

General Introduction

Module 18 will be divided into two sub-sections: Section A and Section B. Section A will briefly discuss the chief features of major characters like The Red Cross Knight, Una, Prince Arthur, Duessa, Sir Guyon, Britomart, Artegal or Arthegall, Cambell, Florimell and Calidore. Section B will throw some light on the stylistic qualities of Spenser in The Faerie Queene. In this section we will discuss: Spenser's musical language and figures of speech. In other words we can say that section B will deal with the art of versification of Spenser.



Section A

Characters

Spenser's The Faerie Queene is a fairly long chain of chivalrous events and characters. Both Major and minor characters colour the canvas of this epic. These characters are not simply the characters they are allegorical symbols to make abstract concrete and to make unbelievable believable. His major characters include The Red – Cross Knight, Una, Prince Arthur, Duessa, Sir Guyon, Britomart, Artegall, Florimell, Campbell, and Calidore. List of minor characters includes Crudor, Briana, Bellamour, Claribel, The dwarf, Archimago, Morpheus, Sansfoy, Fradubio, Fraelissa, the lion, Corceca, Abessa, Kirkrapine, Sansloy, Lucifera, Sansjoy, Aesculapius, the satyrs and the fauns, Sylvanus, Sir Satyrane, the Giant Orgoglio, Ignaro, Despair, Sir Terwin, Sir Trivesan, Dame Caelia, Fidelia, Speranza, Charissa, Patience, Mercie, Contemplation, Una's father and the inhabitants of her country, the monster Error, The beast on which Duessa Rode, the Dragon, and six counsellors of Lucifera including Idleness, Gluttony, Lechery, Avarice, Envy, and Wrath.

The Red – Cross Knight is the chief character or hero of Book I of Faerie Queene. There is a red sign of cross on his armour and his shields that symbolizes the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. He was a loyal follower of Christ.

But on his Brest a bloudie Cross he bore,  
The dear remembrance of his dying Lord,  
The whose sweete sake that glorious badge he wore.  
And dead as living ever him ador'd:  
Upon his shield the like was also scor'd,  
For soveraine hope, which in his helpe he had:  
Right faithfull true he was in deede and word,  
But of his cheere did seeme to solemne sad;  
Yet nothing did he dread, but ever was ydrad.

(I, I, 2)

He is the personification of the virtue of Holiness. Book I is the documentation of the adventures of Red Cross Knight. Emile Legouis aptly remarks, "In the first book the adventures of the Red – Cross Knight represent, in turn or simultaneously the Christian soul in quest of truth, the alternatives offered Protestantism and Catholicism and the advances and lapses of faith in the sixteenth century". He is a symbol of the Church Militant struggling to save itself against its enemies before the beginning of the Reformation. He also symbolizes the Reformed English Church.

Una is the daughter of the King whose kingdom has been destroyed by the Dragon. Una goes to Queen Gloriana to ask for help in saving her father's country from the Dragon. She is very fair. She has been portrayed as a beautiful lady riding on a white ass, who is whiter than snow but she is whiter than the ass.



A lovely Ladie rode him faire beside,  
Upon a lowly Asse more white the snow,  
Yet she much whiter, but the same did hide,

Under a vele, that whimpled was full low,  
And over all a blacke stole she did throw,  
And one that inly mournd: so was she sad,  
And heavie sat upon her palfrey slow:  
Seemed in heart some hidden care she had,  
And by her in a line a milke white lambe she had.

(I, I, 4)

Una is the symbol of Truth, and maidenly virtue. She also symbolizes the Anglican Church. Her beauty is unparalleled. When she takes off her hood and wimple, there is brightness even in a shady place:

From her fair head her fiellet she unlight,  
And laid her stole aside: her angel's face,  
As the great eye of heaven, showne bright,  
And made a sunshine in the shady place:  
Did never mortal eye behold such heavenly grace.



Prince Arthur is madly in love with the Faerie Queene and tries to achieve her. He is represented as the Knight of Magnificence. He may be called the younger version of King Arthur. He fights with Orgoglio in Canto 8 of Book I. He carries a magic shield made by Merlin, a magician. He saves the Red Cross Knight from Orgoglio. In Canto IX he tells Una and Red Cross Knight that how did he fall in love with the Faerie Queene. He also tells them that he is in search of that Faerie Queene.



