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Double agents and triple: teacher-researcher-writers

Abstract

In this paper, I explore Kroll's semi-conspiratorial suggestion that 'we have accepted the role of double agents embedded in the system' (2010). You, of course, understand that we are the writers who teach and/or teachers who write who are likely to be reading TEXT and attending AAWP. You/we have triple agency too, making you/us researcher-writers, researcher-teachers and other hyphenates. And if Writing programs are indeed as 'strange' or 'uneasy bedfellows' (Kroll 1999) with literary studies as creative and exegetical texts once were, then, in what bed are we embedded? Is it in Kroll's (2010) interstitial space or is it within Dawson's (2005) writerly 'garret' within the ivory tower populated by evolved 'literary intellectuals'? I have interviewed ten practitioners who participate in teaching and researching within the spectrum of programs within the writing discipline to uncover the rich, globally nomadic nature of those who sleep towards, but seldom completely on, the writing side of the bed. This paper analyses responses thematically within a framework allowing for my own subjective, reflexive narrative as a multiple agent (teacher, writer, researcher, linguist).

I move on to examine what Richardson (2000) called 'creative analytic practices' and suggest that these offer a space for double/triple/multiple agents, occupying a range of spaces between literary studies and writing. I use discourse analysis to consider articles from writing journals written in the deliberately subversive and vitally interpenetrative spirit of multiple agency. In addition to Jeri Kroll (2010), who openly leaves traces of her literary studies back-story to enrich her research, these include texts by Marianne Grey (2009) and Julia Colyar (2009). These works are multi-literate, rigorous, process-oriented records of nomadic trajectories and learning journeys. They also rearrange the symptoms of conventional academic text generation to become post-modern, interstitial, hybrids of 'creative analytic practices'. This is one hybrid form for the double/triple/multiple agents of the 2010s to continue to take to bed.

Biographical note:

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Keywords:

Creative academic writing—Literary studies—Hybridity—Identity—Literary intellectuals—Teacher-writer-researchers

1 Double Agents and Triple

The journeys of researcher-writer-teachers are more likely to be creative ones in 2010 than in 1996 when the Austral(as)ian Association of Writing Practitioners (AAWP) held its first conference. These journeys might involve such travellers as research student and supervisor(s), learning and teaching teams and students, or several practitioners of writing/teaching writing in collaboration. It might involve the researcher-writer-teacher in retreat, making academic, creative or pedagogic texts or a hybrid mixture of all three. Now writing programs operate on firmer terrain, the greatest landmass belonging to *creative* writing. The territory also accommodates and respects the diversity of writings which may also be regarded containing creativity: professional, educational, academic, curricular, special purposes and English as an additional language (EAL). Partly through writing's ability to span inter- and transdisciplinary journeys and make multiple border crossings, it has increasingly won acceptance as a discipline. But as researcher-writer-teachers, we represent multiple agencies. As Kroll (2010) writes,

We have accepted the role of double agents embedded in the system, talking and writing our way into positions of power, rather than narrowing our horizons so that we only undertake approved field trips along established disciplinary lines (14).

This 'double agency' has multiple interpretations. Despite appearing misfits both in where we sit - within a faculty but on its margins - and in our flexible, sometimes inscrutable ways to knowledge, our very marginality gives us passport to teach, write and research in challenging ways and explore interdisciplinary, hybrid forms. We can inhabit the interstitial spaces between disciplines, between genres, between methodologies, between texts and the fringe-lands beyond. Equally, we can borrow longer-established disciplines, canonical from genre, already-described methodologies. We can choose from the methodological toolbox of the tried, tested and the university-approved. We can also question, challenge and resist. We are not, as Kroll (2010:13) reports AAWP feared in 1996, 'shoehorned into pseudo-scientific boxes'. We can work as agents for the university while operating undercover as agents of the creative. This operation extends to our research. We are gaining respect as a research-productive, student-attracting discipline. This respect is earned from our voyages to strange continents and bringing back gold such as completions of PhDs by artefact and exegesis. As Kroll understands, we are double agents because we continue to teach-write-research in an ongoing climate of scepticism.

