

Marshall Grossman



THE
**SEVENTEENTH
CENTURY
LITERATURE**
HANDBOOK

 WILEY-BLACKWELL

The Seven
Literary

Century
Library

by
Marshall Grossman



 **WILEY-BLACKWELL**

A John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., Publication

This edition first published 2011
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Blackwell Publishing was acquired by John Wiley & Sons in February 2007. Blackwell's publishing program has been merged with Wiley's global Scientific, Technical, and Medical business to form Wiley-Blackwell.

Registered Office

John Wiley & Sons Ltd, The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ,
United Kingdom

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9600 Garsington Road, Oxford, OX4 2DQ, UK
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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Grossman, Marshall. The seventeenth-century literature handbook / by Marshall Grossman.

p. cm. – (Blackwell guides to literature)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-631-22090-9 (hardcover : alk. paper) – ISBN 978-0-631-22091-6 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. English literature–17th century–History and criticism. I. Title.

PR71.G76 2011

820.9004–dc22

2010029814

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

This book is published in the following electronic formats: ePDFs 9-781-4443-9011-7; Wiley Online Library 9-781-4443-9009-4; ePub 9-781-4443-9010-0

Set in 10/13 pt Sabon by Thomson Digital, Noida, India
Printed and bound in Malaysia by Vivar Printing Sdn Bhd

Preface

The seventeenth century is one of the richest periods of literary production in English history. It is bracketed by the plays of Shakespeare at the beginning and the great narrative poems of Milton toward its end. It is also perhaps the most tumultuous period in English history, punctuated by three regime changes: civil war between king and Parliament culminated in the beheading of Charles I and the founding of a republic in 1649; the republic failed, the Stuart dynasty was restored in 1660, and the second Stuart king of the restored monarchy was driven into exile and replaced by his daughter and Dutch son-in-law in 1688. In the larger world of intellectual history, the seventeenth century is the century of Bacon, Galileo, Kepler, and Newton, and in social theory, of Hobbes and Locke.

This book attempts to integrate a coherent narrative of the literary production of seventeenth-century Britain and a succinct account of the historical developments within and against which it took place. It is designed to be used by anyone with an interest in seventeenth-century British literature, either independently or in conjunction with a school or university course. It may be read sequentially or used as reference source in which to look up specific items. The first and longest of its four parts, *Texts and Contexts: An Overview*, seeks to give as clear an account as possible of what happened, of the sequence of events encountered by a person living at the time, and of the literary representations that accompanied those events. In addition, I try to make comprehensible the pressing issues of the time and to understand the literature in specific relation to them by observing a small selection of tropes, or figures of speech, as they are used differently in different contexts. The *Texts and Contexts* section endeavors to give a brief literary history of the seventeenth century. It is the heart of this book and reading it through will provide students of seventeenth-century literature with the basic sequence of events around which everything else in the volume may be organized and understood. To integrate the complex social and political history of the

seventeenth century with the literary history, I have supplemented the necessary identification of important publications and influential events with an attempt to trace the changing uses to which a few very common rhetorical tropes or figures of speech were put. Most notable among these is the analogy of large social structures with the workings of the body: the metaphor of the “body politic,” which is itself a variety of the even more comprehensive and commonplace analogy of the macrocosm and the microcosm. That is the expectation that divinely instituted structures observed on one scale will be repeated on all scales, so that the organizations of heaven, the universe, and the human body, of the family, the village, the city, and the nation, will be expected to resemble each other in salient ways. I have written at length elsewhere about the breakdown of this expectation under the pressure of scientific discovery during the course of the seventeenth century. Here I have tried to suggest something of that change by analyzing the changes in the way the body politic is deployed in samples from the beginning, middle, and end of the seventeenth century.

