



The Phoenix

NEWSLETTER OF THE
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH—
RUTGERS UNIVERSITY-CAMDEN

SPRING 2009

Daniel Mendelsohn Highlights MFA Writers Series



Scholar and essayist
Daniel Mendelsohn

On Wednesday, April 15, the first annual MFA Visiting Writers Series concludes with a reading by scholar and essayist Daniel Mendelsohn. In this monthly series, accomplished poets, novelists, and memoirists read from published work or from work in progress and answer questions about the writing life. This year's roster of visitors has included, among others, novelists Binnie Kirschenbaum, Percival Everett, and Daniel Alarcon; travel writer Rolf Potts; and Joshua Ferris, whose first novel, *Then We Came to the End*, was named one of the five best books of 2007 by *The*

New York Times. All readings, which are free and open to the public, are followed by signings and receptions.

Daniel Mendelsohn's articles, essays, reviews, and translations have appeared frequently in numerous national publications, including *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times*, *New York*, *The New York Review of*

Books, *The Nation*, *Esquire*, and *The Paris Review*. From 2000 until 2002, he was the weekly book critic for *New York* magazine, for which he won the National Book Critics Circle Award for Excellence in Reviewing in 2001. Since 2000, he has been a frequent contributor of book, film, and theater reviews to *The New York Review of Books*; for the latter, he was awarded the 2002 George Jean Nathan Prize for Drama Criticism. Mr. Mendelsohn is the author of three books: *The Elusive Embrace: Desire and the Riddle of Identity*, a memoir of family history and sexual identity; *Gender and the City in Euripides' Political Plays*, a scholarly study of Greek tragedy; and *The Lost: A Search for Six of Six Million*, an award-winning international bestseller about the author's worldwide search for information on the fates of six relatives who perished in the Holocaust. On April 15th he will read selections from all three of his books and discuss common themes in his writing.

Daniel Mendelsohn's appearance at Rutgers will coincide with a special dinner and conversation about ongoing plans for a Writers House on campus. Please contact Department Chair Timothy Martin for details: timartin@camden.rutgers.edu

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New Energy at *The Gleaner*

BY COURTNEY PRESTON

The Gleaner, Rutgers Camden's 57-year-old student newspaper, enjoyed a successful Fall semester with a brand new editorial staff. After several years of being run by just two students, *The Gleaner* has been revived and redesigned thanks to the six editors who have taken on the responsibility of breathing new life into RU-C's oldest tradition.

Led by senior English major Courtney Preston, *The Gleaner* has benefited greatly from a vast increase in student involvement. Writers from all disciplines have contributed to the newspaper's recently well-defined sections of News (led by sophomore Psychology major



CONTINUED ON BACK PAGE

Recent poems by **J. T. Barbarese** have appeared in *Margie*, *The Southern Review*, *Cortland Review*, and *Poetry*, and have been anthologized in *Wild Dreams: The Best of Italian-Americana* (Fordham, 2008). In September he gave a talk at the Hamilton Township Public Library on “Harry Potter and Children’s Literature: One Year Later.” In July Barbarese became Editor of *Story Quarterly*, acquired by the university over the summer and now situated at Rutgers Camden.

NEWS OF Faculty

Betsy Bowden is sharpening the overall argument and slashing redundancy throughout 600-plus pages of “The Audiovisual Wife of Bath, 1660-1810.” She began writing chapter one in March 2003 and drafted the final chapter (number eighteen) in June 2008.

Jill Capuzzo is writing travel and real estate articles for *The New York Times*, including “Havens” pieces in the Escapes section, which profiles vacation destinations around the country, and the New Jersey “Buy of the Week” column for the Sunday Real Estate section. As a restaurant reviewer for *New Jersey Monthly*, she would welcome suggestions for dining venues that might warrant a review.

Chris Fitter’s essay on Shakespeare’s *As You Like It*, entitled “Reading Orlando Historically: Vestry Values and the Counterpublic Sphere,” is forthcoming from *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in English*. Also forthcoming in that journal is his review of Oliver Arnold’s book, *Shakespeare and the Third Citizen*.

