

COUNTER-NARRATIVES IN 18TH CENTURY SELECTED FICTION: ANALYZING SATIRICAL RESPONSES AND ALTERNATIVE PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract

This study delves into the immediate critical response to Samuel Richardson's 1740 novel "Pamela," which became highly popular for portraying a maidservant embodying peak levels of moral purity. Henry Fielding stands out as a significant critic of "Pamela," and this paper scrutinizes his counter-narratives, "Shamela" (1741) and "Joseph Andrews" (1742). Fielding, along with other critics, perceived "Pamela" as a disruption to the established norms of master-servant and upper-lower class dynamics prevalent during the 18th century. Utilizing a variety of literary techniques, Fielding compels the reader to question the sincerity and integrity of their beloved character, Pamela. In his works, Fielding recasts Pamela as a strategic social climber, who is manipulative in her attempts to marry her employer. He meticulously unpacks Richardson's narrative to expose its artificiality and pretence. By aligning his narrative with Richardson's, Fielding seeks to instil skepticism among "Pamela" enthusiasts about the work's ethical soundness. Further extending his critique, Fielding introduced "Joseph Andrews" as a subsidiary narrative aimed at demystifying the elevated notions of virtue and moral purity.

Key words: Critical Response, Henry Fielding, Master-Servant Dynamics, 18th Century Norms, Literary Techniques, Social Climber.

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Introduction

The literary landscape of the 18th century was marked by a vibrant exchange of ideas and narratives, with authors often engaging in spirited dialogues through their works. One such intriguing exchange is observed between Henry Fielding and Samuel Richardson, two prominent figures of the era. At the centre of their literary discourse are Richardson's groundbreaking novel "Pamela; Or, Virtue Rewarded" and Fielding's response through his novels "Shamela" and "Joseph Andrews." These three works collectively form a complex web of counter-narratives, serving as both a commentary on each other and as distinct literary entities that offer differing perspectives on themes of virtue, morality, and social relationships.

Samuel Richardson's "Pamela," published in 1740, captivated readers with its portrayal of Pamela Andrews, a virtuous young woman who resists the advances of her wealthy employer and eventually transforms him into a morally upright husband. The novel's didactic tone and emphasis on virtue prompted significant public attention and debate. However, not all reactions were uniform; some critics began to voice concerns about the socio-cultural implications of the narrative. This polarization of opinions set the stage for Fielding's response.

In 1741, Henry Fielding, a playwright and novelist, penned *Shamela*, a satirical work that playfully subverts the virtuous character of Pamela Andrews. Fielding reimagines Pamela as a cunning and manipulative character who employs various schemes to secure her social standing. Through witty parody and irony, Fielding challenges the moral high ground that Richardson's narrative had established. "Shamela" serves as a counter-narrative that critiques the very virtues celebrated in "Pamela."

Fielding continued this literary conversation with his novel "Joseph Andrews," published in 1742. In this work, Fielding introduces Joseph Andrews, Pamela's brother, as the protagonist. However, unlike Pamela, Joseph is not a virtuous servant; rather, he is depicted as an embodiment of good nature and common sense. Through a series of picaresque adventures, Fielding offers an alternative view of virtue, one that is more pragmatic and rooted in genuine human qualities.

The dynamic between Richardson's "Pamela," Fielding's "Shamela," and "Joseph Andrews" showcases a rich interplay of literary techniques and themes. Fielding's counter-narratives do not merely oppose Richardson's work; they engage in a nuanced dialogue that reflects the evolving literary and social landscape of the time. These novels collectively challenge the norms of their era, question established notions of virtue, and provide readers with diverse perspectives on human behavior and relationships.

In this exploration, we will delve deeper into the intricate relationship between these texts, examining how Fielding's "Shamela" and "Joseph Andrews" function as counter-narratives to Richardson's "Pamela." Through close analysis, we will uncover the ways in

which Fielding's creative responses shed light on the complexities of morality, virtue, and societal expectations, offering readers a fascinating glimpse into the intellectual and literary climate of the 18th century.

The discourse opposing the ideals presented in Richardson's "Pamela" is rich with contributions from esteemed 18th-century authors, including Eliza Heywood and John Cleland (Author, Year). Nonetheless, this study zeroes in on the literary output of Henry Fielding (1707-1745), as he notably stands as the pioneering English writer and novelist to engage with the Pamela discourse. Fielding's literary response took the form of two works: "*Shamela*" (1741) and "*Joseph Andrews*" (1742), composed in direct reaction to Richardson's narrative. Within these works, Fielding strategically employs elements like mockery, irony, and satire as both thematic motifs and literary tools, effectively mounting a counteroffensive against the acclaim Pamela garnered from her contemporary audience.

In "*Shamela*," Fielding masterfully crafts a parody of Richardson's "Pamela," introducing the character Shamela Andrews, a scheming servant intent on securing her master's affections for personal gain. Meanwhile, "*Joseph Andrews*" emerges as an extension of the Pamela narrative, chronicling the experiences of a loyal servant who navigates unwanted sexual advances from his mistress while still upholding the virtues of chastity and moral rectitude. Through these deliberate narrative choices, Fielding artfully engages with and challenges the prevailing narrative norms while offering alternative perspectives on virtue and social dynamics.

