



Emerging Voices of Greek America

A Literary Voice for the Hellenic Identity

Annamarie Buonocore

*Greece offers you something harder ---
the discovery of yourself...*

Lawrence Durrell

As I look across my desk, I can see the copy of Volume I, Number I of *Φωνές*. When I see it, I am filled with a great sense of excitement knowing that it has been nearly a year since the premiere of the first edition and that we are about to publish the second edition, Volume I, Number II. The last two years have been a thrilling and exploratory journey that has brought me to ponder the meaning of Hellenic identity and of what it means to be a Greek-American in this age of the Greek Crisis. The extensive editing, writing, and publishing work it requires to create an in-print publication like *Φωνές* truly binds the community together and helps us to answer the question, "Why keep printing in the digital age?" While we are a fairly new publication with many obstacles ahead of us in the days to come, the last two years have been filled with excitement and greatness that has changed my view of Hellenism in America and has helped me to envision an exciting and satisfying future for the continuation of Hellenism for generations to come. The development of the new and evolved endeavor has challenged my perspectives on Hellenic identity, Hellenic peoples worldwide, and Hellenic literature in a way that is uniquely more challenging; in a way that has brought on the further discovery of the community and of the self.

Like many projects, the publication is an evolved work that started in a very

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different place than where it is today. The story is one that happened very fast, and the failure of original plans turned out to be for the better of the publication itself and those it eventually came to serve. The literary journal that is seen today began as an attempt to resolve an existential crisis and to answer the question why. In 2011, I was taking lecture classes as a student in the history department at my local state university, which is what was necessary in order to achieve my degree in history. Like many students in the humanities and liberal arts, family and friends constantly asked the dreaded question, "What are you going to do with that degree?" At the time, I accepted the question as a hopeless truth as I accepted most of the words my elders spoke to me. I knew there were internships and other jobs available at museums and other nonprofit organizations, but most of them were menial. Most of the quality jobs in the field required more than a bachelor's degree, but as I tell students today; this is not a hopeless situation. It is an opportunity to become creative and innovative. Coming from a Silicon Valley university, I tell them that the business and engineering departments do not own that last adjective.

To make a long story short, I needed a direction. The few museum internships the history department had represented at the job fair were extremely competitive to support the large number of students interested. I desired more of an existence, one that would be meaningful for social betterment and something that would help my people. On another front, I was lost in the shuffle of the direction my community was taking. The elders seemed disgruntled that the greatness in the churches was not continuing, and the youth seemed completely out of touch with continuing the legacy. In all of this confusion, most of the leaders were also out of touch with the needs of the people. My problem was that I was viewing Hellenism, an entire notion and community, through one very narrow window: the Greek Orthodox Church. There are other Hellenic organizations in my local area that are working to better the community by teaching the Greek language and sponsoring community events, and they are thriving. The Greek Orthodox Church, at least in my area, is thriving in Orthodoxy, as well it should, leaving at least a portion of Hellenism to Greek organizations.

My work began with a small Hellenic museum in my community. The idea was pitched as a publication for the museum that would include stories of the many Greek immigrants in the local vicinity. Interviews and updates about the community would also be included, and the publication would serve as a sophisticated newsletter to help the museum gain publicity. The publication would also assist in the development of a volunteer internship program for

Greek-American students in the humanities or students of Modern Greek Studies. While the director found the endeavor to be worthy, there was a lack of funding and volunteer power to develop it in a meaningful way. Unfortunately, this conclusion was reached after some time of working within the organization, which was a pleasure, but in the end, the project needed a new avenue.

With an academic background in the humanities and experience through my family's publishing business, I dared to start this dream publication on my own and founded my own nonprofit corporation. With parents who had been in niche publishing for nearly 30 years, I knew I would be equipped to produce something meaningful to Hellenism in a day and age with nearly all odds against me. Despite these troublesome ideas, the publication began with great excitement because of all the prolific writers in the Greek community that were waiting for this new voice. Even though the publication was its own nonprofit at this point, it was still going to be stories of immigrant families, and when I thought about good writers, most of them were people I knew from the church. While a good start, this evolved after a meeting at the San Francisco State University Modern Greek Studies Department where I met Professor Thanasis Maskaleris, founder of the Kazantzakis Chair, and Department Chair, Martha Kilronomos who introduced and referred me to some excellent writers and advisors. That meeting was the changing day, and the mission and identity began to develop at that point. From there, I was able to connect with a database of writers throughout the United States, Canada, Greece, and eventually Australia. From that point onward, finding content was no longer the challenge. With the strong amount of outstanding authors at our fingertips, we began to grow and develop a vision that was both exciting and challenging. We were no longer limited to the immigrant stories that one would assume for a Greek literary journal. Poets, fiction writers, essayists, academics, and artists became part of the work and greatly transformed the small seed into a blossoming tree.

