

Fantasy, dream and desire in the works of David Lynch and Haruki Murakami

Fantasía, sueño y deseo en la obra de David Lynch y Haruki Murakami

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ABSTRACT: David Lynch and Haruki Murakami are two of the contemporary authors who have succeeded the most at creating their own universe. As a starting point, this paper analyses how their works develop the concept of *the fantastic*, as it was theorized by Tzvetan Todorov. After attending to the convergences between both authors, this paper suggests some differences in the treatment of the quotidian: Murakami seems to find some gratification in it, whereas Lynch seems to consider satisfaction hardly possible. Finally, dream and desire are taken as topics that would lead to the traumatic collision with the lacanian Real, which breaks into the symbolic order that would constitute our subjectivity and reality as we experience it.

KEYWORDS: Murakami, Lynch, the fantastic, psychoanalysis, interartistic comparatism, Todorov, Žižek

RESUMEN: David Lynch y Haruki Murakami son dos de los autores contemporáneos que mayor éxito han tenido a la hora de configurar un universo propio. Al tomar como punto de partida la categoría de *lo fantástico* tal como fue teorizada por Tzvetan Todorov, analizamos cómo estas creaciones se desarrollan en el espacio indeterminado de la fantasía. Tras atender a las concomitancias entre ambos, se advierten algunas diferencias en el tratamiento de lo cotidiano, en cuanto que para Murakami parece albergar un espacio de satisfacción que en las obras de Lynch nos es negado. Por último, se analizan los motivos del sueño y del deseo como acceso al choque traumático con lo real lacaniano, que irrumpe en el orden estructurado de la realidad simbólica en la que, según Lacan, nos constituiríamos como sujetos.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Murakami, Lynch, lo fantástico, psicoanálisis, comparatismo interartístico, Todorov, Žižek



THE FANTASTIC: BETWEEN REALITY AND SUPERNATURAL

Both David Lynch's movies and Haruki Murakami's narrative universe present a primary and noticeable characteristic: the constant crossing from what we consider reality to what we can identify as supernatural, and vice versa. This uninterrupted communication locates their narratives in the sphere of *the fantastic*, a concept that Tzvetan Todorov defined by its ability to cause a "hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event" (Todorov, 1975: 25). Indeed, both authors' stories usually begin depicting quotidian scenes in which the "natural" laws of middle-class daily lives (considering the distinctive features of the United States and Japan, respectively) determine the initially shockless and almost dull routine of the characters. Waiting for a forthcoming second moment of emergence of the supernatural, the representation of the quotidian reaches a high importance in the works of Lynch and Murakami.

In this way, Murakami's novels show detailed descriptions of characters' outfits, taste in food, brands consumed, music listened, unique manners of arranging clothes, or the exact elements they put into their backpacks and the order they follow to do so. Lynch as well provides us with multiple home-loving scenes, being the most emblematic and iconic of all the initial sequence of *Blue Velvet* (Lynch, 1986). At the beginning of the movie, the spectator is presented a wide panorama of the calm and pleasant neighbourhood where the main character lives. The sky is blue, and the red and yellow flowers contrast with the flawless

whiteness of the fences limiting the houses' gardens. A few seconds after, we are allowed to set foot in the main character's house. There, we can appreciate in detail the kitsch decoration and the traditional and slightly corny garments of his aunts. Just as in Murakami's novels, the appearance of Lynch's characters is impeccable and gives the spectator a great amount of information. The primp and flirty style of Audrey Horne and the immaculate elegance of special agent Dale Cooper are significant in *Twin Peaks* (Lynch, 1990-1991),¹ as it is the naive pink cardigan and the soft blonde hair of Betty, the aspiring actress in *Mulholland Drive* (Lynch, 2001), or the vamp look of the first Renée in *Lost Highway* (Lynch, 1997). Scenes in cafeterias are also frequent: we know what they eat and what they drink, being the most paradigmatic case the passion for doughnuts of agent Cooper. In fact, that particular element will become a significant feature in the third season of *Twin Peaks*, since doughnuts will be one of the few things that link Dougie, the guy sharing body with old Dale Cooper, with his past as FBI agent.