From that day forth I lov'd that face divine;  
From that day forth I cast in carefull mind,  
To seek her out with labour and long tyne,  
And never vovd to rest till her I fynd:  
Nyne monethes I seek in vain, yet ni'll that vow unbynd.

(I, IX, 15)

The Red Cross Knight and Prince Arthur exchange their gifts. Historically he represents Lord Leicester. His love for the Faerie Queene symbolizes Lord Leicester's feelings for Queene Elizabeth. His fight with Orgoglio symbolizes his fights in Netherlands which he fought against the Roman Catholic faith.

Duessa is a witch, the daughter of Deceit and Shame – who calls herself Fidessa to deceive others. She represents 'Falsehood'. After the death of Sans foy she becomes the mistress of the Red Cross Knight. She also helps Sans Joy. She visits to the Hell to save Sans Joy's life. There she contacted Aesculapius, the famous physician to revive Sans joy. In Canto II of Book I she becomes the mistress of the Giant Orgoglio, and starts living in a majestic style. In Canto XII, after the death of the Dragon, she sends a letter to the King (Una's father) in which she writes that the Red Cross Knight had promised her to marry so the king should not offer the hand of his daughter (i.e. Una) to this knight. In the last Canto of Book I, the Red Cross Knight describes Duessa in following words:





‘There did I find, or rather I was found  
Of this false woman, that Fidessa hight  
Fidessa hight the falsest Dome on Ground,  
Most false Duessa, royall richly dight,  
That easie was’t inveigle weaker sight  
Who by her wicked arts, and wylie skill,  
Too false and strong for earthly skill or might  
Unwares me wrought unto her wicked will,  
And to my foe betrayed, when least I feared ill.’

(I, XII, 32)

Sir Guyon is the Knight of self – control or Temperance. He is the hero of Book II. He is the chief of the Knights of Maidenhood. Image of Gloriana is on his shield. ‘Good Guyon’ is called God’s ‘wicked Foe’. He is attracted by the loveliness of the Bower of Bliss. But finally he destroys it. Alastair Fowler very aptly writes that: “When Britomart meets Guyon she overthrows him through the ‘secret virtue’ (III, I, 10) of her enchanted spear, because chaste love is a higher virtue than temperance, presupposing it as a *sine qua non*....And Guyon in his quest seeks to arrest concupiscence – a mission one might define theologically as mortification of the flesh and destruction of the body of sin, or as sanctification; the next stage after the baptism of repentance Book I was concerned with.” (Peter Bayley – pg. 237)



Britomart, a warrior damsel, in the Book III represents the virtue of chastity. She is dressed up in the armour of a Knight; she goes to the Faerie land to in search of Arthegall, who has dishonoured her. In fact she loves Arthegall. Malecasta one night lies down beside Britomart, but she wakes up in a shock. Malecasta faints when he comes to know that she is a lady. She symbolizes the power that chastity provides to a person. As per R. E. Neil Dodge, “... Britomart falls in love with Arthegall by the single glimpse which she has of his image in her father’s enchanted mirror. (III, 2, 22 ff).... In the image which Britomart sees the Knight’s armour is inscribed with the legend: ‘Achilles armes which Arthegall did win’ (III, 2, 25) .... The visit of Glauce and Britomart to Merlin in his cave

and the prophecy of Britomart's future line (IV, 3) is of course taken bodily from Canto 3 of the *Furioso*..."



Artegal or Artégall is the personification or an agent of Justice. He falls in love with Britomart. Britomart sees his face in a magic mirror given by her father. She starts searching him. Both are united in this book. Later the Faerie Queene sends him on a quest to save Irena from Grantorto. Astraea is tutor in Justice, who gives him the iron man Talus as his squire.



Cambell represents friendship. He is also one of the major characters in the Faerie Queene. His other friend is Triamond.

Florimell, loves Marinell, She is represented as the most beautiful woman in this book III, She also represents 'the fleeting nature of beauty and the reactions of the other Knights'. Initially she is rejected by Marinell but later on she is captured by Proteus. At the end of Book IV she gets reunited with Marinell. Both of them get married in Book V.