The other day when someone asked me what sets *Φωνές* apart as a literary journal and what its purpose is in an ever-changing and evolving Hellenic global landscape, I began to ponder the ideas of our goals, what we are trying to accomplish in this continuing endeavor, and how a Greek literary journal has a place and a role in the modern-day Hellenic global identity. For every process, there is a bridge linking the start to the current day. Because *Φωνές* is not an academic journal but rather a community journal with academic elements, we hold among our principal values to bridge a very important gap. With roots that began in the community with immigrant stories and interviews of well-accomplished Greeks, the publication publishes works such as these as well as

poems, stories, and essays written by amateur writers. These writers are sought out through Hellenic organizations, including churches. On the other end of the spectrum are academics and scholars from Modern Greek Studies departments and other research organizations in the US and abroad. Professional writers and journalists have also participated in the past two issues. Bringing Greek writers and those with voices to express builds the community in an idiosyncratic way through literature and the cathartic nature of writing. Having all of these voices and perspectives united in one community publication with academic elements, brings the community together through quality reading and conversational material. The quality of content featured in each issue is a top priority of the organization, publisher, and editorial board. The power of that content to educate, inspire, spiritually uplift, and provoke intellectual thought and curiosity is a challenge we enjoy and take seriously.

The literature of Hellenism, from the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* to the works of Modern Greek poets, such as Constantine P. Cavafy, and finally to the works of well-known Greek writers that have made their impact in the current-day United States, such as Nicholas Gage and Harry Mark Petrakis, is a meaningful part of Hellenic culture and history. Disseminating this cultural and historical literature to the general public, the Greek community, and to future generations is a chief goal of publishing and continuing a Greek literary journal. Greek-Americans and other diaspora Greeks living outside of Greece and progressing in terms of generations are in a challenging position. Disseminating this cultural history through famous works of literature and by making the community part of the process to actually participate in that literature, presents a resolution to this challenge that brings the people of the Greek diasporas together in a way that is empowering and that will make an impact on future generations. The Greek Orthodox Church is struggling to capture the interests of the youth, and through that narrow window, it may seem that the community is losing its cohesiveness. A literary journal answers the call to preserve this aspect of the culture and disseminate this important history and literature. The need to preserve the Modern Greek language is also a desperate necessity in order to preserve the Hellenic culture and traditions. Arguably, with more and more churches conducting their liturgies predominantly in English, Greek-Americans and other diaspora Greeks are losing the connection to the language of the mother country and forgetting their roots. *Φωνές* answers this challenge by publishing quality translations of famous Greek works that are in the public domain as well as welcoming submissions written in both modern and classical Greek. Just as important is presenting contemporary Greek-Americans and diaspora Greeks who write in English. Including works in both Greek and English bridges

another gap and builds cohesiveness and fluidity in the community. With a crisis in Greece looming, this cohesiveness will prove to be critically important in the times to come.

While Greece is suffering in the madness of disorganized bureaucracy and its people are suffering in the midst of economic woes, now is the most critical time for Greek-Americans and other Greeks of the Diaspora to remain informed of issues going on in Greece during this time. With a Greek literary journal that is also facing various fundraising challenges, we feel intense social responsibility to inform the public about these issues, encourage tourism to Greece, advocate for Greece in the media, and alter the negative perspectives that are destroying the reputation of our ancestral homeland that is the foundation of democracy. In the midst of the modern Greek Crisis, an artistic and activist outpouring is occurring in Athens, Thessaloniki, and on the islands of Greece. In the midst of this crisis, we are seeing great art, poetry, and other literature that not only makes for quality publishable content in a Greek literary journal but also deserves to be disseminated to challenge the modern-day worldview of Greece and its people. While some individuals I have encountered feel that they are many generations removed from Greece and that it is no longer critical to study the language, culture, literature, and history of Hellenism, we argue that the new literary, artistic, and activist movements coming out of Greece deserve our undivided attention. The greatest way to provide this necessary attention is to study the language and continue publishing and disseminating the great historical and literary works of Hellenism. It is up to all Greeks of the Diaspora regardless of how many generations removed to take social responsibility and participate in the modern-day greatness of what it means to be a Greek.