Todorov's "apparently supernatural event" does not take too long to arrive, because both Lynch and Murakami introduce very soon in their stories an unpredictable event that fractures that reality ruled by "natural" and understandable laws. Murakami's *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* (2003) early confronts the disappearance of Toru Okada's cat, which anticipates the odd events that will occur later. A similar function is fulfilled by Kafka Tamura's birthday number fifteen in *Kafka on the Shore* (2005), or Mari Asai encounter with Takahasi in *After Dark* (2008). In *Blue Velvet*, the initial atmosphere of tranquillity is blasted by Jeffrey's father's heart attack and the subsequent discovery of the amputated ear, rotting in the depths of the grass. The enigmatic sentence "Dick Laurent is dead" through the entryphone of a wealthy but anodyne house in *Lost Highway*, the visit of a bizarre old lady who foresees Nikki's future in *Inland Empire* (Lynch, 2006) and, above all, the discovery of

¹*Twin Peaks: The Return* (Lynch, 2017) continued and concluded the show.

Laura Palmer's corpse in *Twin Peaks* are triggers that inform about the incursion of something excessive that threatens to put reality in danger. "We live in a violent and chaotic world" (Murakami, 2003: 42), warns Malta Kano in *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*. And in her words echo those of Sandy in *Blue Velvet*: "It's a strange world".

The works of Lynch and Murakami move toward the category of the fantastic because there are supernatural elements that burst into reality, opening a certain space for uncertainty that will never be deciphered. "I nearly reached the point of believing" is the maxima that, according to Todorov, sums up the spirit of the fantastic (1975: 31). However, what becomes more relevant is that once the confidence in the usual strength is broken, there is no way to fix it. Reality is going to be pierced by that thing that surpasses it. That is, once the boundary between reality and supernatural begins to blur, the division between the two sides remains fragile. The eccentric characters that appear in *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* live, eat, and mingle with other personalities from the real world in such a way that they partly belong to it. Therefore, Toru Okada confess, after dreaming having sexual relationships with Malta Kano's sister:

Without a step-by-step investigation of that event, I would not be able to distinguish the point at which the real ended and the unreal took over. The wall separating the two regions had begun to melt. In my memory, at least, the real and the unreal seemed to be residing together with equal weight and vividness. I had joined my body with Creta Kano's, and at the same time, I had not (Murakami, 2003: 293).

The confusion between "the real and the unreal" described by Okada is also a perpetual condition in Lynch's movies, where the pair reality/unreality seems to work not exactly as an antagonism of separated terms but as a secret continuity among two apparently scattered sides of existence. In this sense, it is pertinent to recall one of the topological elements that the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan uses in his works: the surface named

Möbius strip. According to Lacan, the Möbius strip would illustrate in a more adequate way some oppositions that psychoanalysis has always understood as separated in a more definitive sense. The Möbius strip is a tridimensional topological surface that has only one side and one border, although intuitively it seems to be a two-sided element. Building a real 3-D Möbius strip is quite easy. It is the result of cutting a long band of paper and putting its ends together but making a twist first on one of them. Despite intuitively perceiving more than just one face and more than one border, we could go across the whole surface with our finger in a continuous way. The same thing happens going over the border. Besides being a ruled surface, the Möbius band is a non-orientable surface. That is, if someone started sliding along the band looking left, at the end of the first round that person would appear in the same spot of the beginning but looking right. And the journey would have consisted of going continuously across one single surface.

Coming back to Lynch and Murakami, we could distinguish a first group of works in which reality and unreality tend to be really close and converge in same space and time, being really difficult to separate. That would be the case of *Blue Velvet*, *Twin Peaks* or *Inland Empire*, films in which narrative time passes without significant forks or radical diegetic interruptions. Alternatively, films like *Lost Highway* or *Mulholland Drive* do present an inflexion point, a certain fold in the story that triggers a cosmic change. That is exactly what happens in Murakami's *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* (1985), which distributes odd and even chapters in two parallel stories set in different worlds. Nevertheless, not even in these cases where the division between the real world and the supernatural world is further defined, a rigid partition is to be considered. Discovering what happens when cutting a Möbius strip can help to illustrate these interrelationships. If we perform a cut along the band, we have two possible results. On the one hand, if the cut is made along the exact half of the band wide, we obtain a longer band with two torsions, and, if we cut again this new band in the middle of the wide, we obtain two intertwined bands. On the other