My focus is on another aspect of our double, triple or multiple, agency, one that resonates in Kroll:

In my case, I trained in conventional literary studies and over the years transformed from a 20th-century British and American scholar into a poet and fiction writer for all ages, who also taught in three countries, researched in poetry and children's literature, then finally in creative writing as a discipline (2010:5).

This is relevant here as Kroll positions herself both to illustrate the globally nomadic nature of those working in writing and to exemplify her passage into the uncharted territories of writing programs with their multiple ways of accessing texts. Kroll's love of interpenetrating Eliot, Auden and *ekphrasis* enables a richly experiential

journey for teacher-writer-researchers. Many teacher-writer-researchers in writing today harbour back-stories in literary studies, and express similar investments in how we view textuality. This journey, our back-story, informs us as multi-hyphenate teacher-writer-researchers, enriches all aspects of our practice, and is part of our scholarly and creative identity.

In this way, too, are many of us 'double agents': graduates of literary studies, now working in writing, Dawson's (2005) 'placeless' (192) 'literary intellectuals' (5), teacher-writer-researchers. The research imperative ties us into a third agency, that of the researcher. My question here, and addressed in section 5 of this paper, is this: Researching necessitates writing too, so why not make it creative? Amongst other things, this paper explores our double, triple, multiple agency: ten colleagues and me. I asked them what aspects of experience qualify us to teach writing. Are they writers who teach or teachers who write? I unpacked the dichotomy with investigative questions. I focus on the people: "I feel it is less important to engage in theoretical debates about what constitutes literature than to ask: what is a literary intellectual?" (Dawson 2005:185). I pursue a wider thesis: the scholarly work where we talk about teaching, supervising, writing, researching and argue whether artefacts and exegeses or literary studies and writing are 'strange bedfellows' or not can't help but reflect our back-stories. Our journeys and back-stories 'become' us in the Shakespearean sense of performing and transforming identities (Royster 2003). I argue for performing the creative, the hybrid, the nomadic, in academic writing, allowing the process to show, declaring our back-stories.

This paper goes on to explore our inhabiting of creative academic writing, using a broad frame from discourse analysis (DA) to analyse texts that are creative, reflexive of the writers' back-stories and challenging of orthodox conventions of what an academic text looks like. There are Grey (2009) and Colyar (2009). Particularly in writing, academic texts have license to exist in the spaces between, cross borders and become themselves. They are a logical, even necessary, medium for the double, triple, multiple agents we have become.

In this first section I have explained my title, gained mileage from the metaphors of journey, back-story and double agency, suggested that Kroll's journey from literary studies to creative writing impacts interestingly on her interpenetrative readings and academic texts and developed the argument that we, too, can make, *creative* academic texts. Next, I will contextualise the emergence of writing and the submergence of literary studies. In doing this, I explore my own back-story.

2 Strange Bedfellows Embedded

Moll: I love to lie o' both sides o' th' bed myself (Thomas Dekker and Thomas Middleton, *The Roaring Girl* 1611, II.i.39)

This conference explores the extent to which literary studies and writing are 'strange bedfellows' or 'perfect partners'. The topic echoes Kroll (1999), 'Uneasy bedfellows', examining how compatible creative and exegetical aspects of practice-led doctoral study appear. Since 1999 writings I can only sample (Brady 2000; Kroll 2004; Barrett

& Bolt 2007; Harper & Kroll 2008) have explored ways of envisaging that relationship, representing its (in)compatibility, while needing to accommodate it within the ivory tower's ways of evaluating research. In this context, too, we are double agents 'embedded' in the system, building a writerly garret within the ivory tower to avoid 'placelessness' (Dawson 2005).

Writing continues to define its limits according to a known principle: "The process of creating and maintaining an academic subject necessitates exclusion, a drawing of boundaries to ward off all that subject is not." (Knights & Thurgar-Dawson 2006:22) The issue becomes how much of the duvet of literary studies with its freight, hegemony and reader-centred pedagogies does writing want to throw off? We, at Swinburne, are writing, not creative writing. Creative writing is part of us because we hold that writing involves an act of creativity. We welcome other forms of writing or of textual or performative representation. This allows multidisciplinary crossover between creative and critical activities, reconciling the 'pitiless divorce' between producer and consumer that Barthes lamented (1975:4). We provide a learning context for informing 'producers' by exploring readerly/ writerly interactions with textuality and cultural production. Like Dawson (2005:20), we negotiate spaces between creative and critical, writer and critic. We are not only double agents but, like Moll Cutpurse, 'love to lie o' both sides o' th' bed', drawing on our experiences in literary studies, applying them to teaching writing.

