

Hypnotist , Philosopher, Serial Killer, Friend: A Critical Review of Ian Brady's *The Gates of Janus*.

By Anthony Metivier

The Gates of Janus, a confessional-philosophical book by the British 'Moors Murderer,' Ian Brady, presents one of the very few prose offerings by a "serial killer." Stephen Milligen mentions a manuscript supposedly penned by John Wayne Gacy and submitted to Doubleday titled *A Question of Doubt* (149) but along with Charles Nimo, Milligen doubts that anyone ever actually published the work.¹ Brady's *The Gates of Janus*, in large part, attempts to smash certain cultural illusions about serial killers, while contradictorily arguing for our recognition of the importance, if not necessity, of the serial murderer in contemporary society. In this way, Brady takes the enlightenment of his reader as the goal of his text, and the book functions paradoxically as both an expose and a how-to guide. Nonetheless, Katherine Ramsland dismisses Brady as a "postmodern nihilist" (166). Ramsland, who draws the term "serial killer" back to the beginnings of recorded history, lumps Brady together with several other authors, whom she equally misinterprets. Consider, for example, the connection Ramsland makes between Brady and three major figures of literature and philosophy: "Inspired by Dostoevsky, the Marquis de Sade, and Nietzsche, [Brady] believed that certain men can rise above society's moral standards and do as they pleased" (166-177).

As I will demonstrate, Brady's text deserves greater consideration than this. After all, Brady explains why he thinks people find him repugnant while also finding him attractive and gives us insight, not into what makes a serial killer tick, but into a method of viewing, by which serial killers do not really exist at all. The probing, interrogative nature of Brady's self-study hardly resembles Ramsland's description, and, as we shall see, *The Gates of Janus* weaves an odd array of themes, such as friendship, hypnosis, and representations of the mastermind criminal, which if anything calls for a deconstruction of the myth of the serial killer. Brady's text offers a productive struggle to dismiss the notion of evil as an essence, and *The Gates of Janus* provides a fascinating means of tracking this line of argument in the mind of a controversial criminal.

For Brady, the term 'serial killer' is a misnomer. Moreover, he spots a disconnection between any analysis of a killer's motivation and the actual event or process of killing:

¹ "Four Visits to John Wayne Gacy." <http://user.aol.com/Karol666/page4/gacy.htm>.

I believe the term ‘serial killer’ is highly misleading, in that it implicitly suggests to the general public that murder is the paramount object or motivating urge in the mind of the killer ... They naturally attribute this motivation partly because they value human life above all else, and partly because, as their endless fascination with the subject suggests, they have a vague conception of murder as being somehow mystical, highly dramatic, or even a nebulously romantic experience, replete with unimaginable connotations of eroticism. And guilt for it must be paid for in full. (85-86)

Generalizing his own experiences and motivations to other killers, Brady argues that murder serves as a cover for the “dramatic” victimizations killers perpetrate upon their victims. Discussing crimes committed by himself and his girlfriend Myra Hindley, Brady asserts that killing and hiding the bodies on the Moors most importantly silenced their prey, thereby preventing any reports of the couple’s crimes. Brady and Hindley made photographs and audio recordings of their abuse of young children as a means of reliving crimes enacted on living bodies. For them, Brady argues, murder itself offered no special excitement. Murder is “a *necessary* conclusion to an exercise of power and will ... a categorical imperative. A wearisome cleaning up after the fear” (89. Brady’s emphasis).

Brady confirms the hypothesis offered by Robert Ressler of the FBI’s Behavioral Sciences Unit, who has been credited with coining the term “serial killer”, “because the behavior of these criminals supposedly reminded him of the movie-house serials he enjoyed as a child” (Milligan 98). Ressler discusses his definition of serial murder, which he first devised and applied in the early 70s (he gives no specific date) in his book *Whoever Fights Monsters*. In short, Ressler argues that the addiction of the serial killer resembles:

the serial adventures we used to see on Saturday at the movies ... Each week you’d be lured back to see another episode, because at the end of each one was a cliff-hanger. In dramatic terms, this wasn’t a satisfactory ending, because it increased, not lessened the tension. The same dissatisfaction occurs in the mind of serial killers. (29-30)²

² Fascinatingly, Ressler’s cinematic suppositions contributed to Thomas Harris’ *The Silence of the Lambs* (Schmid 93), and he served as a supervisor for the television show *Profiler* (172). Schmid discusses Ressler’s various condemnations of filmic representations of the FBI and demonstrates how the Ressler’s opinion hinges on whether or not the filmmakers sought his advice. He approved of Harris’ novel, for instance, but not Jonathan Demme’s film, which did not utilize his expertise (93).

