Lost Plays from Early Modern England: Voyage Drama, A Case Study

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Abstract

This article arises out of work on the recently launched *Lost Plays Database* (http://www.lostplays.org), and provides a case study of how consideration of lost plays can affect studies of early modern English drama. Through attention to lost travel plays, I discuss how our perception of voyage drama as a sub-genre stands to be radically revised by the fragmentary evidence of non-extant texts.

Our picture of the English Renaissance theatre (c. 1580-1642) has been shaped exclusively by the plays that were printed or have survived in manuscript form, but more than 550 plays have been lost, or exist only in manuscript fragments. Others still may have disappeared without leaving a trace. Our conception of the Renaissance stage is, therefore, a distorted one. Owing to the highly speculative nature of discussions about lost plays, these phantom texts are usually relegated to footnotes and tangential comments buried within larger academic works on the histories or repertories of playing companies. Or worse still, they are simply ignored altogether. Yet the work of early modern scholars interested in repertory studies, the history of playhouses and playing companies, Renaissance audiences and playwrights of Shakespeare's day stands to be affected by the information about lost plays that has survived. Recognising this, Roslyn L. Knutson and I have recently begun work on a collaborative digital humanities project called the Lost Plays Database (http://www.lostplays.org) to bring together the available records and scholarship pertaining to lost plays, and facilitate discussion of these non-extant texts and their significance (see Knutson and McInnis). In addition to collecting existing information from Henslowe's Diary, the Stationers Register, the Master of the Revels' records, the Records of Early English Drama, and the work of significant earlier critics like W. W. Greg, Alfred Harbage, E. K. Chambers, and G. E. Bentley, the Lost Plays Database offers new suggestions about possible narrative and dramatic sources or analogues, a reassessment of the relevant criticism, and informed speculation about the nature and significance of the lost titles in question. This attention to lost plays, we hope, will constitute an important development in the field of early modern drama studies.

In conceptualising the topic for this article, I could have chosen any number of alternative applications of the research generated by the *Lost Plays Database*. Scholars who are primarily interested in repertory studies can use the database to find information about competing and complementary offerings of the various English playing companies, such as the *Owen Tudor* play produced by the Admiral's men at the Rose playhouse in 1600. Whilst there were many chronicle sources which may have been used by Michael Drayton, Richard Hathway, Anthony Munday, and Robert Wilson in crafting this play, Roslyn Knutson astutely observes in her entry for the database that '*England's Heroical Epistles* by Michael Drayton (1598) is the likeliest source for the love story of Owen and

Katherine if for no other reason than that it was a recent English publication by one of the dramatists at work on the Admiral's play' ('Owen Tudor', http://www.lostplays.org/ index.php/Owen_Tudor). This would be significant because whilst Shakespeare's company was performing his Henry V play, which dramatised Henry's military exploits in Agincourt and wooing of Katherine, the Admiral's men may have offered an account of the love story between Katherine and her second husband, Owen Tudor.

Other scholars working on theatre history or a specific dramatist, company or time period, may augment their findings with the scholarship assembled and produced for entries of previously unfathomable lost plays. A superb research outcome of the database to date is Matthew Steggle's eminently plausible identification of playwright (William Rowley), company (Prince Henry's Men), genre (historical tragedy/foreign history), date (1613-1619) and subject matter (King Henry IV of Castile) for a play about which nothing previously was known: the curiously titled 'Henry the Una...', recorded on a playlist dubbed 'List D' on the verso of Sir George Buc's History of Richard III (British Library Cotton MS. Tiberius E. X.) ('Henry the Una', http://www.lostplays.org/index.php/ Henry the Una).

