



LIBRARY

A Newsletter of the
Oberlin College Library

PERSPECTIVES

NUMBER SEVEN

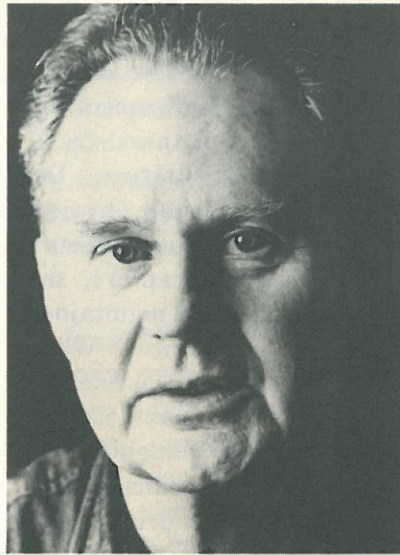
SEPTEMBER 1993

Romulus Linney to Speak at Friends Dinner

Critically acclaimed dramatist Romulus Linney '53 will be the featured speaker at the annual Friends of the Library dinner on Saturday, October 2.

Linney is the author of twelve full length dramas, twenty five short plays, and three novels. His plays, which include *The Sorrows of Frederick*, *Holy Ghosts*, *Childe Byron*, *April Snow*, and *Three Poets*, have been performed since the late 1960's in resident theaters across the United States and in Europe.

Six of Linney's one act plays have been selected for the annual *Best Short Plays* series. *Laughing Stock* was chosen by *Time* magazine as one of the ten best plays of 1984. *Heathen Valley*, which Linney adapted from his 1962 novel of the same title, won the National Critics Award and was included in *Best Plays of the Year 1987-88*. His play "2", produced for the Humana Festival at



Romulus Linney

the Actors Theatre of Louisville, also won the National Critics Award for the season 1989-90 and was selected for *Best Plays of the Year 1989-90*.

Among Linney's many honors are a 1980 Obie Award, three Hollywood Drama-Logue Awards, the Mishima Prize for Fiction, the 1984

Award in Literature from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, and a 1992 Obie Award for Sustained Excellence in Playwriting. He has received two fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts as well as grants from the Guggenheim Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the National Foundation for the Arts.

Linney's short play *The Death of King Philip* will be performed in a student production for the Friends of the Library on Saturday afternoon, Oct. 2 at 4:00 p.m.. Public performances of the play are also scheduled for Friday, October 1 at 8:00 p.m. and Sunday, October 3, at 2:00 p.m.

Mr. Linney will also take part in an informal question and answer session on Friday, October 1, at 4:30 p.m. His talk for the Friends of the Library dinner is entitled "The Dramatist and the Library."

Documents Transmitted Electronically

The library is in the process of implementing a new document transmission service called Ariel. A product of the Research Libraries Group, Ariel allows libraries to send and receive urgently needed documents more quickly than normal facsimile transmission. The system uses a scanner

(to scan documents, journal articles, etc.) and a personal computer. Because the scanned images are sent via the Internet, they are received almost instantaneously, then stored in the receiving library's personal computer to be printed out at the convenience of that library. This method of transmission is faster,

less expensive, and of better quality than fax transmission, and it does not require the photocopying of materials prior to transmission. The addition of Ariel to our work environment will significantly improve the speed with which we can obtain many items needed by Oberlin students and faculty.

Author of Cultural Revolution Memoir to Speak in November



Nien Cheng

Nien Cheng, author of *Life and Death in Shanghai*, a best-selling

memoir of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, will speak in Oberlin on Monday, Nov. 8, at 4:30 p.m.

Life and Death in Shanghai recounts Mrs. Cheng's experiences after she was arrested by the Red Guards in 1966 on suspicion of spying. For six and one-half years she was kept in solitary confinement and subjected to harsh treatment and torture. Despite intense physical pain and brutal pressure from her captors, she steadfastly maintained her innocence. When Mrs. Cheng was released in 1973 she was told that her only daughter had committed suicide while she was in prison. She

learned later, after repeated inquiries, that her daughter had in

fact been beaten to death by the Red Guards.