Bill FitzGerald is enjoying his role as Interim Director of the Writing Program this spring following Holly Blackford’s six-year term of service. He is making steady progress on his book on the rhetoric of prayer, “Spiritual Modalities: Rhetoric, Prayer, Performance.”

During the current academic year, **Keith Green** has presented papers at three scholarly meetings: on *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, at the Midwestern Modern

Language Association Conference in Minneapolis; on Harriet Jacobs’ *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, at the Southern American Studies Association Conference in Fairfax, Virginia; and on *The Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb*, at the Southwest Texas Popular Culture and American Culture Association in Albuquerque. His review of Jonathan Brennan’s *When Brer Rabbit Meets Coyote: African-Native American Literature* is forthcoming in *Callaloo*.

Shanyn Fiske’s book *Heretical Hellenism* was published this fall by Ohio University Press. Her article “Asian Awakenings: Alicia Little and the Limits of Orientalism” came out in the spring issue of *Victorian Literature and Culture*.

Lauren Grodstein’s second novel, *A Friend of the Family*, will be published by Algonquin in September, 2009. She has spent her sabbatical preparing for its publication, researching her next book, and changing many, many diapers. Her story “This Truth I’m Telling” will appear this spring in the inaugural issue of *Caution Horse Magazine*, alongside stories by Stephen Dixon and Tom Carson.

M. A. Rafey Habib is editing the *Oxford Anthology of Literary Criticism and Theory* and the *Cambridge History of Literary Criticism, Volume VI*. He has been invited to produce an updated version of J. A. Cuddon’s *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*. Should he become rich from any of these, he will, like Leonard Cohen, buy a Greek island (presumably somewhere near Greece) and you will never see or hear of him again.

In January **Timothy Martin’s** survey on “Joyce and Music” was published in the essay collection *James Joyce in Context* (Cambridge), and an essay on “Joyce, *Ulysses*, Melodrama” is forthcoming in another collection, *Bloomsday 100: Essays on Ulysses* (UP Florida).

Lisa Zeidner continues work on her fifth novel. A new story has appeared in *Pequod*. The movie of “Layover” continues to go through potential leads. She now has not one but two new dogs.

Summer Writers’ Conference

The 23rd annual Summer Writers’ Conference is slated for July 6-14, and will feature renowned writers such as Kathryn Harrison and Tom Sleigh. As befits our program’s multi-genre approach,  many of the writers are accomplished in more than one field—like Jill Bialosky, who has written novels and poetry collections, and also edits books at Norton. All readings are free and open to the public. A full schedule can be found at summer.camden.rutgers.edu.

Course Highlights (Fall 2009)

The Fall schedule includes new courses and courses that have been on the books but are rarely offered. Visiting New Voices writer Adam Mansbach will offer a course in Popular Culture, focusing on Hip Hop. William FitzGerald will teach Writing in Media, which treats the unique demands of communication in the digital age. New faculty member Keith Green, who has redesigned course offerings in African American literature, will teach the Harlem Renaissance. And Geoffrey Sill offers the department’s first “capstone” course on The Novel of Sensibility.

