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The Succubus and the Suckers: the Soul-Siphoning Leeches in the Stories of Modernist Text.

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Parasitism is defined as a type of symbiotic relationship between organisms of different species where one organism, the parasite, benefits at the expense of the host. While one's thoughts turn to images of vile creatures viciously attaching themselves to innocent or unsuspecting hosts at times, this form of relationship can be less malevolent in its inception. There are those human relationships in which we entangle ourselves willingly, happy to help the ones we care about deeply. Occasionally, the "host" may become aware that the sacrifice becomes a burden and even detrimental to his own health, but the bonds hold tight just the same. While in some cases it may be easy to sever ties and walk away with one's sanity intact, there are relationships not so easy to terminate. Familial bonds, while one of the most strenuous and difficult to maintain, are ones that many would feel treasonous abandoning, thus making it unthinkable. Despite familial bonds being some of the hardest ties to break, there are also the detrimental romantic partnerships and even the unbalanced friendship relationships in which one finds one's self unable to walk away, even though the ending of such a relationship would be more beneficial to the host than its continuation.

These feelings of drastically draining and damaging relationships, combined with general cynicism, are one that unsurprisingly moves through various Modernist texts. The introspection and desire to create new styles and modes of art, found within the Modernist movement, collide and give life to this realization that relationships have a darker, less ideal side to them. Ranging from Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* and his attempt to create a distorted form of reality, to Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire,* where reality itself is distorted on its own, and with F. Scott Fitzgerald's *Tender is the Night* and John

Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* falling in the middle of the timeline with the destructive partnerships of caretaker and cared for, these works tell tales of relationships which turn from the natural order of give and take to the one-sided order of one man having to give until it hurts and beyond.

To fully understand the intricacies that are involved in the relationship of parasite and host, it is best to take a closer look at the realm of parasitism outside of literary context. There are a plethora of parasitic species with their negative effects on their host ranging from mild to lethal. Parasites cause dangerous behaviors in their hosts and cause them to act against their own best interest. For example, when rats are infected with a particular type of parasite, it causes them to go against their instincts to avoid their predators, cats, and instead the rat will seek out the cats. While the rat will more than likely be killed by this decision, the parasite needs it to happen so that it may continue its life cycle by attaching itself to the cat. Parasites also transmit diseases which will weaken, and even kill, a host such as with ticks transmitting Lyme disease or fleas transmitting the deadly disease of plague. There is also a type of parasite known as an enslaver parasite, which takes over the host's body control in order to benefit the parasite itself. For example, a grasshopper infected with a specific type of enslaver parasite will, against its own control, jump into water to drown itself causing the parasite to complete part of its life cycle which requires the water to continue. The parasite's determination to flourish and survive will persist despite the weakening destruction or death of the host from which it gains its strength. Indeed, this information of parasitic relationships within a biological sphere helps to create a context for the interplay between the parasitic person and his or her unsuspecting victim.

While the writers create these stories through differing techniques, their fundamental similarity shines through as their main characters fall prey to a parasitic entity that feasts upon the hosts' efforts until their strengths are depleted. Kafka's story tells of a young man, Gregor Samsa, who sacrifices his identity and, ultimately, his life to provide the security and strength his family requires. Fitzgerald tells of a doctor, Nick Diver, who marries and gives of himself to a patient in order to help cure her of her mental illness to the point of his own possible mental breaking point. Steinbeck demonstrates a partnership of two men where the mentally stronger man, George, is left weakened by the childlike Lennie, who inevitably destroys George's chance of ultimate freedom. Williams' play shows the delicate relationship and damaging plunge it takes when a host, Stella, is plagued by two weaker entities: her husband and her sister. Each story ends with a serious sense of loss by which no character is unaffected.

As stated, one type of parasitic interaction is where the host's life is compromised and weakened by the long term stress of its companion; this relationship is depicted in John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men.* In this tale, the narrative explores the intricacies of a relationship between two men: Lennie and George. As the novella begins with these two men spending the night outdoors before beginning a new job, a few bits of important information are made evident for the reader. Lennie appears as a man with some type of mental disability who strongly depends on his companion, George, for survival. George has been the provider and caretaker for some time and has struggled to keep Lennie safe. His patience runs thin as, through their conversation, one realizes that Lennie has caused multiple disturbances/altercations which, in turn, have caused the men to flee several towns for personal safety. In examining interpersonal relationships, the camaraderie of the two men

demonstrates the detrimental effects of the caretaker giving all of himself to his dependent friend. Lennie, though possessing extraordinary strength, possesses a feeble mind and is unable to care for himself once his aunt passes away. George steps in as a friend, yet clearly fills the role as guardian.

The story opens with these two men beginning their journey to a new place of employment. It becomes clear that this move is neither one made by choice nor is it the first time they've had to make the decision to relocate. Lennie has caused situations that have forced George to rescue him from nothing short of an angry mob and find new jobs in unfamiliar places. Quickly in the story, it is apparent that "each partner takes on different roles: Geprge is the mind, the parent, and the controller; Lennie is the body, the child, and the controlled" but adding to this dynamic is the significant role leaving George as host and Lennie as parasite (Doyle). Evidently, Lennie's penchant for touching soft things has caused a lot of trouble for the duo. As George finds them work, Lennie jeopardizes it by grabbing at young girls' clothing thus leading to both men being run out of town. Despite the repeated admonitions from George about avoiding similar transgressions, Lennie continues to find trouble in the same manner time and time again. George describes the last incident that has caused them to find a new place to work. When Lennie grabs a girl's dress and scares her, George points out "How the hell did she know you jus' wanted to feel her dress? She jerks back and you hold on like it was a mouse. She yells as we got to hide in a irrigation ditch all day with guys lookin' for us" (11). Lennie's actions not only put himself at risk, but he also drags George into the danger as well when George has nothing to do with events that occur. The poorly chosen actions of Lennie continue to harm George until ultimately destroying any hope of a better future for him.

