



Beauty and Meaning

un respiro, uno y uno de del cuello hasta la cintura

Ejercicio de mayordomía. Oficio lo siguiente, p de mayordomía desde se debe. L cristiano en la de la cultura

11 de mayo

como un que yo

University of California, Irvine • Main Library
Muriel Aradley Reynolds Exhibit Gallery
November 2002 - April 2003

Art and Poetry in the Book Arts of Mexico

Mexico

Beauty and Meaning **Beauty and Meaning**

Art and Poetry in the Book Arts of Mexico



An exhibit in
the UC Irvine Main Library's
Muriel Ansley Reynolds Exhibit Gallery

November 2002 - April 2003

Curated by
Lourdes Bates

Foreword

Welcome to the UC Irvine Libraries' fall 2002 exhibit, *Beauty and Meaning: Art and Poetry in the Book Arts of Mexico*. This exhibit was inspired by the Libraries' recent purchase of a group of exceptional research materials, all of which are prime examples of fine and artistic books produced over the last 35 years. All but two of the books on exhibit have been purchased for the Department of Special Collections and Archives since the year 2000.

These books were purchased to strengthen the collections which support the research and teaching of faculty and graduate students in UCI's Department of Spanish and Portuguese. The library's collections and services are developed to enhance the quality of UCI's academic programs.

Beauty and Meaning: Art and Poetry in the Book Arts of Mexico was curated by Lourdes Bates, a graduate student in Spanish and Portuguese. Her doctoral research on Mexico's book artists has brought her into personal contact with many of the artists whose works are represented in our exhibit, and her insights add an important dimension to each viewer's understanding.

We are particularly pleased that UCI Professor of Spanish Juan Bruce-Novoa is the lecturer for our exhibit opening on November 6, 2002. He is a pioneering scholar of 20th-century Mexican artists and writers, as well as a novelist, poet, translator, and visual artist. He is thus exceptionally well prepared to lend both scholarly and personal insights to our exhibit.

On behalf of both the Partners of the UC Irvine Libraries and the entire library staff, we welcome you to this exhibit and invite you to return to view others in the future.

Gerald J. Munoff
University Librarian

On Cover:
Yani Pecanins. *Patrones*. Mexico City, 1994.
Artists' book in accordion-fold codex format.

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Art and Poetry in the Book Arts of Mexico

“Before the aesthetic revolution, the value of works of art pointed to another value. That value was the interconnection between beauty and meaning: art objects were things that were perceptual forms, that in turn were signs. The meaning of a work was multiple ...”

Octavio Paz, *In Praise of Hands*, 1974

The interplay between word and image has been an integral part of Mexican art and culture for centuries, dating back to traditions inherited from both medieval Spain and Mexico’s pre-Hispanic Mesoamerican cultures. In the late 20th century, Latin American cultures began to confront postmodernity with its accompanying political, economic, and technological changes and challenges. Artists and writers have responded by producing works deeply embedded with regional and cultural signs, that also incorporate global concepts and ideas, and they have presented these works in the form of books. In a complex world in which words are sometimes not sufficient to convey meaning, they are re-using and reinterpreting traditional images for our postmodern world.

This exhibition presents a sampling of works produced by book artists in Mexico during the past 35 years, emphasizing the inherently collaborative process by which they were created, their hybrid condition as both books and works of art, and the quality of craftsmanship. The contributions of visual artists, poets, editors, translators, publishers, printers, and book designers are highlighted to emphasize both their individual talents and the inspirations they bring to each other. Some of the works typify a contemporary Mexican style that has been termed “neo-Baroque” in which artists evoke the rich, ornate, and inherently multifaceted nature of works of art of the Baroque period in Latin America. Neo-Baroque works

incorporate elements from multiple sources (such as disparate stylistic influences, cultural symbols, moments in time, physical materials, etc.) and present them in a fresh context.

The nature of the creative partnership and the genesis of the textual and visual content vary from book to book. In some cases, two or three individuals create an entirely new work together. In others, an existing text is interpreted by a visual artist. Certain books reflect experiments by visual artists who are exploring a new medium. The contributions of editors, designers, and specialists in various book crafts complete the creative circle. All of these books challenge art galleries, large publishing houses, and producers of commercial art by making available a cultural product that is highly individual.