In reviewing *Life and Death in Shanghai*, Peter Rose of Smith College stated: "It is the simple story of her will to survive that is so astonishing. Her book is a memoir of an indefatigable woman struggling to maintain her pride, dignity, sanity, and faith in the dark days of the Cultural Revolution. That she managed to do it—and to write about it afterward—is a testament to her indomitable will and individual courage. *Life and Death in Shanghai* is a volume that belongs on the shelf alongside the writings of Primo Levi, Elie Wiesel, Dith Pran, and other chroniclers of ideological fanaticism, its dehumanizing consequences, and its all too rare resisters."

Mrs. Cheng's visit to Oberlin is sponsored by the Friends of the Library, the Oberlin Shansi Memorial Association, and the East Asian Studies Program.

Reception for Alumni Librarians

"I got off the elevator and wondered where all that loud talking and raucous laughter was coming from. I should have known it was a bunch of Obies." "You better do this again!" "This was one of the nicest events of the conference for me." "Great idea!"

Those were some of the reactions from Oberlin alumni librarians who attended a reception hosted by members of the Oberlin College Library staff on June 27, 1993 at the annual conference of the American Library Association in New Orleans. Approximately twenty-five Oberlin librarians who work primarily in academic and

public libraries attended the event, which was held at the Doubletree Hotel.

"There is a very large number of Oberlin alumni who have made—and are continuing to make—significant contributions to the library profession. They work in a wide variety of libraries at all levels of responsibility. It's a natural thing to try to bring them together. Given the good attendance and enthusiastic response we got to the reception, we'll plan to make this an annual event," said Ray English, Director of Libraries.

New FirstSearch Databases

The FirstSearch service, the availability of which was announced in the February 1993 issue of *Library Perspectives*, now includes thirty-one electronic databases. Databases added in recent months to the service include:

- Arts and Humanities Search
- Book Review Digest
- Concise Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia
- Education Index
- Library Literature.

For information on using FirstSearch contact the Main Library Reference Department.

From the Director

A series of interesting Friends of the Library programs is in store for the fall semester. The brief residency by distinguished dramatist Romulus Linney, which will coincide with the Friends annual meeting, promises to be a particularly special event. For me personally, reading Mr. Linney's plays has been one of the most enjoyable aspects of the past summer, enabling me to see firsthand the reasons for his stature as a dramatist. Oberlin is also very fortunate to have author Nien Cheng coming to campus in November for a visit facilitated by Friends members Benjamin and Emiko Custer. Life and Death in Shanghai, Mrs. Cheng's memoir of the Cultural Revolution in China, is an extraordinary personal story. And as yet another part of the fall series of Friends programs, one that marks a step in a new direction, I'm particularly pleased that the Chemistry Department and the Friends are cosponsoring a lecture on "Mass Deacidification of Paper and Books" by Professor Andrew Barron of Harvard University.

Preservation Education

At its fall 1992 meeting the Friends of the Library Council voted to support programing to raise community awareness about issues relating to the preservation of the library's collection. Mr. Barron's lecture on deacidification begins to fulfill that goal admirably. To complement his lecture, this issue of Library Perspectives features an article on preservation concerns that derive from the problem of acidic paper and brittle books. The article focuses in particular on deacidification as a preservation technique that can markedly lengthen the life of library materials. As readers of the article will quickly see, the brittle books problem is a formidable challenge for our library. We're hopeful that future funding initiatives will enable us to make more aggressive strides in this area.

New Electronic Developments

As announced elsewhere in this issue, the library will soon begin transmitting interlibrary loan documents electronically over the Internet, the nationwide electronic network. Later this fall, working with the Computing Center, we will install a new local network that will provide widespread campus access to a number of the CD-ROM databases that are currently available only at individual computer workstations in separate library buildings. These developments, and the LIBS program also discussed in this issue, illustrate the continuing transformation that electronic technologies are bringing to library services. I hope you'll look forward to reading about the CD-ROM network in the next Library Perspectives.

Ray English
Director of Libraries

Friends of the Library

Fall Programs

Wednesday, September 15, 4:30 p.m.

Lecture, "Mass Deacidification of Paper and Books: A Practical Application of Chemistry," Andrew Barron, Harvard University Chemistry Department.

Friday, October 1, 4:30 p.m.