George's resentment towards the partnership is also made clear from the first scene of these two men. When discussing how the two men had to run out of the last town they were in, George laments, "I could get along so easy and so nice if I didn't have you on my tail. I could live so easy and maybe have a girl" (Steinbeck 7). This statement proves to be more than a mere utterance of frustration when, once again, George goes into a bit more detail about the strain caused by this relationship. Without Lennie, George feels that his life would be so much easier and more enjoyable; "I could get a job an' work, an' no trouble. No mess at all… an' whatta I got, I got you! You can't keep a job and you lose me ever' job I get. Jus' keep me shovin' all over the country all the time. An' that ain't the worst. You get in trouble. You do bad things and I got to get you out" (10). This substantial monologue touches on George's frustration with having to continually uproot his own life and chance of stability and happiness because of Lennie's habitual trouble making. This sort of repeated inconvenience weighs heavily on George as "Lennie costs George a great deal in life energy. George experiences his caretaking of Lennie as a Sisyphean task who must continue to act as guardian to a man who either is unable or unwilling to stop accosting young women" (McEntyre).

Lennie's response to George's lecture in this first scene of the book is most revealing of the deviousness that lies under the surface of this relationship. Despite his supposedly having the mental capacity of a small child, Lennie's attempts to manipulate George into feelings of guilt muddy the sentiment of a childlike innocence. After one of George's laments on how life would be much easier if he were not responsible for constantly watching Lennie, Lennie turns the tables and pulls George back in with feelings of guilt by asking, "you want I should go away and leave you alone?" (11). While this question snaps George out of his mindset of lamenting his situation, its initial innocence becomes something more

manipulative. When George becomes apologetic, it is noted that “Lennie avoided the bait. He had sensed his advantage” in the current situation with George and seizes it (12). He continues on; trying to manipulate the situation, as he is described as speaking to George “craftily” about their dream to, one day, own a farm. These word choices suggest that rather than being the naïve childlike man who unknowingly acts in ways to cause harm, Lennie is capable of both reading a situation and determining how to get what he wants out of it. The manipulative nature of this dialogue leaves a sense that while George carries the brunt of the burden that caring for Lennie causes, Lennie happily allows it and continues to add more turmoil as time goes on. Lennie, who has had someone to care for him his entire life, takes for granted that George is not a blood relative; he acts as guardian to Lennie out of kindness rather than strict obligation. This shows that Lennie is more aware than is acknowledged and willingly takes advantage of his friend.

One prime example of Lennie’s habitual disregard of George’s advice and warnings is his treatment of animals. Lennie’s habitual cycle of obtaining mice and then killing them because he is too rough with them is a topic for which George chastises Lennie. Lennie explains how his aunt began gifting him mice so that he could stroke their fur, but discontinued this after he killed so many of them. Once George steps in as guardian, Lennie picks up once more with his mouse stroking fixation. Despite Lennie killing many a mouse from his vigorous stroking, he strives to care for more animals so that he many touch them as well. Part of George and Lennie’s dream of owning property and living off their own land includes Lennie’s raising and caring for rabbits they would keep. George’s only possibility in controlling Lennie lies in the dream of owning rabbits and even this is unsuccessful as Lennie goes against George’s wishes time and time again despite being threatened to not be the rabbit

caretaker one day. The adoption of one of Slinky's puppies is one that George condones, hoping a larger animal can endure Lennie's rough affections. George advises Lennie on multiple occasions to let the pup be for now, as he is too young to be away from his mother. Once again, Lennie shows his disregard for the advice of the man who unselfishly gives of himself time and time again for Lennie's protection. Lennie not only deliberately goes against George's instructions but completely lies in attempt to get his own way. After Slinky allows Lennie to choose a pup from the litter, there is a moment following that shows Lennie once again not caring for what his friend has stated, despite knowing that George always has Lennie's best interest at heart. When George questions if Lennie has brought the dog into the room with him, he immediately denies it. While to some, this defiance seems innocent and harmless, the reaction Lennie has when George's warning about the dog comes to pass, again shows a darker side to him rather than the simple mind that people disregard him with having.

The animal companions that Lennie inevitably kills foreshadow the story's climax. Once again, because of Lennie's complete disregard for George's statement to leave the puppy alone, the young animal dies. Before long, we see Lennie sitting alone with the innocent puppy, now dead, as George predicted when Lennie first snuck the dog in the bunker. George's warning of how the small dog must "sleep with his mother. You want to kill him?" has come to fruition as the lifeless pup lays beside Lennie (40). The most disturbing part of this scene is Lennie's lack of compassion as well as a lack of guilt for what he has done to a living creature much weaker and smaller than himself. Lennie throws the pup across the room and blames it, in a cold and callous reaction. This turn from wanting to care for the animal to being angry that it was unable to survive his rough handling is disturbing. Lennie's initial sorrow is brief as "suddenly his anger arose. 'God damn you,' he cried. 'Why do you

got to get killed? You ain't so little as mice.' [Then] he picked up the pup and hurled it from him…and he whispered, 'now I won't get to tend the rabbits. Now he won't let me" (81). Lennie's remorse is only for himself and his concern that he won't get to handle more animals once George discovers how he went against George's instructions and killed yet another animal he was supposed to care for. This act of anger and indifference at the life lost is unnerving as it shows Lennie incapable of feeling badly for anyone or anything other than himself. His focus on his own desires continues to hurt others, in particular the person who has constantly ensured Lennie's wellbeing. This violent and cold side of Lennie will ultimately lead to actions that destroy both himself and the man he has latched on to for all forms of survival.

Just as Lennie is hoping the dog's death will have no effect or consequence for him due to the thought of how the "God damn little son-of-a-bitch wasn't nothing to George," (a hateful and cruel remark demonstrating Lennie as incapable of caring for anything other than his own wants), Curley's wife walks in (81). As these two seem to have a moment of connection, things take a dark turn when Curley's wife allows Lennie to feel the softness of her hair. As his roughness increases, Curley's wife's concern is that his petting will mess up her hair. She asks him to stop touching her and attempts to break free from his hands when Lennie grasps tightly to her hair, causing her to panic. Curley's wife begins to scream and Lennie immediately reacts in a way to, again, save himself. As Lennie suffocates her, he repeats how he will get in trouble if she screams. As the woman fights him in an attempt to breathe, Lennie becomes angry with her. Oblivious to her struggle for breath, Lennie's concern is solely himself and how this will affect his future as rabbit caretaker. In his anger, he violently shakes Curley's wife—breaking her neck and killing her. Lennie realizes what he

has done and worries not about the life he has taken, the life that matters just as little as the dead puppy which lies near the now lifeless body of Curley's wife, but that George will be mad. Lennie leaves his mess and, once again, it is left to George to find a way to fix things. However, this problem is not as easily fixed as the past decisions Lennie has made and, once George discovers what Lennie has done, he understands that his choice is to endanger Lennie and leave him at the hands of those who wish to lynch him or to finally remove himself from the leech that is Lennie's horrible judgment. As this realization dawns on George, he also laments the destruction of any shot of freedom he may have had with his own farm and embraces the shell of a life that will be left behind following the removal of his life parasite. The murder of Curley's wife acts as the final bit of destruction in this pair's relationship. Lennie has committed the ultimate transgression, and it is at this point where George can no longer take the burden set upon him as host to an unapologetic parasite.