This article is concerned with genre, and takes voyage drama as its case study, mobilising evidence from the database to examine lost travel plays and their relationship to extant texts. In doing so I wish to illustrate how a sub-genre of early modern drama can appear radically different when due consideration is given to non-extant texts. In the process, I will provide various examples of the kinds of historical evidence available to critics. 1

One of the most important sources of information about early modern theatrical practices comes from the archives of Dulwich College, deposited there by the leading Elizabethan actor Edward Alleyn. These papers record the business affairs of theatre manager Philip Henslowe, most extensively associated with the Rose playhouse and the companies who played there, chiefly the Admiral's men and Strange's men. Henslowe kept records of expenses (payments to playwrights; purchases of properties and costumes) and revenue from each day's performance - much of this information pertains to plays which are no longer extant. Using evidence like Henslowe's diary, proponents of the branch of early modern scholarship known as 'repertory studies' have long recognised that 'plays presented on early modern stages were shaped not just by the genius of individual dramatists, but by patterns of company commerce' (Rutter 337). This premise leads to some interesting conclusions about how and why plays were performed. In The Repertory of Shakespeare's Company, Knutson argues that playing companies 'apparently believed that several similar plays of unremarkable quality were potentially more profitable than a single masterpiece' (50). But whilst Knutson believes that the need to stay competitive encouraged companies to run similar repertories, other critics like Andrew Gurr (especially in his Shakespeare's Opposites) have suggested that rivalry created difference between the repertories of competing companies. Both hypotheses stand to be refined by any light we can shed on plays which were once part of repertories but are now lost.

Voyage drama - that is, plays which incorporate scenes of travel, deploy genuinely exotic settings which are not mere foils for London, or are in some way concerned with the motivations and consequences of travel - occupied a consistent (if not always memorable) place in the repertory of most playing companies in Renaissance and Restoration England (see Jowitt; Parr, ed.). Marlowe's Tamburlaine plays (Admiral's, 1587, 1588) and his Doctor Faustus (Admiral's, 1592) incorporate marvellous, boundless travel, and influenced a spate of imitators like Thomas Dekker's Faustian Old Fortunatus (Admiral's, 1599), Thomas Lodge's The Wounds of the Civil War (1588; Admiral's by 1594) and Robert Greene's Selimus, Emperor of the Turks (Queen's, 1592). Critics like Daniel Vitkus

and Richmond Barbour have attended to the immense popularity of 'Turk' plays in the period, including Selimus, Robert Daborne's A Christian Turned Turk (King's, 1610) and Philip Massinger's The Renegado (Lady Elizabeth's, 1624). The anonymous Captain Thomas Stukeley (Admiral's, 1596) and George Peele's The Battle of Alcazar (Admiral's, 1589) are rare extant examples of travel plays steeped in recent history, as is Day, Rowley and Wilkins' The Travels of the Three English Brothers (Queen Anne's, 1607), which dramatises the exploits of the Shirley brothers in the East. Thomas Heywood, best known (perhaps undeservedly) as a 'prose Shakespeare' thanks to Charles Lamb, mined the entertainment value of swashbuckling adventure in his voyage dramas, which are typically set in the East and feature middle-class protagonists: The Fair Maid of the West, Parts 1 and 2 (Queen Anne's, 1610; Queen Henrietta's, 1631), Fortune by Land and Sea (with Rowley; Queen Anne's, 1609), and even The English Traveller (Queen Henrietta's, 1625) to a certain extent, fit this category.

There are also a series of plays which respond to travel satirically, such as Jonson's Volpone (King's, 1606) and Every Man Out of His Humour (Chamberlain's, 1599), and perhaps most famously, the occasionally seditious Westward Ho! (Paul's, 1604) / Eastward Ho! (Queen's Revels, 1605) / Northward Ho! (Paul's, 1605) 'trilogy'. Despite this public ridicule of voyaging, the vogue for travelling at the theatre did not abate, as Shakespeare's Pericles (King's, 1608) and The Tempest (King's, 1611), John Fletcher's The Island Princess (King's, 1621) and The Sea Voyage (King's, 1622) and numerous other plays attest.

Strangely, it is not until the mid- to late-century that we find plays actually set in the New World of the Americas (Fletcher's Island Princess is set in Indonesia, and The Tempest famously resonates with New World concerns but never explicitly identifies its setting as American). In the interregnum period, mini-operatics like Davenant's The Cruelty of the Spaniards in Peru or The History of Sir Francis Drake (both Cockpit, 1658) brought Peru and Panama to the public stage, and were joined in the Restoration by Sir Robert Howard's Indian Queen (King's, 1664) and Dryden's Indian Emperour (King's, 1665), which took Mexico as their scenes.² Aphra Behn's The Widow Ranter, or The History of Bacon in Virginia (United, 1689) and Thomas Southerne's Oroonoko (Patent, 1695) mark more than a century of voyage drama on the English stage and appear to be the first dramas informed by first-hand eyewitness experience of the New World. Unlike the Renaissance travel plays, which were predominantly concerned with fantastical travel or cynical responses to voyaging, Restoration voyage drama regularly attempted to depict historical New World subject matter.

