

**POETRY AND VISUAL ARTS: THE POETIC-IMAGETIC AND PICTORIAL
BOND IN MÁRIO DE SÁ-CARNEIRO**

Poesia e Artes Visuais: o vínculo poético-imagético e pictórico em Mário de Sá-Carneiro

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Abstract

The present article deals with the theme of poetry and the visual arts, which interconnect and connect more deeply than they may appear to. Since ancient times, poetry, and visual art (especially concerning images and painting) have been companions, often indivisible. Now, over the centuries, there have been a profusion of authors who aim to touch both arts. Mário de Sá-Carneiro is one of them. Therefore, the subsequent paper will embark on the wide poetic, imagistic and pictorial ocean that is contemplated in the poetics of this figure who marked both poetry and its graphic and pictorial character, breaking the border that separates both arts. This paper will start by questioning: "How do Mário de Sá-Carneiro's verses illustrate the connection between poetry, painting and image?". Thus, it will be possible to ascertain, in the following words, this connection. It will be possible to understand how poetry and painting, or image can connect, arts that since the beginning accompany the human being. For this purpose, authors such as Fernando Cabral Martins, a specialist in modern literature studies and great admire and scholar of Sá-Carneiro, will be addressed.

Resumo

O presente artigo prende-se com o tema da poesia e das artes visuais, cujas se interligam e conectam mais profundamente daquilo que possam aparentar. Desde tempos antigos, a poesia e a arte visual (especialmente no que concerne à imagem e à pintura) são companheiras, muitas vezes indivisíveis. Ora, ao longo dos séculos, surgem profusos autores que visam tocar ambas as artes. Mário de Sá-Carneiro é um deles. Assim sendo, o subsequente documento embarcará no largo oceano poético, imagético e pictórico que se contempla na poética desta figura que marcou tanto a poesia como o seu caráter gráfico e pictórico, quebrando a fronteira que aparentemente separa ambas as artes. Este documento será incitado por uma questão de partida, nomeadamente "De que modo os versos de Mário de Sá-Carneiro ilustram a conexão entre poesia, pintura e imagem?". Destarte, será possível averiguar, nas subsequentes palavras, esta ligação. Poder-se-á compreender o quão a poesia e a pintura ou a imagem têm a capacidade de se conectar, artes que desde os primórdios acompanham o ser humano. Para tal efeito, serão abordados autores como Fernando Cabral Martins, especialista em estudos de literatura moderna e grande apreciador e estudioso de Sá-Carneiro.

Palavras-chave: *Artes Visuais; Mário de Sá-Carneiro; Modernismo; Poesia.*

Keywords: *Mário de Sá-Carneiro; Modernism; Poetry; Visual Arts.*

Data de Submissão: setembro de 2022 **Publication date:** dezembro de 2023.

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INTRODUCTION

In the course of the following text, starting from the starting question “How do Mário de Sá-Carneiro’s verses illustrate the connection between poetry, painting and image?”, it will become feasible to understand the poem *Manucure* (1915) by Mário de Sá-Carneiro as a poem that alludes to the link between poetry and the visual arts. These visual arts will alternate between the image, the graphics of the words and the allusion to pictorial frames constructed through the author's verses. Some authors, researchers, teachers and scholars of Sá-Carneiro's subject matter will be mentioned, more particularly this poem of his, which embraces artistic vanguards such as cubism, futurism, intersectionism, among others.

Poetry and the art of the image, as well as painting, have been associated for many years. Such is the example of ekphrastic poetry, which goes back to illustrious classical texts, being known as the practice of describing, through poetry, a work of art. This practice is based on the relationship between word and image. This relationship has given rise, over the centuries, to a debate among intellectuals. Horácio¹ used the term *ut pictura poesis* to suggest that poetry should allude to painting, that is, that a poem should have pictorial qualities and, through imagination, resemble what it describes. Now, despite the fact that Sá-Carneiro's poems do not bear such a duty, we witness a demonstration of this throughout his verse. In the poem *Manucure*, the description of the poetic subject is so explicit that it alludes to a pictorial imaginary. The link between both art manifested itself, moreover, in Portuguese experimental poetry, through which words and reading gain a new form, building images and breaking the traditional character of reading, being observable a certain graphism in the words.