The end of Lennie and George's relationship is due to Lennie's actions, causing George to have few choices but to terminate the situation. George's decision to eradicate the person who has long depended on him and caused him much suffering is not one that is undertaken lightly. Similar to the way in which "Lennie 'loved' the mice, the puppy, and Curley's Wife so much that he inadvertently killed them. George loved Lennie so much that he wound up having to kill him (Cardullo). Lennie's only remorse at the story's end is the fear that his meal ticket will no longer wish to care for him. After everything that has transpired, Lennie frets "I might jus as well go away. George ain't gonna let me tend no rabbits now" (97). Lennie, who has been described as being no different than a child, lacks any sympathy for others which shows him as very different from the innocence and kindness associated with children. He shows no concern for the animals he's killed, the woman he's murdered, or the

danger he repeatedly has put his friend in with his actions. Instead he shows anger and contempt for the animals and woman and grieves over not being able to handle more animals in the future. When George appears, Lennie expectantly waits for George to solve the dilemma and, to perhaps, devise a plan to hide and run away as they have had to do in the past and just as they will always have to do if George allows the continuous preying on his life and the life of others by saving Lennie. George understands that he can no longer survive with this unhealthy attachment draining the life from him. The decision of the permanent removal of Lennie pains George but, similar to the task of removing the flesh of necrotic tissue would be, it is necessary if the healthy tissue is to have any chance to survive in the future. In this way "George's mercy killing of Lennie represents the culmination of their intensely symbiotic relationship" as it unquestioningly severs parasite from host while still seeming as a genuine and final act of compassion from George (Doyle). While it may serve as the culmination, it is also the final moment of this cyclical pattern within the relationship. As George confronts Lennie, George appears defeated and broken over the choice he has to make. The last act of kindness he can bestow on the man who has served as nothing but a weight on his soul is to spare him from the events that are about to happen as the group of men search to find him for the murder of Curley's wife. Lennie, oblivious to what George is about to do, is asked to stare at the water and relish the only thought that matters to him—his own happiness. While he falls into his dream of serving as a rabbit caretaker, George kills any remnant of his own dreams of personal happiness as he shoots and kills Lennie.

What brings the tragedy of this tale to a deeper level is that Lennie's actions not only seal his own fate, but like a parasite determined to bring its carrier down with it, George's fate is ultimately doomed as well. From the beginning, the pair of men discussed the ultimate goal

set in motion by their working and saving money: to own their own land. The symbolism of this dream represents freedom and autonomy for the men. George understands that given Lennie's habits, being able to settle down on land they own and live off of their own efforts would ensure stability and safety for his charge. George points out repeatedly how he sacrifices his chances to enjoy his wages on booze and women in order to save the down payment on the farm he has found. This opportunity would keep Lennie out of trouble and allow George to breathe easy without constantly fretting over what mistakes Lennie is bound to make. While it would give George peace of mind with Lennie squared away, by the end, George's lamentation over how that dream perhaps never had a real chance at existing shows that it became more than a bedtime story to appease Lennie. There is a shining moment when the dream has a chance to manifest as reality when Candy presents himself as having the means to financially back up the other two men so that all three may live on the land and, in that moment of possibility, the loss is made that much greater due to George's tie with someone as destructive as Lennie.

In one of the more complex examinations of the breakdown caused by parasite to host, Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire* shows a relationship among three people and the multiple layers of the parasite/host dichotomy. Unlike the previous text examined, there is not a straightforward host and parasite within this play. Instead, there is a single host who finds herself, albeit unknowingly, being placed in the middle of a war between two separate parasites. The victorious parasite leaves behind the utterly damaged weaker parasite in order to keep sole dominion over its host, discovering, however, that it is too late as the host is irreparably marked by the vicious attacks made.

Streetcar opens with Blanche DuBois's arrival in New Orleans to stay with her younger sister, Stella. It is clear immediately that Stella and Blanche's upbringing contrasts greatly from the new lifestyle Stella embraces after meeting her husband Stanley. This difference between Old South romanticized ideals and New Orleans stark reality causes dissonance between Blanche and Stanley right away as they play a game of tug-o-war over the control of Stella. When Blanche first converses with Stella and asks about how she will be received by Stanley, Stella's words contain a hint of foreboding with what will eventually be a portion of the struggle between Blanche and Stanley, when she warns that they will "get along fine together, if [Blanche will] just try not to—well—compare him with the men that [they] went out with at home" (17). Stella admits as well that while she loves Stanley, there was an adjustment period for her after marrying a man so different from her type of upbringing. Stella's awareness and reminiscence of her past begins to threaten Stanley's present role in her life causing him to view Blanche as an opposing force he must fight.

The distrust and discord that set in between Stanley and Blanche begin almost immediately after she arrives. Stanley, who has reveled in having his wife so infatuated with him that she happily exists in an unhealthy co-dependence, is on guard once Blanche steps in with the ability to have her sister's unquestioning trust. Stella informs her husband of the fragile state Blanche presents herself in with her visit, especially with the loss of their childhood home Belle Reve. At the mention of the loss of property, Stanley becomes interested in the details straight away, revealing he assumes there is money to be owed to Stella, which in turns translates as money owed to him. While Stella is sure her sister is not withholding any due remittance, Stanley starts showing his deplorable side by throwing away any sense of compassion for Blanche and becoming belligerent in his demands to see the

paperwork for the property for the Belle Reve property. While Stella asks him to remain quiet and calm, Stanley, coldly states, “It looks to me like you have been swindled, baby, and when you’re swindled under the Napoleonic code I’m swindled too. And I don’t like to be swindled” (33). His concern has little to do with his wife’s wellbeing or family and everything to do with his own desires and cares. He views Blanche as a threat to privileges he feels he is entitled to and this distrust he has for her only increases as time goes on.