In order to avoid incorrectly associating Brady's work with Ressler's theory too closely, and in support of Brady's fundamental thesis that "serial killers," strictly speaking, do not exist, we require a longer excursion into the history of the term "serial murder." David Schmid's *Natural Born Celebrities: Serial Killers in American Culture* demonstrates that the term "serial murder" and associated terms appeared much earlier than Ressler's neologism, first in Grierson Dickson's 1958 study *Murder by Numbers*, and then in the 1966 British edition of John Brophy's *The Meaning of Murder*. Dickson found "series-murderer" too cumbersome for his purposes and preferred the term "multicide." Brophy altered the term. "Serial murder," Brophy felt, described the "essential nature" of the crime (Brophy qtd. in Schmid 71). "Having resolved terminological difficulties to his satisfaction," Schmid tells us, "Brophy went on to install Jack the Ripper as 'the most famous of all serial murderers'" (189). As Schmid notes:

Because we have become so used to the idea that the FBI invented and has practically exclusive ownership of the concept "serial murder," it is surprising to find such a detailed and carefully articulated discussion of the crime a full decade before the FBI started work on the subject. (71)

While I share Schmid's surprise, and appreciate and recommend his close analysis of the history of this term, I still take Ressler and the FBI's introduction of the term as the key series of moments in which the serial killer entered popular culture. Unlike Schmid, I also deny that Jack the Ripper was a "serial killer" for reasons that I make clear in my comments on the development of the serial killer "genre" in some of my other articles on the serial killer phenomenon. Suffice to say, as Schmid does, the FBI's serial murder investigations:

... did not become well known until October 26, 1983, when the Justice Department held a news conference in Washington, D.C., to "disclose some of the findings from ... preliminary research into ... the problem of 'serial murders,' killings by such people as Jack the Ripper or the Boston Strangler." This news conference is important for two reasons. First, it marks the point when the concept of "serial murder" came to the attention of the public as a whole for the first time. ... Second, the news conference determined that the direction of future public policy and mass media discussions of serial murder would be favorable to the FBI's goals by defining the nature and scope of serial murder in highly specific and partial terms. (77)

The ridiculousness of these "terms," however, demonstrates the mythological extremities of the belief in serial murder. Given some of the figures announced by the FBI and other professionals regarding the activities of so-called serial killers, Schmid calculates that certain "serial killers would

have to drive an average of 550 miles a day every single day of the year” (81) and more absurdly, “each killer would have to have murdered an average of 114 people a year” (82).³

We need to notice, therefore, that instead of the metaphor of cinema, Brady offers us an allegory that, unlike Ressler’s, is structured strictly around substance abuse: “With each subsequent killing, the homicidal drug, blunted by habitual use, creates a diminishing and disappointing impression” (89). Brady leaps between the claim that he murders solely for the purposes of covering up his crimes, and that he suffers from an addictive search for the original “impression” of killing someone. Similarly, Brady warbles inconsistently through pedagogical passages that are aimed at educating the reader about precisely why the public finds him repugnant. On the one hand, Brady’s congenial attitude recalls one of the introductory lines in *Child of God*, a novel in which Cormac McCarthy tells us that the serial killer anti-protagonist Lester Ballard “might be a child of God much like yourself perhaps” (4), thereby constructing a consciously unsettling relationship between monstrosity and normalcy. On the other hand, Brady often drops his friendly, explanatory tone in favor of a discursive style that is aimed at establishing the total difference between himself and his reader. For instance, he offers himself as a point of access at certain points in the book, and even uses politically correct gender assignments. Addressing the reader in a non-critical and even kindly manner, Brady says: “You study serial killers not only to understand him/her but also yourselves” (101). On other occasions, however, we hear that serial killers “have their own personal code of ethics and morals, eccentric to the ordinary individual” (64).