Informal Discussion with Distinguished Playwright Romulus Linney.

Saturday, October 2:

Annual Meeting and Dinner

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| Noon | Friends Council meeting |
| 1:30 pm | Main Library tour |
| 2:00 pm | Annual Membership Meeting |
| 3:00 pm | Demonstration of CD-ROM Network & FirstSearch |
| 4:00 pm | Romulus Linney's one act play, <i>The Death of King Philip</i> |
| 5:00 pm | Branch library tours (on request) |
| 5:45 pm | Reception |
| 6:30 pm | Dinner |
| 8:00 pm | Lecture, Romulus Linney, "The Dramatist and the Library" |

Monday, November 8, 4:30 p.m.

Lecture, *Life and Death in Shanghai*, Nien Cheng.

Library Perspectives, a newsletter for users and Friends of the Oberlin College Library, is issued three times a year. Printed from an endowed fund established by Benjamin A. and Emiko Custer. Editors: Ray English, Jessica Grim, and Dan Zager.

The Plays of Romulus Linney: An Interview with Jane Armitage

Jane Armitage, Associate Professor of Theater and Dance, produced Romulus Linney's plays Woman without a Name and Three Poets when Linney was in Oberlin for a brief residency in 1990. She also devoted a semester to his works in her advanced acting class.

Perspectives: How important is Linney as a dramatist?

Armitage: One of the interesting things I've found in reading articles about him is that critics say he's the best kept secret in American theater. One calls him "a mysteriously buried treasure." Yet people in theater are very familiar with his work. They know that he's a major contemporary American dramatist. He hasn't had one of those major Broadway successes that would make him a household name. But the reality is that he's being performed all over the United States all the time. He's been very successful Off Broadway, in regional theaters, in high schools, and throughout the American College Theater Festival. There's a theater in NY—the Signature Theater Company—that devotes each season to a single playwright-in-residence, to his work totally. About two years ago they dedicated their first such season to Linney's plays. He's also been well-received in Europe. Actors love his plays, because they're good theater. He's one of those rare dramatists who also acts and directs his own work.

Perspectives: He's now written thirty-five plays. Are there patterns that characterize them?

Armitage: His topics and themes are very diverse, but there

are two things that stand out for me, that really appeal to me—they derive from his Southern roots and his love of history. He grew up in Tennessee and North Carolina. Plays like *Heathen Valley*, an adaptation of an earlier novel he wrote, *Holy Ghosts*, which is set in a snake-worshipping cult in the South, and *Tennessee*, which is about an elderly Appalachian woman who thinks back on her life, have a wonderful way of capturing the language of the people and the feel of Southern life.

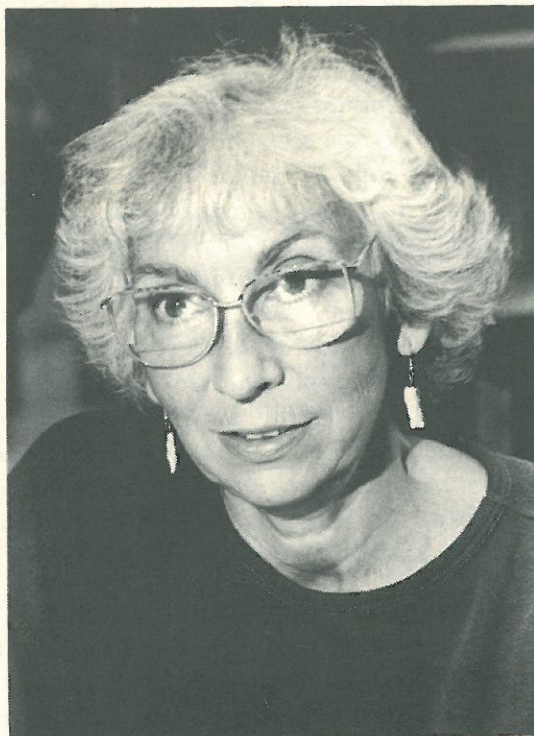
In one interview he indicated that he would never want to go back to the South to live, but it's obvious that the area had a deep effect on him.

Perspectives: And he has a strong interest in historical plays.

