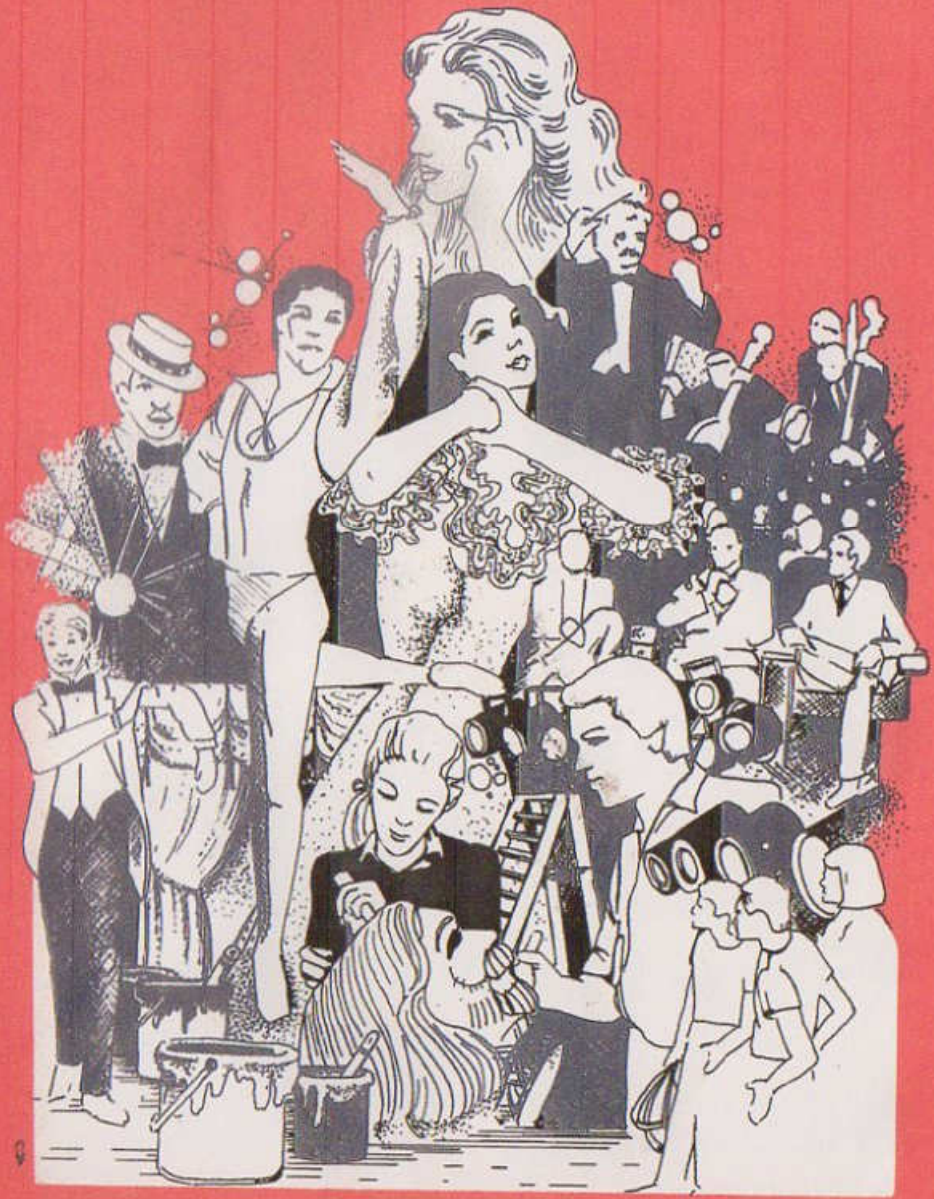


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Rationed Acting

by Eric Shorter

Two actors who had lately spent much time before the cameras came forward in the summer in major stage roles to remind us of the difference between acting for a lens and acting for an audience.