hand, if we do not perform the cut in the exact middle point of the band wide, we obtain as a result two different interlaced bands: the first one with the exact same length as the original and the second one with twice its length. Despite being able to identify a narrative cut-off in *Lost Highway*—from that moment on we abandon the universe of the common and entry in a different one, more terrifying and frenzied in any sense—the supernatural impregnates reality and, besides, some reality elements persist in the unknown stages. Reality and unreality spread out, string together, generate and multiply connections, but the continuity between them is always stronger than expected. A paradigmatic character representing this confluence is the Mystery Man at *Lost Highway*'s party. He seems to come from a different place, in which natural laws are no longer valid, but he is certainly present in the real (but chilling) universe depicted in the first part of the movie. This initial world is portrayed since the beginning until the transformation of impotent Fred into ardent Pete, and it reveals the troubling lack of unicity of reality, the weakness of time and space in existence. The presence of Mystery Man in *Lost Highway* suggests the idea of a connected myriad of different versions of reality, in which that reality always merges with the fantastic. As Slavoj Žižek analyses in regard to Mystery Man, his “timelessness and spacelessness (he can be at two places at the same time, as he proves to Fred in the nightmarish phone conversation scene) signals the timelessness and spacelessness of the synchronous universal symbolic network of registration” (2000: 23).

Once the common characteristics have been analysed, it is however important to observe that the representation of the quotidian varies in both authors, and therefore the significance of the couple reality/unreality also differs. After quitting his job in the law firm, Toru Okada's life in *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* becomes peaceful and organized, though also uninteresting and lonely. When his cat disappears, Okada receives the news that his wife has been missing work for two consecutive days without going back home the night in-between. Showing off a great sense of indifference that is very distinctive of many

Murakami's male characters, Okada starts to suspect that maybe his wife has abandoned him. In a state of bewildering, he visits her neighbour and new teenage friend May Kasahara, who advises him to go back home, take a shower, put clean clothes on and shave off. These little things, she says, are important. Okada goes home and follows May recommendations:

At home, I looked at my face in the mirror. It was true: I looked terrible. I got undressed, showered, gave myself a good shampoo, shaved, brushed my teeth, put aftershave lotion on my face, and went to the mirror again for a close examination. A little better than before, it seemed. My nausea was gone. My head was still a little foggy, though (Murakami, 2003: 188).

It is the same ritual found in, for instance, *Kafka on the Shore*, when Kafka Tamura cleans and contemplates his body just before running away from home. Similar practice is carried out when cleaning the blood and fixing the mess left behind the attack to a prostitute in *After Dark*. For the Japanese writer, quotidian often comes associated to rites, to a sequence of calculated, meaningful and purifying steps that bring tranquillity and composure to the frenetic city life from which Okada wishes to escape. The ritualization of the quotidian is even more obvious at the start of *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, when Toru Okada decides to confront the confusion caused by a strange erotic call in the following way: "I decided to iron shirts instead. Which is what I always do when I'm upset. It's an old habit. I divide the job into twelve precise stages" (Murakami, 2003: 6).

Carlos Rubio, in his work *Murakami's Japan [El Japón de Murakami]*, explains that the idea of purification has shaped the daily life of the Japanese, leading to a "culture of cleanliness":

In relation to the interior of people, there is a facet of the cleanliness and ritual pureness of Shintoism that can not be overlooked. It can be summarized in the concept of honesty or *makoto*, the inner purity of thinking and action. [...] *Makoto* means internal cleansing and

social responsibility, it is the supreme request of keeping personal dignity spotless, in eyes of others and in the eyes of oneself (Rubio, 2012: 223).²

Hence, for Murakami, reality can reveal itself as a comforting place, worth to inhabit even after getting in touch with its most disturbing aspect. In fact, Murakami's characters who have been trapped on *the other side* want to go back to ordinary life, even though it can sometimes involve painful isolation. There is no doubt that Kumiko desires to be saved in *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, that Eri Asai wants to escape the TV screen in *After Dark*, and that Kafka Tamura chooses to come back from that *place beyond* hidden in the forest where he gets lost following the spectrum of Miss Saeki at the end of *Kafka on the Shore*.