When Stella defends Blanche’s honor in this situation, Stanley begins to see the danger in having Blanche’s influence around the woman he has had complete control over for some time. After Stella becomes angry with Stanley’s rants insinuating that Blanche has not only sold Belle Reve without giving Stella her inheritance but also squandered the money on jewels and furs to live as a queen, her manner of addressing Stanley begins to change. She admonishes him for acting horribly and idiotically and instructs him to leave the apartment with her so that Blanche may have privacy while she gets dressed. The shift in the dynamic between the married couple becomes clear here when Stanley remarks “Since when do you give me orders?” (35). This comment sets the tone for a growing tension that comes between the married couple and gives Stanley a strong urge to find a way to destroy the new entity moving in to latch on to his prey.

As the play progresses, Blanche’s past slowly reveals itself to Stella, Stanley, and the audience. Her tragic marriage to a closeted homosexual who committed suicide once his secret was out is followed by darker events as she delved into a world of sex and pedophilia. As the story unfolds, the effect that her husband’s death has on her future comes to light; “from that moment onwards we see how the mixture of scorn, death and guilt compel Blanche to take refuge in desire, sex, and she developed a strong will to go on living in her self-

delusion of youth" (Gallardo). Blanche's internal struggle to reconcile the young woman she was and the fallen figure she has become is heightened with her struggle of accepting Stella's marriage to Stanley. Blanche longs to cling to her past and to bring Stella with her to this land of romanticized memories, which continues to strain Stella and Stanley's relationship. Here is where the parasitic tendencies carried out by Blanche begin to unfurl themselves in this tumultuous triad. While Blanche latches on to Stella as both her lifeline to the past and as her sole living family member, Stanley has also latched onto his wife. From Blanche's first meeting with Stanley, the polarity of these two in relation to their history with Stella becomes clear. Blanche and Belle Reve represent the life Stella once had prior to meeting Stanley. It is the representation of a higher level of social class and finery than Stanley himself could ever imagine. It is a life separate from and contemptuous of a man of Stanley's status—a man who is continuously referred to as a Polack, which indicates one of lower, less refined working class type of background. These two social spheres lie in the heart of both Blanche and Stanley and the play carries a theme in which each character, or parasite, prepares for battle over who will take control of Stella's fate.

In the play's progression, the parasite versus parasite interaction leaves the reader with a distressed feeling, as one does not know exactly who to root for in this battle. Blanche, with her story of love, loss, and personal destruction, becomes perhaps the more likable option over the robust and vulgar Stanley whose past is never revealed. As Stanley begins to strip away any and all of Blanche's fleeting resources for survival, the truth behind her current state is made known. What is also construed is that Stanley's actions against his desire to destroy Blanche seem to stem from vindictive and cruel traits rather than a real sense that he is trying to protect his wife and child. When Stanley brutishly interrogates Blanche about

Belle Reve and begins to ransack her truck, he stumbles across personal letters, and this meddling causes Blanche to react in a way that is nothing less than hysterical. When he questions as to what they are, her response is simple yet direct as she states that they are "Poems a dead boy wrote. I hurt him the way that you would like to hurt me, but you can't! I'm not young and vulnerable anymore" (42-43). Indeed, Blanche's past is one that has left a path of damaged souls in her wake while admitting that she understands Stanley's current battle against her now. Her comment on his inability to hurt her the way he wishes also suggests that she views herself as one who cannot be a prey to the predator as she is also predatory as well. Blanche has landed on her sister's doorstep with no money and no future prospects in the hopes that Stella will support her. In a desperate situation, she turns to Stella who takes her in and acts subservient to Blanche's demands continuing to mount the resentment Stanley feels about the arrangement. Blanche views her need and dependence on her sister as something less horrific than just a deliberate desire to hurt—a point that is made quite clear in Blanche's reply to Stanley that "deliberate cruelty is not forgivable. It is the one unforgivable thing in my opinion and the one thing of which I have never, never been guilty" (157). What separates Blanche as parasite from Stanley is her intention throughout the play. Blanche does not deliberately wish to harm or hurt anyone or anything in her relocation to New Orleans. She is so caught up in her own battle of mental fragility that her siphoning energy and stability from her surrounding area is more a byproduct of her own brokenness rather than her desire to weaken those around her for her own betterment. Whereas Stanley, who comes across as unsympathetic in his quest to "pull the mask off Blanche's face…will really become the agent of her final destruction (Gallardo 153).

The struggle to claim victory over Stella comes to a head after the poker night. Stanley begins to show his annoyance with Blanche's inclination for romance and whimsy (things he views as deceit and lying) and begins to act coarsely. Annoyed with Blanche's use of the radio, "Stanley stalks fiercely through the portieres into the bedroom. He crosses to the small white radio and snatches it off the table. With a shouted oath, he tosses the instrument out the window" (62). Stella verbally berates him for his brutish behavior towards Blanche, causing Stanley to react violently. Unable to stand his wife's newfound defiance--no doubt inspired by interloper Blanche--Stanley strikes his pregnant wife. This violent and crazed outburst leaves Blanche reeling. Wanting to protect her sister from the abusive brut she is married to, Blanche is bewildered to discover that soon after Stanley's physical blow, Stella returns upstairs to the apartment with him to spend the night making up and making love. The following day, Blanche tries to talk sense into Stella, informing her that the man she is married to is crazy and is frustrated to discover that her sister is complacent in her current situation. As she tries to shake the hold that Stanley has over Stella, Blanche ends up making herself a bigger target for Stanley's ultimate wrath and desire to get rid of her before compromising his predatory power over his wife. This confrontation also serves to cause a rift between the two sisters as Stella is unable to pull herself away from the carnal obsession that keeps her tied to Stanley, Stella begins to become indignant when Blanche admits she doesn't understand how Stella has "sufficient memory of Belle Reve to find this place and these poker players impossible to live with" (30). The explosive events spur the already volatile Stanley to seek out ways to discredit the voice of his competitive parasite and seek out her destruction.

