

JEAN BODIN AND THE ROMANCE OF DEMONOLOGY

JEAN BODIN Y LA NOVELA DE LA DEMONOLOGÍA

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ABSTRACT

This article proposes a comparison between the French Renaissance demonologist Jean Bodin and the fictional character Don Quijote. Like the hero of Cervantes' novel, Bodin believes everything he reads. Consequently, Bodin makes his own discipline of demonology a species of romance that eagerly blurs the boundary of fact and fiction. This type of credulity can be usefully juxtaposed to Michel de Montaigne's understanding of the imagination and to his more philosophical exploration of the realm of possibility.

KEYWORDS: Demonology, fiction, imagination, Jean Bodin, Cervantes, Montaigne

RESUMEN

Estas páginas proponen una comparación entre Jean Bodin, demonólogo francés del siglo XVI, y don Quijote como personaje de ficción. Al igual que el héroe de la novela de Cervantes, Bodin da credibilidad a todo aquello que lee y, en consecuencia, convierte su propia disciplina, la demonología, en una forma de novela que desdibuja de manera consciente las fronteras entre hecho y ficción. Ambas formas de credulidad pueden compararse de manera productiva a las ideas de Michel de Montaigne acerca de la imaginación y a su incursión filosófica en el dominio de lo posible.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Demonología, ficción, imaginación, Jean Bodin, Michel de Montaigne, Miguel de Cervantes

This paper explores an unsuspected connection between the novelist Miguel de Cervantes and the late sixteenth-century French prose writer Jean Bodin. Bodin is a perplexing figure, equally renowned as a pioneering advocate of religious tolerance and as a fanatical persecutor of witches. He occupies a prominent place in the history of political thought for his *Six books of the Republic*, and he attempted his own synthesis of natural philosophy in the *Theatrum universae naturae*. Rarely is

he associated with questions of literary genre and even more rarely is he compared to the protagonist of Cervantes' novel *Don Quijote*. What interests me here is the *quijotismo* or attitude to narrative that informs the French author's treatise on witchcraft, *De la Démonomanie des sorciers*, which was first published in 1580, 25 years before part one of Cervantes' novel. More specifically, I am interested in how Bodin appeals to the same arguments in order to defend his belief in witches as Don Quijote does to defend his belief in chivalric romance. Both men make their profession of faith in defiance of all those annoying critics who draw a firm distinction between fact and fiction. This affinity between the demonologist and the hero of the novel emerges most conspicuously if we compare the discussion between Don Quijote and the Canon of Toledo in chapter 49 of the first part of the novel with the chapter on lycanthropy in book two of the *Démonomanie*. We will begin with the Spanish text, in despite of chronology, which is one of the conventions that convince Don Quijote of the truth of fiction.

At the end of Part I of Cervantes' novel, the hero is escorted home in a cage by the priest and the barber of his village, who enact an elaborate charade in order to convince the knight that he has fallen victim to an evil enchanter. Thus the episode presupposes from the outset the proximity of belief in sorcery and belief in romance. En route, the travelers encounter a Canon of Toledo whose curiosity is excited by the spectacle of the encaged knight, whose confidence he gains by assuring him that he knows more about books of chivalry than he does about theological treatises (Cervantes 563). After warming up with a preliminary verbal skirmish with the priest, the Canon engages, out of compassion, to dissuade Don Quijote from reading chivalric romances. Such reading, he fears, has convinced the gullible knight to put his faith in things that are as far from being true as falsehood itself is removed from the truth: "Es posible, señor hidalgo, que haya podido tanto con vuestra merced la amarga y ociosa letura de los libros de caballerías, que le hayan vuelto el juicio de modo que venga a creer que va encantado, con otras cosas deste jaez tan lejos de ser verdaderas como lo está la mesma mentira de la verdad?" (Id. 580). Here the categories of *verdad* and *mentira* stand for the literary genres of history and fiction. Rather than books of chivalry, which ought in his opinion to be burned like heretics (Id. 581), the Canon recommends another type of reading: he urges Don Quijote to read the valiant deeds recorded "en la Sacra Escritura" (Ibid.) and "en la historia" (Id. 582). These books are true while romances lie. No sooner is he out of his cage than our hero makes short work of all these caviling distinctions between different kinds of narrative. Offended by the Canon's "blasphemies" (Id. 583), the knight appeals insidiously to verisimilitude:

how can you deny what is so widely believed and held to be true? If Amadis is a fiction, he declares indignantly, then so are Hector, Achilles and the Trojan War; so is King Arthur, so are Tristan and Isolde, Lancelot and Guinevere (Id. 583-84). So far so good for the Canon, since we are inclined to classify all these names as fictional characters, although we may recall that in the terms of Aristotle's *Poetics*, which is supposed to inform the Canon's critical position (Forcione), the names from the tragic and epic tradition are historical names, not fictional ones. In chapter nine of the *Poetics*, Aristotle allows that, whereas comic poets generally assign their characters arbitrary or fictional names (*tuchonta onomata* 1451b13), tragic poets still prefer real names or *genomena onomata* (1451b15), a phrase which the Renaissance commentator Francesco Robortello glosses as "vera personarum nomina" (Robortello 93). Aristotle has earlier identified *ta genomena* or the facts as the province of the historian (1451b4). Frank Walbank offers a pungent comment on Aristotle's distinction between comic and tragic names: "By real names he means of course the names of real people like Agamemnon and Orestes; and what they did has been defined as history" (Walbank 231). In this respect, Don Quijote is merely revising Aristotelian logic in keeping with the romance tradition when he appeals to the reality of Achilles and King Arthur.

As he continues his catalogue of chivalric heroes, Don Quijote veers from fiction to history, citing a litany of characters whom the diligent editor assures us were historical personages or *caballeros historicos* (Cervantes 584, n. 22). This category includes the hero's own ancestor Gutierre Quijada, whose historicity is contaminated by his genealogy. Don Quijote rounds off his eclectic list with a defiant challenge to the Canon to deny these Spanish heroes if he dares, suggesting that their debate is itself a kind of chivalric contest. This conflation of genres leaves the Canon stunned: "Admirado quedó el canónigo de oír la mezcla que don Quijote hacía de verdades y mentiras" (Id. 585). Such an amazing confusion of fact and fiction, based on an implicit faith in the homogeneity of narrative or the idea that all stories are true, may strike a chord of recognition in readers of Bodin's treatise on witchcraft *De la Démonomanie des sorciers*, which reduces its audience to a similar state of confusion with the stunning range of testimony convoked in favor of its preposterous claims. In fact the Canon, in a momentary concession to his interlocutor, may be said to summarize Bodin's relation to the facts when he acknowledges "todo puede ser" (Id. 586) or anything's possible.

In the debate on sorcery that developed in sixteenth-century Europe, Jean Bodin occupies an eccentric, extremist position. For him, the literal reality of sorcery is confirmed by an indiscriminate mass of narrative precedents, that is of stories about

witches, treated as testimony admissible in court. This tendency to treat all stories as proof becomes most infuriating in the chapter of the *Démonomanie* devoted to lycanthropy or the transformation of human beings into wolves through demonic agency. The devil does some strange things, but the most difficult thing to believe is the metamorphosis of a human being into an animal. And yet, you can't argue with the proof: "Toutesfois les procès faicts aux Sorciers et les histoires Divines et humaines, et de tous les peuples font la preuve tres-certaine" (Bodin 247). To prove the existence of werewolves, Bodin starts with the witch trials, then moves on to the demonologists, the retailers of miracles, and other compilers, before taking a quick turn through the historians. All this lycanthropy may be strange, Bodin is willing to admit, but what is even stranger is incredulity in the face of such universal testimony: "Or c'est chose bien estrange, mais je trouve encores plus estrange, que plusieurs ne le peuvent croire, veu que tous les peuples de la terre, et toute l'antiquité demeure d'accord" (Id. 251). To drive home his point, he inserts a quixotic litany of authorities: Herodotus, Homer, Pomponius Mela, Solinus, Strabo, Marcus Varro, Virgil, Ovid, Pliny, Olaus Magnus, Saxo Grammaticus, Job Finchel, and Guillaume de Brabant (Id. 251–252). This is Bodin's most compact version of "la mezcla de verdades y mentiras" with which Don Quijote stuns the Canon. However, Bodin seems to draw the line, a line he has already crossed, at Ovid: "Je laisse la metamorphose d'Ovide par ce qu'il a entremellé la verité de plusieurs fables" (Id. 252–253). You have to take Ovid with a grain of salt because he mixed truth and fable (a little like Bodin himself and his epigone Don Quijote). Nevertheless, though the *Metamorphoses* may contaminate truth with fable, the myth of Lycaon, surely, is not incredible: "mais il n'est pas incroyable ce qu'il escript de Lycaon Roy d'Arcadie" (Id. 253). Similarly, what Homer says about Circe is not a fable because St. Augustine tells the same story in his *City of God*. All of this is in cruelly bad faith, but the use he makes of St. Augustine is the most devious.