Furthermore, Mário de Sá-Carneiro was part of the Orpheu⁴ generation, remembered up to the present day by modern literature, which often transcends the era in which it subsisted. In *Manucure*, there are both imaginary pictorial aspects such as graphics and the image of words, as well as the use of collage, which will be investigated in this article.

Portuguese poet and short-story writer, Mário de Sá-Carneiro was part of the illustrious Generation d'Orpheu⁵, being one of the founders of the magazine that had a

⁴ Lyric poet and satirist, as well as philosopher of Ancient Rome.

⁸ It is noteworthy to mention that this generation of artists has a dispersive attitude that allowed them to discover that an entity can equally be: Apollonian and Dionysian, bright and dark, good and bad; i.e., these artists accepted the divisible quality of the human being.

considerable impact on Portuguese literature and culture in the 20th century. He was born in the Portuguese capital in 1890 and, after living between Lisbon and Paris, ended up dying in 1916 at the Hotel Nice located in the city of lights. From an early age, Mário began to write around the theater, and later he began to explore prosaic narrative, as well as poetry.

According to Fernando Cabral Martins: “Owner of an unusual personality, Mário de Sá Carneiro turned [his] life [into] a very attractive book due to the complexity, surprise and fascination of his inner world” (Martins 1995, p. 163). Complemented by an unusual narrator who recounts and goes through experiences embellished by the fantastic, homoeroticism and oneirism, his life encompasses experiences inherently intertwined with the self-destruction of the self. His work is scarce, in the quantitative sense, due to the fact that he left at a young age. However, what remains of it means that whoever reads Sá-Carneiro cannot go unnoticed by its linguistic ability and poetic content, even if it is a story.

The Pictorial Vanguard of Sá-Carneiro

The Lisbon poet's interest in the visual arts was not limited to his own painting and drawing. Given that, since 1912, the author of *A Confissão de Lúcio* has been in direct connection with modern art and literature. He becomes hermetic to innovations, and he decides to spontaneously and impulsively explore the different vanguards that are interconnected through anti-traditionalism and cosmopolitanism (Piedade, 1994, p. 35). In his literary works, Sá-Carneiro weaves together visual elements, such as vivid descriptions of color and shape, to create a dynamic and sensorial reading experience. An example of such a statement is given by the scene in the novel *A Confissão de Lúcio* (1914), in which the storyteller uses color and light to convey the state of mind of a character: “(...) ...Until finally, in a mystery, the fire went out in gold and, dead, his body floated heraldic over the golden waters – peaceful, dead too...” (Sá-Carneiro, 2009, p. 30). This quotation not only creates a vivid and sensorial experience for the reader, but also captures the subject's exaltation in his context. However, the use of visual elements by Sá-Carneiro is not limited to color and light, as the poet of *Céu em Fogo* (1915) includes geometric and fragmented forms in his writing – especially in his poetry.

Although, for the most part, Sá-Carneiro's writings are made just for reading (that is to say, there is nothing in the poems or texts that alludes to the reader, from the outset, to imagery) the poet published, in 1915, in the magazine he founded⁶, the poem entitled *Manucure*. This poem focuses on factors related to space and the objects it contains, time and action. In this way, the poet offers the reader a cubist and futuristic perspective on life, alluding to vanguards such as symbolism, paulism, sensationism, decadence, intersectionism, among others. In addition, regarding the poem *Manucure*, it is possible to note the presence of the intersectional⁷ literary current that is distinguished by the blending of different sensations.

Living in the Parisian environment, Sá-Carneiro was greatly influenced by and influenced by the emergence of Cubist painters of the time. His poem begins in the morning, in a cafe, portraying the moment when the poet takes care of his nails, in the case of a manicure: "In the feeling of polishing my nails" (Sá-Carneiro, 1915, p. 25) Initially, the subject appears a certain annoyance, even lamenting his current subsistence state. The surrounding environment portrayed is based on a perennial melancholy, revealing a routine character. Quoting its first stanza:

(...) I include myself in Me – piously. / So here I am alone in the Café / In the morning, as always, in yellow yawns. / Back, just the tables – ungrateful / And hard, cornered in their clumsiness / Boçal, quadrangular and free-thinking... (Sá-Carneiro, 1915, p. 25).

