accept her role.

The Shakespearian idea of the world as a stage comes to be questioned by Jane, who is reluctant to play the role of the poor orphan, governess, romantically involved with her master. Is Jane a representative of the lower- class, practically being a servant in Rochester's house or is she an upper- class representative since she has an intellectual superiority to other servants? The role of "plain Jane" (Gilbert, 2001) does not fit Jane, who is anything, but plain: she defies the role she is given by life, her permanent confrontation with power, independently from the moral or social status of the person she confronts, finally brings her to a happy ending. Sandra Gilbert discusses the shock of the reviewers of *Jane Eyre*, stating that the main aspect disliked by the Victorian readers

was the novel's "'anti-Christian" refusal to accept the forms, customs and standards of society- in short, its rebellious feminism." (Gilbert, 2001, p. 483)

Regarding rebellion, another famous example of an insubordinate woman is Sue, the protagonist of Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*. The fin de siècle, as Gail Cunningham (Cunningham, 1978) presents it, brought a change in the perception and attitude of women, both in the Victorian society which was on the verge of women's emancipation and in literary works as well. By the end of the century, it was not shocking to read about a female character who was anything but the traditional wife and mother, who was educated and had her own thoughts and beliefs to which she remained faithful no matter the circumstances.

"Heroines who refused to conform to the traditional feminine role, challenged accepted ideals of marriage and maternity, chose to work for a living, or who in any way argued the feminist cause, became commonplace in the works of both major and minor writers and were firmly identified by readers and reviewers as New Women." (Cunningham, 1978, p. 3)

Sue Bridehead is the New Woman, in conflict with the society and the prejudices regarding women. We find Sue at a teacher's training college, as an intellectual, educated young lady who, opposing the social expectations of the age, smokes and reads poetry and defies the institution of marriage and general social conventions. In this urban setting, Sue is the New Woman, who doesn't think much about religion, she is free and independent, having no problem in deserting her husband, Phillotson. Still, the New Woman's flight of freedom and accomplishment is stopped by the death of the children. If nothing could stop Sue- neither education, nor religion, nor marriage- in pursuing her own path, Little Father Time, whose nickname might suggest the idea that this period is not the proper age for this kind of behaviour, stops Sue from being Sue. After the death of the children, Sue experiences repentance, she turns back to Christian, religious values and to the marriage which she considered inappropriate before these tragical events. The New Woman, thus, in a space where her individuality is not accepted, can cope with every aspect, except the death of her children. Guilt and remorse turn Sue back to the traditional beliefs, becoming thus a complex failure. The rebellious character of Sue and her freedom are finally broken in a place, where her alterity is not acceptable as the social and moral standards of the age where she tries to be different, do not permit deviations from the norms, and if they occur, as in Sue's case, they are punished thoroughly, by death. The idea of postfigurative society reluctant to elements of novelty is presented in *Jude the Obscure*, as Hollington observes it:

"Jude the Obscure seems to ask whether the present must be seen simply as a continuation of the past, or whether some radical break with the past has already taken place-to usher in the era of 'modernity', for instance-or is about to, or whether such a break can be wrought by individual or collective human agency." (Hollington, 2004, p. 104)

Sue Bridehead is the present, modern woman in contrast with the outdated, traditional world which she not only rejects, but she is at times even ironic regarding the Bible and its interpretation, stating her belief in the new world against the old one in the exclamation:

"[...] I think I'd rather sit in the railway station,' she answered, a remnant of vexation still in her voice. 'That's the centre of the town life now. The Cathedral has had its day!'" (Hardy, 2004, p. 128)

The cathedral, the place considered to be the archetype of faith and religiousness, is considered to be old fashioned by the unconventional Sue Bridehead, who is rather interested by the railway, the symbol of evolution, of industrialization. Thus, she rejects the past and boldly looks to the future, but as the events unfold throughout the novel, this attitude is reproved and the punishment does not come from any social institution, from the exterior, as it would be expected, but from the interior, by the act committed by Little Father Time. This is the point where Sue, by the use of the modal *must*, expresses strong obligation towards being what one is expected to be:

"We must conform!' she said mournfully. 'All the ancient wrath of the Power above us has been vented upon us, His poor creatures, and we must submit. There is no choice. We must. It is no use fighting against God!'" (Hardy, 2004, p. 331)

With reference to space, both in *Jane Eyre* and *Jude the Obscure* the locations are reflective for the characters' internal lives. Located in Wessex, England, Hardy's novel is divided into six parts, each of them representative for a geographical location: *At Marygreen*, *At Christminster*, *At Melchester*, *At Shaston*, *At Aldbrickham* and *Elsewhere* and the last part, *At Christminster Again*. Marygreen is seen as the departing point, the village, in opposition with the image of the town, which is seen as a high aspiration of the simple stonemason, Jude. Marygreen, a compound word, could suggest through the colour symbolism the image of natural world, growth and new beginnings, which, associated with Mary (Virgin Mary) might become the image of purity and fertility. Thus, the starting point of Jude is the pure, natural state, tradition, which seems not to be enough for the protagonist: his longing for Christminster, which he calls "The Heavenly Jerusalem" (Hardy, 2004, 15) is an expression of the aspiration towards a better life and towards exceeding his own limitations, although the working class Jude seems to be unacceptable for a prestigious college as Christminster. Another compound word, Christminster, suggests on the one hand, through the Biblical reference, the possibility of fulfillment of faith, but on the other hand, through the image of Christ, the sacrifice for obtaining atonement. The events of the last chapter, with the setting in Christminster underline the sacrificial suggestion of the name of the location. The unfolding of the events suggests circularity, repetition and through this, the architectural mastery of the novel. The characters return to the same places, like in a vicious circle to start again, humiliated by the impossibility of fulfillment, like Philloston's return to Marygreen or Jude's return to Christminster which is observed in its cyclicity by Jude himself: "This is the very road by which I came into Christminster years ago full of plans!" (Hardy, 2004, p. 177)

"Each repetition is a painful reminder of the characters' failure to move forward: Jude's ambitious childhood carving, for example-"THITHERJ. F.," pointing to Christminster-taunts him each time he passes the milestone, forcing him to remember his failed ambitions." (Prentiss, 1995, p. 189)

Another novel, where locations play an important role is *Jane Eyre*, which takes place in Gateshead, Lowood School, Thornfield Hall, Moor House, Thornfield and Ferndean. Each

place is a step forward in Jane's journey to herself. The starting point of the self-quest is Gateshead, a compound word which suggests departure, the beginning of a voyage to find freedom and happiness. *Gate* might signify a barrier (possibly the origins of the poor orphan which could stop her in fulfilling her destiny), a passage or an entrance, probably to a better living. As Jane's pilgrimage progresses, Lowood is the next stage, which, as its name suggests, is a place where Jane becomes an institutionalized orphan in oppressive conditions. Although having some tendencies towards independence, Jane finally learns a certain extent of obedience here and through the characters of Helen Burns and Miss Temple her spiritual and intellectual formation are offered a direction. The next stop is Thornfield Hall to which Jane independently accedes and where, as the name of the place suggests, Jane is exposed: the *field* being an open space, where finding protection is difficult and a *thorn* is a sharp, dangerous spine. *Thorn* might also mean an obstacle or a difficulty. Thus, Thornfield is the place where Jane is unprotected, she has to find her place and stand out for her own individuality. Moving further on, Moor House suggests a period of calmness, where Jane retreats to find herself. The significance of the name on the one hand might indicate an infertile land, a place where Jane can find peace, but without accomplishment or, on the other hand, it might suggest anchoring, in this case the possibility for Jane for safety: financially, by receiving her inheritance and sentimentally, by becoming St. John River's wife. The last part of Jane's pilgrimage is Thornfield and Ferndean Manor, which give a proper ending to the *Bildungsroman*. The term *fern* suggests fertility, life and abundance. Jane has completed her quest and she seems to have found her own self and happiness: "My Edward and I, then, are happy [...]". (Brontë, 2001, p. 385)