As Stella begins to defend her parasitic and unhealthy marriage, Blanche confesses she is ashamed of her current situation. This remark brings out the sentiment Stanley has been

driving home to his wife and it is his voice one almost hears coming through as Stella questions Blanche's sense of superiority over the situation. Blanche uses every attempt to convince her sister of the type of man she's entangled herself with, going so far as to say "He acts like an animal, has an animal's habits!...There's even something—sub-human—something not quite to the stage of humanity yet! Yes, something ape-like about him" (83). Blanche's admonishments serve to remind Stella of her upbringing and just how far she has fallen to live with a man who delights in his deterioration of the structure created by Stella's childhood. This straightforward dialogue that Blanche has, one of the few where her words are direct and sharp rather than whimsical and romantic, indicate her determination to pull her only remaining family from the clutches of a crude fiend like Stanley Kowalski. After her stern diatribe, she sees all her efforts have fallen on deaf ears as Stella runs into the arms of the person Blanche sees as a terrible threat to both her sister and to her own window of continued survival. In this scene, the lines are drawn as "Blanche competes with Stanley for Stella, offering to rescue her from him. Crucial is Blanche's tirade about Stanley being a subhuman ape. The eavesdropping man is stung by her contempt" and becomes even more driven to bring down his rival (Dace).

Blanche, however, cannot be a true victim as her devolvement shows her as one who preys on the innocent before and after arriving in New Orleans. Seeing her failing position to have her sister's unquestioning adoration and attention, she sets her sights on what she hopes to act as her next host, Mitch. In his first appearance, his loneliness is suggested when he reminds his poker friends that they "are all married. But [he'll] be alone" when his mother passes away (48). Blanche sees him as a real chance for care and safety, and she uses every effort to beguile him quickly as she "[doesn't] know how much longer [she] can turn the

trick" (92). Her reason for this courtship is devoid of purity of feeling when she admits to Stella, "I want to rest! I want to breath quietly again! Yes—I want Mitch…very badly… if it happens! I can leave here and not be anyone's problem" (95). Her drive to ensnare Mitch is for her own needs of safety and security rather than a desire for love and mutual fulfillment. She spins her web of deceit to lure him in with the hope that his desperation for a wife will allow her to latch on to him before he realizes the truth of her age and her past. Once Stanley determines to undermine Blanche and destroy any credibility she has with her sister, the dark secrets of Blanche's past begin to surface from the shadows of Laurel, Mississippi. When her truth has been revealed by her parasitic foil, Stanley, Blanche describes quite clearly the dubious path her life had taken before her arrival in New Orleans. Seeing that Stanley has ruined any chance at Blanche finding redemption and stability in a long term host, she shares with Mitch the reality of what she has become. She confesses," I stayed at a hotel called the Tarantula Arms! Yes, a big spider. That's where I brought my victims" and explains this habit began after the death of her husband (146). His death caused a void within her that compels her to seek host after transitory host in the hopes one might be able to sustain her and repair the damage that has been done. In this confession, Blanche "becomes the 'Tarantula' who uses her victims for pleasure, the Tarantula who eats her victims and drinks from their youth" (Gallardo 153). After Blanche reveals everything of her sordid past, including finding sexual solace "in a seventeen-year-old boy but—somebody wrote the superintendent about it--'This woman is morally unfit for her position,'" Mitch declares her unfit to become his wife. He attempts to have sex with her as this is the only thing she is worthy of, but Blanche, understanding that her final chance at the stability and sustenance she hoped to gain from

Mitch is now gone, sends him away. She is left severely wounded and, in this weakened state, her rival parasite makes his move to completely eradicate her.

In the play's climax, Stanley decides to rid himself, and his marriage, of the interloper who has come to destroy his relationship for her own attempts at recovery. Stanley not only seeks to destroy the fantasy world Blanche struggles to hold on to for her sanity, but he goes one step further to ensure her destruction. After violating her mind and psyche, he goes for the ultimate violation and rapes her. The penultimate scene starts with Blanche alone, drinking and daydreaming of the glory days of her youth. She is dressed up in her clothes and rhinestones and is talking to herself. It is clear that Mitch's rejection, and the falling away at a last shot at some redemptive life, has left the already weak Blanche hanging by a thread of sanity. In this moment she is most vulnerable to her adversary parasite, and it is now that Stanley sees his opportunity to solidify his place as the only one in Stella's life. Stanley confronts Blanche and all the intricate webs of illusion she has weaved since appearing in New Orleans. As he forces the harsh reality of her life upon her, Blanche begins to unravel and attempts to flee from his verbal attacks. As he sees he has Blanche backed in to a corner, Stanley takes one step further in finding a way to demonstrate his complete dominance over Blanche and, by proxy, her sister. As he wrestles Blanche down, he tells her "we've had this date with each other from the beginning" as though to acknowledge that this confrontation was inevitable from the moment both parasites came into the vicinity of the same host (163). It could never be that both people would latch on and control Stella while the other was around, and Stanley ensures his place on top through his crude and brute strength. What follows is the brutal act of rape—an act from which Blanche is never to recover.

As Stella prepares for Blanche's departure, she confides in her neighbor that she "couldn't believe her story and go on living with Stanley" as if this, in some way, justifies her choice (165). In choosing to send her sister away and to ignore her recount of the past events, Stella believes she is exerting her agency, when in fact she is simply allowing the stronger of predators to benefit from the destruction of the other. In this tragic final scene, Blanche has changed from the truth bending, web weaving spider to a damaged creature who timidly slinks past the man who has ensured her undoing for his own selfish means. Blanche is broken and defeated yet still tries to cling to the only familiar thing she has in this world: her sister. When she realizes that something is not quite right with her gentleman caller and attempts to retreat back in the bedroom, Stanley's seemingly innocuous act of helping her to retrieve the one final thing she owns in the house is enough to unhinge Blanche. The stage note describes that as Stanley "crosses to the dressing table and seizes the paper lantern, tearing it off the light bulb…[Blanche] cries out as if the lantern was herself" which causes Blanche to react violently, solidifying for all present her mental deterioration (176). Stanley's act of rape is echoed in this scene and, as he rips and removes the fragile piece of paper delicately placed around the bulb, we see the reminder of destruction of the fragile psyche of his opposition. After Blanche reacts strongly to Stanley's presence, the doctor is able to calm her in order to have her leave with him to what is guessed is a mental facility. As she leaves, Blanche's final words serve as a reminder as to the woman she became in life and its significance in her ruin by the competitive destructive force, Stanley. Blanche steps out in to the only future she has left, now that Stanley has taken away all other options, and as she clings to the man who will usher her in to her final resting place, she confides how she has "always depended on the kindness of strangers" an allusion to her nights spent with the multitude of strange men who

fed her need for their companionship and affection to sustain her through her troubled life (178). As Blanche exits Stella's life forever, Stella is left severely affected and weakened herself by the loss of her sister. This lifetime bond that has leeched from her has left her forever marked by the choice she has made in an attempt to free herself from the severity of Blanche's emotional toll. As she mourns the loss of her past life and her sister, Stanley physically latches himself her to resume his position as sole benefactor of Stella's vitality. One parasite is destroyed while one clings harder to his prey while attempting to soothe her of the pain of separation he did everything in his power to cause. In the final moments of Williams's play, the tragedy is wide spread as one person has wreaked havoc in the lives of multiple people to cement his own stabile source of strength.