Calidore is the Knight of Courtesy. He is the hero of Book VI. As per Alastair Fowler: "Calidore's own part in Book VI has a triadic rhythm of one proceeding and two reverting phases. For, after a first period of virtuous (reverting) activity during his so-called trancy he mainly receives benefits, such as Meliboe's hospitality, and seems to forget his mission. Finally, inspired by his glimpse of the

graces (a poetic vision proceeding from the divine), he enters on another reverting phase of activity.” (pg.228). His character is based on idealistic vision which Spenser projects through the poetic genre of the pastoral idyll. Maurice Evans very rightly says that “Calidore’s story is not designed to reveal Calidore himself so much as the poet’s conception of his own craft, and Book VI is an anatomy of poetry itself using poetic genres as allegories of its strengths and weaknesses.”

## Section B

### Stylistic qualities

Musical language and Melody

Spenserian stanza,

Imagery,

Epic Similes,

Figures of Speech

Musical Language and Melody –

The language of Spenser is musical. He like a dextrous musician produces a fine harmony of sound and sense by using the most elementary words. Liquid vowels and consonants as ‘u’, ‘o’, ‘l’, ‘m’, ‘n’, etc, are used in quick succession.

The Laurell, meed of mightie Conquerors

And Poets sage, the Firre that weepeth still

The willow worne forlorne Paramours,

The Eugh obedient to the benders will,

The Birch for shaftes, the Sallow for the mill,

(I, I, 9)

He uses onomatopoeic words to produce melodic effect. This device can be defined as the use of words which echo their sense. He uses this device in the descriptions of the environs of the house of Morepheus, the god of sleep.

And more to lulle him in his slumber soft,

A trickling streame from high rocke tumbling downe

And ever – drizzling raine upon the loft,

Mixt with a murmuring winde, much like the sowne

Of swarming Bees, did cast him in a sworne

No other noyse, nor peoples troublous cryes,

As still are wont I’ annoy the walled towne,

Might there be heard: but careless Quiet lyes

Wrapt in eternall silence farre from enemies.'

(I, I, 41)

He also uses medial rhythms and alliteration. Alliteration, particularly assonance is the striking feature of his poetry. William Empson rightly says: "Spenser concentrates the reader's attention on the movement of his stanza, by the use of archaic words and constructions, so that one is at a safe distance from the exercise of an immediate judgement, by the steady untroubled flow of similar lines, by making no rapid change of sense or feeling, by sustained alliteration, parallel adjectives and full statement of the accessories of a thought, and by the dreamy repetition of the great stanza perpetually pausing at its close." (pg. 142) Alliteration and assonance are available in all of his works. I am citing a few of his lines:

(1) But of his cheere did seem too solemne sad (Repetition of /s/ sound)

(2) And twist them both was born the bloody bold

San loy. (Repetition of /b/ sound)

(3) And rushed forth, hurling her hideous taile. (Repetition of /h/ sound)

(4) downe in a dale, hard by a forests side. (Repetition of /d/ sound)

(5) That feigning dreame, and that faire – forged Spright.

(Repetition of /f/ sound)

(6) With change of cheer the simple seeming maid. (Repetition of /ch/ sound)

(7) For the late loss of her dear loved knight. (Repetition of /l/ sound)

(8) All night she thinks too long, and often looks for light (Repetition of /l/ sound)

(9) Fight for the rule of the rich fleeced flacke (Repetition of /f/ sound)

(10) A virgin widow whose deep wounded mind with love, long time did languish as the stricken hind.

(Repetition of /v/, /w/, and /l/ sound)

(11) His blessed body spoiled of lively breath. (Repetition of /b/ sound)

(12) From fiery wheelles of his faire chariot. (Repetition of /f/ sound)

(13) Glad of such lucke, the luckelesse lucky maid. (Repetition of /l/, and /k/ sounds)

There are a number of stanzas that can be quoted for their rhyme rhythm, alliteration and soothing melody. Stanza twenty two from Canto VI in book one is one such example.

The forlorne mayd did with loves longing burne,

And could not lacke her lovers company,

But to the wood she goes, to serve her turne,



And seeke her spouse, that from her still does fly,  
And follows other game and venery:  
A Satyre chaunst her wandering for to find,  
And kindling coles of lust in brutish eye,  
The loyall links of wedlock did unbind,  
And made her person thrall unto his beastly kind.

