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# The Influence of *the Waste Land* on Modern Kurdish Poetry: Strani Nergiz as a Sample

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## Abstract

This paper examines the influence of T.S. Eliot's poem *The Waste Land* on Strani Nergiz (Daffodil's Song) a poem by the contemporary Kurdish poet Dilshad Abdullah. One of the factors that make one literature influenced by another, in two different languages, is the existence of a masterpiece in one of them. The passage of this work will be either through the original language or through translation. The Kurdish poet Dilshad Abdullah (b.1956) started writing in the mid 1970s and was known in the 1980s. Abdullah has his peculiarity among poets of his generation. He is concerned with the needs of Kurdish culture in general. Besides Kurdish culture, he has been interested in foreign cultures and literatures, especially the poetry of T.S. Eliot. That is to develop his poetic talent, and to create a new style and form in Kurdish poetry. Abdullah gave T.S. Eliot special importance. One can easily notice the Eliotan imagery and techniques in his poems utilized by his own expressions and colored by his personal psychology. Accordingly, this study adopts a comparative method to reveal the influence of *The Waste Land* on Strani Nergiz in a way enriched the style and techniques of Dilshad Abdullah's poetry in specific and Kurdish poetry in general. Consequently, he transferred certain stylistic features and techniques from *The Waste Land* into Kurdish poetry.

**Keywords:** T.S. Eliot; *The Waste Land*; modern Kurdish poetry; modernism

## 1. Introduction

One of the factors that make one literature influenced by another, in two different languages, is the existence of a masterpiece in one of them. The passage of this work will be either through the original language or through translation, may affect some writers either by its technique, or style, or content. According to (Gardi, 1978: 74) the writer (poet) is willingly experiencing a foreign literature and consciously gets this experience to widen his poetic horizon in a special kind of literature. Then, he tends to select the elevated and brilliant samples, or discover new techniques and arts in the other literature, in order to transfer them into his national literature. Under the influence of this foreign masterpiece, the other writers will try to develop their national writing and innovate a new creative presentation in their national literature. There are numerous examples in world literature to prove that, including Kurdish literature. Gardi (1978: 75) remarks that the Kurdish poet Goran, through his contact

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with English literature, had an opportunity to ramble the static position of Kurdish poetry. The result was his innovation of Romanticism in Kurdish literature.

In accordance with what is mentioned above, the role of individuals has a special interest in comparative studies, because such individuals were able to make their national literature flourish and push it forward. One of the English poets who have an obvious presence in Kurdish poetry is T.S. Eliot (1888-1965), who became familiar to Kurdish poets through translations of his poems, especially *The Waste Land*. As it is known, *The Waste Land* has a great influence on modernism, not only in English literature, but also on literature in the whole world. Therefore, it is not strange that *The Waste Land* has influenced Kurdish poets when they dealt with modernism and took it as avant-garde and a source of their approach towards modernism. After the 1970's, Kurdish poets took their advances from that of *The Waste Land*, in form, style, content, and techniques.

Here, the purpose is to discuss the Kurdish poet Dilshad Abdullah (b.1956) who is familiar with the atmosphere of T.S.Eliot and his literary achievements. He is one of the Kurdish poets who started writing in the mid 1970s and was known in the 1980s, Mawlud states that Abdullah has his peculiarity among poets of his generation. He is not prolific in writing, because he practices it seriously. He is concerned with the needs of Kurdish culture in general. Besides Kurdish culture, he has been interested in foreign cultures and literatures, especially the poetry of T.S. Eliot. That is to develop his poetic talent, and to create a new style and form in Kurdish poetry. Abdullah gave T.S. Eliot special importance. It is easily noticed that the Eliotan imagery and techniques utilized by his own expressions and colored by his personal psychology.

He [Dilshad Abdullah] is deliberate to draw the reader into cultural, mythological, and psychological channels by his familiarity and use of Eliot's experience, through his multi reading of him. (Mawlud, 1987: 229)

Therefore, this poet reads Eliot deliberately and purposely. His interest in Eliot is to widen his personal talent in order to change the techniques of Kurdish poetry and introduce new artistic forms into Kurdish poetry. This use of Eliot is to overpass the traditional realism of general subjects in Kurdish poetry. Thus, it is a step of renovation needed by Modern Kurdish poetry in the context of Modernist atmospheres and demands.