How does the picture change if we include lost plays about travel? Some early examples of lost travel plays reinforce the characterisation of Renaissance voyage drama propounded above. Beginning on 3 February 1595, Henslowe's diary records six performances by the Admiral's men of a Fortunatus play which preceded Dekker's Old Fortunatus. There is no evidence of a second part having been written or performed, despite Henslowe's designation of this play as 'the j p of fortewnatus' (Henslowe 34). The entry is not annotated with a 'ne' - the designation commonly believed by scholars to be Henslowe's shorthand marker for plays which were new, or at least substantially revised – hence critics tend to agree that the play whose performance is recorded in February 1595 was actually an old play, probably dating back to c. 1590 (Fleay, Biographical Chronicle 1.125; Greg 179). The respectable receipts for this 3 February performance (f,3) suggest substantial revision rather than mere revival. The likelihood is strong that this older play used the same source, the German Volksbuch (1509), as Dekker's play. Some critics go so far as to assert that the lost play was revised by Dekker into his Old Fortunatus, but there is no basis for this claim: the £6 paid to Dekker for his 'hole history of ffortunatus'

(Henslowe 126) was on par with the fee paid for an entirely new play. In any event, it is clear that the 1590s stage often bore witness to the fantastical wanderings of a man in possession of a 'wishing cap' that provides magical transportation. Dekker's play premiered c. 1599/1600 at court, but the anonymous earlier play seems to have appeared as early as 1590, with a substantial revision and possibly even a second part in 1595.

A manuscript fragment from the Folger Shakespeare Library's archives offers further support for the working theory that voyage drama of the Renaissance typically embraced the 'fantastical' Faustian or 'Eastern' Tamburlainean travel modes. In A Stately Tragedy Containing the Ambitious Life and Death of the Great Cham (17th cent.? 1590s?), 3 exotic Eastern settings are combined with Faustian devils and magic. In addition to the Great Cham's history, the fragment's extended title reveals that the lost play concerned itself with the 'inchantments of Bagous the Brachman[,] with the straunge fortunes of Roxen[;] the Captiuity[,] release and death of his brother Manzor the Turchestan King[;] and [the] happy Fortunes of the Sophy of Persia[,] with the loue of Bargandell his sonne'. In other words, we initially have the makings of a typical eastern play: a captivity narrative, a Persian Sophy and Turkestan King, and an all-powerful Cham, Velruus, whose wife Drepona declares 'other courtes are cottages to this/Mayntained by my Lord the mighty Cham' (45-6). In her speculation that her husband's displeasure stems from 'our vassayles the Tartarians' having 'Bessegd or sackt some of our fronter townes' (57-8), Drepona hints at the possibility that the Cham of the lost play had even greater analogy with the all-conquering Tamburlaine of Marlowe's creation; Drepona's hyperbolical (and typically Marlovian) solution to the dilemma is for 'our army far more great' to 'Waste all Tartaria to the Northren Seas' (59, 61).

But whereas the title of this lost play would suggest an imitation of Tamburlaine on par with the 'weak sons', an engagement with Faustian magic is also evident even from the fragment's two extant pages. When Bagous the Brachman (an Eastern priest figure; possibly a eunuch) enters the stage alone, he is joined by Aldeboran, a spirit or 'deuill' who the stage direction explains 'must rise from vnder the stage in a flash of fier' (17 SD). Aldeboran wastes no time establishing a Faustian pact with Bagous, offering him diabolical temptations:

Fiendes of Auernus shall attend on thee And tremble at thine incantations Thou shalt have power to countermand the fates And to presage of future accidents To rise Latonas daughter from her spheare And blindfold Phœbus with æternall might To walke about the worlde with a wish And dart destruction and deserved death On those who manage enmities with thee If you plot your ententions with mee. (17–26)

Significantly, the allure of travel is prominent, as in Aldeboran's enticing offer of the power to 'walke about the worlde with a wish' (23), which is reminiscent both of Faustus's infernal transportations and Fortunatus's wishing cap.