About the musical quality of Spenser's poetry William Hazlitt rightly remarks: "Spenser was the poet of our waking dreams; and he has invented not only a language but music of his own for them. The undulations are infinite like those of the waves of the sea: but the effect is still the same, dulling the senses into a deep oblivion of the jarring noises of the world, from which we have no wish to be ever recalled." Unfailing sweetness and fluent projection of his verse is the base of magical harmony in his poetry.

### **Spenserian Stanza:**

Spenser was a gifted poet. He invented his own stanza form. This newly invented form of stanza was popularly known as Spenserian stanza. The Faerie Queene is composed in Spenserian stanza. Dixon very rightly writes: "To Spenser's credit stands the most brilliant metrical invention of our literature, the famous stanza which bears his name; a measure as its history shows, comparable to blank verse in the range and variety of its harmonies, and superior in liquid and lingering charm, in sheer romantic and musical sweetness."

Spenserian stanza contains nine lines. He took its inspiration from an Italian variety of stanza popularly known as Ottava Rima which was used by Ariosto and Tasso. As per William Nelson: "This hunger for complexity, for binding into one the multiple and for revealing the multiple in the one, shows itself in almost every aspect of Spenser's technique. The stanza which he invented for the poem is itself such a various unit. Its closest relatives are the Italian Ottava Rima (ab ab ab cc), rhyme royal (ababbcc), and the stanza used by Chaucer in the Monk's Tale (ababbcbc). In the first two forms the final couplet rhymes independently of the rest; the Monk's Tale stanza lacks a clear-cut conclusion. By adding an Alexandrian rhyming with c to this last verse pattern, Spenser introduces metrical variety and at the same time supplies an ending which is linked to rather than separated from the remainder." (pg. 193 – 194)

The first eight lines of the Spenserian stanza are written in iambic pentameter (deca-syllabic lines composed in iambic meter). The ninth line remains longer. It contains twelve syllables (hexameter). It is also called Alexandrine. The rhyme scheme of Spenserian stanza is 'ab abbc bcc'. Four lines end with same rhyme 'b' and three other lines end with same rhyme 'c'.

Who all while, with charmes and hidden artes,  
Had made a Lady of that other Spright,  
And fram'd of liquid ayre her tender partes,  
So lively and so like in all mens sight,  
That weaker sense it could have ravisht quight:

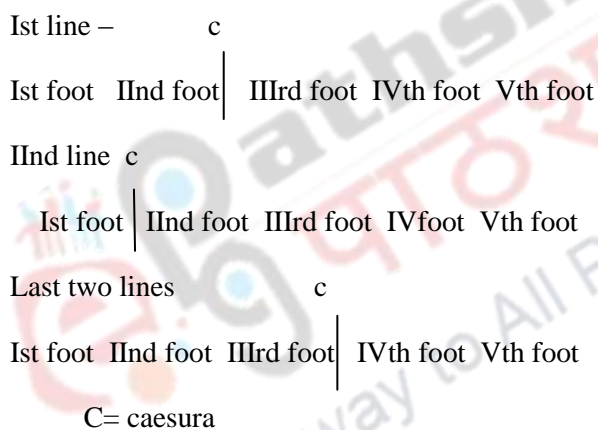
The maker selfe, for all his wondrous witt,  
 Was nigh beguiled with so goodly sight.  
 Her all in white he clad, and over it  
 Cast a black stole, most like to seeme for Una fit.

(I, I, 45)

In the above mentioned stanza ‘spright’, ‘sight’, ‘quight’, and ‘sight’ are the examples of ‘b’, and ‘wit’, ‘it’ and ‘fit’ are the examples of ‘c’ in the rhyme scheme of Spenserian stanza.

William Empson also writes that: “abab bcbcc’ is a unit which may be broken up into a variety of metrical forms, and the ways in which it is successively broken up are fitted into enormous patterns. The first quatrain usually gratifies the ear directly and without surprise, and the stanzas may then be classified by the grammatical connections of the crucial fifth line, which must give a soft bump to the dying fall of the first quatrain, keep it in the air, and prevent it from falling apart from the rest of the stanza.” (pg. 142 – 143)

The caesura or pause in Spenserian stanza keeps changing. Following figure will show it clearly



In the first line it occurs after the second foot, in the second line it shifts back one foot and occurs after the first foot while in last two lines it occurs after IIIrd foot. The middle line has no caesura.