Some people think there isn't one. They do not see why an actor, if he's any good at all, shouldn't be as good on stage as on screen. Perhaps in the theatre he has to speak so that his voice can be heard at the back. That's obvious enough. And everybody knows that if you're acting before a camera you mustn't overdo things. So there is in fact a certain difference.

But if the actor knows his job he ought to be able to make an impact in either medium, allowing for adjustments of technique such as I mention. That is what some of us believe, anyhow. Yet most of us I think who have a fondness for acting would argue that the difference is deeper than that. And that the playgoer in particular senses it when the actor switches over from the studio to the stage.

At any rate I sensed it forcibly this

summer in the acting of Edward Fox and Ronald Pickup. Having become accustomed to playing in film or television studios more regularly than on the stage, they looked as if the gift for causing us to hang on every word they spoke had eluded them when they returned to the theatre: something to do with technique, no doubt, but also with their expressive powers.

It was as if their instincts had been directed for so long to the restrained requirements of the film or telly, which tend to fasten our attention on actors' heads, that the theatrical necessity of acting with the whole of one's body and not just the head had been overlooked or grown out of reach.

Mr Pickup came back as Dr Astrov in Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya* and Mr Fox came forward as Shakespeare's Hamlet; and no doubt during the run of each revival the actors found their theatrical, as opposed to film studio, feet.

But on the first night in each instance I found myself becoming insidiously aware of something unexpectedly limited in their acting.

They had of course both been trained for stage. Mr Fox's very British, well-bred tones and polished manners are particularly popular in the cinema; and Mr Pickup who had been with Olivier's National Theatre Company in its Old Vic days earned with it a reputation for passionate, lyrical acting before going off to work for the cinema and television about ten years ago.

Mr Fox had not in fact been away from the stage for long. He was good in

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T.S.Eliot's *The Family Reunion* as the thoughtful hero catching up with a mysterious past. Mr Fox is very good at looking thoughtful. Then he gave an even more introspective performance, and admirably so, in Simon Gray's comedy about school teachers between classes called *Quartermaine's Terms*.

So his appearance as Hamlet at the Young Vic earlier this year hardly counted as a return to the stage. But it was a return to Shakespeare; and what made his acting interesting was that he just acted, as it were, with his head. From the neck down he was dramatically dead.

He was royal, of course. No doubt about that. A very princely Prince of Denmark. And his voice sounded superbly of the upper class, almost to the point of strangling the verse before it came out. How many Hamlets ever sound as if they lived in high society?

But what about the rest of him? What about the rest of the character? Where was the fiery, furious youth who must avenge his father's murder? Where was passion's slave?

He just stood there being intelligent, sardonic, indignant, observant, graceful and socially superior. Hamlet, the prince of a dozen moods, now gay, now glum, now sarcastic, now tender, requires a range of expression beyond Mr Fox's inherent quietness and courtesy.

At least that is how it looked to me; and if there is any truth in those impressions it may be easily excused on the grounds of the actor being out of practice. He had given good performances on the stage not long before; but they hadn't tested him like Shakespeare.

His personality saw Mr Fox safely through, but I longed to see his whole form suited to the action: his shoulders, arms, hands, legs responding to his anxieties and adventures. Instead they seemed almost dead.

Ronald Pickup was challenged by a role less charitable, less actor-proof, as they say. Astrof in *Uncle Vanya* is a man of vision, a friend of the family, of the community, of humanity, though unable to make much of his personal friendships. And what seemed so odd to me as Mr Pickup came on was that he could not make more of that fascinating character. He played Astrof with a solid, dogged, almost dull integrity, sympathising with himself and seeming somehow more self-centred, in his quietly reflective way, than the character should.

Everybody in the play talks of being bored or disgusted with himself or the others. So it requires the daintiest art to avoid boring us or losing our sympathy. Nor must the actors take their cues for interpreting their roles merely from what the other characters say about them.