Similar to publishing an in-print publication, preserving Hellenism is a modern-day challenge. As Lawrence Durrell said, "Greece offers you something harder-- the discovery of yourself" While in desperate economic times the arts are often the first programs to be cut, Greece has not allowed this to happen, and this is evidence that Greece, Hellenism, and all of its people will regain the ability to prosper and thrive. It will be a challenge that will offer the discovery of community and self in a changing global landscape. Anyone interested in learning more about *Φωνές* or wishing to propose a contribution can contact us at abuonocore@vhpprojec.org.

Connecting our Greek and American Heritages

Anna Tsiotis

I was at diner with some friends before I left Philadelphia to come to the Future of Hellenism in American conference held in Miami. I mentioned something about the conference and one of my friends turned to me and said, “Anna, everything you do, you say you do because you have red hair or because you are Greek.” I had always thought that one of those characteristics about myself was a bit more obvious than the other. But her comment got me thinking about what traits about myself I did attribute to being Greek. Even though I grew up in the United States, I formed an identity—the way I acted, how I ate, my values and priorities—that is all profoundly Greek. So much so, that to my non-Greek friends, my “Greekness” was just as obvious as the hair on my head.

Growing up, my days spent with my *yiayia* making spanakopita, my years of Greek school, Greek dance, Easters, and name days all shaped my Greek identity. My Greek heritage outwardly defined me. During attendance on the first day of school, I waited patiently for the teacher to attempt to pronounce my last name, silently betting which syllable she would mispronounce or what common, English word my name would morph into. “It’s Tee-oat-sis,” I would say. From that moment on I was labeled as the Greek girl—embodying the “Big Fat Greek life,” feta, gyros, Windex, and all. These moments helped tie me to Greece early on in life. As I got older, my relationship with Greece continued to evolve. I took Greek during college and studied in Greece. My experience on the American Hellenic Institute’s foreign policy trip to Greece and Cyprus radically changed the way that I saw myself as part of the Greek community. The trip gave me firsthand exposure to the very real and very important issues that are facing Greece and Cyprus. Beyond the economic crises, the issue of the Macedonian name issue, illegal immigration, and the illegal, Turkish occupation of Northern Cyprus all resonated with me. Actually seeing the ghost city of Famagusta, meeting the people affected by these policies, and seeing all of the destruction and deterioration of society as a result of the Turkish occupation and economic crisis, made these issues take on new life to me as a Greek-American.

My generation’s relationship with Greece is slightly different than that of our parents and grandparents. My grandparents came to America fleeing years of

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war and economic depression in Greece. For them, Greece was something to escape and the United States was the place where they would find a better life. My generation views Greece through an entirely different lens. My upbringing allowed me to view Greece as an ideal, the country of Cavafy, a home. The American Hellenic Institute's trip changed the Cavafy ideal for me; it showed me a realer, Hellenic community, one that needed help.

All of these experiences lead me here today, speaking to you. My Greek heritage is not different from most of my peers in the Greek community. Yet, within the Greek community, I always saw my experiences as slightly different. My friend, cousins, and peers in the Greek community always seemed "more Greek" than me. My mother is not of Greek decent, as a result, the way that I was raised by comparison always felt different, I felt this way because my friends primarily identified with their Greek heritage—to them, they were Greek first, American second. I understand how this relationship is formed. In an attempt to not forget about the culture and place that our ancestors left, we wrap ourselves in the Greek flag. Even in the way we talk about ourselves as Greek- Americans, Greek comes first. Our love of culture and community creates a family and makes Greece a home for all of us of Greek decent, no matter when our ancestors left, I home that I hold dear.