Alexandrine provides a wonderful conclusion to the stanza. Sometimes it ends with some pithy sentences:

For blood can nought but sin, and wars but sorrows yield.

(I, X, 60)

God help the man so wrapt in Error’s endless train,

(I, I, 18)

**Imagery:**

The Faerie Queene deserves a unique place amongst all the epics on account of its splendid imagery. Spenser employs vivid imagery in this book. The most common type of imagery is visual

imagery. He paints beautiful pictures with the help of words. In the second Canto of the third book he writes:

And underneath his feet was written thus,

Vnto the Victor of the Gods this bee:

And all the people in that ample hous

Did to that image bow their humble knee,

And oft committed fowle Idolatree.

That wondrous sight faerie Britomart amazed,

Ne seeing could her wonder satisfie,

But euer more and more upon it gazed,

The whiles the passing brightness her fraile senses dazed.

(IV, II, 49)

Daze of the Britomart 'intensifies the reader's reaction to the dazzling effect of the palace.' (P.J. Alpers. Page – 124) His imagery is most of the times concrete. William Hazlitt very rightly remarks that "He paints nature, not as we find it, but as we expected to find it, and fulfils the delightful promise of our youth.... He is the painter of abstractions, and describes them with dazzling minuteness," These wonderful word pictures are scattered in the entire epic. Legouis says that "The Faerie Queene is essentially a picture gallery".

In the Canto I of the book I he gives a graphic description of the forest, where he portrays the picture of various types of trees like Cedar, pine, elms, poplars, Cyprus and so on. He also gives a graphic description of the monster and his offsprings. The monster looked like a serpent stretching out at full length. It had a long tail with a deadly sting. Thousands of young ones of this monster, after seeing the strange light, crept into her mouth and disappeared.

By which he saw the ugly monster plaine,

Halfe like a serpent horribly displaide,

But th' other halfe did womans shape retaine,

Most lothsom, filthie, foule and full of vile disdain.

And as she lay upon the dirtie ground,

Her huge long taile her den all overspread,

Yet was in knots and many boughtes upwound,

Pointed with mortal sting....

Soone as that uncouth light upon them shone,

Into her mouth they crept, and suddain all were gone.

(I, I, 14, 15)

Lovely image of beautiful, rosy figured Aurora exhibits Spenser's extraordinary portrayal of natural scenes. Graphic description of fight between the Red Cross Knight and Sans foy is also interesting. He also presents the seven stars known as bootes. In the same stanza we find visual, auditory and tactile images simultaneously.

By this the Northerne wagoner had set

His sevenfold teme behind the stedfast starre,

That was in Ocean waves yet never wet,

But firme is fixt, and sendeth light from farre

To all, that in the wide deepe wandring arre;

And chearefull Chaunticlere with his note shrill

Had warned once, that Phoebus fiery carre

In hast was climbing up the Eastern hill,

Full envious that night so long his roome did fill.

(I, II, 1)

Queen Lucifera's palace has also been painted graphically. He also presents a vivid picture of Lucifera's chariot. The fight between The Red Cross Knight and Orgoglio and the fight between Prince Arthur and Giant Orgoglio are two very good examples of vivid imagery produced by Spenser. The heart-rending portrayal of the pain and the afflictions of The Red Cross Knight have been pictured dexterously. His thighs had become so weak that they could not support the weight of his body. His eyes had sunk deep in the hollow pits, his cheeks were without flesh, and because of undernourishment his arms were reduced to mere bones.

His sad dull eyes deepe sunck in hollow pits,

Could not edure th' the unwonted sunne to view;

His bare thin cheeks for want of better bits,

And empty sides deceived of their dew,

Could make a stony hart his hap to rew;

His rawbone armes, whose mighty brawned bowrs

Were wont to rine steele plates, and helmets hew,

Were cleane consum'd, and all his vitall powers

Decayed, and all his flesh shronk up like withered flowers.

(I, VIII, 41)



Abode of despair, the treatment of the Red Cross Knight by the physician, the picture of sunrise, description of the Dragon, Knight's torture, picture of dawn, and the delineation of beauty of Una are some examples of vivid imagery. Defining Una's charm and freshness he writes:

As bright as doth the morning starre appeare,  
Out of East, with flaming lockes bedight...  
So faire and fresh that Lady shewd her selfe in sight.