The Phoenix

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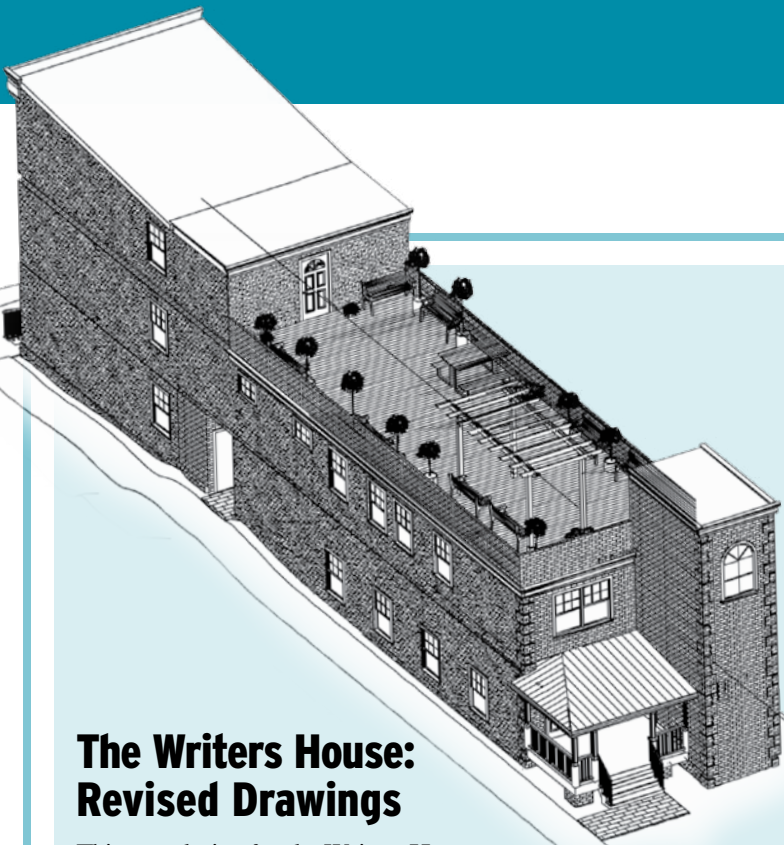
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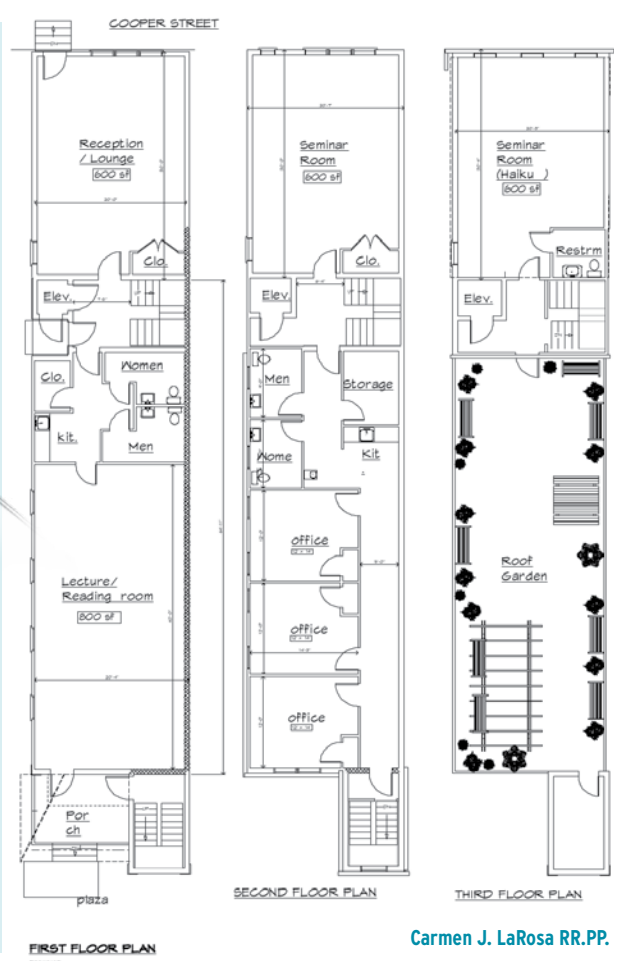
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Phoenix image by Sonia Krutzke



The Writers House: Revised Drawings

This new design for the Writers House reflects the department's ongoing development, including the recent establishment of our MFA program in Creative Writing. A lecture room on the ground floor will seat seventy-five and offer an ideal setting for readings, larger classes, and conferences. The adjacent lounge, with kitchenette, will enable us to host receptions and provide a hang-out space for students. The second floor includes a seminar room and office space for *Story Quarterly*, *Mickle Street Review*, and the Nick Virgilio Haiku Project. The third-floor seminar room doubles as a multi-media composition lab; a roof garden graces the rear of the building.



Carmen J. LaRosa RR.PP.