As for the subsequent verses, it is possible to note the presence of the dandy⁸: "(...) And I always feel like I'm polishing my / [my nails] / And painting them with a Parisian varnish, / I'm getting more and more tender / Until cry for Me..." (Sá-Carneiro, 1915: see page). With this, the lyrical *Eu* shows its sensitivity to "(...) Parisian luxury, the temptations of Fashion and above all the bored decadent artificiality." (Rocha, 1955, p. 21). In other words, the subject represents a subspecies of the intellect, assigning enormous value and attention to aesthetic values and the beauty of details. Therefore, the

⁶ *Orpheu Magazine* nº2. Second edition of the magazine created by Fernando Pessoa and Mário de Sá-Carneiro, containing poems by numerous poets of the 20th century such as Ângelo de Lima, Raul Leal, Luís de Montalvão, among others.

⁷ A estética interseccionista, criada por Fernando Pessoa, corresponde à consciência do relativismo, como afirma Clara Rocha: "(...) o conhecimento humano não é absoluto, só pode apreender o todo desintegrando-o nas suas partes constituintes (assim, não podemos ver uma laranja toda duma só vez). Como o cubismo na pintura, pretende realizar a conjunção, o cruzamento de vários planos distintos (temporais, espaciais, vivenciais, etc.) na linearidade do discurso." (Rocha, 1995, p. 46).

⁸ This expression alludes to dandyism that aims at the transparency of the dandy, that is, of a perfectly perfect gentleman, a man who chooses to live life intensely.

lyrical self is characterized as a thinker, however dilettante (someone who dedicates himself for pleasure and not because he has to), who occupies his time with leisure, playful and idle activities, possessing an obsession with social classes and a dissidence by the vulgar – usual in the writing of Mário de Sá-Carneiro.

Ditto, the subject also recalls his Parisian past, briefly and taciturnly:

I become more and more tender / Until I cry for Me... A thousand colors
in the Air, a thousand throbbing vibrations, / Misty planes deviated (...)
/ They even tenuously outline me / All the tenderness that I could have
experienced, / All the greatness that I could have felt (...) / It is there,
in the great Mirror of ghosts / That undulates and gives way to all my
past, / My present crumbles, / And my future is already dust... (Sá-
Carneiro, 1915, pp. 26-27).

In another moment of the poem, the poetic I transits from its gloomy contemplation to an imaginary Universe. Departing from Air, he begins his avant-garde adventure, based on the immeasurable environment that adorns him. Put away your polishing file. The ecstatic atmosphere begins:

Then I lay down my files, / My scissors, my varnish wells, / The
polishers of my sensation - / And I let my eyes go mad with Air! / Oh!
To be able to exhaust everything that is encrusted in it, / Cut through its
Beauty – without support, anyway! - / Singing what he revolves, and
molds, impregnates, / Spreads and expands in vibrations (...) / What
solid triangles through the broken naves! / What propellers behind a
vertical flight! / What graceful spheres succeeding a tennis ball! (...)
(Sá-Carneiro, 1915, p. 27).

Travel to every corner and then some. He lets himself be carried away by the environment that surrounds him, on the coffee tables, in the reflection of mirrors and windows, in the solar luminescence, in the city movement, in the people who surround him, among others. The poetic subject finds himself, at a certain point, lost in the Air that adorns him; beginning to envision shapes, triangles, spheres, colors - reds, yellows, golds, endless pictures of sensations that the atmosphere transmits to you. The tables that were once painted with routine and melancholy, appear with new life, new shapes, embraced by endless colors. His soul begins to wander through an atmospheric canvas, now painted by the environment that surrounds him, by the city life he contemplates: from the people to their gestures and movements, to the objects they carry; giving it an undeniable futuristic character, uniting your soul and mind with everything you see and feel, as if it were part of you. Geometric shapes appear in the air, “What brutal vertices diverging,

creaking (...)” (Sá-Carneiro, 1915, p. 28). As if the city and the air itself were a canvas where infinite manifestations of everything that is form, color and life are tinted:

(...) If apache knives intersect / (...) And by the stations and the shipping docks, / The large accumulated crates, / (...) All inserted in Ar, / Fond of it, separated by it / In multiple interstices / By where I feel my Soul wandering!... / - O futuristic beauty of merchandise! /how I wanted to touch you!/ The wood of the crates,/ How I longed to sink my teeth into you!/ And the nails, the ropes, the hoops.../but, above all,/ How they dance sparkling/ To my daring eyes of beauty,/ The inscriptions of all these bales/ – Black, red, blue or green – / Shouts of current and commerce and industry (...). (Sá-Carneiro, 1915, p. 28).