Part 2, *Topics in Seventeenth-Century Literature*, offers four free-standing chapters on four different aspects of seventeenth-century writing: “Aemilia Lanyer and the Gendering of Genre” looks at the work of the first middle-class Englishwoman to publish a book of religious verse, asking what her poems might tell us about the gender specificity of the generic conventions she inherited from her male predecessors and contemporaries, and how reading her story might change the way we read *history*. “Changing Conventions: *Hamlet* and *The Alchemist*” provides a more extended look at two important and much studied plays with a view toward understanding why one might feel more “modern,” even more “natural” or transparent today than the other. As in the chapter on gender, the idea is to work outward from a few specimen texts toward an understanding of how conventions are established, so that a particular way of representing the world may seem transparent and simple in one time period but opaque and difficult in another. The two concluding essays, “Pamphlet Wars: To Kill a King!” and “Everything Happens Twice” return to the intricate interrelationship of political and literary history in the period. They examine the contesting representations of the execution of King Charles I by supporters and opponents of the republican regime, and look at the literary coding and recoding – in the rapid give and take of political polemic – of a major crisis in the early days of the Stuart dynasty, and the way that crisis – the Gunpowder Plot of 1605 – was reused and revalued during the Restoration.

Part 3, *Some Key Texts*, singles out for closer consideration four works: Shakespeare’s late play, *The Winter’s Tale*, *Areopagitica*, John Milton’s 1644 plea for freedom from pre-publication censorship, Milton’s epic

poem “doctrinal to a nation,” *Paradise Lost*, and John Bunyan’s hugely popular allegory of spiritual renovation, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*. Many other texts are discussed in the course of the book, but these four chapters are intended to take up specific questions of genre, audience, and function as they are posed by each text in its historical moment and in ours.

Finally, Part 4, *Writers of the Seventeenth Century*, provides an alphabetized and cross-referenced set of entries dedicated to individual writers, some of whom are discussed in the narrative sections of the book and some of whom are not. These entries are intended to give salient facts, point toward important texts and indicate areas for further study and reading. Wherever possible I have included a sampling of pertinent texts to provide a sense of the language of each writer. Along with the comprehensive list of the *Works Cited* section of this volume, which is offered for reference and documentation but also as a reasonable bibliography which may facilitate readers who wish to pursue further the topics treated in this book, Part 4 is dedicated to the reference function of this volume. I have relied so heavily on one work included in the reference section, the online edition of the monumental *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, as to feel it merits a special mention here. I have tried my best to cite its entries specifically where appropriate, but add a general acknowledgment now that it is the first resource I have consulted for a large variety of background material about individuals whose names appear in this volume.

Any single volume work that attempts to survey a century of literature and its historical contexts is going to be culpable in its omissions. I have tried to tell *a* story, not, *the* story of seventeenth-century literature in Britain, and I make no claim that the story I have told is comprehensive. In making many, many decisions about what (and whom) to include and what to pass over in silence, I have made some recourse to the definition of the literary historical event put forth in my book *The Story of All Things*, but I have relied much more heavily on my experience as a teacher. The particular story told here resembles the one told in my seventeenth-century literature survey, and in the many, many instances when one choice of material or emphasis has had to be made over another, I have chosen to tell the story that has worked best in the classroom; and as I have thought of my students over the years as collaborators in this project, I hope now for collaborative readers, readers who will be happy to find new and harder questions, even where they have sought answers.

In assembling a work as broad as this book is, one necessarily finds oneself sometimes writing about things one knows fairly well, but many other times, one feels the need to turn to friends and colleagues. When I began this project it seemed like a good way to fill in the lacunae in my own knowledge of the seventeenth century. As work on it progressed, however, the metaphor of a

field of knowledge in which here and there a hole had to be filled in, often gave way to that of an ocean of ignorance in which the writer stood like a forlorn polar bear clinging to small ice floes of factual acquaintance. For constant rescue from this cold sea of my own inadequacies, I am indebted to the uniquely wonderful community and facilities of the Folger Shakespeare Library and the breadth and expertise of my colleagues at the University of Maryland. If working scholars designed paradise, the Folger is what it would be like, and all the angels would be library staff. Among my colleagues at Maryland, I am particularly indebted to the generosity and critical inquisitiveness and knowledge of Elizabeth Bearden, Kent Cartwright, Kim Coles, Gary Hamilton, and Theodore Leinwand. Of singular glory among my colleagues is Gerard Passannante, who undertook the duty of reading the manuscript, catching errors and offering many sage suggestions. If I have made a fool of myself in anything here, it will be attributable to my own obstinacy and despite his greater than due diligence. I am indebted also to the extraordinary patience and support of my students, especially, Margaret Rice Vasileiou, who volunteered to read a draft of "Texts and Contexts," along with my Readings in Seventeenth Century Literature class and to offer a running commentary on its adequacy as a supplementary text. I also thank Emma Bennett, Isobel Bainton, and the editorial staff at Blackwell for their extraordinary patience and support. I am especially grateful to Felicity Marsh for her meticulous and informed copy editing, which has countless times intervened to repair obscure passages and correct embarrassing errors. I could not have completed this project at all without the generous financial support of the Graduate Research Board of the University of Maryland and of a long-term Folger fellowship provided by the National Endowment for the Humanities. Finally, I owe the greatest and most special debt to Karen for her patience, caring, and goodness in support of this book and of all things else.