Augustine begins book 18 of his *City of God* by announcing that he will now review the history of the city of man from Abraham to the Incarnation, through a sort of concordance of Biblical history and pagan history. For instance, the reign of the Hebrew judges coincided roughly with the Trojan War, during which, incidentally, Diomedes' men were turned into birds (Augustine 276). This leads to an interesting novelistic digression on metamorphosis, drawing on examples compiled by Marcus Varro, including the episode of Circe in Homer,¹ and various

¹ For Peter Bietenholz (154–157), the episode of Circe is a key test case for the emerging distinction between history and fable in the modern era.

incidents of lycanthropy among the Arcadians. In the following chapter, chapter 18 of book 18, the self-conscious narrator remarks that his readers may wonder what he thinks about all this transformation from human to animal form: “Sed de ista tanta ludificatione daemonum nos quid dicamus, qui haec legent, fortassis expectent” (Id. 277). Does he believe in any of it? The short answer is no: “Haec vel falsa sunt vel tam inusitata, ut merito non credantur” (Id. 278). These stories, he asserts, are all false or at least so strange, *inusitata*, that they should not be believed. And yet, the Christian must believe that nothing is impossible for God: “Firmissime tamen credendum est omnipotentem Deum posse omnia facere quae voluerit,” a confession that once more blurs the boundary between fact and fiction. Augustine will never believe that demons literally change the human body or soul, but rather that they deceive the human imagination, which he calls “phantasticum hominis” (Ibid.). In this sense, the stories of metamorphosis, when recounted by credible authorities, which seems to include Homer but exclude Apuleius,² are at least possible if not factual. So, all the stories told in book 18, chapters 17 and 18 of the *City of God* testify to the power of the imagination, which tends to merge with divine omnipotence as the dual guarantors of lycanthropy and other metamorphoses.

So this is Bodin’s authority for asserting as a fact the reality of lycanthropy, which he doggedly defends by analogy to other notorious cases of metamorphosis. Bodin is cheered by the stories he has read of witches who transform their victims into animals, generally asses, and he generously invents an anecdote of a trained ass and former human that he attributes to Pierre Belon (Bodin 253). He is most captivated by the Golden Ass or *Metamorphoses* of Apuleius, which he takes to be some sort of autobiography rather than a work of fiction. He eagerly cites, from book one, Aristomenes’ dubious protestation of veracity, that bears a strong resemblance to and may indeed be a model of Maître Alcofrybas’ strident claim to veracity in the prologue to Rabelais’ *Pantagruel*. Whereas Aristomenes swears by the all-seeing sun to tell nothing but the truth: “sed tibi prius deierabo solem istum <omni>videntem deum me vera comperta memorare” (*Metamorphoses* I, 5 cited in Bodin 254), Alcofrybas swears an even more aggressive oath of veracity: “je me donne à mille panerés de beaulx diables, corps et âmes, trippes et boyaulx, en cas que j’en mente en toute l’hystoire d’un seul mot” (Rabelais 216). It’s a wonder Bodin doesn’t cite Alcofrybas as an authority on the demonic, but he may have

² “Sicut Apuleius in libris, quos *Asini aurei* titulo inscripsit, sibi ipsi accidisse aut indicavit aut finxit” (Augustine 278).

resented Rabelais' obvious parody of verisimilitude.³ Bodin has a moment of lucidity when he admits that Apuleius may have embellished his history with some tall tales, but surely the story is no stranger than all the other lies he's swallowed whole: "Il se peult faire qu'il a enrichy son histoire de quelques contes plaisans, mais l'histoire en soy n'est pas plus estrange, que celles que nous avons remarquées" (Bodin 254). *Estrange* in this context seems to mean *inverisimilar*/*invraisemblable*, and Apuleius defines the outer limit of verisimilitude, beyond which literature dare not go. Apuleius is in effect Bodin's *Amadis de Gaula*, the work of fiction that he alone takes as fact.