The exhibit opens by acknowledging the influence of earlier artistic traditions. Facsimile images illustrate the origins of Mexican visual and textual traditions in Spanish medieval manuscripts and Mesoamerican *códices* (Items 1 and 2). Both of these antecedents highlight the rich interplay between word and image throughout the history of Mexican books. Leaping forward in time to the work of contemporary artist Derli Romero, it is then interesting to note the stylistic inheritance from pre-Hispanic *códices* in the work of this native of Michoacán, Mexico (Items 3 and 4). Romero is the artist, author, printer, and publisher of these books, which makes them true “artist’s books.”

Many items in the exhibit are from a collection recently acquired by the UC Irvine Libraries: the complete published output of Ediciones Papeles Privados, a small and exclusive publishing house in Mexico City. Papeles Privados was founded by and continues under the direction of writer Mario del Valle and his wife, literature professor Maricela Terán. Del Valle began his career as a journalist, writing for a small provincial newspaper owned by his grandfather. After moving to Mexico City and graduating from the university, he worked as an art critic for an urban newspaper. Beginning in 1981 he and Terán began publishing books of poetry, each of which features an integral visual component.

Their books consciously create active dialogue between visual art and poetry, while also confronting particular technical and aesthetic challenges. The publishers conceptualize each work, match writers with visual artists, bring together the necessary book arts specialists, and contribute editorial expertise. The authors and artists range from the internationally acclaimed to the unknown. Elegant and individually designed, the books are made using highest quality materials. Each includes one or more works of art created especially for that edition. All titles are issued in very limited editions, ranging from 100 to 350 copies.

In the works on exhibit that were published by other presses, or by the artists themselves, one can see the variety of approaches taken by contemporary Mexican book artists. The earliest work in the exhibit, *Discos visuales* (1968), is an example of a visual presentation style that precedes neo-Baroque art. The performativity of poetry (that is, the ability of some poems literally to “perform”) becomes evident in this “book” designed by Vicente Rojo using text from Mexico’s Nobel laureate poet Octavio Paz (Item 23). In a much more recent example, installation artist Felipe Ehrenberg renders a neo-Baroque view of his urban environment by fully integrating text with image in his *Codex aeroscriptus Ehrenbergensis* (Item 19). The use of text within image is evident in the artist’s book *Patrones* made by Yani Pecanins, who celebrates the symbiosis between women’s domestic labors and intellectual talents in her unique creations (Item 18). Finally, the close relationship that visual artist Magali Lara shares with words becomes evident in her curatorial work for an exhibition of artists’ books (Item 21).

Two items in the exhibit were published outside of Mexico, yet are included to draw attention to shared Latin American traditions and issues. *El angel blanco*, created by Cuban poet Alfredo Zaldivar and visual artist Yohan Enrique Trujillo, is an outstanding example of creativity in the face of severe economic hardship and shortage of traditional bookmaking materials (Item 10). In contrast, the highly political, magnificently executed *Codex Espangliensis*, published in Santa Cruz, California, reveals what can be achieved when the availability of fine materials and

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funding are non-issues (Item 20). This joint project of performance artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña working with artists Enrique Chagoya and Felicia Rice is a neo-Baroque work that integrates history, images and text. As with the Ehrenberg, it takes the accordion-fold format of a traditional *códice*.

From pre-Hispanic codices to neo-Baroque art, from emerging artists to Nobel laureate poets, from artists' books produced inexpensively using "found" objects to elegantly designed and printed limited editions: an array of works emerges from these contrasts that exhibit fascinating interactions between word and image. All are juxtapositions of beauty and meaning created in response to contemporary cultural issues.

Beauty and Meaning: Art and Poetry in the Book Arts of Mexico was curated by Lourdes Bates, graduate student in UC Irvine's Department of Spanish and Portuguese, whose doctoral research is focused on contemporary Mexican book arts. All items in the exhibit are from the collections of Special Collections and Archives in the UC Irvine Libraries.