The poet Abdullah himself, in an interview, talks about Eliot's influence on the formation of constructing his poetic faculty:

And thus my poetic faculty changed. This change was related to Eliot in one way or another. I have been influenced by his poems and poetic ideas, especially the objective correlative. (Abdullah, 2005:65)

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As it is noticed earlier, after the (Rwanga group) the Kurdish poets were bored of the direct expressions, and they were concerned with more intrinsic, aesthetic, and complex issues. This demanded other techniques and forms of expression. Thus, Abdullah's familiarity with Eliot led him to find these poetic devices to escape the direct expressions on the one hand and to discover the philosophy that supports him psychologically for building epistemological bases for his poems on the other. Abdullah states that Eliot's poetry taught him that the other side of catastrophe is rebirth, exactly what happens in nature. In other words, the poet should not be limited in his thinking. Poetry is not only a faculty, but it is an establishment as well. He learned a part of this idea from myth, and the other part from Eliot's poetry.

What Abdullah learned from Eliot in this respect was exactly an important point to deal with the circumstances of the Kurdish political conditions after the setback of 1975, the oppression of the former Ba'ath Regime, and the first Gulf War. This poet was conscious of the external world. He learned from Eliot how to reflect this reality and this catastrophe in various creative ways. He learned from Eliot how to utilize mythology in reflecting his ideas throughout the usage of Eliot's poetic idiom.

Thus, the poet deals with Eliot consciously, and he has found in Eliot's experiments the tools to utilize them, in his own personal experience, in discovering styles of expression. That suits what was needed in Kurdish poetry after the 1970s.

## 2. Poetic analysis

In this section let us go through one of Abdullah's poems and compare it with *The Waste Land*. The aim is to find out similarities between these two poems. In addition, to explain how this poet made use of the *The Waste Land*'s style and technique, and to point out Eliotian elements in the poem. In an introduction to the poem (Dizayi, 2006:84) states that *Strani Nergiz* (daffodils song)" [written 1982] is a poem by the contemporary Kurdish poet Dilshad Abdullah published in a collection entitled " Bafirnis"(The Snow Writer) in 1999. The poem depicts the conflict of a man struggling with the cruelty of existence. He tries to avoid the heavy impact of time, and, psychologically renders the flow of visual images putting his confusion artistically in the poem.

In this chapter we concentrate on the key word "influence" according to the French school of comparative literature, to find out how Dilshad Abdullah in his poem *Strāni Nērgiz* is influenced by T.S.Eliot's *The waste Land*.

According to (Carscallen, 1968: 253) April is the cruelest month, the opening of the *The Waste Land* unmistakably echoes that of *The Canterbury Tales*. The same opening in *Strāni Nērgiz*, which opens with the following verses:

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*Rêbandân mângi tanyäyi w xo kuştina**(Străni Nêrgiz, 1.1)*

(January is the month of loneliness and suicide)

So, the opening of *Străni Nêrgiz* unmistakably echoes that of the *The Waste Land*. Thus, as (Dizayi, 2006:86) mentions "The poet tries from the start to build his poem in Eliot's manner. The opening line in poetry is the base on which the rest of the lines will run accordingly." Not only the opening line of *Străni Nêrgiz* echoes the opening of *The Waste land*, but also another line echoes "April is the cruelest month" which is:

*Zistân warzi sarsaxtia**(Străni Nêrgiz 1.18)*

(Winter is a season of cruelty)

The opening line of *The Waste Land* is placed in the setting of time. The literal plot line of the poem occurs in April. Similarly, in *Străni Nêrgiz* January is the opening line of the poem which occurs in January, i.e., is the winter season in Kurdistan. It suits the snowy images and snow-covered objects. It sites snowfall images of winter in Kurdistan.