The returning detected in Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* is observable in *Jane Eyre* as well, but they are different types of returns. If in *Jude the Obscure*, the returning is a humiliating recommencement, in *Jane Eyre*, the two returns (Martin, 2013): from Thornfield to Gateshead and from Moorhouse to Thornfield are merely confirmations of the changes the protagonist and other characters have undergone. Jane's attitude towards her own pilgrimage for self-quest is definitory for her final happiness. *Jane Eyre* is a character who has the power of changing the seemingly unchangeable: she surpasses her condition as a poor governess through her ambition, endurance and powerful will.

The mentioned locations from the above novels are not a void, waiting to be filled with meaning, but as seen, they all have their own significance and role in the development of the characters and the unfolding of the events. The places the characters revolve in are triggers of the action and the bond that is created with different places is important for the development of the narrative. It is observable that a closed society is less prone to accept alterity than a more modern society which takes steps towards emancipation, equal rights and democracy.

If the Victorian society permitted a change in the perception of women, their rights and their position in society, as is the case with Charlotte Brontë's and *Jane Eyre*'s case, the Romanian heroine, Lady T. (*Doamna T.*) in Camil Petrescu's *The Bed of Procrustes (Patul lui Procrust)* (Petrescu, 1970) is unfortunately a utopian view of the

female character, and even the writer believes that a woman like her is only a product of the imagination. Camil Petrescu was the promoter of modernity and he was the writer who tried to synchronize the Romanian literature of the age with the European literary trends. Camil Petrescu's heroine is the first type of New Woman in Romanian literature, the prototype having emerged in America and Western European literature already by the end of the nineteenth century. Her modernity lies in her social and financial independence and in the powerfulness that she emanates: she is a charming and enigmatic intellectual woman, the owner of a furniture shop. Her sensibility, delicacy, elegance, femininity and her taste for beauty and culture are the constitutive elements of the ideal modern woman. Lady T. (*Doamna T.*), Maria T. Mănescu, is an unconventional character, with her own perspectives, she defies the rules to achieve a higher state of fulfillment in a world where, as considered by the author, only usual women existed. Lady T. (*Doamna T.*) is the expression of a totally new frame of reference, a beauty coming from the inside, which is seen as utopian. Compared to Emilia, the other woman of the novel, seen as the ordinary, traditional view of a woman, Lady T. (*Doamna T.*) resembles a work of art: rare, delicate, special, alive, ready to be discovered and in the meantime, never capable of being totally unveiled.

The symbol of the Procrustian bed signifies the idea of the tailoring of identities to suit the acceptable norms of the age, which undoubtedly brings forward the awareness of the postfigurative Romanian society perceived by Petrescu as an unnatural obligation to fit in. The title of the novel, coming from the Greek myth of Procrustes who either stretched people or cut off parts of their bodies to fit in his iron bed advances the idea of suffering in the case when somebody is out of the standards. Not only Lady T. (*Doamna T.*), also the other characters of the novel, suffer from their inability to conform to the standards as expected. The open ending of the novel suggests the fact that there could be several interpretations and possibilities, although the last sentence of the novel brings us to a certain degree of disillusionment: "a tributary follows the law of the river" ("un afluent urmează legea fluviului"). (Petrescu, 1970, p. 326) This suggests the same conclusion as we can find in *Jude the Obscure*, as well: a human individuality, a different consciousness, although sometimes capable of exceeding the usual bonds, is from time to time insufficient to change the entire system.

Considering the main keywords of the article, women and location, the investigation of the theory of space and spatiality, localization, different types of society and feminism prove that the extent to which a society is inclined towards change influences the personal development of the person living in that space. The present article discussed the extent to which women writers were influenced by the space in which they created their works, and so were their female characters' fate in the societies in which they lived. The analyzed outstanding female personalities in some cases proved to be able to change the working of a system such as *Jane Eyre*, while in other cases, on the contrary, they were predisposed to a dramatic end since the postfigurative society in which they acted, denied them the possibility of accomplishment.

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