Differentiating himself from his audience, Brady virtually erases the dichotomy of good and evil in this short lecture regarding the relationship between killer and detective in crime fiction:

Both protagonists must be ruthless in purpose, astute in deceit, clear in strategy, temper self-confidence with caution; cultivate doubt where there is a certainty and certainty where there is a doubt; feign incompetence to provoke overconfidence; nourish arrogance by fake humility; deny, affirm and divert with dexterity as tactics

³ In *Freakonomics: A Rogue Economist Explores the Hidden Side of Everything*, Steven Levitt and co-author Stephen Dubner present a similar case in which advocate for the homeless Mitch Snyder provided figures, which when calculated, suggested that “45 homeless people die each second – which would mean a whopping 1.4 billion dead homeless each year” (90). For Levitt and Dubner, this architecture of “conventional wisdom” occurs because of the incentives that journalists and experts offer one another: “Everyday there are newspaper pages and television newscasts to be filled, and an expert who can deliver a jarring piece of wisdom is always welcome” (91).

dictate; incite anger to obtain the unguarded response and sow confusion; exude sympathy for trust while doubting everyone; regard all individuals as essentially corrupt and guided by self-interest; live and breathe moral and legal relativism whilst projecting moral and legal rectitude; and, above all, as already postulated, believe and act in the certainty that the end always justifies the means. (71)

The brutal length of this single sentence, replete with rhetorical inversions and assonance, represents, not so much a further example of Brady's inconsistency, but rather his struggle against the typologies hoisted upon "serial killers." In this regard, Brady reasserts the suggestion of serial killer scholar Elliot Leyton that "the classification of types is a murky form of butterfly collecting" (243). Although Leyton does not discuss Brady in his analysis, it is interesting that Brady directly addresses Leyton's criticism that many academic discussions about serial murder omit the various ways in which police and even psychiatrists resemble the serial killer (113). Brady's speech here links the "skills" of the detective directly with the "skills" of the killer, and one might extend the comparison to the "skills" of the academic.

Brady's insistence on the relation between the professional representative of the state – i.e. the detective – and the supposedly rogue serial killer forms the bulk of his lesson. Brady first defines and then indicts what he calls throughout *The Gates of Janus* the "general public." As a body only vaguely aware of its own uncanny attraction to aggression and murder, the public suffers at the hands of the duplicitously "hypnotic media" (84). The media, Brady argues, has trained the public not to disavow murder and killing, but to admire or express interest only in certain kinds of violence. The mental and spiritual acknowledgment of only a particular few forms of aggression results in the repression of all the others, Brady argues, resulting in a public characterized by unconscious guilt. Brady cites televised news pieces that celebrated the actions of Vietnam pilots as one example of state sanctioned violence. Brady points to the way the public takes great pleasure in the media's revelations of trivial new details about "the bosses of certain extermination camps" (84).

In Brady's view, Serial killers inspire more interest than hired guns because they break the spell of the shared hallucination that privileges some forms of violence while vilifying others. It is from this philosophical notion that Brady draws the title *The Gates of Janus*: both the serial killer and government sanctioned killers emerge from the same "Janus Faced" legal code. While the military officer takes his or her permission to kill from the state, the serial killer takes the designation "serial killer" because of the law that makes transgression possible. However, just as the public may be unaware of the ideological processes directing their repression of murderous

impulses, the serial killer may be unaware of how his or her behaviors at once emerge from and illuminate certain legal formulas: “these people kill at will, requiring no legislation, without asking for or needing permission, the very concept never entering their mind” (84). For this reason, Brady expresses astonishment that governments train civilians rather than hire what Oliver Stone might call “natural born killers” as mercenaries for military purposes (85). However, as Joel Black suggests in *The Aesthetics of Murder* “democratic governments are capable of manipulating news broadcasts in a way that makes state-sanctioned killings appear not only legal but heroic” (23). Brady seems to be responding to a similar sentiment.