Armitage: He's really well known for them. He's said that he doesn't write history plays in order to put on historical pageants. Instead he looks for something in a particular historical situation that affects him, that connects with him personally, and he writes from there. In other words an emotional connection with the historical person comes first and the history follows. And he fleshes out such amazing characters from these events.

Perspectives: Can you give us some examples of that?

Armitage: One is the *Sorrows*



Jane Armitage

of *Frederick*, his first major success. It's about Frederick the Great of Prussia. Linney became interested in Frederick when he was reading about him and discovered patterns similar to his own father's life. In *Childe Byron*, an amazing play in which complex relationships have evolved out of Linney's imagination, the connection for Linney came from Byron's separation from his daughter Ada and Linney's own separation from his daughter following a divorce.

Perspectives: Are there other major characteristics of his plays?

Armitage: He is known for his short plays. He has really developed the short play into an art form. Many of his ideas fit the short play format perfectly, and he seems to be fascinated by it. He feels the short play has everything

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Armitage... *continued*

that would be there in a longer work, but it concentrates on the result and implies the rest. Back in 1987 he predicted the short play form would be in vogue. Now six years later the Humana Festival has an annual short play contest and the short play form has become commonplace. He was right.

Perspectives: Which of the short plays stand out for you?

Armitage: One of the best, I think, is *Akhmatova*, which is about the Russian poet Ana Akhmatova. We did it here in repertoire as part of *Three Poets*. It's a good example of Linney working with a real historical person in a particular place and time. In this instance it's the day that Stalin died. Stalin had imprisoned

Akhmatova's son in an attempt to break her spirit. This woman stood outside of a prison for months and months trying to get Stalin to let her son go. Out of that fact Linney has woven a very powerful, impressionistic play that centers around a confrontation between one of Stalin's henchmen and the poet.

Perspectives: What about the style of his dramatic writing?

Armitage: His plays are very simple, stark even. I really like that. That's the way they've been conceived, and it allows the focus to stay on the characters. The other important stylistic thing is his language. He's brilliant with language. He's equally at home writing Appalachian dialect, creating snappy New York dialogue,

or developing styles that fit different historical and cultural periods. If you read *The Death of King Philip* — it's like reading poetry.

Perspectives: If you had to choose one thing that stands out for you about his plays, one essential element, what would it be?

Armitage: I think it's his humanity. The basic structure of his plays depends on particular situations, on how people, imaginary or real, would react in very real emotional ways in those situations. That's what good theater does. It relies on the basic core of the experience of people, and as such it can unify widely diverse audiences. Linney's been very successful at having that kind of broad, diverse appeal. I'm really excited that he's going to be in Oberlin again.

Focus on Preservation: Brittle Books and Deacidification

As the Oberlin College Library adds materials to its collections a series of operations must take place. Collection development refers to the careful decision-making process that determines which materials are selected for the collections. Acquisitions work includes ordering, receiving, and paying for these new items. Newly acquired materials must be bound or otherwise prepared for use, and then be cataloged according to national standards and included in the Oberlin Bibliographic Information System (OBIS), the library's online catalog. Members of the circulation staff in each library facilitate use of these items both through borrowing and course reserve. Reference librarians provide class instruction and individual consultation, directing users to those materials that will be most helpful

in their study and research. Selection, acquisition, catalog access, and assistance in the use of materials — this sequence of operations accounts for a good deal of the work that goes on in libraries. But there is one further step in the series of operations: library materials must be preserved so that their intellectual content will be available to successive generations of students and faculty as well as to scholars outside the Oberlin community.

Preservation work has emerged as a vigorous sub-discipline of librarianship, with many libraries, including Oberlin, counting a preservation specialist among the staff. And while we sometimes tend to think of advances in librarianship primarily in terms of computers and electronic access, the world of preservation has been

making its own strides in many areas, including deacidification. Just what is deacidification and what is the preservation problem addressed by this process?