In this revival, however, there was a tendency to do that and Mr Pickup could not discover Astrof's lighter side - his humanity, his charm, his humour and his warm affection for the family. Like Mr Fox as Hamlet he seemed to be acting with his mind's eye mainly; and I suppose that is what a camera wants from actors.

It must therefore be a jolt to return to the stage where acting makes demands on the whole body. It is a jolt for the spectator: not because it robs their acting of interest but because it looks so strangely - well, rationed, I suppose, is the word.

Because we all have our ups and downs.

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Bob Dixon writes . . .

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Next week we have a great children's show from Boden Studio Agency *Toad of Toad Hall*, this magical children's musical is a must for children of all ages from 1 to 100.

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Our children's Saturday morning matinees are a tremendous success and will continue regularly after the Christmas panto, the first date being on the 22nd January when we will be starting a children's club with badges, tee shirts, certificates and many specials for the members.

As I mentioned last week, our Christmas panto *Jack & the Beanstalk* is selling very fast, so hurry and book before it is too late, and remember, you can meet the entire cast of the panto at Wood Green Shopping City at 4.30 p.m. on 22nd November when Stephen Lewis and Fiona Curzon will be switching on the Christmas lights.

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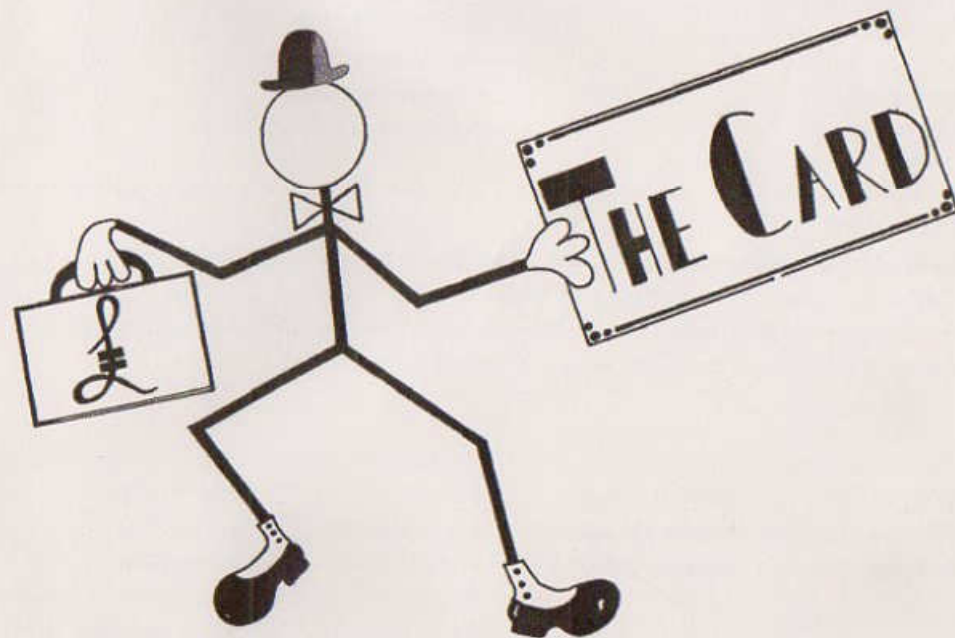
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Choreography
MARIA MANOLI

Musical Director
SIMON MURPHY

November 9th - 13th 1982

Cast



Denry Machin (The Card)
Ruth Earp
Nellie Cotterill
The Countess of Chell
Mrs. Machin
Mr. Duncalf
Mr. Calvert
Parsloe
Mr. Shillitoe
Mrs. Codelyn
Mr. Blundell

Ian Parrott
Liz Arrowsmith
Sally Pearson
Iris Baker
Marjorie Hanson
David Williams
Colin Arrowsmith
Howard Wright
Mike Gilbert
Doreen Magee
Anthony Golding

Townfolk:

Colin Arrowsmith, Richard Bodek, Paul Cody, Les Cooper, Chris Cope, Catherine Cox, Caroline Pourmy, Mike Gilbert, Anthony Golding, Katie Golding, Chris Hadland, Doreen Magee, Jonathan Mann, Alf Mousley, Pauline Rawe, Paul Smith, Jean Streeton, Howard Wright.