Whereas Don Quijote had the good sense for a madman to mix only secular facts and fiction, Bodin insists on enlisting the authority of Biblical narrative to support his argument. King Nebuchadnezzar in the Book of Daniel sets the precedent for metamorphosis and thus for lycanthropy. If you believe one, you have to believe the other. "Et si nous confessons la verité de l'histoire sacree en Daniel, qui ne peut estre revoquee en doute, il est certain que le changement d'homme en Boeuf est possible, il est possible en tous autres animaux" (Bodin 259). Conversely, if you don't believe in werewolves, or if you think it's all an illusion, you better not believe in the Bible: "Car qui voudroit pour une illusion conclure que tout n'est qu'illusion des oeuvres de Sathan, il faudroit confesser que tout ce qu'il fist à Job ne seroient que illusions. Et la saincte Escriture, et toutes les Histoires de telles chose ne seroient que mocqueries" (Id. 258, n. 61). This is the type of pious reasoning that has strengthened Bodin's reputation for atheism.⁴

Bodin stakes out such an extreme position in the contemporary debate on sorcery in response to the work of the Flemish physician Johan Wier, who debunks the wild imaginings of the witch hunters in his *De praestigijs daemonum*, first published in five books in 1563 and expanded to six books in 1568. Apparently the confusion of fact and fiction that we find in Bodin was already quite current in 1563, for Wier devotes a chapter to the poetic authorities conventionally invoked by demonologists as evidence in their case against witches. Book two, chapter 17 in the first edition purports to define "quid sit Lamia" but is in fact an anthology of verse depictions of witches from Ovid, Virgil, Homer, Horace, Tibullus, Lucan, Manilius, and even the modern Macaronic poets. If you think those are lies, Wier remarks, you haven't seen anything until you've read Apuleius, whose book is

³ For which, see Rigolot and also MacPhail.

⁴ François Berriot offers a handy survey of Bodin's reputation for heterodoxy in his introduction to Bodin's *Colloque entre sept scavans*.

stuffed with infinite histories, more fabulous than fables: “At apud haec poetarum commenta locum merentur infinitae historiae, fabulis fabulosiores, XI libris Metamorphoseos sive lusus asini conscriptae a L. Apuleio philosopho platonico” (Wier 178). In the phrase *fabulis fabulosiores*, we have a nice hyperbolic formula that seems to respond to Erasmus’ adage *vero verior*. In fact the formula comes from Apuleius himself in book one of the *Metamorphoses* where the narrator encounters two travelers who are disputing an account of witchcraft. The traveler named Aristomenes gives a breathless account of his own harrowing encounter with a witch while his anonymous interlocutor and fellow traveler tells him to lay off the enormous lies: “parce in verba ista haec tam absurda tamque immania mentiendo” (*Metamorphoses* I, 2). The credulous narrator naturally sides with Aristomenes and asks him to retell his story, which elicits from his *comes* or companion the categorical verdict, “nihil hac fabula fabulosius, nihil isto mendacio absurdus” (I, 20). To bolster their respective positions, Bodin cites the credulous traveler and his oath to the sun and Wier alleges the scornful words of the incredulous traveler: “Nae istud mendacium tam verum est, quam si quis velit dicere, magico susurramine amnes agiles reverti... noctem teneri” (*Met* I, 3 cited in Wier 179). In effect Apuleius has already staged the Renaissance debate over witchcraft at the outset of his novel.

The publication of the *Démonomanie* in 1580 provoked mixed reactions including ridicule and indignation as well as some astonishment.⁵ Reginald Scot’s *The Discovery of Witchcraft* from 1584 sides openly with Wier against Bodin. Chapter seven of book twelve, entitled “Poetical Authorities commonly alleged by Witchmongers,” basically replicates the florilegium of verse from the *De praestigis daemonum* (II, 17). In the following chapter, XII, 8, Scot makes clear where his sympathies lie:

You see in these verses, the Poets (whether in earnest or in jest, I know not) ascribe unto Witches and to their charms, more than is to be found in Humane or Diabolical power. I doubt not but the most part of the Readers hereof will admit them to be fabulous; although the most learned of mine adversaries (for lack of Scripture) are fain to produce these Poetries for proofs, and for lack of judgment, I am sure, do think that Actaeon’s transformation was true. And why not as well as the Metamorphosis or Transubstantiation of Ulysses his companions into Swine, which S. Augustine and so many great Clerks credit and report? (Scot 129)

⁵ The contemporary reception of Bodin’s work has been ably summarized by Françoise Lavocat, who confirms Bodin’s isolated position even in his own credulous era.