Themes of Friendship in *The Gates of Janus*

If Brady sees murder as nothing more than a way of avoiding capture, how does he view friendship? Brady briefly discusses friendship in *The Gates of Janus* from a biographical perspective. Taking the school system for granted, rather than viewing it as an institution worthy of the same vitriol and vigor he brings to his discussion of the media, Brady sees his youthful triumphs on the playground in terms of personal, inborn talents:

In childhood years I was not the stereotypical ‘loner’ so beloved by the popular media. Friends formed around me eagerly in the school playground, listening to me talk, and I took it as natural. Apparently, I had a descriptive talent and contagious enthusiasm. All harmless, adventurous stuff, no devious intent. No sense of superiority. (92)

While Brady combats the popular, mythical notion of the serial killer as a friendless, distant, and possibly deranged social misfit, he speaks of his personality in terms of nature or essence. In this way, Brady constructs the illusion of normalcy. Brady’s account differs from the publicized accounts of the childhood experiences of serial murders that typically reflect the master narrative popularized by the FBI, the media, and the entertainment industry. For example, in *Sexual Homicide: Patterns and Motives*, a book that tremendously influenced the theory of criminal profiling, co-authors Robert Ressler, Ann Burgess, and John Douglas present a series of anecdotes crafted from interviews with serial sex offenders. All thirty-six of these narratives hone in on “abnormal” childhood experiences as a means of explaining adult transgressions. The authors comment: “(w)hat is remarkable in the interviews of offenders is an absence of recounting positive childhood fantasies” (35). Discussing one killer in particular, we learn that “Warren (a pseudonym), experienced family role confusion” as a child and as a result “manipulated his family and social system.” (75).

Brady, as we have seen, confidently links his success in the community of his youth with his outgoing personality. Although I maintain that Brady conceives of his “self” as an essence, he does not conceive his “self” as static. Rather, the “ideal Brady” learned by experience, accreting ability and value over time (92). Brady speaks of the formation of his friendships in terms of both unconscious processes and a desire to draw followers who reflected his likeness or essence. However, the production of these relationships always stems from actual social processes:

Gangs formed around me ... I had no conscious sense as to why, only that again, I took it as a natural process. I was not consciously aware of being out to gain followers, but follow they did, obviously predisposed to go where I led. (92)

This “natural” course of action blends Mister Rodger’s thoughts about reciprocation in friendship with the Aristotelian notion of utility. As noted, one of the ways that Brady sees crime, including murder, is as just another form of labor.⁴ The friendships he describes reflect this view and rest upon a blend of deviance and the promise of shared economic gain. And yet, despite this focus on purposeful assemblage, Brady attributes the actual, social processes with natural ones:

That our activities became criminal was also accepted as natural. The more money we stole the more fun we had. Only when we were caught by the police did a minority drift away, mainly at the behest of their restrictive parents. I hardly noticed, nor did the remaining others; replacements joined us, and we continued to enjoy the fruits of our activities. (93)⁵

Those who fell away as a result of either parental or police intervention demonstrated that the limits of friendship with Brady hinged upon their usefulness. Moreover, in terms of essences,

⁴ Although we need not necessarily take Brady at his word on this point, he does directly contradict the link between himself and the characters who “kill for pleasure” in both Anthony Burgess’ and Stanley Kubrick’s versions of *A Clockwork Orange* in online serial killer lore. *Tookeys Film Guide*, for instance, claims that Kubrick’s film “remains one of the clearest expression of the Sixties belief in ‘doing your own thing’ that spawned Charles Manson, Ian Brady and many, many others” (<http://www.christookey.com/devFilm.asp?ID=2932>). For a more objective association between Brady and *A Clockwork Orange*, see Alex Burns review of *The Gates of Janus* on the disinformation website (<http://www.disinfo.com/archive/pages/article/id1861/pg1/index.html>).

⁵ This way of framing the situation recalls Augustine’s theft of the pears with his gang of friends, although in Augustine’s case, the episode results in a confession of guilt most certainly structured around the fruit of knowledge and the resulting punishment in The Book of Genesis. All the same, Augustine’s break with his friends comes not from any social intervention, as it did with Brady, but from Augustine’s self-revelation that his friendships did not satisfy his spirit.

those capable of replacing the missing friends must have reflected, according to Brady, some quality of their leader. In other words, the interjection of families or the law only served to expose flaws in otherwise well-suited friends because Brady himself operated free from directive forces.