This repetition of echoing the opening of *The Waste Land* is not incidental but it has a deep-rooted relation of the poem with *The Waste Land*.

As one continues reading the poem, he will recognize the influence more clearly. Abdullah takes the flower "Lilac" from *The Waste Land* and changes it to "Nergiz" –daffodil-, which is a local flower. It can be understood that he attempts to calm down the weight of the influence; first, he changed April to Rêbandân –January- and this time Lilac to Nergiz. However, both words have the same function exactly as they have in *The Waste Land*. For example, both lilac and Nergiz stand for hope:

*To blêy lam gašta**çapka nêrgizêk biçnim?**(Străni Nêrgiz ll.101-2)*

"I wonder if I can get a bouquet of daffodils

From this journey?

Eliot says:

*Breeding lilacs out of the dead land**(The Waste Land line.2)*

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Depicting snow as the state of forgetfulness and separation from the real life is again another resemblance of both poems.

*Bafir mni ba yakcāri ciākirdawa*

(*Strāni Nērgiz* 1.4)

(The snow completely separated me)

This echoes *The waste Land*'s:

*Covering earth in forgetful snow.*

(*The Waste land* ll.5-6)

Therefore, the snow, which separated the Kurdish poet, is that forgetful snow which covered the earth in *The waste Land*. The snow separating the speaker from real life and makes him avoid dealing with it any longer. As with the forgetful snow of *The waste Land* which separated the speaker from life and made him not to contact with earth" reality" by forgetfulness. Moreover, this is the same notion that both images present with the same word *snow*.

Another resemblance that both poems share is the depiction of the mountain as a symbol of freedom. *Strāni Nērgiz* clearly gives the same idea as given in *The Waste Land*:

*Sar kawa*

*Ba lūtka har zor bin*

(*Strāni Nērgiz* ll.21-2)

(Climb, no matter how many peaks of the mountains exist.)

And Eliot writes:

In the mountain, there you feel free.

(*The Waste Land* 1.17)

Throughout the poem, one discovers many images derived from *The Waste Land*. Just contemplating lines such as:

*Bā minīš ba cwani bbīnim*

(*Strāni Nērgiz* 1. 24)

(Let me look carefully.)

This is the same as the *The Waste Land*'s:

One must be so careful.

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(*The Waste Land* 1.59)

Moreover, one can discover the same expression as it came within the line 24:

*Awi daryā garma u cwanau firāwān*

(*Strāni Nērgiz* 1.24)

(The sea is warm, beautiful, and wide)

Is almost a copy of Eliot's

"od,und leer das Meer"

(*The Waste Land* 1.42)

This means:

"The sea is wide"

Many of *Strāni Nērgiz*'s images have been made of the same components of *The Waste Land* such as

*la bardi xawālui bniši běna lam*

(*Strāni Nērgiz* 1. 52)

(If they come to me from the sleepy stones in the bottom of the water)

It can also be compared to *The Waste Land*'s:

"Find the dry stone no sound of water"

(*The Waste land* 1.24)

The impact is clear and one needs a little contemplation to find out a great deal of resemblance between both. So, let us see this question of *Strani Nergiz* in which it shows that the poem is under the influence of *The Waste Land*.

*To blěy lam gašta ĉapka nērgizěk biĉnim?*

(*Strāni Nērgiz* 1.101-2)

(I wonder if I can get a bouquet of daffodils from this journey.)

This is a very close image to what Eliot depicts in *The Waste Land*, asking:

*Will it bloom this year?*

(*The Waste Land* 1.72)

It is the same question and the same doubt about hope, symbolized by a flower.



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Therefore, according to what has been demonstrated *Strāni Nērgiz*, in its imagery is, clearly, under the influence of *The Waste Land*. Moreover, a great number of its images belong to it in various ways.

Not only have the images of *Strāni Nērgiz* had similarities with *The Waste Land* but, the style and diction of the poem have similarities with it as well. From the simple words that made up the poem one can find out the resemblance of *Strāni Nērgiz* with *The Waste Land* such as; snow, winter, stone, death, forgetful, sea, flower, journey ,etc. All these lexemes are the same diction of Eliot's *The Waste Land*. Likewise, both share the narrative style and many symbols and allusions to myths.