1. Maius and Florentius (artist-scribes)

A Spanish Apocalypse: the Morgan Beatus Manuscript.

New York: G. Braziller and the Pierpont Morgan Library, 1991.

The Morgan Beatus Manuscript, produced in a 10th-century Spanish monastery, is an example of the rich tradition of word and image brought to the "New World" by Spanish missionaries. This medieval folio contains text from the Old Testament (Book of Daniel I:1). In the image shown, King Nebuchadnezzar witnesses the blinding of the defeated King of Judah to his right and the slaying of his sons to his left. The accompanying text both provides useful information and complements the overall composition.

2. Martín de la Cruz (author)

Juan Badianus (artist-scribe)

The Badianus Manuscript: An Aztec Herbal of 1552 (Codex Barberini, Latin 241, Vatican Library).

Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1940.

The *Codex Badianus* is an example of a Colonial-era Mesoamerican *códice* prepared by an Indian scribe, known as a *tlacuilo*. These scribes were trained in the Spanish writing style so that they could document Indian traditions and history under the guidance of missionary priests. This treatise of Aztec herbal medicine, the only known primary record of Aztec medical practices, was a collaboration between the Aztec physician Martín de la Cruz and the Indian scribe Juan Badianus, who transcribed the text into Latin at the Colegio de la Santa Cruz in Tlalteloco, Mexico. Prepared as a gift for the Spanish Emperor Carlos V, the book was dedicated by de la Cruz to Don Francisco de Mendoza, the son of the Viceroy to Mexico, Antonio de Mendoza.

The image of a plant, painted on European paper (rather than on the animal skin or bark that the Indians would have used), occupies the central area of each page. Each image is accompanied by text explaining the plant's medicinal use. These images clearly illustrate the Aztec style, which lacked both chiaroscuro and perspective. The elements of the plants are depicted in their most essential form, but the paintings include all necessary details pertaining to the information provided in the accompanying text, such as roots, shape of the leaves, and seeds. A combination of color and form gives the plants a characteristic movement similar to that of humans.

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3. Derli Romero (artist, poet, printer, publisher)

Sitio de las palpitaciones.

San Diego: Nihil Obstat, 2000.

20 copies printed.

A Mexican visual artist and expert printer who is a native of the state of Michoacán, Mexico, and resides for part of each year in San Diego, Derli Romero explores the interplay between word and image in this book of poetry. His etchings depict a mix of human and plant elements within a frame above the poetic text. By mixing shapes found in nature with those of humans, and establishing relationships between image and text, Romero develops a symbolism that minimizes conventional iconography. Both the composition and the imagery of his work recall the *Codex Badianus* (Item 2).

4. Derli Romero (artist, poet, printer, publisher)

Dextra-sinistra.

San Diego: Nihil Obstat, 2000.

25 copies printed.

In this unusual portfolio, Romero explores the basics of printing by using incandescent iron brands heated over an open fire to “print” outlines of hand movements on handmade paper. The result is a set of warm and beautifully-shaded prints which invite reflection.

5. Mario del Valle (poet)

Alberto Gironella (artist)

Trazos de la serpiente.

Mexico City: Ediciones Papeles Privados, 1994.

150 copies printed.

Mario del Valle’s role in producing most Papeles Privados editions is restricted to that of editor-publisher, but this book also reveals his accomplishment as a poet. *Trazos de la serpiente* is accompanied by a single serigraph (or screenprint) created for the book by Alberto Gironella, a member of the Ruptura Generation in Mexican art. The binding and slipcase evoke the serpent of the book’s title.

6. René Char (poet)

José Luis Cuevas (artist)

Mario del Valle and P. Cheron (translators)

Poemas.

Mexico City: Ediciones Papeles Privados, 1984.

50 copies printed.

Renowned Mexican artist José Luis Cuevas and Mario del Valle designed this bilingual edition in homage to the French poet René Char. It contains translations of selected poems from Char’s books *Fureur et mystère*, *Les matinaux*, *Recherche de la base et du sommet*, and *Le nu perdu*. The edition includes several prints designed by Cuevas that are enhanced with watercolors. One of his images is embossed on the accompanying leather slipcase.