Chronology

Some Significant Events Political and Literary

1587	Execution of Mary, Queen of Scots.
1588	Defeat of the Spanish Armada.
1590	Edmund Spenser publishes <i>The Faerie Queene</i> books 1–3.
1596	<i>The Faerie Queene</i> , books 1–6.
1601	Shakespeare's <i>Hamlet</i> performed at the Globe; Earl of Essex executed after an abortive uprising. Shakespeare's <i>Twelfth Night</i> ; <i>Troilus and Cressida</i> .
1603	Death of Elizabeth I; James VI of Scotland becomes James I of England. Shakespeare's <i>Alls Well that Ends Well</i> . Jonson's <i>Sejanus</i> . <i>Essays</i> of Montaigne translated into English by John Florio.
1604	Shakespeare's <i>Measure for Measure</i> ; <i>Othello</i> .
1605	Gunpowder Plot: conspiracy to blow up the King, court and parliament and raise rebellion among Roman Catholics is foiled. <i>King Lear</i> . Bacon's <i>The Advancement of Learning</i> .
1606	<i>Macbeth</i> performed; Jonson's <i>Volpone</i> .
1607	Shakespeare, <i>Antony and Cleopatra</i> . Beaumont and Fletcher, <i>The Knight of the Burning Pestle</i> . Jamestown, VA settled.
1608	John Milton born.

1609	Shakespeare, <i>Coriolanus</i> performed; <i>Sonnets</i> published.
1610	Shakespeare, <i>Cymbeline</i> . Jonson, <i>The Alchemist</i> .
1611	King James Bible published. Aemilia Lanyer, <i>Salve Deus Rex Judeorum</i> . Donne, <i>The Anatomy of the World</i> . Shakespeare, <i>The Winter's Tale</i> ; <i>The Tempest</i> .
1612	Death of Prince Henry. Donne, <i>The Anniversaries</i> . Webster, <i>The White Devil</i> .
1613	Webster, <i>The Duchess of Malfi</i> . Middleton, <i>A Chaste Maid in Cheapside</i> .
1616	Jonson's <i>Works</i> published in folio edition. King James's <i>Works</i> . Death of Shakespeare.
1620	Mayflower leaves for America.
1621	Bacon impeached.
1623	Shakespeare first folio published. Prince Charles and Buckingham fail in negotiations for Charles's marriage to the Spanish Infanta.
1625	Death of James I and accession of Charles I. War with Spain.
1626	Charles dissolves parliament after impeachment of Buckingham.
1627	John Ford, <i>'Tis Pity She's a Whore</i> . Phineas Fletcher, <i>Locustae</i> . Tom May's translation of Lucan's <i>The Civil Wars</i> .
1628	William Laud becomes Bishop of London. Buckingham assassinated.
1631	John Donne dies.
1633	Laud becomes Archbishop of Canterbury. Donne's <i>Poems</i> published. George Herbert dies. Herbert's <i>The Temple</i> is published. Cowley, <i>Poetical Blossoms</i> . Phineas Fletcher, <i>The Purple Island</i> .