Henslowe's diary records other lost plays including the two-part Tamar Cham plays from the Admiral's and Strange's repertories (1592, rev. 1596) and the play of Sir John Mandeville from Strange's (1591/1592) which probably belong to a similar domain as the plays discussed above, but I wish to turn now to some lost plays which complicate our perception of the travel play sub-genre in the Renaissance. A new play called *The New* World's Tragedy was performed at the Rose on 17 September 1595 by the Admiral's men. There are plenty of contenders for the subject matter of this intriguingly titled play: in his Revels Plays edition of Three Renaissance Travel Plays, Anthony Parr suggestively notes that The New World's Tragedy was 'perhaps inspired by the lost colony on Roanoke Island in Virginia or by the much-trumpeted atrocities of the Spanish further south' (3). Other critics have proposed Sir Francis Drake's adventures (Ramsaram 99) and more specifically the disastrous 1595 Drake-Hawkins expedition to the West Indies (Cawley 289). None of these possibilities can be accepted definitively, though minor objections can be raised against Ramsaram and Cawley's propositions (see the Lost Plays Database entry). The important point to note here is the fact of the New World having been dramatised as early as 1595: over 60 years earlier than Davenant's entertainments. Unlike many of the plays in Henslowe's diary, which are only mentioned once or twice, The New World's Tragedy was moderately successful, gaining no fewer than 11 performances from September 1595 to April 1596.

The New World was again dramatised in 1623, in the anonymous A Tragedy of the Plantation of Virginia. The play is known through two versions of its licensing by the Master of the Revels, Sir Henry Herbert. In August 1623 Herbert approved for performance 'For the Company at the Curtain; A Tragedy of the Plantation of Virginia; the profaneness to be left out, otherwise not tolerated' (Herbert 24). The Folger Shakespeare Library's scrapbooks of J. O. Halliwell-Phillipps contain a 19th-century transcript of Herbert's office book, in which an alternative licensing notes that the play was 17 sheets in length, and apparently too long for Herbert's liking (Bentley 5.1396). The critical consensus is that the play almost certainly dramatised the 1622 massacre of 347 English settlers by American Indians in Virginia, which was an historically significant turning point in the relations between colonisers and natives (on the massacre, see Vaughan 75-6, Ransome 370; on the play, see Jowitt 201-2). News of the massacre reached England via a lost ballad called 'Mourning Virginia' (10 July 1622), Christopher Brooke's 'A Poem on the Late Massacre in Virginia, with particular mention of those men of note that suffered in the disaster....' (1622), Edward Waterhouse's A Declaration of the State of the Colony in Virginia, and John Donne's 'Sermon preached to the Honourable Company of the Virginian Plantation' (13 November 1622). The event was not so much famous as infamous.

Whilst the London stage was attempting to dramatise a New World massacre in 1623, English merchants abroad in Indonesia were being subjected to atrocities at the hands of the Dutch. On 9 March 1623, 10 Englishmen were beheaded in Amboyna by order of the Dutch governor there. They stood accused of conspiring to seize control of the lucrative spice trade by capturing Fort Victoria from the Dutch. When news reached England over a year later, on 29 May 1624, it was accompanied by a flurry of pamphlets, a ballad, propagandistic iconography, and in 1625, a stage play. Letters to Sir Dudley Carleton, preserved in the Calendar of State Papers, Domestic (James I) and in the collected letters of John Chamberlain, record

a play or representation of all the busines of Amboyna redy to be acted: and of a large picture made for our East Indian companie describing the whole action in manner and forme wherupon the counsaile gave order the picture shold be supprest, the play forbidden, and the booke called in: and withall for a strong watch of 800 men extraordinarie against Shrove Tewsday to see the citie be kept quiet. (Chamberlain 602)

The scheduling of this controversial play for Shrove Tuesday, the traditional day of apprentice riots (Heinemann 209-10) suggests that its sponsors sought to deliberately tap

into the civil unrest. This Amboyna play (the intuitive title is mine; no official title is recorded) contained not only recent history, but sensitive recent history at that. Ready for production in 1625, this play was almost 50 years older than Dryden's Amboyna (1673).