On the contrary, most of David Lynch's movies (with the exception of *Blue Velvet*) tend to present the common universe as profound and perturbing. Though *Twin Peaks* seems to be a friendly and quiet town, the truth is that its inhabitants belong to the sphere that Todorov called *the uncanny*, that is, events "which may be readily accounted for by the laws of reason, but which are, in one way or another, incredible, extraordinary, shocking, singular, disturbing or unexpected (Todorov, 1975: 46). *Mulholland Drive* begins presenting a young woman called Betty who arrives at Hollywood full of dreams, in such a naive attitude that cannot evade being discomfoting. In *Lost Highway*, as Slavoj Žižek analyses, the "real" word at the beginning of the movie does not manage to avoid being truly strange and terrifying, as everything is in Lynch's universe:

In *Lost Highway*, on the contrary, the noir universe—the universe we enter after the mysterious identity change of Fred/Pete, the film's male hero—is confronted not with idyllic small-town life, but with the aseptic, grey, "alienated," suburban-megalopolis married life. [...]

²Translation by the author of this paper from the original: "En relación con el interior de las personas hay un aspecto de la limpieza y la pureza ritual del sintoísmo que no se puede pasar por alto. Se puede resumir en el concepto de sinceridad o *makoto*, la pureza interior de pensamiento y acción. [...] *Makoto* es limpieza interior, es responsabilidad social, es exigencia absoluta de que la dignidad personal se mantenga siempre limpia a ojos de los demás y de uno mismo".

we get the opposition of two horrors: the fantasmatic horror of the nightmarish noir universe of perverse sex, betrayal and murder, and the (perhaps much more unsettling) despair of our drab, “alienated” daily life of impotence and distrust (Žižek, 2000: 17).

According to Žižek, the escape from reality desired by the characters would seem to lead to the traumatic collision with *the Real*, the third order proposed by Jacques Lacan (along with the Imaginary and the Symbolic) that would cover everything resisting to be expressed by language. The contact with the unnameable Real triggers the return to the initial world in *Lost Highway*, a moment that takes place when Alice whispers to his lover Pete: “You’ll never have me!”. For Žižek: “Significantly, it is at this very point that Pete is transformed back into Fred, as if to assert that the fantasmatic way out was a false exit, that in all imaginable/possible universes, failure is what awaits us” (2000: 19). In the process of escaping reality, dream becomes more real than reality and, therefore, more “traumatic in its breathtaking intensity, yet impossible in the sense that we cannot ever make sense of it” (Žižek, 2000: 49). “What awaits me ‘there’ is not a deep Truth that I have to identify with, but an unbearable truth that I have to learn to live with” (Žižek, 2007: 3). The escaping is unsuccessful, and we return to reality in an (impossible) flight from the traumatic truth we cannot stand.

Eluding the always confusing reality, thus, it is not possible for Lynch, who seems to throw a final message: reality is not only multiple and inconsistent but also deeply unsatisfactory.

This brings us to a further crucial complication: if what we experience as ‘reality’ is structured by fantasy, and if fantasy serves as the screen that protects us from being directly overwhelmed by the raw Real, then *reality itself can function as an escape from encountering the Real*. In the opposition between dream and reality, fantasy is on the side of reality, and it is in dreams that we encounter the traumatic Real—it is not that dreams are for those who

cannot endure reality, reality itself is for those who cannot endure (the Real that announces itself in) their dreams (Žižek, 2007: 57).

Whether the familiar world can act like a refuge or not seems to be a point of divergence between the work of Lynch and Murakami. Nevertheless, what both suggest is that reality, in essence, is not solid, reassuring, or clear. In fact, as Žižek states in his analysis of *Lost Highway*, “‘reality’, and the experience of its density, is sustained not simply by A/ONE fantasy, but by an INCONSISTENT MULTITUDE of fantasies” (2000: 43). The philosopher continues defending that “Against this ‘multiple reality’ talk, one should thus insist on a different aspect, on the fact that the fantasmatic support of reality is in itself necessarily multiple and inconsistent” (44). Not jumping through the looking glass is not a reason to be calm. The uncanny can catch us by surprise at any time since it is written in the conditions and structure of existence. It is inscribed in the masking of a flaw inherent to existence that the phantasmatic support would have the function to soften.