Another important point proving that Eliot deeply influenced Dilshad Abdullah is the mythological method of *The Waste Land*. Eliot states the following notes to *The Waste Land*:

Not only the title, but the plan and a good deal of the incidental Symbolism of the poem were suggested by Miss Jessie L Weston's book on the Grail legend: *From Ritual to Romance*. Indeed, so deeply am I indebted, Miss Weston's book will elucidate the difficulties of the poem much than my notes can do; and I recommend it ( a part from the great interest of the book itself )to any who think such elucidation of the poem worth the trouble. To another work of anthropology, I am indebted in general, one which has influenced our generation profoundly; I mean *The Golden Bough*; I have used especially the volumes Adonis, Atts, Osiris. Anyone who is acquainted with these works will immediately recognize in the poem certain references to vegetation ceremonies. (*The Waste Land* note number1.)

One can readily find similarities between the above quoted note by Eliot and what Abdullah says here:

In condensing the images [in poetry] I have made use of mythology. I have taken myths from different cultures. A great deal of them came from The Old Testament, James Frazer's books, and Kurdish mythology. I have moved from the ancient moment of these myths to the present time, as if their roots stretched to now. (Abdullah, 2005: 66)

And let's contemplate the following line:

*Ay Midās ay Midās*

(*Strāni Nērgiz* 1.49)

(Addressing Midas)

Here, the poet makes use of mythology and this mythological allusion to Midas is surely an Eliotan use. The poet uses the story of Midas as a symbol of salvation. Like the Fisher King of Eliot, when there was no hope for salvation in the present time. Moreover, addressing Midas from the past as if he were present is a typically Eliotan style in *The Waste Land*. Like *The*

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*waste Land, Strani Nergiz* gives the impression that there is doubt about hope for the rebirth of Nergiz. Therefore, there is no salvation. Similar to *The Waste Land*, where there is no fisher King to cure *The Waste Land*, here in *Strani Nergiz* there is doubt about the rebirth of Nergiz:

*Ay narsis, narsism*

*To blěy lam gašta*

*Čapka nergizěk bičnim?*

(*Strāni Něrgiz* ll.100-102))

(Narcissi, My Narcissi

I wonder if I can get a bouquet of narcissi from this journey. )

Again, using Nercis from mythology and linking it with the thematic purpose of the poem is typical of an Eliotan use of mythology.

According to what we quoted from both Eliot and Dilshad Abdullah, it follows that both have used the same source of mythology. It is Sir James Frazer's book *The Golden Bough*. In addition, since Abdullah admitted that he was deeply influenced by Eliot's poetry and views in developing his talent, he was influenced by the mythological method of *The Waste Land*.

The mythological method is due not only to what was mentioned above, but also the whole structure of *Strāni Něrgiz* is based on the mythological structure of *The Waste Land*. Smith argues that

*In reading Eliot's poetry in particular The Waste Land, one should bear in mind that the adoption of certain material from Frazer implies in no way Eliot's outright acceptance of Frazer's interpretations. The anthropological data of The Golden Bough, as Eliot regarded that monumental compilation, had perhaps slipped through their interpreter's hands. Eliot's point of view, never servile to that of others, assimilated that of the literary anthropologists in this respect, that the function they saw in myth helped Eliot express his feelings through myth. (1968:104)*

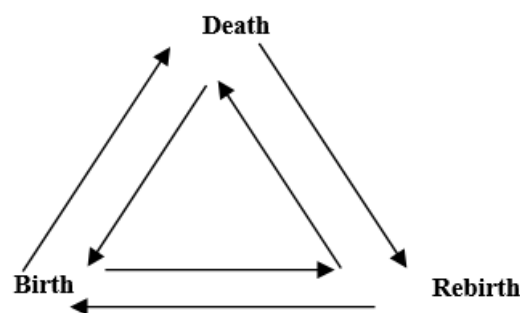
Here, Eliot mentions that the plan of *The waste Land* and a good deal of its symbolism was suggested by Jessie L. Weston's book on the Grail legend and to James Frazer's book *The Golden Bough*. Eliot also asserts that anyone who is acquainted with these works will immediately recognize in the poem certain references to vegetation ceremonies. (Coles Notes, P.29) Therefore, *The Waste Land* is based on the notion of vegetation, which means:

According to (Carscallen, 1968:262) the story of a hero who dies and rises with the year is the vegetation myth that Sir James Frazer made famous in *The Golden Bough*. Another important form of this story about life and death occurs in the mediaeval legends of the Holy



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Grail, which were interpreted by Jessie L. Weston, in *From Ritual to Romance* as versions of a fertility myth similar to Frazer's. Some features of Eliot's poem, including its title, are specially related to the Grail story, which provides the feature of the Fisher King. The same thing with Dilshad Abdullah's *Strani Nergiz*, the plan of the poem and the thematic structure are based on the cycle of Nergiz's life.



The poem's setting is in winter and it is the season of the plantation of Nergiz. The poem's internal movement and its external structure, based on the hope of rebirth, the planting of Nergiz, in the coming season, spring. This indicates the cycle of the seasons in the year as well. In addition, this is really one of the matters where Dilshad Abdullah is indebted to *The Waste Land*. He composed his poem in a similar way and on the same pattern, with the same background. Dilshad Abdullah not only built his poem thematically according to *The Waste Land*, but also, the pattern he uses is a corresponding pattern. As Carscallen referred to the Eliotan pattern, when he wrote

*The pattern Eliot is dealing with is one that corresponds to the temporal pattern of the cycle. Time seems to bring an endless variety of things, and yet the same kind of things does happen repeatedly: night keeps returning after day, seasons keep returning in the same order, and one life after another grows up to maturity and then sinks to death.* (Carscallen, 1968:268)

Moreover, when one looks at the coming lines in *Strani Nergiz* he feels that he is using the same Eliotan pattern:

*Bafir u zaryă yakyăň sarată  
awi tryăň kotăyia  
ay dări mrăz kask ba  
aw gulănay la šari zistăněm dakužrěn  
Sarkaš w gamža nïň  
šănoya am žŭr w aw bafiray*

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*Darawam**(Strāni Nērgiz ll.71-76)*

(The snow and the ocean

One of them is the beginning and the other is the end

Oh, my hope's tree, be green

The flowers are not stupid when they got killed in winter's war

It is theatre this room as well as the snow from outside.)

Here, as the lines indicate, there is reference to the cycle of water in nature; the ocean becomes cloud and then snow, the snow in return will melt and will become water and go back to the ocean. The same thing happens to the cycle of the flowers' lives. Consequently, he depicts life as a theatre, one life starts and ends and another in return starts. Therefore, the pattern is the same with what Eliot dealt with in *The Waste Land*, and, of course, this came not haphazardly, but due to the impact of reading *The Waste Land* and due to Eliot's influence upon Abdullah. As noticed earlier, it is evident that the thematic background of vegetation and the notion of life cycles in *The Waste Land* deeply influenced him in composing *Strāni Nērgiz*.

Using ordinary daily language is an Eliotan stylistic feature in *The Waste Land*, which is remarked by (Leech, 197:50), that Eliot was determined to be rid of orthodox restrictions of choice by making use of flagrantly prose like vulgar aspects of everyday usage. This notion is also one of Eliot's ideas about poetry. According to (Eliot, 1959:50) in his essay *The Music of Poetry*, "Every revolution in poetry is apt to be...a return to common speech" When one looks at *Strāni Nērgiz*, one discovers that this idea is practiced throughout *Strani Nergiz* in an obvious way:

*Kas la mal wadarnakawě**Kasiṣ la rěyān nābindrě**Har la maľ wadarkawi**Ziryān tund barokit dagri**(Strāni Nērgiz ll.9-12)*

(No body comes out from Home

No one can be seen outside as well

The storm will catch you just if you appeared outside)

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Another resemblance between *The Waste Land* and *Strani Nergiz* is the way of dealing with the notion of time. *Strani Nergiz* gives the same feeling of that in *The Waste Land*. It is clear that time has a very heavy presence in the poem. This notion is confirmed by (Dizayi, 2006:88): "Time could be regarded a main zodiac in which the poem moves around."