As *Streetcar* shows the complex nature of the family parasite dynamic, Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* also sheds a harsh light on the damage done to a host individual once his parasitic relatives take from him until he loses both his humanity and his life. Kakfa's first line, "When Gregor Samsa woke up one morning from unsettling dreams, he found himself changed in his bed into a monstrous vermin," starts the story with Gregor's externalized change matching his internal sense of suffering humanity from his relentless labor to support his entire family (1). In order to understand the full meaning of this physical transformation, one must look to what information there is to be found in Gregor's past. Gregor had practically slaved away for the past five years at his job as a traveling salesman, a job which has caused him to spend vast amounts of time away from his family. Gregor initially takes on this job in order to help out the family, which is struggling due to his father's failed business. In this situation, Gregor decides to take on the load and responsibility of his family and act as host the source needed to ensure their survival. Gregor's diligent work serves in paying off

the debt incurred by his family, although it is clear that the job is stressful and wearisome to Gregor. The pressure of the knowledge that his father, mother, and sister rely on his wages compels him to continue his work without fail. While he dreads waking up and heading off to the "grueling job [he's] picked! Day in, day out –on the road" he does so without question out of his sense of obligation as the man of the house (Kafka 1). Emrich states that Gregor "believed he had to provide his family with a pleasant, contented, secure life by sacrificing himself, by selling himself to his business" (Emrich 123). Gregor himself indicates that his own discontent with his job is nothing compared to what it allows him to provide for his family. Whether conscious or not, the soul-sucking work Gregor undertakes gradually removes his own sense of humanity and exhibits itself physically.

In the moments before Gregor realizes the terrifying transformation he has become, his inner thoughts indicate strongly just how unhappy he is with his current life. His discontent with his job is matched with his sense of familial obligation when he admits that "if I didn't hold back for my parents' sake, I would have quit long ago…once I've gotten the money together to pay off my parents' debt to him—that will probably be another five or six years—I'm going to do it without fail" (4). Why exactly it is left to Gregor to work off the debt of his parents is never made clear. After his change, the reader sees that both parents are alive and his father seems healthy and able to work. It is made clear that the family's business failed, causing debts to accumulate and Gregor to end up as sole bread winner for the family. Once Gregor realizes the nightmare he finds himself living, his main focus is on how this crazy situation will affect his family more than on concerns for himself.

In his current state as a horrific monster, Gregor's main focus is still on his ability to get ready to head out for his day's work. His total disregard for himself on a psychological

level has manifested into a physical state. Gregor continues to give of himself for his family, and his family, in turn, continues to feed off his life force without question or an ounce of gratitude. The family and employer's reaction to Gregor missing his train is telling of the unquestioning dedication he has put in for the entirety of his employment. Even his mother admits "there's something wrong with him. Otherwise how would Gregor have missed a train? That boy has nothing on his mind but the business" (10). While it may seem ludicrous to those of us who have taken sick days without our supervisors pounding on the door, this scene demonstrates quite clearly the fact that everyone sees Gregor as nothing more than a work horse. While Gregor struggles to simply move in his new body, he is pressured to immediately open the door by his father and manager. Adding to this stress, Gregor hears his sister begin to sob, not out of concern for her brother, but "because if he didn't get up and didn't let the manager in, because he was in danger of losing his job, and because then the boss would start hounding his parents about the old debts" (10). As the scene progresses, the reader sees the nasty side of Gregor's employer as well. The manager at the Samsa house begins to make negative comments about Gregor's work performance and morals, going so far as to allude that perhaps Gregor has stolen money from the business and is now attempting to hide himself. The callous encounter indicates that there is little concern for Gregor as a person and, in his first failure in his work life, the ingratitude from family and employer alike echo the mistreatment of the person who has, until now, given of himself without complaint.

Once it becomes clear that Gregor is no longer in human form, and therefore no longer able to act as bread winner for his family, the family dynamic shifts. As Gregor listens to his family's conversation, never once does he hear a word of concern for his wellbeing. His hard work and dedication to his family's welfare do not come without a price. Not only does his

job take him away from home, clearly causing him to be an alien in his own home, but also Gregor "is estranged from himself insofar as he is alienated from his essential nature as a human being" (Sokel 485). This isolation and breaking away from his humanity are responsible for his physical transformation. Yet even in this dire state, it seems to have no effect on Gregor on a personal level. Instead of worrying about himself, Gregor feels guilt and concludes all he can do is "[show] his family every possible consideration, help them bear the inconvenience which he simply had to cause them in his present condition" (22). While trying to come to terms with having to be taken care of, Gregor is overjoyed to hear that his father's financial situation is not as dismal as once imagined. In hearing that not only had his father managed to save money from his ruined business but he had also personally saved Gregor's hard earned money, Gregor breathes a sigh of relief. Another person might feel betrayed by his father saving this money without giving his son, the person working for the money, the option to save it for his own personal use, yet Gregor's thoughts never even venture near that idea. Gregor even reflects that "he could have actually paid more of his father's debt to the boss with the extra money, and the day on which he could have gotten rid of his job would have been closer" but this type of self gratification is second compared to the benefit it now presents for his family (27). As long as his family is content from feeding off his sweat, Gregor's personal sufferings are negligible, reinforcing the use of Gregor as a means of sustainability for his parasitic relations.

Arguably, Gregor's shift turns the tables in the parasite/host dynamic, causing Gregor to now become the parasite feeding to the detriment of the host. As Gregor's condition/dehumanization brought on by his role as host continues, the roles become reversed. Gregor is now dependent on those he has spent years taking care of as the story progresses.