Idem, the use of short and broken lines, as well as geometric shapes, allow the writer to convey a sense of chaos and fragmentation through his verses.

– Look at the tables...Hey! Hey! / There they all go cavorting in the Air, / In instantaneous series of squares / There – but now, further away, in deviated diamonds... / And the rows intermingle inextricably, / And the garish insinuations mingle with the months / From the stands of red velvet / Which, flanking it, run the entire Café... / And, higher, in oblique planes, / Air symbolisms of tenuous heraldries / Dazzle the checks of the straw backs / Of the chairs that, slumbering in their horizontal sleep, (...)” (Sá-Carneiro, 1915, p. 29).

The lyrical self observes the tables around it, the windows, the chairs intersecting in a sublime harmony - the space it is in is no longer a common space, but rather a metamorphosis of a cubist painting, painted in exuberant colors and in mind-blowing shapes. “(...) my futuristic eyes, my cubist eyes, my intersectional eyes (...)” (Sá-Carneiro, 1915, p. 29). The poet gives life to a static setting, to an event as banal as sitting at a cafe table; he combines the different events, painting a picture that harmonizes imagination and reality. In addition, he refers “It is in the air that everything wavers! That's where everything exists!” (Sá-Carneiro, 1915, p. 30), this Ar being a fantasy place created by him, sitting at that coffee table, initially while polishing his nails, while painting an imaginary picture of “(...) multicolored dust (...)” (Sá-Carneiro, 1915, p. 30) that surrounds it, referring to the birth of the European artistic avant-gardes that shook the culture and art of the 20th century, as well as its body and spirit. The cosmos created from the café in which it is located wanders through a series of arts. The poetic subject also alludes to the sound spasm inciting the futuristic wonder, the ecstasy in which he finds himself in the face of all this. Elevating sound to image quality, as will be seen later. Pay attention to the following verses:

A voice asks for a number on the telephone: / North – 2,0,5,7... / And in the Air, molds of numbers are stuck (...) / Farther away, a servant drops a tray... / There is no end to the wonder! / A new whirlwind of silvery waves / It expands into circular, glittering, rustling echoes (...) (Sá-Carneiro, 1915, p. 31).

The pictorial art, according to his words, wanders through the station and through the textured air, filled with avant-garde, culture and 20th century agitation. He travels in the temporal and spatial substance inserted in the mind of the lyrical self when faced with such changes, starting his artistic journey from an act as simple as polishing his own nails. In the final part of the poem, the poetic subject gets up from his table and feels defeated, perhaps because he is nothing more than a human who sees himself incapable of matching and accompanying everything he contemplates, given that his unadaptation to existence is constant. This excitement for the “new” leads the poetic subject to embark on a ship of art, allowing himself to be totally dyed by it. As José Luciano de Melo states in “Mário de Sá-Carneiro: A Cubist Painter Between Futurism and Intersectionism”:

Effectively, Mário de Sá-Carneiro exposes an artistic thought with a view to the transformations and innovations that modernity would reveal from then on. However, the poetic excerpt provides more than the account of the New that appears at that moment: impregnated in the description is the glimpse, the enchantment, the illumination that Art offers to the poet (Melo, 2008, p. 5).

The Graphics of Words in Manucure (1915)

As observed so far, this poem contains an entire pictorial Universe based on the European artistic vanguards and their peak, showing that, in his verses, Mário de Sá-Carneiro paints an imaginary picture, with cubist and futuristic aspects, crossing objects, colors and sensations. Futurism, cubism and intersectionism, despite being distinct vanguards, end up unifying in these verses, forming a poem full of avant-garde references. Intersectionism and the geometric character were part of Orpheu⁹ 2, as asserted by Fernando Cabral Martins (2013):

In Orpheu 2, which is already, unlike Orpheu 1, of a radically non-symbolist poetic nature, the “fury of plastic geometry” is immediately seen in the cover design, it is reflected in the intersectional compositions of Santa Rita Pintor in the body of the magazine, manifests itself in the poems of Sá-Carneiro and can be read in the long intersectional poem by Fernando Pessoa: *Oblíqua Rain* (Martins, 2013, p. 1).