*Aw strānāy amro bom nāwtrě*

*Sibai*

*Min u bālindey dam kali margěk dayčrīn*

(*Strāni Nērgiz*, ll.78-80)

(The song that I can not sing today

Tomorrow, I will sing it with a bird on the hill of death)

In addition, Eliot brings images from the glorious past in front of the cruel and impotent present. *Strāni Nērgiz*, much like *The Waste Land*, brings brilliant and happy images from the memory. It is a kind of nostalgia observed in both poems. It is a typically Eliotan method as Cleanth Brooks remarks;" Eliot makes use of ironic contrasts between the glorious past and the sordid present."(Modern poetry and the Tradition)

*Lasar bafirě rākišawim*

*Lasar bafirě cānd car nustūm*

*Geštīm la bafirě kirdwa*

*cānd car hānām bo birdwa*

*Min tanyā aw kasukar u asmāni ārāmīm bwa*

(*Strāni Nērgiz* ll.59-63)

(We have lied down on the snow

I slept on the snow many times

Many times I resorted to the snow

The snow was my only kin and my secure sky)

In *The Waste Land* one can move through the past- present relationship and it is regarded as a perfect example of stopping time. In *Strāni Nērgiz* the poet attempts to present the notion of escaping the chronological idea of time. A according to (Dizayi, 2006:84) "He [Dilshad Abdullah] tries to live in the psychological time, or the inner time." The snow and ocean are the best examples of the flow of time in the poem. Both are in the move and one alternates with the other. It is impossible to know which one of them is the first.

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*Bafir u zaryä**Yakyän saratä u awi tryän kotäyia**(Sträni Nėrgiz ll.71-2)*

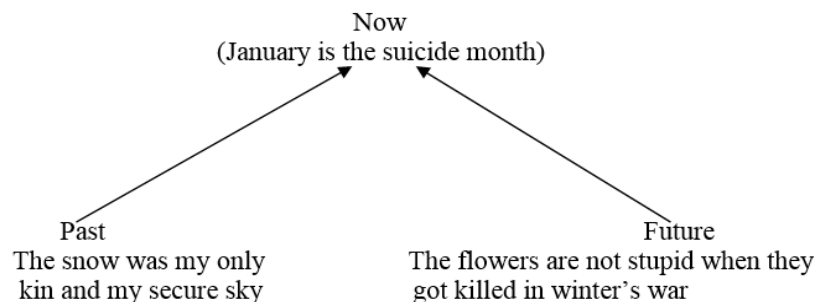
(The snow and the ocean

One of them is the beginning and the other the end)

Moreover, the future has a special presence;

*Aw gulänay la šari zistänėm dakužrėn**Sarkaš u gamža nın**(Sträni Nėrgiz ll.74-75)*

Therefore, the flowers that grow in the future are present in the poet's mind. Here, he deals with the future psychologically. The relation of past, present and future can be distinguished as a cycle:



Therefore, it is not incidental that the poet mentions in the opening line that January is the month of suicide. However, he sees suicide as a salvation of the cruelty of (now) when there is no solution; this is in comparison to the brilliant past. In addition, the idea of suicide was not included haphazardly; it is due to the mythological notion of vegetation utilized in the poem. Again, to see salvation in death, as the only way of rebirth, is undoubtedly, derived from *The Waste Land* that is based on fertility and vegetation myths.

### 3. Conclusion

According to the above-mentioned examples and analyses, Abdullah is interested in the Anglo-American poet T.S.Eliot. He read Eliot's poetry intensively, especially *The Waste Land*. He was influenced by *The Waste Land* and made use of its themes and style in his poem *Sträni Nėrgiz*. Dilshad Abdullah's being under the influence of *The Waste Land* suits the

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positive approach of comparative literature because; he transferred certain stylistic features and techniques from *The Waste Land* into Kurdish poetry.

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