Remember Us

If you're thinking of making a gift to Rutgers, please remember that you can direct your gift to a Department of English account rather than to Rutgers in general:

- the Department of English-Camden Fund, which helps support experimental courses, implement new technology, and develop new programs
- the Camden Writers House and Writing Programs Gift Fund, which supports the department's plans for a new building dedicated to the *Mickle Street Review*, the Nick Virgilio Haiku Association, the undergraduate Writing Program, and the new Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing
- the Betty Harris Jones Fund, which awards an annual prize to an outstanding graduating student
- the Miriam Thomas Chaplin Endowed Scholarship, which provides substantial scholarship support to our most accomplished English majors
- the Gloria H. Moffatt Scholarship Fund, which provides scholarship aid for students in Journalism

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Media Studies Minor

For some years students have been able to earn a minor in Film through courses in subject area 354, which are offered

>In Brief

entirely within the Department of English. Though this possibility remains, the Film minor has been effectively transcended by a new interdisciplinary minor called Media Studies, which may involve courses in the Departments of English, History, Sociology, Fine Arts, and others. According to the program's webpage, "The minor critically examines dead media and new media in global, cultural, social, political, and economic contexts." Students who have begun to work toward a Film minor should in theory be able to apply courses already completed to the Media Studies minor. Information is available at mediastudies.camden.rutgers.edu.

Baby Boom

Babies are booming in Armitage. The month of March brought three infants into our midst: Ellen and Alexandre Ledoux welcomed Charlotte Malenas Ledoux into the world on March 9th, while twins Michael and Julian Fitter were born to Chris Fitter and Catherine Parrish on March 5th. Meanwhile Nathaniel Eli Freeman (son of Lauren Grodstein and Ben Freeman) is enjoying his eight month of life, and Phoenix Alexander Blackford-Wadhams (son of Holly Blackford and Todd Wadhams) celebrates his first birthday. (Phoenix was named, apparently, for the department newsletter.) Finally, Caleb Fiske Doranz, son of Shany Fiske and Ben Doranz, toddles into his twenty-second month.

Carmen Adamucci (M.A.'09) has been offered a fellowship to join the MFA program at Columbia University.

Poems by **Nagehan Bayindir** ('06, M.A.'09) have recently appeared in the *Newark Metro*, the *Bosphorus Art Project*, *Istanbul Literary Review*, *Blazevox Literary Magazine*, and *63 Channels Literary Magazine*.

NEWS OF Students

Karen Carter ('07) is community liaison for a program in Philadelphia called Recovery Paths, a division of the Community Council for Mental Health and Mental Retardation. She works mostly with adults who have mental disorders, finding them productive activities in the city and offering guidance on rehabilitative services that may be helpful to them in their recovery.

James Harper ('78) recently saw his short story "Just For One Day" published in *Stress City: A Big Book of Fiction by 50 DC Area Guys*, an anthology edited by Richard Peabody. The book featured works by men struggling to present their art in the land of hollow men, the nation's capitol.

Jenny Kosnik (M.A.'98) lives with her husband Bob and sons Mitchell and Peter in Cary, North Carolina. A hockey mom, she is mulling a run for vice president in 2012.

During the current academic year **Rosemary McAndrew** (M.A.'07) has been teaching in the English Department of the Community College of Philadelphia. She is also a member of the adjunct faculty at Penn State Abington.

In the Fall of 2008 **Maria McGarrity** ('92) published two books. She is the author of *Washed by the Gulf Stream: The Historic and Geographic Relation of Irish and Caribbean Literature*, published by the University of Delaware Press. She is also co-editor, with Claire Culleton, of a collection of essays called *Irish Modernism and the Global Primitive*, published by Palgrave Macmillan.

Since early January **Bryan McGough** ('10) has been interning at *Saturday Night Live*, living in New York from Wednesday through Sunday and returning to Camden for classes on Monday and Tuesday. Though much of the

job involves getting coffee and food for the cast and writers, he's been trying to learn as much as he can about the sketch-writing process.

Lisa Nikolidakis ('02, M.A.'06) is a Fulbright finalist, and she is finishing her coursework for a Ph.D. in Creative Writing at Florida State University. Her fiction has recently appeared in *Night Train* and *River Styx*.

Mary Ann O'Gorman (M.A.'90) has lived in Ocean Springs, Mississippi, since 1991. She teaches creative writing at a domestic violence shelter and at the local community arts center, and she is also in teacher training in yoga, "a year-long course that requires a lot more than head stands and lotus positions." She is working towards her MFA in the low-residency program at Sewanee University, where she has worked with X.J. Kennedy and Charles Martin. Her chapbook *Life in This House* was published by Finishing Line Press in 2008.