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7. Mario del Valle (art critic)

Alberto Ramírez (artist)

Rogelio Cuellar (photographer)

Obra reciente de Alberto Ramírez.

Mexico City: Ediciones Papeles Privados, 1994.

150 copies printed.

Practicing the Mexican tradition of poetic art criticism, former critic Mario del Valle penned an essay for this catalogue of Alberto Ramírez's paintings. Cuellar's photographs vividly document the exhibition, which was held at Casa Lam in Mexico City.

8. Octavio Paz (poet)

Vicente Rojo (artist)

Claude Roy (translator)

Kostas.

Mexico City: Ediciones Papeles Privados, 1984.

180 copies printed.

The poet Paz, the artist Rojo, and the translator Roy worked together to create *Kostas*. Each copy includes an original print by Rojo interpreting the journey described in the poem's narrative as a geometrical design. Rojo's design is also embossed on the leather slipcase to complete the presentation of form and content.

9. Luis Granda (artist)

Los ritos de la palabra y la línea.

Mexico City: Ediciones Papeles Privados, 1996.

30 copies printed.

In *Los ritos de la palabra y la línea*, Mexican visual artist Luis Granda creates a new version of poems by eight poets whose work was selected by Granda and del Valle for presentation in this simple yet elegant portfolio. Granda's visual interpretation of each poem transforms the poet's words into a graphic work, producing a new "reading" of the text.

10. Alfredo Zaldívar (poet)

Yohan Enrique Trujillo (artist)

El angel blanco.

Matanzas, Cuba: Ediciones Vigía, 1998.

200 copies printed.

El angel blanco is an outstanding example of the artistic partnership of poet Alfredo Zaldívar and artist Yohan Enrique Trujillo. Created in Cuba during the height of the crisis which resulted from the United States economic embargo of that nation, the book's images are derived from a blending of poems with collages made of rough and burnt materials. The book explores the theme of angels, as well as the endless cultural meanings of black and white. *El angel blanco* is one of a collection of handmade books that have cords attached for displaying the books for sale (such books are known in some parts of Latin America as *literatura de cordel*).

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11. Octavio Paz (poet)

Arnaldo Coen (artist)

Carta de creencia: cantata.

Mexico City: Ediciones Papeles Privados, 1987.

300 copies printed.

The publication of *Carta de creencia* stemmed from the desire of renowned Mexican poet Octavio Paz to publish a series of poems which he had written for his wife. Coen created these three surrealistic serigraphs to accompany the poems. Mario del Valle worked with both artists to design the five folded leaves on which the poems are beautifully printed. The prints and leaves are laid in a folder, and the folder is housed within in a simple slipcase.

12. Alvaro Mutis (poet)

Leticia Feduchi (artist)

Crónica regia.

Mexico City: Ediciones Papeles Privados, 1985.

100 copies printed.

Colombian poet and narrator Alvaro Mutis, who has resided in Mexico since 1956, asked Italian artist Leticia Feduchi to create drawings inspired by his poem *Crónica regia*. From among the resulting images, he selected this serigraph to accompany his text. Feduchi's depiction of a tree works with the poems, exploring the notions of monarchy, nation, and family in the foundations and traditions of the Spanish language.

13. Arturo González Cosío (poet)

Armando Villagrán (artist)

Juan José Arreola (author of Prologue)

Penteconterión.

Mexico City: Ediciones Papeles Privados, 1984.

350 copies printed.

Seventeen photogravures by Armando Villagrán interact with Cosío's whimsical poems. The traditional presence of animals in poetry takes a new twist as we perceive them as mythical creatures from the artist's imagination.

14. Jaime Sabines (poet)

Rafael Coronel (artist)

Algo sobre la muerte del mayor Sabines.

Mexico City: Ediciones Papeles Privados, 1993.

100 copies printed.

In this elaborate edition of the most popular poem by Jaime Sabines, his text *Algo sobre la muerte del mayor Sabines* interacts with drawings by Mexican artist Rafael Coronel. The images depict the body parts of a recently deceased old man, creating an intense correlation with the tragic litany quality of Sabines' poem. The edition is trilingual, with the original Spanish followed by translations in English and French. One of Coronel's drawings is embossed on the lush suede book cover, and the volume is enclosed in a matching suede-covered slipcase.