I think, however, that for the future of Hellenism in America, it is equally as important to be connected to our American heritage. The reason for this is fairly simple. We, my generation of twenty- and thirty-somethings, live and plan to build our future lives in America. For Greek Americans it is important to treat the hyphen between our two heritages as an equal sign, not a minus. We need to view ourselves as part of the fabric of American society in order to perpetuate Hellenism for years to come. I believe that this is true because primary association with Greece weakens the effectiveness of the Greek diaspora community in achieving substantive change on policy issues important to all people of Greek decent.

Any Greek—Greek American, Greek Canadian, a Greek from Greece—has visceral and strong opinions about the treatment of the Patriarch and closing of Halki, the Macedonian name issue, and the illegal occupation of Cyprus. These issues resonate with all of us. However, when we view ourselves as Greeks, and not Greek-Americans, we isolate ourselves from the structures of government and society that we need to make substantive policy change. Yes, we have our strong, but few, champions in Washington; but so much more can be done.

We have the power and ability as a community to make substantive policy change, to use the power of the U.S. government to help Greece. From my

experience working on Capitol Hill, small interest groups achieve monumental change every single day and from my experience at AHI and on the foreign policy trip, the Greek American community is not insignificant. For me, as a 20-year-old female, to have a conversation with the U.S. Ambassador to Greece , where he listened to my opinions on the various foreign policy issues facing Greece is a testament to the power of the Greek diaspora community.

The way change happens is through the channels of American government, by lobbying our representatives, by writing letters, and using organizations like AHI as a mouthpiece in Washington. The Jewish- American community is extremely active at all levels of government. The Greek- American community can do the same.

Our Greek heritage is what brought us here today, but it is our American citizenship that is going to change what is out there. There is a future for Hellenism, but we have to create it.

We Are All Hellenes

Georgea Polizos

I'm a Hellene. We're all Hellenes. Were it not for the enthusiasm and appreciation that I have for my heritage, my life would not be the same. Upon completion of my undergraduate degree, I spent two and a half years working for the Student Life Department of the American Farm School in Thessaloniki, Greece. The majority of the students that I had the pleasure of working with were not Greek but rather from all over Eastern Europe.

Living in northern Greece, in a region of very close borders yet very separate countries, was an exceptional experience. I took advantage of my location and visited many of my students' homes. Travelling through Albania, Kosovo, FYROM (Former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia), and Turkey taught me firsthand about the lives and mentalities of the Balkan people through the hospitality and kindness of my students, their families, and their communities. My experience working at the American Farm School changed everything for me from expanding my interest and passion for the Balkan region to helping me fully understand my own areas of interest and how I would like to capitalize on them in the future. It remains the most influential experience of my life and the friendships I made and lessons I learned from my students were extraordinary.

My experiences throughout the Balkans gave me a renewed appreciation for our Hellenistic values and the significance of keeping these ideals alive. As a member of the "up and coming" generation of Greek Americans, I hope to promote Hellenism and serve as its ambassador. It might be a cliché but knowledge is power; it is important for us to be informed on modern day threats to our Hellenistic principles so that we can work together to defend them. The term Hellenism encompasses many different ideals. But I'd like to define a few key principles that are under attack today: the freedom of expression, equality under the law, and preservation of our historical identity. The battles for these values are still being fought in places like FYROM, Turkey, Cyprus and Albania.

As a young child, I took for granted the richness of our Greek-American community. I was rewarded with so many wonderful experiences from my

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participation in youth groups, camps, dance and language education, and Sunday school which resulted in my most lasting friendships. I naively believed that actual "persecution" against Greeks of the diaspora was largely a thing of the past.

My Greek Albanian friends and my visits to Northern Epirus began to change this perception. Although I was aware of the existence of a Greek minority in the region, I did not know of the strong and lasting discrimination which has been perpetrated against them for generations. The Greek community in Turkey has also suffered. We've heard many people discuss this and at the risk of beating the dead horse, I also will be addressing this. Today, the few remaining Greeks living in Istanbul including the Ecumenical Patriarch still don't have many of their fundamental rights. Many of us heard Patriarch Bartholomew when he stated in his interview on the TV program 60 Minutes that he feels "crucified" by the Turkish government as they continue to seize Orthodox Christian and Greek-owned property in Istanbul. Yet nothing has been done to change this or improve their conditions.