We are the agents of writings' flourishing while literary studies flounders. Programs promoting and assessing textual production generate the cultural and economic capital that used to belong to critical analysis. Embedding textual analysis in producing/ performing has more validity and relevance than creating a textually analytic work of criticism (Knights & Thurgar-Dawson 2006). Further, the idea that supporting writers to critique their own and others' work, a process that gives voice to acts of critical reading and theorisation, is fundamental to creative writing pedagogy (Dawson 2005:87). Such critiquing, involving reading as a writer, is a technique in writing programs, but is reading as a writer any more different from reading for critical analysis in literary studies than understanding that the purpose of the analysis is different? When we read as a writer, we consider the potential journey of the reader rather than trying to reconstruct the intentions of the writer. We read to improve a text not to elucidate one, but in both cases we apply principles to our task and unpeel the plural layers of denotation and connotation. Reading as a writer Dawson concludes is both 'a formalist examination of the methods by which a literary work is made, and a "making", a form of reading which participates in the drafting process' (2005:120).

Much has been written of the emergence of writing programs as economically viable and educationally relevant (Dawson 2005). Dawson and Knights & Thurgar-Dawson (2006) have related this moment to the decline of 'English'. Symptomatic of this disembowelment is English's fragmentation into literary theory and studies-by-numbers – cultural studies, women's studies, queer studies. English did this to preserve her relevance when universities were undergoing 'corporatisation' (Dawson 2005:4).

These moments happened as I was finishing my PhD in recessional New Zealand, 1991. I had published poetry, stories and journalism and been an editor. For my thesis, I had read the Elizabethan and Jacobean ages and examined spatial metaphors of the body. I liked interstices because they are like the empty spaces on the stage where the body is discovered. I had begun my doctorate understanding that with my professor's generation's retiring there would be openings. By the time I had finished, the retirements had happened but not the vacancies. I was seconded into cinema and language studies. The jobs in literary studies were buried and my generation of literary scholars reinvented itself as teachers of EAL Internationalism was in ascendancy. My second string of linguistics/languages could play more vibrantly than my first. I thrived for a decade, analysing texts with linguistic tools, writing articles on learner identity, reading Pennycook (2004). I analysed learners' stories. I became a lecturer in writing, bringing an interest in textuality from literary studies, a practical desire to reconstruct texts from linguistics and the urge to teach writing using authentic texts. I bring to my identity as researcher-writer-teacher a desire for creative methodologies and theories of identity. I am a triple agent, writing sleeping with literary studies and linguistics.

3 Methodology

My methodology mixes three methods. The first is motivated by auto-ethnography; the second is a holistic variation of thematic analysis, and the third involves critical reading that owes more to discourse than literary analysis.

Firstly, the subjectively staged narrative of my entry to the status of researcher-writer-teacher is part of my data (Pagnucci 2004). It reveals my reflexive complicity and contributes to my argument that writers who teach and teachers who write bring experience from literary studies, linguistics (and *life*) that add value to teaching writing. I write this grounded by the ideas that 'every piece of writing reflects the disposition of its writer' and that our position reveals our assumptions that impact our research (Chang 2008:14).

Secondly, I present my peers' back-stories in literary and linguistic studies impacting current identities as researcher-writer-teachers. I designed an open-ended questionnaire, e-mailing 18; receiving ten back with permission to quote. I asked for free-written responses, no word limit. Here are the questions:

- 1. Which term to do relate to, or would you place yourself somewhere in between? 'teacher who writes', 'writer who teaches'.
- 2. What do you see as the connections between your practice as a teacher of writing and your practice as a writer?
- 3. What literary or linguistic studies have you done during your career?
- 4. What connections do you see between studying literary studies and gaining skills to write creatively?