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**15. Elvia de Angelis (poet)
Daniele Crepaldi (artist)**

Ave.

Mexico City: Ediciones Papeles Privados, 1994.
600 copies printed.

Mario del Valle often publishes the work of renowned poets and artists, but he also sometimes highlights the talents of emerging figures such as de Angelis and Crepaldi. *Ave* (which means “bird”) is a woman’s exploration of poetry centered in the traditional poetic image of the pelican.

**16. Ignacio Orendain (traveler)
Ediciones Papeles Privados (graphic and book design)**

Navegar la Riviera.

Mexico City: Ediciones Papeles Privados, 2001.
200 copies printed.

Navegar la Riviera artistically records impressions of a trip to Italy taken by Ignacio Orendain. The presentation of the prose poems and serigraphs suggests oversized picture postcards in which words and images blend, forming poetic collages. The “postcards” are presented in a stationery-like envelope that completes the overall design.

**17. Efrén Rebolledo (poet)
Armando Eguiza (artist)**

Caro victrix.

Mexico City: Ediciones Papeles Privados, 1997.
40 copies printed.

Armando Eguiza recreates the erotic poetry of Efrén Rebolledo using a variety of intaglio printmaking techniques: etching, aquatint, dry point, varnish, and mezzotint. His visual interpretation greatly enhances this elegant printing of *Caro victrix*.

18. Yani Pecanins (artist)

Patrones.

Mexico City, 1994.
1 copy produced.

In this unique artist’s book titled *Patrones*, Yani Pecanins adds an important dimension to her depiction of the traditional domestic tasks of women by emphasizing that they are literate beings who must apply their knowledge of math and reading in the course of their daily work. Her work thus blends history and gender studies with contemporary art. She incorporates bits of the materials used by women in completing various tasks such as sewing and mending, thereby making a strong statement about the meaning of creating and of re-creating. Pecanins’ work conveys the relationship between manual and intellectual labor and, ultimately, between feelings and objects.

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19. Felipe Ehrenberg (artist)

Codex aeroscriptus Ehrenbergensis.
Atlanta, Georgia: Nexus Press, 1990.
40 copies printed.

In his recent work, installation artist Felipe Ehrenberg has been exploring the book form. In this work the artist interprets the Latin American postmodern urban environment with a combination of images and words. The book opens by unfolding its pages in the same accordion-fold format as a pre-Hispanic *códice*. The brightly colored prints form a collage, interacting with, rather than simply complementing, the text.

20. Guillermo Gómez-Peña (poet)

Enrique Chagoya (artist)

Felicia Rice (book designer)

Codex Espangliensis: From Columbus to the Border Patrol.
Santa Cruz, Calif.: Moving Parts Press, 1998.
50 copies printed.

A collaboration between performer, poet, and journalist Guillermo Gómez-Peña, graphic artist Enrique Chagoya, and book designer and publisher Felicia Rice, *Codex Espangliensis* features popular imagery from Mexico and the United States, as well as a text in which Spanish and English sometimes blend into “Spanglish.” Gómez-Peña refers to himself as a “Chicanlango” artist, acknowledging his own multifaceted heritage: that of his birthplace, Mexico City (whose natives are known as “Chilangos”), and the Chicano culture of his adopted United States. The book is constructed in accordion-fold fashion, resembling the physical presentation of Mesoamerican *códices* of earlier centuries. It can be unfolded selectively or fully for presentation. Highly political in content, this work demonstrates interactions among artists, cultures, languages, and politics.

21. Magali Lara (artist and curator)

Yani Pecanins (artist and book designer)

Mexican Artists' Books = Libros de artista en México.
Mexico City: Cocina Ediciones, El Archivero and
Galería de la Raza, 1993.
100 copies printed.

The work of visual artist Magali Lara has always maintained a close relationship to text. Her versatility is evident in her work as curator of the exhibition described in this inventive “catalog” designed by Yani Pecanins for an exhibition of Mexican artists’ books held in San Francisco in 1993. The exhibition featured Lara’s collaborations with Mexican writer Carmen Boullosa.