We have, then, three travel plays set in the New Worlds of the Americas and Spice Islands, at least one of which depicted the colonies, all of which were tragedies. Considered independently, it is no wonder that the snippets of information about each of these plays have barely received critical attention; considered together, the sum exceeds the parts, and a new perception of Renaissance voyage drama begins to emerge. Coupled with the plays on Stukeley and the Shirleys, these lost entertainments suggest that the portrayal of recent historical events was not an aberration in voyage drama after all.

The final play I want to discuss continues but also extends the new generic line of voyage drama illustrated above. On Samuel Rowley's authorisation, Henslowe (on behalf of the Admiral's Men) paid amounts totalling £6. 15 to John Day, William Haughton and Wentworth Smith for The Conquest of the West Indies between 4 April and 1 September 1601, and an additional £15. 5. 9 for properties including suits, stockings and copper lace. All in all we have 11 notes of payments by Henslowe, and two additional letters by Samuel Rowley to Henslowe concerning this play, but no performance dates are recorded. Five sheets of the play had been written by 4 April 1601 (approximately a third of the length of the overly long Plantation of Virginia, for the sake of comparison), but Henslowe was still paying for properties 9 months later on 21 of January 1601/1602. Critics have variously suggested that this play may have dealt with Raleigh's expeditions to Virginia or Guyana (Creizenach 183n), with 'the adventures of English buccaneers' (Wright 634), or with Sir Francis Drake (Ramsaram 99), but there is a far more intriguing and plausible possibility.

An entry in the Stationer's Register for 28 January 1596 reads:

Thomas Creede/ To paie vj^d in the Pound to th[e] Use of the poore/

Entred for his Copie vnder the wardens handes. / a booke intituled The Conquest of the West Indies by HERNANDO COURTIS / and another booke intituled. The treasure for Englishmen. xij^d

The Register was a document recording publishers' assertions of rights to publish certain texts; in this instance, Thomas Creede paid sixpence to document his right to print a book with precisely the same name as the lost play: The Conquest of the West Indies. The text in question is actually a 1596 republication of The Pleasant Historie of the Conquest of the West India (Thomas Nicholls' 1578 translation of Lopez de Gomara's Spanish text). Unlike the other lost plays discussed above (with the possible exception of The New World's Tragedy, if we accept Parr's suggestion of Spanish atrocities as the subject matter), if this play were indeed based on Nicholls' translation of Lopez de Gomara, the Spanish conquistadors and their New World activities would have been the focus here. Lopez de Gomara recounts Hernando Cortez's conquest of Mexico and the defeat of the Mexican king, Montezuma ('Mutezuma' in Nicholls' translation). The text describes the Spaniards' arrival in Mexico, where they are welcomed with gracious hospitality by the natives, who greatly outnumber the Europeans (a cause of concern for Cortez). When word reaches Cortez of the massacre of nine Spaniards at the hands of the Mexican Lord,

The text limns Cortez in heroic, larger-than-life terms redolent of a Tamburlaine figure, and includes many set-piece speeches motivating his troops in a fashion that accords well with Shakespeare's Henry V. The Mexican king also has orations preserved in the text. There are numerous 'theatrical' elements of the printed text, including the dispatch and receipt of several missives, a secret door conducive to utilising the discovery space of the stage, the imprisonment of Montezuma in a fashion reminiscent of Bajazeth's incarceration by Tamburlaine, the relation and fulfilment of various prophecies, and a trial of treasure which proves the downfall of many a greedy Spaniard following the great siege of the Mexican capital at the denouement of the narrative. If Nicholls' text were followed as the primary source for the lost play, we might hazard a guess that there would have been approximately five to six main speaking parts (Cortez, Pedro Hircio, Mutezuma, Qualpopoca, Pamphilo de Narvaes, James Velasques) and four minor speaking parts (Andres de Duero, Pedro de Alvarado, Botello, Cacamazin), making a total of approximately 10 actors plus extras (NB. no allowance has been made for a fool's part here, though it would be reasonable to expect one).