However, Brady would eventually experience the limits of his freedom and see how prison life shapes friendships. First of all, the constrained quarters of a penitentiary offer many of the hallmarks of friendship discussed by Aristotle and many others: shared interests, proximity, and the luxury of time. Colin Wilson, who introduces *The Gates of Janus*, describes one of Brady's first friendships in incarceration. The following discussion of the never-held chess match between Brady and "Yorkshire Ripper" Peter Sutcliffe touches upon not only friendship, but also the theme of the mastermind criminal:

The press got wind of this and falsely reported that the two notorious killers had played chess together. "Brady Checkmates the Ripper," took up the whole front page. Sutcliffe stated that Brady had simply asked whether he, Sutcliffe, could play chess and, as he had replied, "Not very well," no game had taken place and they had simply talked all the time, mostly about cities in the north of England they had both visited and left their mark upon. *The chess gambit had simply been a good story for the newspapers to concoct,*⁶ as previous reports on file had accurately stated that Brady had played John Stonehouse (a former British government minister convicted of embezzlement) in the chess final at Wormwood Scrubs in 1979.⁷ (6. My emphasis)

The mythical nature of the chess match does not negate the fact that Brady played chess at a nationally recognized level. Rather, the notion of Brady as a chess wizard evokes the image of two antagonists, two mastermind criminals, waging a friendly war. The image implies two grand, transcendent wizards casually toppling pawns, a continuation of Brady's insistence that the pleasure of murder is contained in the procedures that precede it.⁸

⁶ I italicize this line in order to address a characteristic trivialization of the victims. Nowhere in Wilson's introduction do we hear anything about those killed by Brady and his partner.

⁷ A play titled *Crackdown* performed at the Norwich Arts Center on 26 April 2008 mentions Brady's involvement in the tournament.

⁸ Brady mentions one other friendship organized around chess with serial killer Graham Young against whom he apparently played prior to entering prison (125). The online Crime Library highlights "their shared fascination with Nazi Germany. " (http://www.crimelibrary.com/serial_killers/weird/graham_young/11.html/). The Boston Strangler, one of Brady's friends on Myspace.com posts the image of a chess board for Brady and discusses

Brady's own description of his meeting with Sutcliffe differs considerably. We detect more of the criminal mastermind in Brady's frustration with the meeting, in which he fantasized about hypnotizing Sutcliffe:

I tried a wide variety of approaches to elicit or evoke a hint of the injured catalyst buried, and in all probability blocked off, deep in his psyche, but with no success. This eventually left me to conclude that probably nothing short of drug-induced hypnosis would be able to extract the fatal secret, if indeed there was one. (159-160)

Brady gives no indication of whether he wanted to expose Sutcliffe's "fatal secret" for the simple pleasure of knowledge, but given the length of his book, we can assume that Sutcliffe's undisclosed thoughts would have appeared in *The Gates of Janus* had Brady obtained them. At the same time, he may well share the "mystical, highly dramatic, or even nebulously romantic" desire for murder trivia he accuses his audience of holding. As we will see shortly, Brady's greatest satisfactions arrive only when he can extract the motives of his serial killer "friends" and develop those motives into a theory of "drives against the norm" (253).

Although Brady did not meet Henry Lee Lucas, we can assume that the FBI authorities expected Brady would take pleasure in lending them his assistance when they requested his "considered opinion of Lucas" (115). As Brady describes the situation, however, the Moors murderer sought to turn the opportunity to his own advantage. Brady recounts telling the officers "that it would help considerably if I could see or hear Lucas confessing" (115). In one sense, both the killer and the police sought satisfaction for similar needs: knowledge, insight, and a greater

the game in Brady's comment area (<http://profile.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=user.viewprofile&friendID=270534940>). Although it is unlikely that either Brady or The Boston Strangler hold Myspace accounts, the instance foregrounds the importance of chess between even fictional serial killing friends:



Boston Strangler Dec 10 2007 3:42 AM

Boston Strangler Dec 5 2007 11:13 PM

Oh yeah chess is one of my favorites. Dont know if Im that good but Id give it a go. Our new comrade from Russia sure does. Have you got wind of him ? The "Bitskyevskel Maniac" or the "Chessboard killer". Tryin to kill 64 people for every square on the board. Im sure you..ve heard. Anyways I hope its check and then checkmate for you next time I catch you on. See ya round - Al

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understanding of crime. A similar situation arose between Ted Bundy and King County police authorities during the “Green River Killings” in the Seattle, Washington area. According to A&E’s *Cold Case Files*, a television documentary about Gary Ridgeway – who eventually pled guilty to this set of crimes – Bundy gave the police solid advice. In one recorded interview, for instance, Bundy advises: “the best chance you have of catching this guy red-handed, is to get a site with a fresh body and stake it out.” Although Ridgeway later confessed that he did indeed revisit his dump sites for the purpose of sex with the corpses, police did not immediately take Bundy’s advice.