1634	Milton's <i>Mask (Comus)</i> performed at Ludlow Castle.
1637	Milton's <i>Mask</i> published anonymously. Jonson dies.
1639	First Bishops' War with Scotland.
1640	The "Short Parliament." Second Bishops' War. Scots army crosses the Tweed into England. Charles calls the "Long Parliament." Wentworth and Laud are impeached. Carew's <i>Poems</i> published. Jonson's <i>Works</i> vol 2.
1641	Laud imprisoned. Wentworth executed. Irish rebellion. Milton enters anti-prelatical polemic.
1642	Charles I enters Parliament with armed guard in failed attempt to arrest five opposition MPs. Bishops are excluded from the House of Lords. King withdraws to Oxford, fails in attempt to control the arsenal at Hull, raises his standard at Nottingham, Civil War begins. Theaters are closed as of September 2.
1643	Episcopacy is abolished. Solemn League and Covenant signed. Milton begins publishing <i>Divorce Tracts</i> .
1644	Laud tried. Parliament begins to prevail in Civil War. Milton, "Of Education," <i>Areopagitica</i> .
1645	Laud executed. Book of Common Prayer abolished. New Model Army organized. Milton, <i>Poems</i> . Waller, <i>Poems</i> .
1646	Royalist forces defeated. King surrenders to Scots. Suckling, <i>Fragmenta Aurea</i> . Crashaw, <i>Steps to the Temple</i> . Vaughan, <i>Poems with the Tenth Satire of Juvenal Englished</i> .
1647	Scots turn Charles I over to parliament; Charles is seized by army; escapes to Isle of Wight. Army Levelers engage in Putney Debates.
1648	Second Civil War. Army seizes the king. Colonel Pride excludes Presbyterian MPs from Parliament (Pride's Purge). Herrick's <i>Hesperides</i> and <i>Noble Numbers</i> published.

1649	King tried, executed January 30. <i>Eikon Basilike</i> , the king's book, appears. House of Lords abolished. Commonwealth proclaimed. Cromwell suppresses Irish rebellion. Milton becomes secretary for Foreign Tongues. Lovelace, <i>Lucasta</i> ; Milton's regicide tracts: <i>The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates</i> ; <i>Eikonoklastes</i> .
1650	Davenant, <i>Gondibert</i> . Vaughan, <i>Silex Scintillans</i> . Marvell, "An Horation Ode." Baxter, <i>Saint's Everlasting Rest</i> .
1651	Charles II crowned at Scone; Battle of Worcester destroys last royalist threat. Cromwell campaigns in Scotland, after Fairfax resigns his commission. Hobbes returns to England from exile in Paris. <i>Leviathan</i> published. Milton, <i>Pro Populo Anglicano Defensio</i> . Vaughan, <i>Olar Iscanus</i> .
1653	Cromwell dissolves the Rump. Barebones Parliament. Protectorate established. First Anglo-Dutch War. Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, <i>Poems and Fancies</i> and <i>Philosophical Fancies</i> .
1654	Milton, <i>Defensio Secunda</i> . Hobbes, <i>Of Liberty and Necessity</i> . Vaughan, <i>Flores Solitudinis</i> .
1655	War with Spain. Marvell's "First Anniversary of the Government under O. C." Vaughan, <i>Scilex Scintillans</i> (expanded). Waller, <i>Panegyric to my Lord Protector</i> . Hobbes, <i>De Corpore</i> . Milton <i>Pro Se Defensio</i> .
1656	Cowley, <i>Poems</i> (including Davideis and Odes). Bunyan, <i>Some Gospel-Truths Opened</i> . Hobbes, <i>Questions concerning Liberty, Necessity, and Chance</i> .
1658	Cromwell dies and is succeeded by his son Richard. Hobbes, <i>De Homine</i> . Davenant pushes against ban on theaters, by staging "operas" in the Cockpit at Drury Lane.
1659	Army forces dissolution of third protectorate parliament. Rump is recalled. Monk moves his army south from Scotland. Suckling, <i>Last Remains</i> .