(I, XII, 21)

In the very next stanza he portrays Una's beauty which is as fresh as the freshest flower in the month of May. He further defines her garment in following words:

And on her now a garment she did weare,  
All lilly white, withoutten spot, or pride,  
That seemed like silke and silver woven neare,  
But neither silke nor silver therein did appear.

(I, XII, 22)

### **Epic Simile**

Use of epic simile in The Faerie Queene has been discussed in detail in the last module.

### **Figures of speech**

In The Faerie Queene we find similes, metaphors, Homeric similes, symbols, alliteration, assonance, consonance, hyperbole, mythological references, or allusions, personification and onomatopoeia scattered here and there in abundance. We have already discussed about Homeric similes, onomatopoeia, alliteration, assonance and consonance in the last module. It seems that Spenser's favourite figure of speech was simile. Here are some examples of simile in The Faerie Queene.

The lady, when she saw her champion fall  
Like the old ruines of a broken towre,

(I, II, 20)

● \* \* \*

Her angels face

As the great eye of heaven shy ned bright,  
And made a sunshine in the shadie place;  
Did never mortall eye behold such heavenly grace.

(I, III, 4)

● \* \* \*

The Lyon would not leave her desolate,  
But with her went along, as a strong gard  
Of her chast person;

(I, II, 9)

● \* \* \*

Exceeding shone, like phoebus fairest childe,

(I, IV, 9)

● \* \* \*

And heaped blows like yron hammers great:

(I, V, 7)

● \* \* \*

Scarce could be footing find in that fowle way,  
For many corses, like a great Lay – stall  
Of murdered men which therein strowed lay,  
Without remorse...

(I, V, 53)

He also uses metaphor with equally great skill.

That flower of faith and beautie excellent.

(I, VI, 15)

Defining the ravishing beauty of Una displayed by A False Lady created by Archimago he makes use of Hyperbole.

That weaker sence it could have ravish quight :

The maker selfe, for all his wondrous witt,

Was nigh beguiled with so goodly sight.

The very next example can be cited for hyperbole and simile both.

The cruell wound enraged him so sore,

That loud he yelled for exceeding paine;

As hundred ramping Lyons seem'd to rore

(I, XI, 37)

Here the roar of the wounded Dragon has been compared with the roar of the hundred leaping lions. In the third Canto of Book I the lion behaves in a gentle manner who is moved by the beauty and simple truth of a woman.

Instead there of he kist her wearie feet,

And lick her lilly hands with fawning tong...

O how can beautie master the most strong,

And simple truth subdue avenging wrong?

...

And drizzling teares did shed for pure affection.

Spenser's diction was different from the language of the day. He made changes into words on his own. He changed the syntax, interchanged actives and passives, and gave language a new attire.

He invented his own stanza. Spenserian Stanza was his biggest contribution to the art of English versification. The most striking characteristic of his verse is its sweet music and melody. Its vivid imagery and frequent use of figures of speech make it more attractive. William Hazlitt very rightly says that "His versification is, at once, the most smooth and the most sounding in the language. It is a labyrinth of sweet sounds 'in many a winding bout of linked sweetness long drawn out' ---that would cloy by their very sweetness, but that the ear is constantly relieved and enchanted by their continued variety of modulation – lingering on the pauses of the action, or flowing on in fuller tide of harmony with the movement of the sentiment." Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* is one of the biggest and most precious gems in the treasure box of English literature.

**Questions:**

- (1) Write a detailed note on the character of the Red Cross Knight.
- (2) Discuss the chief characteristics of Una in Book I of the *Faerie Queene*.
- (3) Write an essay on the heroines of Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*.
- (4) Write an essay on the negative characters in the *Faerie Queene*.
- (5) "The *Faerie Queene* is a huge picture Gallery". Discuss.
- (6) "Spenser's poetry is sweet and melodious". Discuss.
- (7) Write an essay on the art of versification of Spenser with special reference to *The Faerie Queene*.
- (8) Discuss Spenserian Stanza in detail.
- (9) 'Spenser's use of figures of speech is unique.' Discuss.
- (10) Write an essay on the imagery in Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*.



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