DREAM AND DESIRE AS AN ACCESS TO THE REAL

In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Sigmund Freud (1953) presents the following oneiric scene: in a dark room, a father holds a vigil for a child resting in a wooden casket. Restless and exhausted, the progenitor takes the advice of his relatives and decides to sleep a little until dawn, while an old member of the family is in charge of guarding the child’s corpse. After some hours of sleep, the father feels a pressure in his arm, raises his eyes and discovers his son facing him. In a reproachful tone, the son says to him: “Father, don’t you see I’m burning?”. Startled, the man wakes up to check the room where the body has been guarded and finds out that a candle has fall into the coffin and set fire to the shroud’s sleeve.

Freud understands this episode considering the dream of the father as the response to his worries and to the external stimulus of fire. Žižek resumes the lacanian reading, according

to which “the dreamer is awakened when the Real of the horror encountered in the dream (the dead son’s reproach) is more horrible than the awakened reality itself, so that the dreamer escapes into reality in order to escape the Real encountered in the dream” (2000: 20). Besides, in the sentence pronounced by the son, Žižek identifies a vindication of life against the symbolic authority embodied in the father. Hence, “Father, can’t you see I’m burning?” (that is the way the philosopher translates it) becomes “Father, can’t you see I’m enjoying?” (Žižek, 1992: 124-125).

In this story, three main elements are displayed: fire, dream and desire, all of them prevalent in Lynch and Murakami’s creations. For the moment, let us focus in the last two, dream and desire, which are the most interesting for the analysis of the significant structure of the works. In line with the lacanian reading, the function of dreams is neither in Lynch or Murakami an answer to a stimulus or reality. On the contrary: “Dream overpowers reality, and the one going through the looking-glass, through those thresholds and frames that plow *Twin Peaks*, can awake carrying in his/her bewildered memory the punishment of visions still not lived” (Pintor Iranzo, 2006: 73-74).³ In the case of Murakami, the relation between dream and reality is bidirectional: just like dream can become a symbol of reality, reality can become a symbol of the dreamed-about. Dreams are not a passive product of unconscious, because sometimes they can become an exhausting and demanding mandate prepared to disturb the life of the dreamer. Kafka Tamura raping Sakura in dreams is something that did not actually happen, yet it seeds some reminiscences in reality. In the second part of *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, Toru Okada, after having accessed through the well to *another oneiric dimension* where Room 208 is placed, discovers a new blue mark on his face. That interaction is perfectly summed up by the narrator and main character in *A Wild Sheep Chase*:

³Translation by the author of this paper from the original: “El sueño dobllega a la realidad y el que se interna al otro lado del espejo, de esos dinteles y marcos que surcan *Twin Peaks*, puede despertar acarreado en su desconcertada memoria la condena de las imágenes todavía no vividas”.

There are symbolic dreams—dreams that symbolize some reality. Then there are symbolic realities—realities that symbolize a dream. Symbols are what you might call the honorary town councillors of the worm universe. [...] The only way to get out of the worm universe is to dream another symbolic dream (Murakami, 1990: 79-80).

Iván Pintor Iranzo states that in Lynch's world "Sex and murder are frequently the core of a plot around which the symbolic order, that guides the spectator in a drift across the memories of the characters, falls" (2006: 94).⁴ When the police ask Fred and Renée if they have a video camera, Renée answers they do not own one because Fred hates them, and he adds: "I like to remember things my own way". Plagued by the desire to escape alienation and sexual impotency, Fred holds onto memory as a guarantee of the symbolic order that structures his narrative. He rejects the immediacy of the camera, regarding the referent, and prefers to build a story mediated *in his own way*. However, the desire of keeping the order, as any other desire, leads to the dissatisfaction of its absence. Specially through sex and murder, we attend the breakdown of that desired order.