Produced and
Directed by: **Dora Basham**
Choreography: **Maria Manoli**
Musical Director: **Simon Murphy**

Orchestra:
Piano **Peter Bridges**
Percussion **Paul Clarvis**
Bass Guitar **Neil Hatton**
Organ/
Synthesizer **Simon Murphy**

Musical Synopsis



ACT ONE

Scene One **Bursley Town Hall**
Hallelujah
Nine Till Five
Scene Two **Duncalf's Office**
Scene Three **The Dancing Academy**
Lead Me
Scene Four **The Tailors**
Scene Five **The Machin Kitchen**
Scene Six **The Ball**
Universal White
Kid Gloves
Nobody Thought of It
Scene Seven **Duncalf's Office**
Scene Eight **The Streets of Bursley**
Nine Till Five (Reprise)
Nobody Thought of It (Reprise)
Scene Nine **The Dancing Academy**
Moving On
Scene Ten **The Machin Kitchen**
Scene Eleven **Llandudno**
Come Along and Join Us.

Interval

ACT TWO

Scene One **The Universal Thrift Club**
That's The Way the Money Grows
Scene Two **Chell Hall**
Scene Three **The Town Hall Square**
The Card
Scene Four **The Machin Kitchen**
Opposite Your Smile
I Could Be the One
Scene Five **The Town Hall Square**
Nothing Succeeds Like Success
Scene Six **The Grand**
The Right Man
Scene Seven **Liverpool Docks**
Nobody Thought of It (Reprise)
Scene Eight **Bursley Town Hall**
Hallelujah (Reprise)
The Card (Reprise)

Backstage



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Editorial



PRODUCERS COMMENTS

First novel by Arnold Bennett, then a film version with Alec Guinness and now a musical! Our hero, Edward Henry Machin – nicknamed 'Denry' by his plain speaking mum, takes every chance that comes his way to climb the ladder of success. He gets taken down a rung or two by his Mother, but eventually he reaches the top and manages to find the right girl just in time! The music is anything but turn of the century, but it blends very well with the lively activities of our 'Denry'. We hope this bright and friendly show entertains you and as Mr. Bennett says, "identifies with the great cause of cheering us up".

Dora Basham

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If you are interested in joining our Company please ring Mike or Chris Gilbert
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Training in Shakespeare

by Ellen Terry

At breakfast father would begin the day's coaching. Often I had to lay down my fork and say my lines. He would conduct these extra rehearsals anywhere – in the street, the bus – we were never safe. I remember vividly going into a chemist's shop and being stood upon a stool to say my part to the chemist.

Such leisure as I had from my profession was spent in "minding" the younger children – an occupation in which I delighted. They all had very pretty hair, and I used to wash it and comb it out until it looked as fine and bright as floss silk.

It is argued now that stage life is bad for a young child, and children are not allowed by law to go on the stage until they are ten years old – quite a mature age in my young days. I cannot discuss the whole question here, and must content myself with saying that during my three years at the Princess's I was a very strong, happy and healthy child.

I was never out of the bill except during the run of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* when, through an unfortunate accident, I broke my toe. I was playing Puck, my second part on any stage, and had come up through a trap at the end of the last act to give the final speech.

My sister Kate was playing Titania that night as under-study to Carlotta Leclercq. Up I came – but not quite up, for the man shut the trap door too soon and caught my toe. I screamed. Kate rushed to me and banged her foot on the stage, but the man only closed the trap tighter, mistaking the signal.

"Oh, Katie! Katie!" I cried. "Oh, Nelly! Nelly!" said poor Kate helplessly.