All paper will eventually deteriorate, but its longevity is determined by several factors: the raw material from which it is made, the paper-making process used, and the conditions under which it is stored. Until the early nineteenth century most paper was made from rags, cotton or linen, or other natural fibers — such paper can last for centuries. Then, because of high demand for paper and less availability of rags, wood pulp became the raw material of choice. Wood pulp manufacturing during the first half of the nineteenth century produced long-last-

continued on page 6

Preservation... *continued*

ing papers, but around the middle of the century a simplified method of adding aluminum sulfate sizing was initiated. It led to the "quiet disaster" that now threatens library collections. Aluminum sulfate produces sulfuric acid in a relatively short period of time causing acid hydrolysis, which decomposes the chemical bonds that hold together the fibers in paper. As paper deteriorates it goes through several stages — first becoming weakened, then embrittled, before eventually disintegrating.

The problems posed by acidic paper are most critical in library collections such as Oberlin's, with rich nineteenth- and early twentieth-century holdings. A 1991 survey of Oberlin's collections, assessing a random sample of books published between 1850 and 1940, determined that 100 percent of the titles were printed on acidic paper, with 34 percent of those titles being embrittled. The fact that Oberlin's library had acquired approximately 415,000 volumes by

the year 1940 indicates the magnitude of the problem we face.

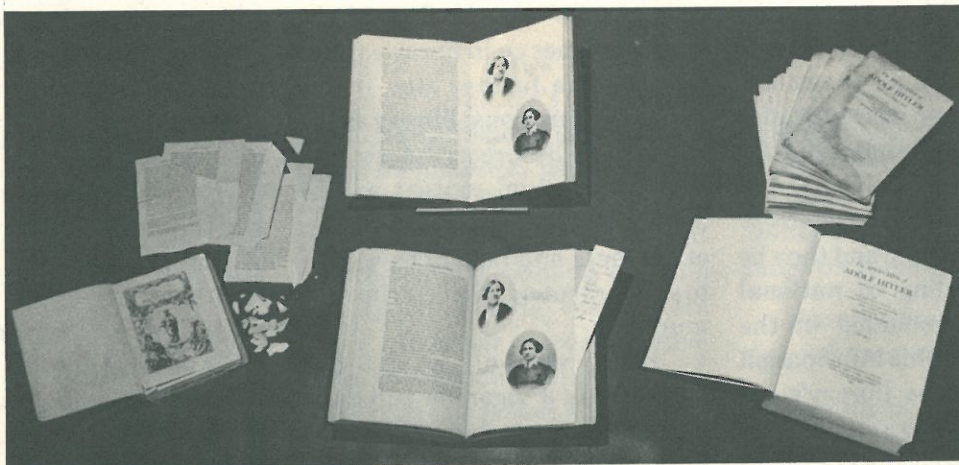
While acidic paper deterioration in libraries can be slowed by maintaining proper environmental controls for the collections, it can be stopped only by reformatting or deacidifying specific materials. Present options for reformatting include microfilming and photocopying onto acid-free paper. In the not-too-distant future it will also be feasible to reformat library materials through optical scanning and electronic storage methods. By using new technologies for deacidifying materials printed on acidic paper it is now also possible to preserve books in their original format.

Deacidification is accomplished by a process that forces an alkaline substance in either a gaseous or liquid medium into the pages of a book, thereby changing the pH of the paper from acid to alkaline while leaving a buffering solution on the paper to counteract any future acidic deterioration. Such deacidification treatment does not affect the ink, covers, or

binding of a book. While deacidification does not restore a book to its original state, it does stop the acidic destruction so that a book will not deteriorate further.

The techniques available today for preserving library materials provide multiple options in the ongoing struggle to save our printed intellectual heritage. The technology of mass deacidification, which enables large numbers of volumes to be rescued from ultimate self destruction—for a cost of approximately \$10 to \$15 per book, has now advanced to the point where it offers one of the most exciting and promising options.

On September 15 at 4:30 p.m. Andrew Barron, a member of the chemistry faculty at Harvard University, will present a lecture, co-sponsored by the Friends of the Oberlin College Library and the Oberlin College Chemistry Department, entitled "Mass Deacidification of Paper and Books: a Practical Application of Chemistry." This lecture promises to be a timely discussion of a most important topic.



The book on the left (Chapman's *Homer*, Chiswick Press, 1880), has deteriorated beyond help. It can be saved only through reformatting. The lower copy of the book in the center (Fletcher's *History of Oberlin College*, Oberlin, 1943) was deacidified in 1985 and is indistinguishable from the untreated copy above it. On the lower right is a volume that was commercially photocopied and bound because the original book (upper right) suffered mildew and staining from user mishandling.