For Lynch and Murakami, sexual elements tend to develop at the same time as the immersion into mystery of the main characters. *Blue Velvet* is also the story of sexual initiation of Jeffrey, which runs in parallel to his level of implication in the incomprehensible. Likewise, in *Lost Highway* mystery and sexual desire go hand in hand, since Fred leaves his impotency behind after transforming into Pete, a character who enjoys multiple and passionate intercoursures. In *Inland Empire*, it is the forbidden relationship between the two main characters—*forbidden in Inland Empire* as well as in the intradiegetic movie being filmed in Lynch's movie—what contributes significantly to create the increasingly tense atmosphere.

⁴[El sexo y el asesinato suelen ser, de hecho, el núcleo de una trama en torno a la cual se derrumba el orden simbólico que guía al espectador en una deriva a través de las memorias de los protagonistas] Translation by the author of this paper from the original.

Similarly, for Murakami sex also leads to inexplicable situations and incalculable effects that transform the life of the characters. In *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, we find out that Kumiko decided to leave his husband after feeling immense sexual pleasure with a stranger. Creta Kano, too, states that: “Being caressed by that man, and held by him, and made to feel such impossibly intense sexual pleasure for the first time in my life, I experienced some kind of gigantic physical change” (Murakami, 2003: 304). Likewise, in *Kafka on the Shore*, the overwhelming sexual experience lived by the teacher in her dreams is connected to the incident of the kids who fainted during a trip under her vigilance. That is the incident that causes Nakata’s amnesia. All these stories have in common the implication of the dreamed-about in the reality, as well as sex as a traumatic and overwhelming experience which essentially disrupts the inner self of the subjects, that is, the clash into the Real across dream.

Gaston Bachelard, in his *Fragments of a poetic of fire*, lays out that “At times a poetic image may do violence to sense” (1991: 12) and suggests an idea of poetic language as excess, as an aesthetic of “inflamed speech” that “responds to proponents of the theory of linguistic stability explosively, out of its own inner dynamism” (1991: 13). He adds:

If I am able to demonstrate here that in poetic imagery there burns an excess of life, an excess of language, I will be able to discover point by point the sense there is in speaking of *the heat of language*—that great hearth of undisciplined expression in which, afire with existence, in the almost mad ambition to spark some existence beyond, something beyond existence comes into being (Bachelard, 1991: 13-14).

Lynch’s iconography shows excessive and highly sexual characters. The best models would be the furious Frank Booth in *Blue Velvet* and Mr. Eddy in *Lost Highway*. According to the analysis made by Žižek, they would be identified as the “the enforcers of the fundamental respect for the socio-symbolic Law”, that “in Lynch’s films, the law is enforced through the ridiculous, hyperactive, life-enjoying agent” (2000: 22). The motif of fire, too,

asserts Pintor Iranzo, goes through Lynch's creation, starting with his first installation *Six men getting sick* (1967) and from then on (2006: 80). Fire is also manifest in Murakami's work, where its function variates between redemption and the destruction that makes it possible. Some examples of this are Okada's decision to take a new name and to burn the letters from his wife Kumiko in *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicles*, or the end of *A Wild Sheep Chase*, when the silhouette of the Rat burns after sacrificing himself with the sheep spirit, just before making his house go up in flames.

CONCLUSIONS

According to André Breton, the primary utility of dreaming lies on the movement, understood as a contradiction that pushes forward, as a vital drive: "It is the unknown source of light destined to remind us that at the beginning of the day as in the beginning of human life in earth, there can be only one resource which is *action*" (Breton, 1990: 46). In connection with this idea, the fantastic in Murakami and Lynch does not appear as a mechanism of evasion of reality, but a straightforward confrontation with it. Both creators arouse in the reader a reflexion about the quotidian and suggest our existence in an astonishing and multiple reality.

In Murakami's case, the spectrum of the quotidian seems to accept certain degree of tranquillity and protection, which can be reached through rituals that transfer material hygiene to some vital and spiritual cleanliness. Most Murakami's readers will probably identify that sensation of warmth and comfort their books give. On the contrary, bastions of calm and order are extremely rare in Lynch's films. His characters want to escape reality, but they are forced to go back to it due to the brutal crash they experiment. Yet, even in the familiar, his daily lives are hunted by the threat of alienating banality or by the imminence of a peril whose dangerous flame never fades away.

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