What is significant about this shift is the attitude taken on by the Samsa family now having a sense of the burden they put upon Gregor all the years prior. The family becomes resentful and angry at the role of having to give after only ever taking. Gregor, ever mindful of the interests of his family over his own well being, sees the unhappiness his family experiences now that they no longer have their devoted host to provide for them. While Gregor's transformation has shifted him into the literal and figurative parasite, what separates him from the typical role is his unwillingness to continue to use his family as a source of life. Gregor gives up his humanity to his parasite relatives and, once the strain caused by his monstrous evolution becomes too problematic for his loved ones, he actively decides to cease to exist. This very act of self-sacrifice goes against the mentality of self-preservation which propels any and all parasites.

Gregor's destructive selflessness meets its pinnacle after his humiliating outburst brought on by overwhelming emotions stirred by his sister's violin playing. After revealing himself to boarders the family has taken in since Gregor's transformation, his family explodes with how Gregor is ruining and burdening them beyond tolerance. Grete, Gregor's sister whom he had always dreamed of sending away to pursue and improve her musical talents, the one who had initially taken to feeding and cleaning up after Gregor, is the one to verbalize the "cure" for the Samsa family. She verbalizes a thought that once again proves Gregor's alienation from his own person: "It has to go…you just have to get rid of the idea that it's Gregor" (49). Gregor officially becomes a creature and loses any shred of humanity that may have lingered since his transformation. In hearing his sister say these words, once again Gregor never questions his own personal wants or desires. Never do the thoughts of struggle and self-sacrifice he endured for these people enter his head. Instead, Gregor agrees with his

sister's desires and gives up his body in death to the true vermin: his family. This sacrifice, like every sacrifice made in Gregor's life, is taken for granted by his supposed loved ones as they rejoice in his death and move on with their own lives.

Another example of a relationship in which the parasite moves on to the next viable host, once it has left an utterly ruined host in its wake, is F. Scott Fitzgerald's *Tender is the Night*. Dick and Nicole Diver are a seemingly perfectly happy couple that possess a charming quality that enchants those who come into their presence, particularly through the eyes of Rosemary Hoyt, a young actress who quickly becomes enamored with the couple. Through her eyes, both Nicole and Dick seem larger than life. It is only in scenes where the couple is not surrounded by friends that the reader gets a glimpse that the relationship may not be the ideal that others imagine it to be. Dick, in particular, has moments of tedium that only Nicole witnesses. In their everyday lives of luxury, Nicole notices times that Dick's mood falls into a "form of melancholy, which he never displayed but at which she guessed…The reaction came when he realized the waste and extravagance involved" (27). This unhappiness that arises from time to time foreshadows Dick's downward spiral due in part to this excessive way of life as the story progresses. Dick is also reminded by his wife of his lack of financial contribution as Nicole chooses to splurge under the belief that they should not "penalize [themselves] just because there's more Warren money than Diver money" (159). As time progresses, the core of the marriage dynamic is realized when, upon seeing a black man who has been shot and killed, Nicole has a sudden breakdown in the bathroom while Dick attempts to snap her out of it. As unexpected as it seems to those witnessing it, what seems even more surprising is the lack of panic for Dick. His handling of the situation seems to suggest that perhaps this situation is one with which he is quite familiar.

Once Nicole and Dick's history is revealed, so are the lengths which Dick has gone to always care for Nicole's well being. Nicole meets Dr. Diver when she is in a medical clinic being treated for her schizophrenia. At first she is ignorant of Dick's position in the medical world and begins to write him letters while he is away. Upon his return, Franz Gregorovius, a doctor working with Nicole, informs Dick that the letters written to and from Nicole are largely responsible for her recovery. Without even having close physical contact with her, Dick becomes aware that his relationship with Nicole is vital and important if she is to continue in her recovery. While Dick finds Nicole attractive, he originally sets out with one goal in mind: "to be a psychologist—maybe to be the greatest one that ever lived" (132). Dick struggles with the line between being a good doctor to help Nicole and being a good man for her to spend her days getting to know. Dick confesses to his colleagues that he is half in love with Nicole from his dealings with her, a confession that is met with disapproval.. Gregorovius does not hesitate to say that giving in to these emotions is an unacceptable decision. He questions if Dick truly would "devote half [his] life to being a doctor and nurse and all" for Nicole and proclaims that it is something not to be considered (140). Despite voiced disapproval from his colleagues, Dick eventually decides to continue his relationship with Nicole, a decision that Boker suggests is because "Dick does not foresee the enormity of the burden he will unceasingly have to maintain in his role as Nicole's teacher and model, and ideal" (Boker 302). Whatever the initial reason, Dick's decision is absolute when confronted with Nicole's sister, Baby Warren.

Baby in no subtle terms expresses a desire to buy, rather than hire, an appropriate caregiver for her sister. As she gushes about her family connections, she states that "Nicole will need to be looked after for a few years… what could be better in her condition than if she

fell in love with some good doctor" (152). She sees her sister marrying a doctor as the most straightforward and surest way to ensure Nicole will have professional help 24/7 from someone with an intimate, rather than clinical, connection. With Baby's forceful and businesslike manner, Dick allows himself to be taken in and he marries Nicole. Dick himself may be in love with Nicole at this time, "but by accepting Nicole's devotion, knowing full well that her love is an extended part of her illness, Dick can never know for sure whether Nicole loves him for himself or whether her love is merely a symptom induced by her pathological condition" (Boker 299). However, as time progresses Dick learns that Nicole's recovery is neither constant nor complete. This is evident after the birth of their daughter, Topsy, when Nicole suffers another mental breakdown. This example in the novel perhaps leaves the reader to imagine that throughout their entire marriage, Nicole has suffered these setbacks, leaving Dick to put the pieces of his wife back together repeatedly in a professional sense but clearly with emotional strain.

This duty begins to take a toll on Dick as made apparent through the novel's progression. His years of enormous responsibility weigh down on him to where even day-to-day interactions with his wife fill Dick with a sense of dread because "before her he must keep up a perfect front, now and tomorrow, next week and next year" (166). The anxiety of the situation soon turns to agitation for Dick due to Nicole's apparent lack of self awareness where her illness is concerned. Dick's annoyance with Nicole grows because he feels that "after all these years, [she] should recognize symptoms of strain in herself and guard against them" (168). Her unconscious dependence on Dick to constantly monitor her actions and treat any problems that might arise frees her completely from all personal responsibility and lays the complete burden at Dick's feet. The relationship is "a perverse symbiosis between the

book's central characters, Nicole and Dick Diver, through which the former 'as parasite' attaches to the latter as 'host' to feed and nurture her growing 'self' as he is drained of selfhood or 'ego' almost entirely" (Ruehrer 282). Dick must continue to give of himself in order to strengthen his wife, despite his own continued weariness of doing so.