A fifth novel by **Carol Plum-Ucci** (M.A.'05), *Streams of Babel*, was published by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt in 2008. Nominated for Best Books for Young Adults by the American Library Association, the novel was a Junior Library Guild Premiere Selection, and was featured in a special issue of *Kirkus* called *Upcoming Mysteries and Thrillers*. For the past six years Carol has been teaching composition at Atlantic Cape Community College.

Melissa Smith (M.A.'06) works for Heldref Publications in Washington DC as Managing Editor of three scholarly journals: the *Journal of Social Psychology*, the *Journal of Environmental Education*, and the *Journal of Experimental Education*. Hedref also publishes *The Explicator*, *Critique*, *World Affairs*, and *Change Magazine*. Her office is in Dupont Circle, "a very cool part of town, in what used to be the mansion belonging to the inventor of the Singer sewing machine."

Chris Tracey ('03) has been named Teacher of the Year at Palmyra (New Jersey) High School. Chris has taught British literature there since 2004 and has directed the school's last four drama productions. He hopes to begin pursuing his master's in education administration in the fall.

Brad Windhauser (M.A.'02) has a short story forthcoming in *The Baltimore Review*.

Finishing Up

Most of our undergraduate students will be aware that requirements for the English major have changed, as of this academic year. Students who matriculated at Rutgers before the Fall of 2008 are following the “old” major, which requires 42 credits, whereas students who joined Rutgers

> Ex Cathedra

this Fall and after will follow a more streamlined major that requires just 36 credits. During this phase-in period our curriculum committee must keep the interests and needs of both groups of students in mind.

Our decision to revise the major reflects to some extent the simple need for an update. In fact, our requirements had not changed, except in minor details, for twenty-five years, and we had fallen out of step with trends in peer institutions in the region and across the country. In addition to simply keeping abreast of the times, we wanted better to address the special character of our institution and of our student body: most are commuters, with complicated schedules that involve responsibilities to family members and to employers, and many are transfer students, who have already begun to take English courses elsewhere. We needed a curriculum that would be both flexible and coherent. We think,

with our new major, that we have achieved flexibility by reducing the total number of credits and the number of specifically required English courses to six. We hope to achieve coherence by emphasizing the centrality of four of these required courses, one of which, the new “capstone,” will serve as a culminating experience for all our majors.

The capstone course is a hot topic right now in Departments of English. As a department chair I have access to an on-line discussion list that includes my counterparts across the country. In response to an increasing emphasis on assessment and accountability, departments like ours are being asked to think more consciously about what they want to achieve, about what they want their students to know and be able to do when they complete their studies. In effect, they are being asked to create an image of the accomplished English major. The capstone or senior seminar has become a focal point in this discussion because it represents a culminating experience—a way of finishing up—in which students can bring all their training in critical methods, writing, and literary study to bear on one area of inquiry. Not only can it create a sense of completion and closure; as the experience toward which all our majors are working, it can have what the Chair of English at Bryn Mawr

College called a “reverse-engineering” effect, shaping goals expectations in all the courses that precede it, including what my fellow chairs seem to be calling the “gateway” course, which for us is Critical Methods in English.

A few students who joined Rutgers Camden in the Fall of 2008 are already inquiring about the new capstone, which we are calling Seminar in English Studies. This will be a topical course, limited to twenty students with ninety or more credits. English 220, 221, and 222 are pre-requisites. Anyone, old-style or new-style major, may enroll if he or she meets these requirements. We’ll generally offer three or four of these courses each year, though next year, with the new major still phasing in, we’ll offer just two. In the Fall, Geoffrey Sill will offer a course in eighteenth-century literature, “The Novel of Sensibility,” as a capstone, while in the Spring I’ll be offering a course in twentieth-century literature, “Ten Modern Poems.”

This (speaking of finishing up) is my last semester as Department Chair. It’s been a privilege to serve the chair’s four-fold constituency: students, faculty, the college, our alumni. Best wishes for a productive and healthy spring and summer.