⁹ This magazine, in which the poem “Manucure” by Sá-Carneiro and other intersectionist poems was published, is, in itself, an open aesthetic project. “bizarre”, the “unusual”, among others.

Starting from what he contemplates around him, Sá-Carneiro builds a picture with his eyes and sensations, allowing the reader to idealize this entire pictorial Universe, thus making it possible to find a strong connection between poetry and painting, as well as the exterior – the environment, the people, the objects, himself and the interior – the imagination and the avant-garde vision. As Martins says:

[...] Intersectionism is understood by Sá-Carneiro as the crossing of the visible and the invisible. Sá-Carneiro quotes a phrase (attributed to Taine) that makes clear the core value of this understanding: “Beautiful is everything that provokes in us the sensation of the invisible” (Martins, 2013, p. 4).

Likewise, professor and researcher Paula Cristina Costa (2008) reflects on all the avant-garde aesthetics in *Manucure's* verses:

[...] a poem that, by exalting an entire cubist and futuristic aesthetic, uses the successive and vertiginous interpenetration of planes, the mixture of sensations and different registers, ranging from the initial situation of the poet’s coffee experience (much to the taste of poets de Orpheu) that quells his boredom while polishing his nails, to the daring and hilarious re-enactments of the adventure of a new beauty that, in apothecotic mutations, sings the freedom of words and imagination (Costa, 2008, p. 364).

However, another aspect that cannot be overlooked is the graphic character of its words. During the poem, the poetic subject integrates newspaper headlines, numbers and moving onomatopoeias into his text, thus including an imagery character in his verses. The words and numbers that he incorporates into the poem form, by themselves, small images that the reader not only reads (as in a normal poem) but also visualizes. – just like looking at an image. In line with what Maria Mikhailovna Mazniak (2016) mentions:

(...) the author focuses on the “rise of numerical beauty”, placing numbers and arithmetic signs in aesthetic order: sometimes as a kind of radio wave, sometimes imitating sea waves – shortly before *Manucure*, telegraph cables were past the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean. And the poet concludes his “formula” with the mathematical sign of infinity (∞), which symbolizes both the in-finity of space and limitless communication. At the same time, the layout of the figures graphically resembles the musical staff, as it occupies five lines with five figures on the left, arranged from bottom to top (Mazniak, 2016, p. 250).

This graphic and imagistic aspect that Sá-Carneiro includes in his poetry demonstrates his propensity for futurism, “(...) surrender to the wave nature of sounds and attraction to numbers” (Mazniak, 2016, p. 250).

All this character is revealing of the appreciation for the futuristic movement and agitation, for the different characters and for their hallucinatory energy, referring to a new way of writing and even reading, a “typographic revolution” based on the graphics of words and sounds. Examples of this are figures 1 and 2:

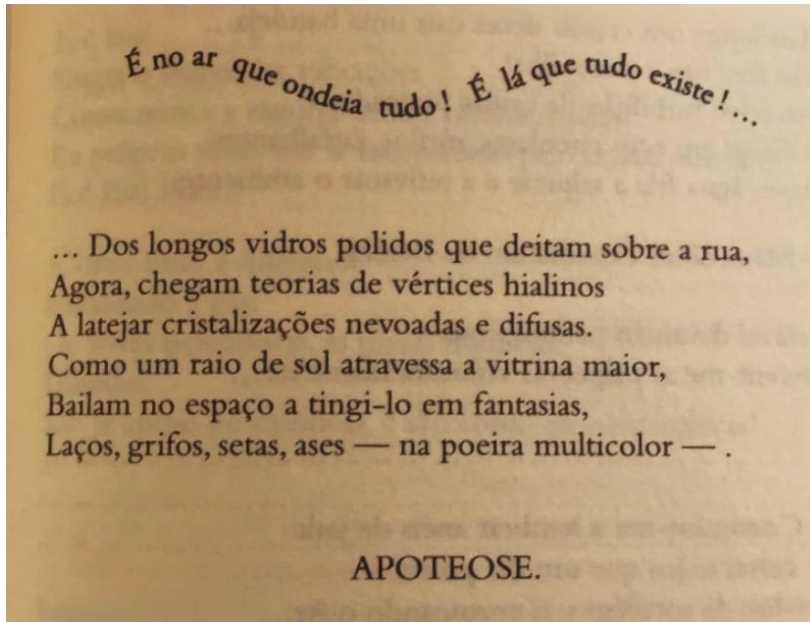


Figure 1. Poem *Apoteose*.