Ellen Terry, 1874 (In 'The Wandering Heir')

ly. Then Mrs Kean came rushing on and made them open the trap and release my poor foot.

"Finish the play, dear," she whispered excitedly, "and I'll double your salary." There was Kate holding me up on one side and Mrs Kean on the other. Well, I did finish the play in a fashion. The text ran something like this –

If we shadows have offended
(Oh, Katie, Katie!)
Think but this, and all is mended
(Oh, my toe!)
That you have but slumbered here,
While these visions did appear.
(I can't, I can't!)
And this weak and idle theme,
No more yielding but a dream,
(Oh, dear! Oh, dear!)
Gentles, do not reprehend;
(a big sob)
If you pardon, we will mend.
(Oh, Mrs Kean!)

How I got through it, I don't know. But my salary was doubled – it had been fifteen shillings, and it was raised to thirty – and Mr Skey, President of St Bartholomew's Hospital, who chanced to be in a stall that very evening, came round behind the scenes and put my toe right. He remained my friend for life.

I was not chosen for Puck just because I had played Mamilus with some credit. The same examination was gone through, and again I came out first. During the rehearsals Mrs Kean taught me to draw my breath in through my nose and begin a laugh - a very valuable accomplishment!

She was also indefatigable in her lessons in clear enunciation, and I can hear her now lecturing the ladies of the company on their vowels. "A, E, I, O, U, my dear," she used to say, "are five distinct vowels, so don't mix them all up together as if you were making a pudding.

"If you want to say, 'I am going on the river,' say it plainly and don't tell us you are going on the 'rivah'. You must say **her**, not **har**; it's **God** not **Gud**; **remonstrance**, not **remunstrance**," and so forth. No one ever had a sharper tongue or a kinder heart than Mrs Kean. Beginning with her I have always loved women with a somewhat hard manner. I have never believed in their hardness, and have proved them tender and generous in the extreme.

Actor-managers are very proud of their long runs nowadays, but in Shakespeare at any rate they do not often eclipse Charles Kean's two hundred and fifty nights of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the Princess's. It was certainly a very fascinating production, and many of the effects were beautiful. I, by the way, had my share in marring one of these during the run.

When Puck was told to put a girdle round the earth in forty minutes, I had to fly off the stage as swiftly as I could, and a dummy Puck was whirled through the air from the point where I disappeared. One night the dummy, while in full flying action, fell on the stage, whereupon in great concern for its safety, I ran on, picked it up in my

arms, and ran off with it amid roars of laughter. Neither of the Keans was acting in this production, but there was someone in authority to give me a sound cuff. Yet I had such excellent intentions. 'Tis ever thus!

I revelled in Puck and his impish pranks, and unconsciously realised that it was a part in which the imagination could run riot.


I believe I played it well, but I did not **look** well, and I must contradict emphatically the kind assumption that I must have been "a delightful little fairy". As Mamilus I was really a sweet little thing, but while I was playing Puck I grew very gawky - not to say ugly. My hair had been cut short, and my red cheeks stuck out too much. I was a sight.

The parts we play influence our characters to some extent, and Puck made me a bit of a romp. I grew vain and rather "cocky", and it was just as well that during the rehearsals for the Christmas pantomime in 1857 I was tried for the part of the Fairy Dragonetta and rejected.

I believe that my failure was principally due to the fact that Nature had not given me flashing eyes and raven hair, without which, as everyone knows, no bad fairy can hold up her head and respect herself. But at the time I felt distinctly rebuffed, and only the extreme beauty of my dress as the maudlin "good fairy" Goldenstar consoled me.

The pantomime in which I was the fairy Goldenstar was very frequently preceded by *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and the two parts on one night must have been fairly heavy work for a child, but I delighted in it.