Connecting to the World Through LIBS

The Library and the Computing Center have made available a software program called LIBS, which opens the door to a fascinating world of information via the Internet. While the kind of information available via LIBS varies from weather reports to calendars of campus events, one of the most exciting and useful offerings is the access to the online catalogs of hundreds of libraries worldwide.

The LIBS program is menu-driven, and very direct, so that with a few short steps one can search the catalogs of libraries in the region (such as the Cleveland Public Library or the College of Wooster), across the country (the University of California System or the New York Public Library), or on the other side of the

globe (the Israeli InterUniversity Computerized Catalog System,

has the books they will need; faculty going on research leave abroad can ascertain whether the materials they need will be available to them in the region they'll visit; students going to Cleveland to do research in Case Western Reserve University's Law Library can find out before they make the trip if the books they want are actually on the shelf, or currently checked out.

Because the Computing Center has mounted the LIBS software on the local VAX, anyone using

this system can simply type "LIBS" at the initial prompt. The Library has also supplied a dedicated LIBS terminal in the Main Library so that researchers can have the LIBS world at their fingertips while engaged in their local research.

LIBS - Internet Access Software v2.0 Mark Resmer, Sonoma State University, Dec 1992

On-line services available through the Internet:

- 1 United States Library Catalogs
- 2 Library Catalogs in other countries
- 3 Campus-wide Information Systems
- 4 Databases and Information Services
- 5 Wide-area Information Services
- 6 Information for first time users

Press RETURN alone for exit now or
Press Control-C Q <return> to exit at any time

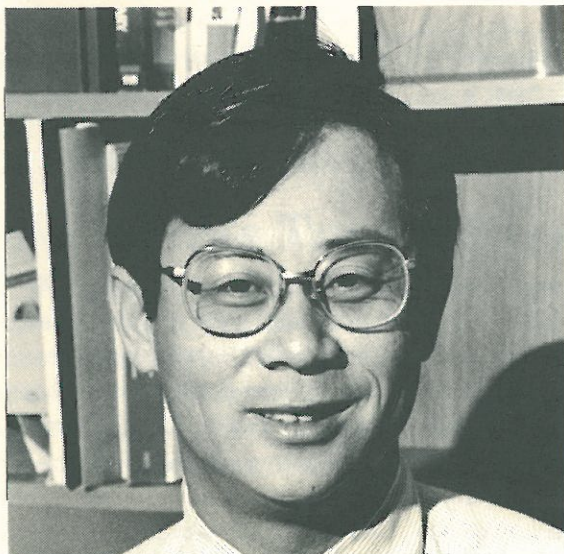
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LIBS Main Menu

Hong Kong University of Science & Technology, or Oxford University).

The potential uses for access to these catalogs is remarkable: students going away over break can find out if their local library

Library Welcomes New Reference Librarian



Haipeng Li

The library is pleased to welcome Haipeng Li to its reference staff. Haipeng worked most recently as a reference librarian at the University of Arizona, where he received his Master of Library Science degree. He also holds the Master of Arts degree in American Literature from the Northeast Normal University in Jilin, China, and the MA in Southern Studies with emphasis on African-American literature from the University of Mississippi.

Haipeng's scholarly interests include American Literature and ethnic studies, particularly Afro-American literature and Native American, Asian American, and Afro-American studies. Haipeng was born and raised in the cold northeast region of China, and says that he and his family are happy to be back in a place with winters more like home.

JOIN US. BE A FRIEND.

The **Friends of the Oberlin College Library** provide significant support for special acquisitions and programs that help the library fulfill its fundamental role in the academic life of the college.

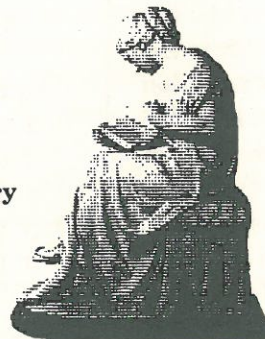
Members receive the *Library Perspectives* newsletter (published three times a year), invitations to Friends programs, and other privileges. Most of all, Friends have the satisfaction of supporting Oberlin's outstanding library.

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