In fact Scot is too hard on Augustine, who, despite Bodin's willful misreading, reports without crediting the episode of Circe in Homer's *Odyssey* under the chapter heading "De incredibilibus commutationibus hominum quid Varro tradiderit" (Augustine 276). However, he's not too hard on Bodin, who doesn't hesitate to credit the strangest fictions of antiquity.

Some years later Jean de Nynauld published a work on lycanthropy whose title page clarifies the author's poor esteem for Jean Bodin.

De la Lycanthropie, transformation et extase des sorciers, où les astuces du diable sont mises tellement en évidence, qu'il est presque impossible, voire aux plus ignorants, de se laisser dorénavant séduire. Avec la réfutation des arguments contraires, que Bodin allègue au 6. chap. du second livre de sa Démonomanie, pour soutenir la réalité de cette prétendue transformation d'hommes en bêtes.

Bodin, nearly alone among his peers, espouses the "realist" position in regard to lycanthropy (Lavocat 68), relying on literary precedents and the omnipotence of God to prove the reality of werewolves. Nynauld draws out the implications of this logic. If we say that anything is possible because God is omnipotent, then we'll have to accept lies for truth: "s'il falloit croire toutes choses pource que toutes choses sont possibles à Dieu, Certes toute science nous seroit ostée, d'autant que nous serions comme contraincts à croire les choses, voire les plus estranges, et le plus souvent prendre le mensonge pour la verité" (Nynauld 77-78). For Nynauld, writing in the immediate aftermath of the first French translation of Cervantes' novel *Don Quijote* by César Oudin in 1614, it is crucial to distinguish between fact and fiction. Thus he stands in relation to Bodin, as the Canon of Toledo does to Don Quijote.

Finally, Gabriel Naudé made a decisive intervention in this debate in 1624 when he published his *Apologie pour tous les grands personnages qui ont esté fausement soupçonnez de magie*. In chapter 11 he unmasks the treachery of "nos Demonographes" who discount historical testimony but use the *Metamorphoses* of Apuleius as if it were a history to prove lycanthropy, even though Apuleius takes every precaution to tell us that he's writing a fiction or rather "une pure fable et Romant" (Naudé 246). With this phrase, Naudé adapts Apuleius' own generic designation of *sermo Milesius* to the modern genre of the novel, which is not bound by the same generic conventions as history. Later, at the end of his book, Naudé returns to the willful confusion of narrative genres in the work of the demonologists. He finds it strange that Bodin and his colleagues refuse to distinguish fact from fiction:

Et à la verité c'est une chose estrange que Delrio, le Loyer, Bodin, de Lancre, Godelman qui ont esté ou sont encores personnes de credit et de merite, ayent escrit si passionnément sur le sujet des Demons, Sorciers et Magiciens, que de n'avoir iamais rebutté aucune histoire, quoy que fabuleuse et ridicule de tout ce grand nombre de fausses et absurdes qu'ils ont peslemeslé sans discretion parmy les vrayes et legitimes. (Naudé 608[642])

Here, with the help of the neologism *peslemesler*, Naudé renders exactly the Canon of Toledo's reaction to Don Quijote's fantastic "mezcla de verdades y mentiras." But Naudé doesn't seem to worry about the triumph of credulity and the ruin of science, like Nynauld. Rather, it is demonology that will lose all credibility due to its indiscriminate use of sources. Naudé invokes the authority of St. Augustine to buttress his argument that lies will discredit the truth: "solent res gestae aspersione mendaciorum in fabulas verti" (*De civitate dei* VII, 35 cited in Naudé 609[643]). He even appeals to Aesop's fable of the boy who cried wolf, which is an underhanded reference to Bodin's obsession with lycanthropy. Eventually, he insinuates, we will learn to read the *Démonomanie* as a work of fiction.