Turkey's suppressions do not stop within its own borders. I've heard this next issue referred to as the "question" of Cyprus, especially in my experiences on Capital Hill. It's the number one topic of conversation in my meetings with Congressional staffers. "Where are we on the Cyprus question?...ah yes, let's discuss the Cyprus question...any updates on the Cyprus question?" But questions imply that there's doubt. And in my mind, nothing could be clearer. Turkey's occupation of Cyprus is illegal. Their prime minister, just a few weeks ago, said that Cyprus as a country doesn't exist. This is unacceptable yet the international community has sat in silence for almost forty years. Is it because people are no longer being killed on a daily basis? Ambassador Kakouris, the former Cypriot ambassador to the United States, once said that "peace is not the absence of conflict." Hundreds of Cypriots remain displaced, multiple religious and cultural sites desecrated, and norms of international law violated. This is not peace.

As a graduate student, I attended the American Hellenic Institute's student foreign policy trip to Greece and Cyprus which provided us with the opportunity to visit the occupied portion of Cyprus. Seeing the abandoned homes, ghost towns, and desecrated Greek cemeteries and churches made me angry. It's one thing to read about it in a book or listen to someone else tell me a story about what they've seen. But being there in person and seeing it for myself made me feel like my rights had been violated. I'm also a Hellene. We're all Hellenes. Saint Paul reminds us in Corinthians, "And if one member suffers, all

the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it." We are all Hellenes.

Another important modern Hellenistic principle is the preservation of our historical identity. For example, as Greek-Americans, we often take it for granted that the term "Macedonia" encompasses a piece of our heritage and background. As the members of my Greek dance group know well, "Macedonia is Greek" (and I don't let them forget it!) Yet FYROM is increasingly referred to internationally as "Macedonia" as its government continues to actively claim an identity and history that is not theirs but ours. It is Hellenic. Furthermore, the distribution of anti-Greek propaganda within FYROM is disturbing. I have visited FYROM three times. Throughout my visits, I saw a multitude of offensive posters and graffiti extending beyond my imagination: the "Former Ottoman Republic of Greece," middle fingers in front of Greek flags, and, worst of all, a giant billboard with a swastika in place of a cross on a Greek flag. In their capital, I also saw the newly erected, enormous bronze statue to Alexander the Great, another wasteful and transparent display of propaganda.

It was the only time when I actually hesitated before sharing with others that I was of Greek descent. And let me clarify; I was not ashamed. But the environment was a hostile one.

If you've ever wondered if Hellenism is still valued or relevant in today's world, consider FYROM. Hellenic culture still bears so much weight in the international community that we find in FYROM the case of a young country with no clear identity, attempting to take a vital piece of ours. History matters. Blatant attempts such as this to revise it should not go unnoticed.

These issues are very real to us as Hellenes. And real issues need real solutions. Our mission is clear; we must continue to educate ourselves and those around us about the attacks on Hellenism in the world. But education is only the first step; we must also advocate for the preservation of our Hellenistic ideals whenever and wherever they are threatened. We are all Hellenes, aren't we? I plan to keep working and advancing the principles of Hellenism through my own actions. I also believe in my generation of Greek-Americans. We have tremendous talent and potential to mobilize on behalf of Hellenistic ideals and their significance worldwide if we stay focused, informed and, most importantly, unified. After all ... we are all Hellenes.

Formal Education in Modern Greek: a Lifelong Investment

Peter Hasiakos

The etymology of the word *diaspora* contains deep insight relating to the experiences of Greek Americans. The common understanding of the word is “that which is scattered throughout,” referring to a group of people who are scattered abroad; but the verb from which it originates (*σπείρειν*, Modern Greek: *σπέρνω*) means “to sow.” We are talking about a seed. When we consider how heritage is transmitted among people in the diaspora, it is like examining a living plant that has been sown in a new soil and cultivated over time.