22. Francis Thompson (poet)

Raymundo Sesma (artist)

**Juan José Arreola and Paul Claudel
(translators)**

Corimbo del otoño (A Corimbus for Autumn).
Mexico City: Ediciones Papeles Privados, 1996.
140 copies printed.

This elegantly designed book presents a poem by the 19th-century British writer Francis Thompson, presented in three languages: the original text in English, followed by translations in Spanish (by the distinguished Mexican writer Juan José Arreola) and French. The autumnal aura of the poem has been brilliantly interpreted in prints by Raymundo Sesma. The texture and colors of the art work establish a dialogue with the text of the poem not only in content, but in intensity as well.

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**23. Octavio Paz (poet)
Vicente Rojo (artist)**

Discos visuales.

Mexico City: Era, 1968.

1000 copies printed.

Discos visuales features poetry written by Octavio Paz for a “book” designed by Vicente Rojo. The series of four discs, the colors of which clearly evoke the aesthetic of the 1960s, demonstrates the performativity of poetry and draws the reader into the creative process.

**24. Martha Chapa (author)
Raymundo Sesma (artist)**

Dies solis: estudio para una última cena.

Mexico City: Ed. Papeles Privados, 1995.

150 copies printed.

In *Dies solis*, Martha Chapa and Raymundo Sesma stir up a mix of poetry, recipes and color prints in a richly designed portfolio. This stunning work of art invites the reader to a banquet of succulent Mexican culinary creations which, when visually consumed in combination with the poems and an array of brilliant colors and physical textures, produces an irresistible visual and textual cornucopia. The book is housed in an equally elaborate case, designed to double as a recipe stand.

25. Twelve small books from Ediciones Papeles Privados.
Mexico City, 1981-2000.

The covers of these twelve small books selected from the Ediciones Papeles Privados collection demonstrate both the design skills of the publishers and their sensitivity to art and literature. Each cover is an elegant combination of materials, techniques, and content. The interplay of visual and physical elements—color and texture of paper, color of ink, layout of the page, quality of printing, typography, overall dimensions, and choice of imagery as it corresponds to the poetic content—all work together to render the editions artistically satisfying, despite their apparent simplicity.

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| <p>a. Jaime Sabines and
Jesús Martínez.
<i>Poemas sueltos.</i> 1981.
250 copies printed.</p> | <p>g. Carmen Alardín.
<i>La violencia de otoño.</i>
1984. 100 copies printed.</p> |
| <p>b. Fayid Jamís.
<i>Los parpados y el polvo.</i> 1981.
250 copies printed.</p> | <p>h. Enrique González Rojo and
Nunik Sauret.
<i>Por los siglos de los siglos.</i>
1981. 250 copies printed.</p> |
| <p>c. Juan Bañuelos and
Agustín Figueroa.
<i>Destino arbitrario.</i> 1982.
180 copies printed.</p> | <p>i. Arturo González-Cosío
and Armando Villagrán.
<i>Pequeño bestiario ilustrado.</i>
1984. 350 copies printed.</p> |
| <p>d. Arturo González-Cosío and
Fernando Leal-Audirac.
<i>Animales del mundo en los
proverbios.</i> 1982.
500 copies printed.</p> | <p>j. Darie Novacenu and
Luis Granda.
<i>Hombres en las orillas.</i>
1983. 75 copies printed.</p> |
| <p>e. Guillermo Rousset Banda
and Agustín Figueroa.
<i>Extraños.</i> 1982.
150 copies printed.</p> | <p>k. Reyna Barrera.
<i>Lunario.</i> 2000.
100 copies printed.</p> |
| <p>f. Roberto Juarroz and Byron
Galvez.
<i>Novena poesía vertical.</i> 1987.</p> | <p>l. Alejandro Aura and
Juan Manuel de la Rosa.
<i>Hemisferio sur.</i> 1982.
150 copies printed.</p> |



The primary objective of the UC Irvine Libraries Exhibits Program is to support the research and instructional missions of UCI by interpreting and publicizing the richness, diversity, and unique strengths of the resources of the UC Irvine Libraries.

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