Seeking key themes and common understandings is a feature of auto-ethnographic approaches (Chang 2008), but is also resonant with the form of thematic analysis

Ryan and Bernard (2003) call 'theoretical sensitivity' (88). This method draws on 'word-based' and 'scrutiny-based' techniques of readerly observation (Ryan & Bernard 2003). Borrowing from Sandelowski (1995), I used a method of closely reading the material, identifying key storylines to understand everyday practices and underlining key phrases 'because they make some as yet inchoate sense' (373). Other analytic include Glaser and Strauss's (1967) 'constant comparison method' (101-116). This holistic, instinctive, multiple-technique method brings out 'indigenous' themes (Patton 1990).

Thirdly, to illustrate the possibility that academic texts about writing can also be creative, I present brief discourse-informed analyses of two articles. There are four main ways of analysing discourse (Weatherall, Taylor & Yates 2001). The fourth type of DA, 'to look for patterns within much larger contexts, such as those referred to as "society" or "culture" (Taylor 2001:7) is valuable for analysing writing that belong to a particular discourse community. Here I examine two articles and identify features indicating they contain 'creative analytic practices' (Richardson 2000:924).

4 Writers who teach and/or Teachers who write

I begin reporting five key themes with a tabular description of participants.

Subject	Age	Sex	Most recent qualification	Undergraduate study	Teacher who writes (TW) /writer who teaches (WT)?
1	60s	F	PhD (Education)	BA/MA (Literature)	Both
2	30s	F	PhD (Writing)	Undergraduate (Journalism/ ESL)	Both
3	30s	M	Enrolled PhD (Writing)	BA (Education)	Both
4	40s	F	Enrolled PhD (Writing)	BA (Education)	WT
5	60s	F	Enrolled PhD (Writing)	BA (Visual Arts)	WT
6	50s	F	Enrolled PhD (Writing)	BA (English/ ESL)	WT
7	60s	F	MA (Education)	BA (Linguistics)	TW
8	40s	F	PhD (Writing)	MA (Writing)	WT
9	30s	M	Enrolled BA (Creative Writing)	BA (English)	TW
10	40s	M	PhD (English)	BA Hons (English/ Linguistics)	Both

Figure 1: Table of Participants

Theme 1: The categories 'teacher who writes' and 'writer who teaches' are not mutually exclusive

When asked if they related more to the category 'teacher who writes' or 'writer who teaches', only participants 8 and 9 gave unqualified answers. There is a strong sense of writing being an innate vocation (participants 1, 4, 5, 6, 10). Participant 6 articulates the theme roundly: 'I am a writer by nature and have since I was a child written down thoughts and ideas to better understand them'. The question raises a deeper sense of self-identity for participant 5:

If I did not teach my life would continue to be fulfilling. If I did not write my life would fall into chaos. Therefore I am a writer who teaches.

While more participants relate to being writers who teach, the clearest theme is: the categories are not mutually exclusive:

The two fit into and enrich one another (1)

I do not think that I have to be one or the other (2)

Education informs my practice as a writer and increasingly...the other way round (3)

Theme 2: Studying literary studies impacts on teaching writing

Although five participants identified literary studies as a major, all participants engaged with literature. The data suggests a background in literary studies enables writing teachers in analysing texts and differentiating genres. Writes participant 9: 'It's a must to enrol in English in university if you want to improve your creative writing'. Participant 2 unpacks this:

Studying English ... allows one to explore in detail the many ways into a text, and trains one to deconstruct the multiple meanings that live in a text and that the reader brings to a text.

Participant 10 argues 'whether you unpeel and deconstruct Eliot or student 'X', you still apply principles of literary analysis'. Participant 5 echoes this: 'formal analysis provides criteria ... to critique writing and critical skills ... for reflective editing'. The participants indicate synergies between reading and writing: 'Through deconstructing text we understand better how to construct it' (4). Alongside the critical interplay of reading and writing, six participants (2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9) identify 'practice' as vital to establishing profiles: 'Writers learn to be writers by writing' (4). Practising helps writers develop voices.

Theme 3: Teaching writing and writing are 'a two-way street'

The theme that teaching writing impacts on teachers' roles as writers and vice versa appears in 10 responses: 'It is a two way street' (8); 'they mutually complement each other' (9); 'they are inexorably intertwined' (3). 'I approach my own writing', writes participant 7, 'in the way my students are taught to do so, using the tools I teach'.

There is unanimity that teaching writing impacts both one's own practice and one's ability to help students:

As a teacher of writing I constantly draw on my own experience as a writer to understand the processes in which my students are engaged and to formulate constructive feedback (5).