The word *heritage* is a rich term. In my estimation, it communicates something handed down that cannot necessarily be defined in words. It includes—but is not limited to—faith, culture, customs, and language. This last element, language, is what I wish to discuss now. I will tell my own story about how the “seed” of Hellenism, which I received from my parents, was cultivated from a young age up until this very moment, as I am continuing to work with the language in my current studies as a theology student.

I am a “generation 2.5” Greek American. That is to say, by my mother’s side I am third generation, and by my father’s I am second generation. I grew up with what I would call a significant “exposure” to the Greek language, having attended Greek school and hearing my grandparents converse. Thus, I was given an invaluable foundation for the language that made all of my future learning possible. I cannot emphasize enough the importance of these early foundations. Not speaking much Greek in the home, though, I had an interest to learn more and to improve. In the back of my mind, I always wondered if it would be possible for me to develop the kind of facility with the language that my father had.

As I neared the end of my high-school education, I noticed in a flyer that Modern Greek was being offered at a local community college in the Chicago area. That was all the bait I needed. On Thursday nights during my senior year, I made the fifty-minute commute to class. The course was hardly rigorous, but it helped kindle a small flame of interest that I had to learn the language.

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After sending in my acceptance letter to the University of Michigan, I learned—from an article that my grandfather had clipped from a local newspaper—that I was headed for one of the universities in the country that offered a program in Modern Greek Studies. During my freshman year, fellow students encouraged me to enroll for a one-hour-per-week conversation class during the winter term. After that course, I was hooked; I proceeded to take more courses, eventually earning a minor in Modern Greek studies.

Nearly a decade later, there are not many cobwebs forming on the foundation that I received through my studies. Every day, some knowledge or skill is reactivated or built upon. The frequency of our class sessions provided many hours of personal interaction with our instructor, whose voice often still comes to my mind when, in conversation or reading, I encounter a grammatical phenomenon that we learned in class. Thus, my formal education in Modern Greek at the university level built upon my previous education. It was a foundation laid upon a foundation. It seems to me that by its very nature, the process of learning a language is never complete. Language is simply inexhaustible because of its inextricable connection with the human experience.

There is one particularly rewarding aspect of my studies that I have noticed. Comprehending Greek has allowed me to appreciate the personalities and ideas of Greek people in a more intimate way than before. If reading a work of literature in translation is subject to imperfections, how much more is this true with people! Even more splendid than reading a Greek poem in the original is the experience of sitting and having a lengthy conversation with my grandmother, relatives, or friends, in Greek. In addition, I have taken two trips to Greece since my university years, one being a pilgrimage, the other being my honeymoon. Being able to speak the language during those trips enriched my experience beyond words and left an indelible mark on my heart.

I must also emphasize the tremendous benefit I have received from being able to read Greek texts. While working as a high school physics teacher for several years after graduating, I frequently read Greek Orthodox theological books, as well as the New Testament itself, which I was able to learn to read with the help of some tutoring. Furthermore, in serving as a chanter for my home parish, my familiarity with the ancient heritage of the language increased through reading the hymnological texts. Last year, I enrolled at Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology, where I began my Master of Divinity. The courses here have provided me new opportunities to take my knowledge and skills to an even higher level, both through Greek language courses and through my other theological courses. In these contexts, we study Biblical and patristic

texts and are encouraged to consult the original Greek. In the library here, I have encountered many “bilingual” editions of such texts, which contain the original Greek and a modern Greek translation side-by-side. These books have been yet another important resource for learning. Furthermore, I have been able to engage with a wealth of modern theological writings that have remained largely untranslated. This last category includes, for example, many of the erudite works of Saint Nektarios of Aegina, a twentieth century bishop, who, despite his poverty and being persecuted, managed to write extensively on a variety of topics, drawing on an impressive collection of sources.

The story of my learning Greek is an ongoing one. The seed is continuing to be watered and is constantly growing. I believe that formal education in Modern Greek is, for those who have the opportunity to pursue it, a priceless investment. The presence of Modern Greek Studies programs in the diaspora is an invitation to Greek Americans who wish to experience Hellenism in a deeper way, to take that which has been passed down to them and enrich it. Such programs build upon the foundations that are laid by families and communities, and in doing so, they honor all who have labored in the name of Hellenism. It is my hope that such programs continue to flourish, providing the blessings that I have received to others who wish to share in the same.

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