(Extracted from *The Story of My Life* by Ellen Terry published by The Boydell Press at £4.95)





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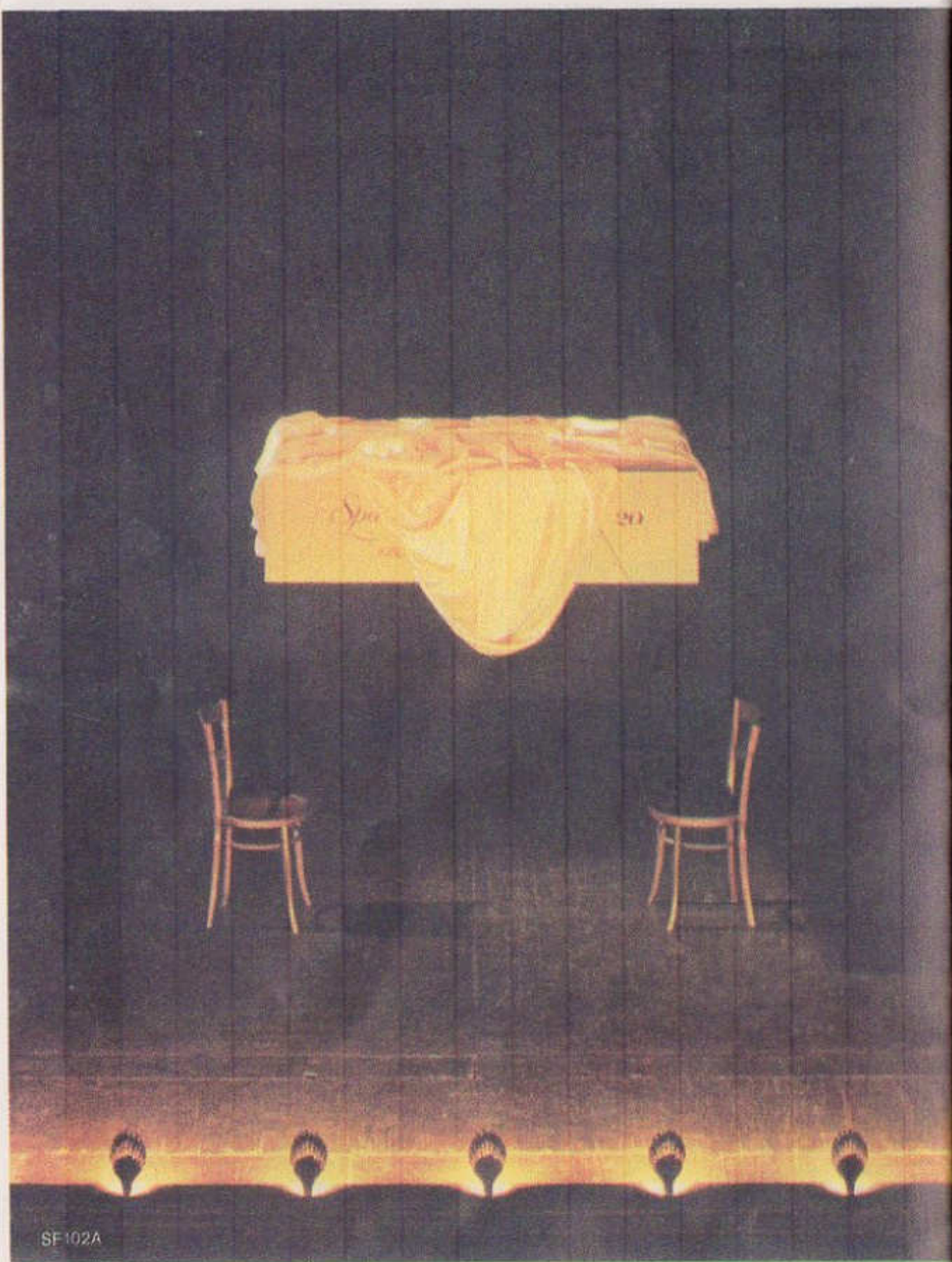
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