Participant 1 maintains her academic writings are motivated by needs observed in the student experience. Participant 2 notes 'students are a source of inspiration ... adding much to my constant enquiry about what it means to be a writer'.

Theme 4: Advantages of linguistic experience in teaching writing

Six participants emphasise the doors that teaching EAL writing opened in their writing teaching. Participant 3 argues writing teachers need:

a base level of competence in linguistic manipulation and ability to achieve 'authorly intent' and audience response via wordsmithing and sentence structure.

Participant 10 points out the ability to offer feedback about why student work might be 'repetitive', appear 'trite' or read 'monotonously' is enhanced if teachers offer specific feedback on how language systems work.

Teachers can offer feedback that is symptomatic of the text ('your overuse of present participles leads to a lack of syntactic variation') rather than critical (your writing is 'monotonous').

Participant 6 adds that linguistic grounding

has allowed me to use skills I have to work with words and language and people all of which I enjoy... [and has] focused my teaching of writing in functional, skills-based, vocational and academic situations.

Participant 7 goes deeper:

I try to show my students how [linguistics] affects the approach they take to a writing task in academia or in life, the process of writing and the quality of the product.

Theme 5: Writing teachers bring their career journeys to their practice

Writing teachers bring their back-stories to their pedagogical and creative practices Recognising students are also 'on a journey' is crucial because our journeys are now teaching assets (5). Participant 6 describes herself, writing teacher and practitioner, as the sum of experiences:

Now when I work with students I am using skills I have enjoyed and gained great satisfaction from ... [tapping] into my own creativity in encouraging learners to write about their own experience (6).

While there is a feeling that being a writer without academic background might lead to inadequate teaching (e.g. students being taught only 'half the skills they need', 2), there is an equal feeling that writers can value-add where non-practitioners cannot:

I feel that being a creative practitioner allows me to approach teaching in a less structured and a more innovative manner [and] lets me talk about the process of creativity in an insightful way (2).

'I am able to offer students practical advice in ... commercial publishing' (8). Having a voice helps others find theirs (6). Seven participants maintain possessing imaginations are assets: 'I am imaginative, creative, critical and academic but the common thread is being an educator' (10).

5. Creative Academic Writing

In section 1, I posed a question for us: Researching necessitates writing too, so why not make it creative? Since we are, in Kroll's description, double agents pursuing knowledge in our roles as writers within an academy but beyond traditional disciplinary boundaries, and since we would seem to comprise the multiple agencies of teachers-who-write, writers-who-teach and other multi-hyphenates not explicitly covered in this exploration, it seems feasible to suggest that one type of writing we naturally perform in our writerly-teacherly-'reseacherly' role is creative academic writing. I say 'perform' because in an age of multimedia and performativity, our writings need not even manifest themselves as texts. They can hybridise, alchemise and form themselves in interstices and margins. In writing creatively within academic contexts, we continue to offer challenges to disciplinary boundaries and to gently resist or redefine them, suggesting new ways to present knowledge generated in writing programs. 'Researcherly' is not a word, so I pushed linguistic boundaries to create it. In this section I use another tool, DA, to discuss two texts that strike me as exemplifying the type of texts befitting double, triple and multiple agents.

Taylor emphasises DA is valuable for identifying features of a generic norm and of difference, of 'power and resistance, contests and struggles' (2001: 9). Here, I maintain that Marianne Grey's article 'Ethnographers of difference in a critical EAP community-becoming' (2009) and Julia Colyer's, 'Becoming writing, becoming writers' (2009), instantiate my wider argument: writing research texts have license to 'become' in the spaces between, to cross borders. We can use our double, triple and multiple agencies, our back-stories of literary studies and other assets to make and inhabit hybrid texts everywhere (including the interstices) between *critical* and *creative*. Such texts resist the tyranny of discursive expectation and are sites of the contestation and assertion of identity. Such writings *must* do so: they are products of the back-stories of such writing teachers as my participants. These are the texts by writing teacher-writer-researchers *about* and *utilising* our creative analyses. They allow us to channel, not hide, our reflexive back-stories of 'becoming'.