The Chair of the Department of English is Timothy Martin: timartin@camden.

Resurrection of the ESO

BY SARAH SKOCHKO

The English Students Organization is not new. When Professor Rafey Habib resurrected the club this year, however, it had been dormant since the mid 1990s. Its account was found to contain a staggering twenty-six dollars. The entire club could have fit in a minivan.

We came up with more ideas on that first day than could possibly be achieved by a minivan-load of English students with twenty-six dollars. Some students talked about planning a trip to see a play, while others suggested that we write our own. We wondered, for blatantly selfish reasons, if anyone had yet considered forming an English Honor Society. Most of us showed interest in the poetry readings that Professor Habib envisioned. All of us wanted to make our own literary magazine.

Since that day, the ESO has bake-saled its way into a small fortune, held poetry readings, recruited new members, and applied to form a chapter of the National English Honor Society. On January 20th, when *Writers’ Bloc* went on line, we published our own literary magazine. Of all our projects, the magazine has been the most successful. It incorporates artwork and poetry as well as literature, and features submissions not only from Rutgers but from around the world. While *Writers’ Bloc* is currently a quarterly on-line publication, a hard copy is planned for December 2009. *Writers’ Bloc* would not have been possible without the hard work of a core group of dedicated, enthusiastic members, including its editor Kevin Dickinson.

Among events planned for the spring is a special reception, on campus, for graduating seniors.

News from the MFA Program

Rutgers Camden welcomed the first class of its MFA in Creative Writing last Fall. Poets, fiction writers, and essayists joined us not only from the Delaware Valley, but from London, Texas, Florida, Colorado, and elsewhere. The 2010 incoming class promises to be just as talented. By next year we will have thirty-four students enrolled in the program. They will attend our reading series, intern at *Story Quarterly* magazine, study with New Voices Professor Adam Mansbach, participate in our Summer Writers' Conferences, and go on our study tours—one in travel writing is planned for the Spring, to Vietnam and Singapore.

Official MFA social life centers around the student-run reading series, which gives our writers the chance to read their work to a live audience. On Friday evening, February 27th, Rachel Ryan Estrada, Brian Heston, and Pete Gambino read fiction, poetry, and memoir (respectively) to a standing-room only crowd in the Grooveground cafe, Collingswood. Daniel Wallace gave us the following account: "The cafe was packed, there was applause, there was laughter, there were seven-foot tall penguins." The readings will continue monthly. The March 27 event promises Matt Blasi (reading fiction), Kristen Voget (poetry), and Eric Zrinsky (memoir).

The Director of the MFA program is Lisa Zeidner: zeidner@camden.rutgers.edu.

New Energy at *The Gleaner*

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Nick Tontarski), Features (led by senior Political Science major Matt Dobson), Commentary (led by freshman Liz Clements), Arts & Entertainment (led by junior Psychology major Becca Zielinski), and Sports (led by senior Theater major Rob Repici). Lance Carsillo, a senior Animation major, is also serving as staff photographer, while Dan Lowden, a junior English major, is tackling graphic design.

Along with coverage of more campus news, including the ongoing gym renovations and the unveiling of the new Walt Whitman statue, *The Gleaner* staff has introduced *The Weekly Word* in the Commentary section, which features photographs of RU-C students along with their opinions on a specific topic. Our Arts & Entertainment editor, Becca, has added *RU Bored?* to her section, which highlights the week's most exciting album and DVD releases, as well as on-campus events.

Jill Capuzzo, instructor in journalism at RU-C and advisor to *The Gleaner*, says there seems to be a "growing interest" in the English Department's Journalism minor, which consists of eighteen journalism and journalism-related course credits. News Reporting and Writing I and II are just two of the courses that will help develop students' writing skills to use at *The Gleaner*. Each semester Capuzzo also offers independent study opportunities for students who wish to contribute to the newspaper on a regular basis.

The Gleaner staff is looking forward to many more successful semesters, but they cannot accomplish this without the support of the students, professors, and staff of Rutgers Camden. Through article submissions, constructive criticism, and even ad placements, the campus community can help them to accomplish their goal of representing the diverse voices of Rutgers-Camden.

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