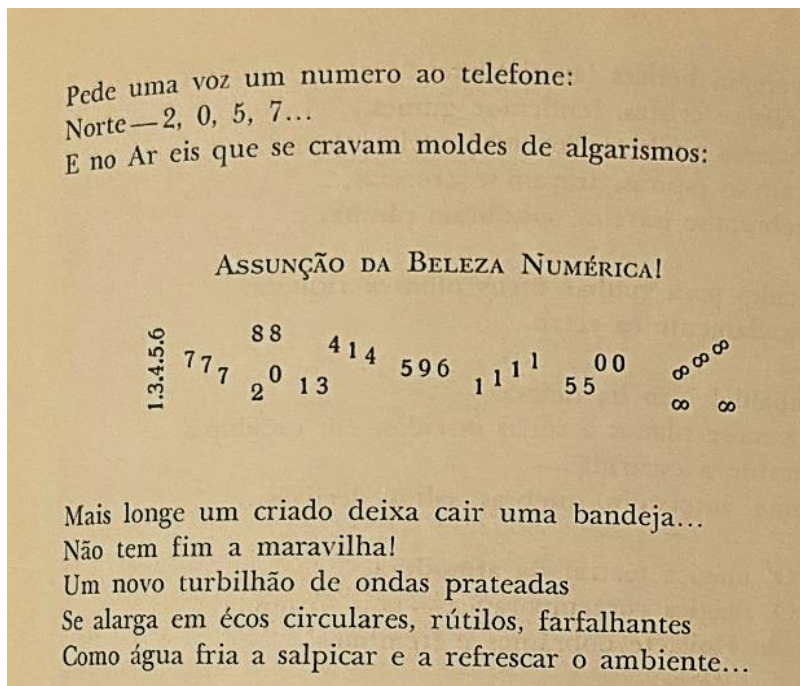


Figure 2. Poem *Manucure*.

Finally, according to the ideas presented by Clara Rocha:

It is curious to see that our author [Mário de Sá-Carneiro] was interested in the visualizing possibilities of poetic language, and in general in the verbal games that result from a conceptualization of art as a ludic activity without an immediate significant purpose (Rocha, 1955, p. 49).

This means that the short story writer from Lisbon followed the ideal of *l'art pour l'art*, that is, he seeks beauty for the sake of beauty and art for the sake of art, rejecting the notion that art should have a social purpose or moral. In this way, the search for artistic beauty must be governed only by its aesthetic pleasure, freeing itself from all other values. Thus, Mário de Sá-Carneiro becomes a revolutionary figure in the context of Portuguese literature, as he explored and practiced his own form of writing, his own poetic style. This style is based and determined by your visual experiences.

CONCLUSION

Mário de Sá-Carneiro lived at the altar in Lusitanian Modernism, becoming adored for his themes around madness and desire, but, above all, for his genius and poetic innovation.

Sá-Carneiro's enjoyment of the visual arts was incessantly and repeatedly a central and basic part of his artistic vision. His fascination with the aforementioned avant-gardes and the use of visual elements in the sentences of his texts help to sculpt the Portuguese modernist movement, inspiring future generations of artists. Furthermore, it is notable to state that Manucure's poet breaks the chains imposed by modernist "isms", given that he carefully and fleetingly explores each one of them, molding them in the manner of his narrative and poetic style.

Concisely, in response to the question posed at the beginning of this document, Sá-Carneiro demonstrates the connection between poetry and image through the graphics that he insists on including in his verses in *Manucure*. It builds, in the margins of its pages, a new typographic cosmos that intertwines the letter and the image. It encompasses and describes futuristic paintings around it as if it were a painting. It takes to Modernism a link that has been established since antiquity, capable of traveling through time — a relationship between poetry and image.

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