Both Grey's and Colyar's articles are about 'becoming', and enact and perform their meaning while embodying it. Both articles resist the linearity that typifies orthodox academic thought, and both find their own logic: Grey's is nomadic, rhizomatic, and structured instants 'when things change ... where someone gets it '(Pennycook 2004:330). Organising the text around 11 key themes builds the reflexive (the researcher's awareness of her own complicity and use of 'musings' as data) and the experiential (the discovery of the student ethnographers) into Grey's text. The reader

discovers the findings as an ethnographer might, in a sequence selected by the author. Although the methodology and findings are there, the author controls the content rather than shoehorning it into pseudo-scientific models of academic text presentation. The act of writing emulates the author's methodology in fashioning her EAP students into nomadic ethnographers of difference, creating and commenting on images of otherness. The discourse structure of the article is appropriate for its content, and as a record of Grey's consciousness of hybridity, 'difference' and nomadic self-identification: 'innovative, resourceful, practical, and opportunistic' (127). Hers is the only article the *Journal of English for Academic Purposes* that disrupts the reader's expectations of discourse structure and it does so deliberately within a 'poststructuralist discursive framework' (128).

Colyar's paper offers her own writing processes 'as a means of illustrating (embodying? emwording?) what writing looks like' (424). Colyar's text 'becomes' data even as she writes about tricking herself into writing about why writers write. It's 'about', she tells us, 'this place, this space of contradictory possibility' (422). The article is structured into thematic sections, 'reasons why we write', that Colyar discovered in the process of writing. She dramatises the writer's conflict between the process and the 'dressed' product we read: 'the fact that I must begin my paper with placeholder paragraphs reveals my insistence on product' (425). Her self-awareness unnerves the reader from expecting the orthodox discourse structure of 'the article': it must have an introduction and such discourse markers as placeholder paragraphs. She deliberately points to the discursive function of a previous sentence: 'That is also not the introduction ... it's a comment about the above' (422). She reminds us throughout of her thesis ('to argue that writing enables us to become better researchers,' 426) and she includes, deliberately occluded, a literature review and a description of methodology. Once again, the structure of the article is resistant to the dominant hegemony that defines what academic articles look and sound like. Colyar controls sequence and style to demonstrate, in an inversion of the cogito, 'literally, I come to know what I think because I can read it' (426).

6 Conclusions

Colyar (2009) wonders why we are resistant to 'including writing more explicitly in our courses, our papers, and our methodologies' (434) and feels the 'invisible pull' of positivism even in writings by teacher-writer-researchers *about* writing. I feel it too, as I shoehorn into a conclusion but happy I have enacted three strands of a methodology that are three parts of my back-story as teacher-writer-researcher/triple agent. My backstory as a linguist has helped me too. We can, should, must write research that stylistically 'becomes' us, within a discursive structure that enacts the knowledge that we mean to portray and accommodates the processes that leads to our knowing.

Arguing for 'creative analytic practices' is not new. In addition to Richardson (2000), Colyar (2009: 423) cites Tierney's (2000) call to 'get real' on how to write. These practices show themselves in slightly subversive articles on writing in the spirit of double agency. Our double agency allows us to write research, *become* creatively and

perform resistance at the same time. The creative academic text is a hybrid form for us double agents to inhabit.

This paper demonstrates that many teacher-writer-researchers in writing today, like my 10 participants and myself, like Kroll, Grey and Colyar, have nomadic backstories and are likely to have crossed the borders of literary studies, possibly linguistics and other realms. These have become part of our identities, rather than dividing us in two. We sleep 'o' both sides'. In this way, too, are we double agents: adapting and evolving pedagogical, critical, analytic and philosophical strategies from literary studies into writing.

Because of the nature of its 'literary intellectuals' (Dawson 2005:5), the pedagogical and critical space of writing has partially subsumed that of literary studies. Writing's place in the university remains geographically peripheral yet more practically oriented and strategically placed than today's residual literary studies discipline. Writing's place is stronger if it does not hide over-fastidiously under a patchwork quilt labelled *creative* writing. The word *creative* still has a magic halo but if writing enacts creativity, *creative writing* starts to seem tautological. For us to write *creative* academic writing is to claim the *creative* in the *academic* as a natural extension of our multiple agencies. Like Moll Cutpurse, 'I love to lie o' both sides o' th' bed myself'.

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