In addition to providing yet another example of the New World being dramatised earlier than is commonly supposed, this lost 1601 play provides a theatrical precursor to extant texts which also deal with the story of Cortez and Montezuma. The first of these is the little known Latin manuscript play, *Montezuma sive Mexici Imperii Occasus*, probably by the Jesuit playwright Joseph Simons (1594–1671; alias of Emmanuel Lobb), based at the English College of St. Omers, Pas de Calais (see Sutton and Simons). Written on the Continent and existing only in manuscript form, it is uncertain whether this play would have been known to the English, but the second example I have in mind would undoubtedly have been known by many and all in London: Dryden's *The Indian Emperour* (1665). As is likely with the lost Admiral's play, Lopez de Gomara was also one of Dryden's known sources, though probably in French.⁴

Despite the implicit claims of distinctive originality which Dryden makes in his prefatory letter to Princess Anne – namely, that Montezuma's story is 'perhaps the greatest, which was ever represented in a Poem of this nature (the action of it including the Discovery and Conquest of a New World)' (25) – there were theatrical precursors dramatising the conquest of the New World. Davenant's aforementioned *Cruelty of the Spaniards in Peru*, which premiered in 1658, had recently been reprised as a self-contained Act in Davenant's *The Playhouse to be Let* (August 1663) at Lincoln's Inn Fields – just months before *The Indian Queen* debuted at the Theatre Royal, and around a year and a half before *The Indian Emperour* (April 1665). But the Jesuit play, and more importantly for the native English tradition, the lost *Conquest of the West Indies*, constitute substantially earlier precursors which may have been significant; especially if, as Samuel Rowley claimed of the 1601 play in his letter to Henslowe, 'I dow not doute but It wyll be a verye good playe' (Henslowe 294). Dryden's *Indian Emperour* thus had a demonstrable stage history as one of a number of dramatisations of the conquest of the New World.

As such, it must be understood as innovating within an established field spanning the 17th century, rather than as a completely novel theatrical experience localised entirely in the 1660s.

Theatre historians who ignore lost plays are restricting themselves to approximately half the output of the English Renaissance theatre (e.g. see Gurr, Shakespeare Company 126-7). Whilst a good deal of the scholarship pertaining to lost plays is speculative, it is intelligent, educated speculation, and in the case of the Lost Plays Database, always supported by historical documentation. This new, responsible, documented speculation contrasts sharply with the at times whimsical and almost always undocumented and unjustified speculation of early critics like F. G. Fleay (see Biographical Chronicle or Chronicle History). To fully appreciate a playwright's dramatic output, a company's reportorial strategies and offerings, a trend in theatrical productions, or the characteristics of a genre or sub-genre of early modern plays, due acknowledgement must be accorded to those plays which once constituted a commercially viable or privately enjoyable offering, but have not survived.

Short Biography

David McInnis completed his PhD in the English programme at the University of Melbourne, where his thesis examined vicarious travel and the early modern English stage. His work has been published or accepted for publication in such journals as SEL: Studies in English Literature 1500-1900, Notes & Queries, Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England, Ariel and Parergon. He has co-edited a special issue of Early Modern Literary Studies on the theme 'Embodying Shakespeare' and a book on 'Refashioning Myth' for Cambridge Scholars Press. With Roslyn L. Knutson, he edits the Lost Plays Database, and has been awarded a short-term Fellowship at the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington DC to pursue research on lost plays.

Notes

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- ¹ When working with historical records of lost plays, caution must be exercised in assuming from a title alone that a play actually concerned itself with – in this case – voyaging (or whatever subject matter a scholar is investigating). Extant masques, for example, sometimes carry titles which misleadingly read as though the entertainment involved travel: Jonson's News from the New World Discovered in the Moon (1620) and The Fortunate Isles (1625), for example (I am grateful to the anonymous reader who reminded me to mention this complication). On the basis of the evidence I provide here and in the LPD, however, the likelihood seems high to me that the lost plays discussed in this article were actually voyage drama.
- ² On the now once again disputed authorship of *The Indian Queen*, see Spielman's excellent historical survey of attributions and his convincing suggestion that Dryden's role in the collaboration was minimal.
- ³ Harbage lists the MS fragment in Supp. List I and assigns it to the 17th century; the Folger catalogue tentatively suggests a c. 1590 date (which seems a little too early to me).
- ⁴ On Dryden's sources, see the California edition, 307–18, and Macmillan. Gomora's analogue of Dryden's torture scene (5.2) does not appear in Nichols's English translation, but it does appear in the French (see Macmillan 368).

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