With this loss of self inevitably come consequences for Dick. His physical appearance may not change so drastically into something horrific, like Gregor, yet a transformation is noticed by those around Dick. In regards to this dissent, Barry Scherr states that "like a succubus, Nicole has drained Dick of his self…and subsequently he reacts against Nicole and his marriage to her" (13). He begins to drink heavily and often, a habit that does not go unnoticed by his business partner, Gregorovius. The pressures of always having to be perfect and stand tall finally cause Dick to cave and act out against the way he has been forced to live. His rebellion shows in not only his drinking, but his belligerence which extends so far as to land him in prison. Even while he begins to undo the charming and put-together facade he has created, he still tries to keep Nicole's best interests in mind. He lies and conceals information from his wife, concerned that the truth of his falling apart will negatively affect her mental health. While he attempts to downplay his new lifestyle, it does not go overlooked by those around him. Dick breaks away from his partnership of the clinic, which exacerbates his self-destruction due to his continuous loss of self over the years of marriage. His reputation begins to suffer from his attitude while drinking, an attitude that is much harsher compared to the charming and light-hearted man his friends had known. Rosemary, who once again runs into the Divers and hears that Dick is "not received anywhere," is shocked at the drastic change of atmosphere surrounding the couple.

The final nail in the coffin of Dick's current life happens when Nicole actually becomes aware of his change towards her. Nicole confesses to Dick that she feels she has ruined him and yet, with this belief, she does not inconvenience herself to attempt to save him even though he has saved her time and time again. She feels his indifference towards her and feels unappreciated. Perhaps sensing that she has taken from Dick all that she can, or will ever be able to, she entertains the advances of Tommy Barban. While she laments that she saw Dick "as an inexhaustible energy, incapable of fatigue—she forgot the troubles she caused him at the moment when she forgot the troubles of her own that had prompted her," she sees that this source is tapped out and she has no choice but to move on in search of the next eager life source…a role Tommy is happy to fill (301). When deciding to leave Dick for Tommy, Nicole does not even see her marriage as something worth ending herself. Tommy steps up as her savior to discuss the unsavory details of divorce with her husband.

This scene only reinforces Nicole's lack of independence even though she feels she is a complete woman capable of being on her own. Tommy stands in as Nicole's protector and unknowingly allows the parasite to settle in comfortably within her next victim full of love, life, and vitality. When Dick leaves, Baby and Nicole have a conversation about him in which Nicole defends him as being a good husband sparing her any pain in their entire marriage. Baby's indifferent response of "that's what he was educated for" serves as a callous reminder that he fulfilled his role and thus no longer serves a purpose. Never once stopping to reflect on the loss of Dick, the parasitic creatures remorselessly look forward to the next person they can benefit from in the future.

In the final scenes of the novel, the reader gets a vague understanding of Dick's future, or lack thereof. While there is one rumor of scandal involving a woman, one gets the feeling

that Dick's nomadic tendency stems from a constant involvement in relationships or activities that are less than desirable for any doctor or man. While Dick seems lost far across the ocean in the United States, Nicole naively sees his situation in that success is simply waiting for the right moment to emerge for him. This idea either shows the optimism Nicole has for Dick that he may eventually begin to rebuild his life, find himself, and find happiness or (and what is more likely) a complete disregard for the fact that she had drained Dick psychologically, emotionally, physically, and spiritually so that he has nothing left to give to the medical world or any potential mate.

While parasites tend to destroy the host that they infect, as seen with Gregor and Dick, the other side in this is that the parasite can also destroy itself in doing so. Nicole escapes her own destruction by latching on to a new unsuspecting host, Tommy, when she sees that her initial host is drying up. The Samsa parents, in a similar fashion, move on to their blossoming daughter once their meal ticket son has served his purpose. With Gregor's death, they begin to look towards Grete's transformation into the new host to feed their ambitions. The once useless daughter they thought they had is now transformed into a beautiful woman, one who should be easily married off to a suitable man. In sinking their claws into Grete with hopes of finding her a husband, it is clear that she is becoming the next profitable victim to the hunger-driven Samsa parents. One cringes in the horror show quality these final scenes have for the reader in seeing the parasites of both novels move on to the future prey without hesitation. Then there are the parasites that unknowingly destroy themselves as they attempt to take all they can from their host. There is Stanley. whose marriage, the marriage he goes to despicable lengths to protect, is left with a chasm after the destruction of Blanche. His attempt to keep his host all to himself seems to backfire as Stella understands that the rape of her sister is not a lie

uttered from the lips of a mentally fragile woman. This results in Stanley and Stella being left in a state of limbo by the play's end, a state which the reader never knows if they fully recover. Then there is Lennie, who leaves George forever damaged and weakened, but in the end the host is able to eradicate fully the parasite that clings to him. Lennie leaves his mark on the man he has taken so much from, but in the end it is Lennie who will never be able to take away or harm another person again.

Perhaps what makes these stories most intriguing is that instead of monstrous persons with wretched ill will in their hearts gleefully destroying others, the characters are flawed to a level that makes them seem more real than ever. The poignancy comes from reading texts in which the love and loyalty of the hosts aid in their own destruction as the vampiric entities they have aligned themselves with drain them completely by the tales' end. Even with Gregor's surreal transformation, the motives and feelings behind his situation have a strong sense of realism for the reader. As each host loses something significant, George's dream of self-sufficiency, Blanche's psychological welfare, Gregor's life, and Dick's career and reputation, the reader is left feeling the weight of that loss. The test of the Modern text is to prove that life is not black and white, but rather a gray bleakness that people wander through. In this grayscale world, no one can be truly all good or all bad. While the parasites are not all completely detestable and not all hosts are free from sin, the destructive nature that seems inevitable in all these stories stems from the sacrifice one is willing to give in the name of love for those parasitic people who prove to be both undeserving and unremorseful.

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