1660	Monk recalls the Long Parliament. Charles II signs the declaration of Breda. Convention Parliament restores the monarchy. Royal Society chartered. Dryden, <i>Astraea Redux</i> . Killigrew and Davenant given patents to build two theaters and form two companies.
1662	Act of Uniformity reestablishes Church of England. Dissenting clergy are purged. <i>The Book of Common Prayer</i> is reintroduced.
1665	Second Anglo-Dutch War. Severe plague in London.
1666	Much of London destroyed by fire. Waller, <i>Instructions to a Painter</i> . Bunyan, <i>Grace Abounding</i> .
1667	Dutch destroy British ships in the Medway and threaten London. Clarendon is impeached and goes into exile in France. Milton publishes <i>Paradise Lost</i> , a poem in 10 books. Dryden, <i>Annus Mirabilis</i> , Marvell, <i>Clarendon's Housewarming</i> ; <i>Last Instructions to a Painter</i> .
1668	Dryden becomes Laureate. Cowley, <i>Works</i> . Denham, <i>Poems and Translations</i> . Dryden, <i>An Essay on Dramatic Poesy</i> . Shadwell, <i>The Sullen Lovers</i> .
1670	Milton, <i>The History of Britain</i> . Behn, <i>The Forced Marriage</i> . Dryden, <i>The Conquest of Granada</i> , pt 1. Shadwell, <i>The Humorists</i> .
1671	Milton, <i>Paradise Regained</i> , to which is added <i>Samson Agonistes</i> . Dryden, <i>The Conquest of Granada</i> , pt 2. Wycherly, <i>Love in a Wood</i> . Buckingham, <i>The Rehearsal</i> .
1672	Third Anglo-Dutch War. Shaftesbury becomes chancellor. William of Orange, later to be William III of England, becomes Dutch Stadholder. Marvell, <i>The Rehearsal Transposed</i> . Wycherly, <i>The Gentleman Dancing-Master</i> . In theater: Dryden, <i>Marriage-a-la-Mode</i> and <i>The Assignment</i> . Shadwell, <i>Epsom Wells</i> .
1673	Declaration of Indulgence revoked and Test Act passed. Marriage of Duke of York to Mary of Modena. Shaftesbury dismissed as chancellor. Davenant's <i>Works</i> published. Behn, <i>The Dutch Lover</i> , Dryden, <i>Amboyna</i> .

1674	End of Third Anglo-Dutch War. Death of Milton; <i>Paradise Lost</i> published in revised, 12 book version.
1675	Dryden, <i>Aureng-Zebe</i> . Wycherly, <i>The Country Wife</i> . Shaftesbury, <i>Psyche</i> . Otway, <i>Alcibiades</i> .
1676	Shadwell, <i>The Virtuoso</i> . Otway, <i>Don Carlos</i> . Behn, <i>The Town-Fop</i> . Wycherly, <i>The Plain Dealer</i> .
1677	Buckingham and Shaftesbury sent to the Tower. William of Orange marries the Duke of York's daughter Mary. Marvell, <i>An Account of Popery</i> , Dryden, <i>All for Love</i> and <i>The State of Innocence</i> . Behn, <i>The Rover</i> .
1678	Titus Oates and Israel Tongue give evidence of a "Popish Plot" against Charles II. Danby impeached. Marvell dies. Vaughan, <i>Thalia Rediva</i> . Bunyan, <i>The Pilgrim's Progress</i> , pt. 1. Shadwell, <i>Timon of Athens</i> and <i>A True Widow</i> . Behn, <i>Sir Patient Fancy</i> ; Otway, <i>Friendship in Fashion</i> .
1679	End of Cavalier Parliament. Whigs take control of Commons. Duke of York sent out the country, but recalled and made High Commissioner of Scotland when Charles II becomes ill. Monmouth meets and defeats Covenanters in Scotland. Dryden, <i>Troilus and Cressida</i> . Behn, <i>The Feigned Courtizans</i> .
1680	Monmouth, seeking legitimation as heir, makes progress through West. Bill to exclude the Duke of York fails in the House of Lords. Otway publishes <i>The Poet's Complaint of his Muse</i> . Rochester, <i>Poems</i> . Filmer's <i>Patriarcha</i> printed. Bunyan, <i>The Life and Death of Mr. Badman</i> . Otway, <i>The Orphan</i> and <i>The Soldier's Fortune</i> . Dryden, <i>The Spanish Friar</i> .
1681	Charles II dissolves new parliament to prevent it from passing an exclusion bill. Shaftesbury charged with treason but freed by London Grand Jury. Dryden, <i>Absalom and Achitophel</i> . Marvell's <i>Miscellaneous Poems</i> posthumously published by Mary Marvell. Hobbes, <i>Behemoth</i> . Behn, <i>The Rover</i> , pt. 2; <i>The False Count</i> and <i>The Roundheads</i> . Shadwell, <i>The Lancashire Witches</i> . Nahum Tate's reworking of <i>King Lear</i> .