As epilogue, I would like to briefly consider Michel de Montaigne's essay on the force of the imagination, which engages with many of the issues raised in the preceding pages and which, moreover, is exactly contemporary with Bodin's *Démonomanie*. While revising his essay, which first appeared in 1580, Montaigne could have taken into account both editions of Bodin's treatise, from 1580 and 1587, as he deepened his reflections on credulity and possibility. In its primitive form, essay I, 21 "De la force de l'imagination" consists of a series of examples of psychosomatic ailments where the imagination induces in the patient either the sensation of malady or of remedy. The last section turns to the sort of phenomena that St. Augustine classifies under the heading of *invisitata*, including an anecdote about the falconer who made a bird fall from the sky merely by staring at it, "à ce qu'on dit" (Montaigne 105), and which Montaigne reports without confirming or denying its veracity. He is not answerable for the truth of his anecdotes: "Car les Histoires que j'emprunte, je les renvoye sur la conscience de ceux de qui je les prens" (Ibid.). When he revised his essay for the 1588 edition, Montaigne pursued this point a little further. The essayist is not concerned with the facts but rather with their interpretation or meaning: "Les discours sont à moy, et se tienent par la preuve de la raison, non de l'expérience: chacun y peut joindre ses exemples" (Ibid.). The essayist acknowledges responsibility for the *discours* but not the *exemples*.

It is the final revision of the essay, completed sometime before the author's death in 1592, that takes the most provocative approach to all these questions. Here the author insists that he does not care if his examples of the power of the imagination are true or false: "Aussi en l'estude que je traite de noz moeurs et mouvemens, les tesmoignages fabuleux, pourveu qu'ils soient possibles, y servent comme les vrais. Advenu ou non advenu, à Paris ou à Rome, à Jean ou à Pierre, c'est tousjours un tour de l'humaine capacité, duquel je suis utilement advisé par ce recit" (Montaigne 105). The key distinction is not between real and fabulous but rather between possible and impossible. Therefore, he dismisses the objective question: are these stories really true, did they really happen, "advenu ou non advenu"? In effect, he dismisses literary criticism as enacted in the debate between Don Quijote and the Canon of Toledo. He is not a literary critic adjudicating the boundaries of romance and history. He creates his own genre, the essay, that situates itself in relation to existing genres and genre theories. For instance, he recognizes two categories of authors, of which he identifies with the second category: "Il y a des auteurs, desquels la fin c'est dire les evenemens. La mienne, si j'y sçavoie advenir, seroit dire sur ce qui peut advenir" (Ibid.). As Gisèle Mathieu-Castellani (86) pointed out long ago, this distinction matches rather closely the distinction that Aristotle draws between history and poetry in chapter nine of his *Poetics*. Montaigne's "evenemens" corresponds to Aristotle's τὰ γενόμενα (1451a36) or the facts while his own specialty, "ce qui peut advenir," translates the realm of poetry, οἷα ἂν γένοιτο (1451a37). This affinity for poetry leads not to a confusion of genres but rather to a seeming indifference to the effort to segregate fact from fiction.

In the same essay, the narrator confides that some people have encouraged him to write an impartial history of his times (times tainted with indelible partisanship); but we already know that Montaigne is not suited for this task which prefers facts to possibilities. Moreover, history writing would compromise his independence and inhibit his free speech: "Aucuns me convient d'escrire les affaires de mon temps, estimant que je les voy d'une veue moins blessée de passion qu'un autre Mais ils ne disent pas que, pour la gloire de Salluste, je n'en prendrois pas la peine: ennemy juré d'obligation que ma liberté, estant si libre, j'eusse publié des jugemens, à mon gré mesme et selon raison, illegitimes et punissables" (Montaigne 106). Apparently, no one has urged him to take up poetry, and there are no surviving poems by Montaigne. Instead, the essay form indulges his freedom. Like fiction, the essay opens up the wide realm of possibility, but Montaigne never confuses possibility with proof. He may agree with the Canon's concession to Don Quijote that

anything is possible, but he cannot agree with Bodin that everyone is guilty. The essay draws us away from the “tribunal of history” (Frisch 120) and the archaism of chivalry to a neutral terrain that is not far from philosophy.

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