The important point here is that the relationship forged between the killer and the investigative team often revolves around utility and pleasure. In an interview featured in the A&E special, King County Sheriff Dave Reichert explains:

Part of the reason that I think he wanted to talk to us is that these personalities like to be the center of attention, and he’d been in prison for awhile and what was happening here in Washington was drawing attention away from his cases and his legacies, so to speak.

The documentary then cuts almost seamlessly to the voice of Criminologist Bob Keppel: “Of course his ego is boosted by this. I mean it’s a way for Ted Bundy to maintain his significance and feel important.”

While the documentary explicitly frames the “facts” so that it appears that Bundy contacted the authorities, and that the investigative team used this opportunity to “pick his brains,” the 2004 television movie, *The Riverman*, about Bundy’s assistance with the “hunt for clues” clearly takes its cues from Thomas Harris’ and Jonathan Demme’s *The Silence of the Lambs*. The situation presented in the A&E documentary is depicted here as a game of *quid pro quo*, with Bundy offering information in exchange for the possibility of a stay of execution and other small favors. In both the A&E documentary and *The Riverman*, we see Bundy represented as an opportunist who “liked to talk about murder” and used the investigation for his own purposes. As well, both the documentary and the film portray the investigate team as tainted by their engagement with Bundy; the “usefulness” of Bundy’s contribution is downplayed. In fact, in the documentary, Keppel states that they asked Bundy the same questions they would have asked him about his own crimes, and thereby learned about two crimes at once.

For his part, Brady labels his relationship with the FBI a “charade” (117) and relates no particular feeling of reciprocation. Brady’s account of his friendship with John Wayne Gacy is more

promising. Although he does not specify how he made Gacy's acquaintance, he explicitly states that he "had personal contact with Gacy and we shared mutual friends" (119). For Brady, Gacy stands out from the group of acquaintances that Brady represents as a sprawling network of admirers. In Brady's view, Gacy was capable of "breathing life into ideas ... creating an organic structure" and "enacting a hypothesis, which, if believed in, should then be taken under personal ownership and expanded into whatever avenues of action the belief indicates" (257). Here we sense the classical conception of a friendship of virtue, in which one party not only mirrors the other, but also offers the other opportunities for self-improvement. Brady admired Gacy for his extra-curricular activities as well. Comparing Gacy's numerous performances to that of a clown at a gathering for children, Brady argues that "there is no reason to suppose that [Gacy's] charitable activities were not genuinely altruistic" (119). Brady praises Gacy as the bearer of virtues to which, he recommends, we should all aspire.

In the final analysis, Brady challenges the popular perception of the friendless serial killer. If we are to take Brady at his word, the sense of personal refinement he experienced through his relationship with John Wayne Gacy push his socially, critically and philosophically provocative position – that murder can be a "lucrative and exciting form of illegal self-employment" (53) – into interesting waters. After all, Brady takes the betterment of his readers as a prime directive. Although he moves between passages of vertiginous philosophy and buttery braggadocio, the overarching purpose of *The Gates of Janus* is pedagogical. Brady identifies the social understanding of serial murder as a failure, and offers his book as a correction; not merely for shock value, or for the continued victimization of those affected by his crimes, but for the purposes of illuminating the not-so-mysterious mysteries of his murderous behavior in a world structured by social processes rather than essences. Like a professional scholar, Brady contributes to existing knowledge by packaging his ideas in the form of a book and publishing it. Ironically, this process reflects one of the main social crimes that Brady rails against, i.e. the "officially sanctioned crimes of capitalist free-enterprise" (53). Nevertheless, his writing instantiates that which he claims to be the true purpose of the serial murderer. The authentic killer (i.e. Brady) is someone who:

Would much rather inflict *life* than death upon the victims, so that he might savor the knowledge that the victim has been forced to suffer the memory of the ordeal for the rest of his/her days. (90)

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