1682	Duke of York returns from Scotland. Shaftesbury goes into exile in Holland. Monmouth makes a second progress and is arrested. Dryden, <i>The Medal</i> ; <i>MacFlecknoe</i> ; <i>Absalom and Achitophel</i> , pt2; <i>Religio Laici</i> . Bunyan, <i>The Holy War</i> . Behn, <i>The City Heiress</i> . Otway, <i>Venice Preserved</i> .
1683	Death of Shaftesbury. Rye House Plot. Monmouth goes into exile in Holland. Otway, <i>The Athiest</i> .
1684	Bunyan, <i>The Pilgrim's Progress</i> , pt. 2. Rochester, <i>Valentinian</i> performed at court. Tate, <i>A Duke and No Duke</i> .
1685	Charles II dies, February 6 and is succeeded by James II. Scottish rising for Monmouth is defeated. Monmouth defeated at Sedgemoor and executed. Waller, <i>Divine Poems</i> . Dryden, <i>Albion and Albanius</i> .
1686	James II begins to empower Catholics. Anne Killigrew, <i>Poems</i> . Behn, <i>The Lucky Chance</i> .
1687	Buckingham dies. Dryden, <i>Song for St. Cecilia's Day</i> ; <i>The Hind and the Panther</i> . Behn, <i>The Emperor of the Moon</i> .
1688	Birth of James II son sets up prospect of Catholic dynasty. William of Orange lands at Torbay, November 5 and marches on London. James goes into exile in France. Bunyan dies. Dryden, <i>Britannia Rediviva</i> . Behn's novel <i>Oroonoko</i> . Shadwell, <i>The Squire of Alsatia</i> .
1689	Convention Parliament offers Crown to William and Mary. Coronation April 11. Locke, <i>A Letter Concerning Toleration</i> . Shadwell, <i>Bury Fair</i> . Dryden, <i>Don Sebastian</i> .
1690	Waller, <i>Poems</i> , pt2. Locke, <i>An Essay Concerning Human Understanding</i> ; <i>Two Treatises of Government</i> ; <i>Second Letter Concerning Toleration</i> . Dryden, <i>Amphitryon</i> .
1691	Rochester, <i>Poems on Several Occasions</i> . Dryden, <i>King Arthur</i> .
1692	Tate named Poet Laureate. Dryden, <i>Eleonora</i> . Bunyan, <i>Works</i> , v.1. Locke, <i>A Third Letter of Toleration</i> . Dryden, <i>Cleomenes</i> . Shadwell, <i>The Volunteers</i> .

1693	Locke, <i>Thoughts Concerning Education</i> . Rhymer, <i>A Short View of Tragedy</i> . Congreve, <i>The Bachelor</i> and <i>The Double Dealer</i> .
1694	Addison, <i>An Account of the Greatest English Poets</i> . George Fox, <i>Journal</i> , ed. by Thomas Ellwood. Wotton, <i>Reflections upon Ancient and Modern Learning</i> . Dryden, <i>Love Triumphant</i> .
1695	Whigs take control of government. Vaughan dies. Locke, <i>The Reasonableness of Christianity</i> . Congreve, <i>Love for Love</i> .
1696	Baxter, <i>Reliquiae Baxterianae</i> . Toland, <i>Christianity not Mysterious</i> . Colley Cibber, <i>Love's Last Shift</i> .
1697	Dryden, <i>Alexander's Feast</i> ; trans. of Virgil. Congreve, <i>The Mourning Bride</i> .
1698	Milton, <i>Prose Works</i> , ed. John Toland. Farquhar, <i>Love and a Bottle</i> .
1699	Farquhar, <i>The Constant Couple</i> .
1700	Dryden dies. Dryden, <i>Fables Ancient and Modern</i> . Harrington, <i>Works</i> . Congreve, <i>The Way of the World</i> .

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