This study adopts an analytical approach to examine the role of Henry Fielding's two novels as counter-narratives to Pamela. The research assesses and classifies the strategies and methods utilized by Fielding to undermine Pamela's reputation within her audience. Notably, Fielding's authorial style is characterized by the incorporation of mockery and irony as literary devices through which he critiques his adversaries. In his examination of Henry Fielding's literary works, George Levine (1967) states that:

The utilization of verbal irony techniques collectively illustrates its comedic role most effectively in "*Joseph Andrews*," with Fielding employing them with unprecedented frequency and nuanced execution across his early works. Within this novel, Fielding primarily harnesses verbal irony to craft satirical character portrayals and, to a lesser extent, employs it structurally to bolster the intricate thematic patterns interwoven throughout "*Joseph Andrews*." Furthermore, he utilizes verbal irony to direct attention toward the potential parody inherent in the meticulously stylized scenes present in the narrative (Levine, 1967, p. 91).

In the context of this research, the study dissects Fielding's dual works while systematically identifying the literary elements he used to construct an opposing narrative against Pamela. Utilizing a side-by-side comparison between the events and letters featured in Pamela and those in "*Shamela*" and "*Joseph Andrews*," this inquiry explores the strategic literary devices Fielding employs to set up his works as counter-narratives to Pamela's

message. The investigation proceeds in a phased manner. Initially, Fielding critiques the inherent misleading qualities found in the epistolary narrative style that serves as the backbone of *Pamela*. Next, he skillfully highlights concealed examples of Pamela's hypocrisy. Finally, he expands the narrative lens to emphasize how Pamela disrupts the traditional gender and social hierarchies of the 18th century, particularly the conventional relations between the bourgeoisie and aristocrats.

The apex of Fielding's criticism manifests in "*Joseph Andrews*," a work that can be seen as an extension or offshoot of Richardson's *Pamela*. In this subsequent narrative, Fielding crafts an alternative universe where her interactions with her brother reveal hidden stories and obscured aspects of Pamela's character. *Joseph Andrews* acts as the male parallel to Pamela, and through him, underlying themes of longing and insincerity present in Pamela's existence are exposed. This compilation of themes acts as a well-orchestrated attack on the social and cultural implications raised by Richardson's *Pamela*.

The Framework of Fielding's Critical Narration

Henry Fielding deliberately chooses to replicate and invert Samuel Richardson's narrative elements in a manner that extends from the titles "*Pamela*" and "*Shamela*," to the epistolary structure, characters, and plot progression. "*Shamela*" serves as an embodiment of the female servant archetype, albeit one that is deceitful. Through this tactic, Fielding effectively subverts Pamela's propagated model of the virtuous servant. Scarlett Bowen highlights the significance of this, noting that the portrayals of mercenary servant women in anti-Pamela works serve to cast a negative light on their economic agency. Fielding strategically presents servant women whose primary aim is to attract wealthy suitors for marriage, thereby diverting attention from their economic self-reliance (Bowen, 1999, pp. 265-6).

During the 18th century, the prospect of upward social mobility, as suggested by Pamela's narrative, provoked unease among the elite class. Pamela's character potentially fostered an atmosphere of defiance, audaciousness, and insubordination among the lower working class towards the aristocracy. Bowen argues that "*Shamela*" was crafted to challenge aristocratic authority, thus destabilizing the social hierarchy in pursuit of financial gain and influence (Bowen, 1999, pp. 265-6). A closer examination of the counter-narratives presented by the anti-Pamelists in response to Pamela's discourse unveils the motivations and rationale driving their opposing viewpoints.

Bowen emphasizes that the theme of "female servants' upward mobility" was a pivotal point of contention within the anti-Pamela discourse. She asserts that the emerging prospects of social elevation and status mobility were particularly disruptive due to the favorable portrayal of a rebellious servant who defied conventions and achieved both her goals and social advancement. This encouraging representation fostered a counter-narrative that reimagined the core concept with a subversive lens. Consequently, the anti-Pamela

proponents promptly engaged with and countered the narrative of upward mobility presented in Pamela. The crux of the anti-Pamela discourse aimed to overturn the possibilities of social ascent that Pamela's narrative had initiated (Bowen, 1999, pp. 261).

Fielding's use of parody serves as a deliberate endeavor to challenge the duplicitous nature inherent in the character of Pamela. Fielding's work carries the comprehensive title "*An Apology for the Life of Mrs. Shamela Andrews.*" Within this title, the character Shamela is intentionally linked to her predecessor, Pamela Andrews, to engage the readers' awareness. The selection of words and the title itself hold a distinct significance in this narrative context, as Shamela is a phonetically reminiscent derivative of Pamela, achieved by substituting the "pam" element with "sham." This alteration plays a pivotal role in shaping the foundation of Fielding's parody.

As previously mentioned, Fielding's central source of contention with Richardson's Pamela revolves around the portrayal of the virtuous maid. Fielding's critique is markedly directed towards Pamela's perceived role as a disingenuous exemplar of a virtuous woman. According to Fielding's perspective, Pamela embodies a charade rather than genuine virtue:

According to Fielding's perspective, Samuel Richardson's portrayal of Pamela is fundamentally deceptive, portraying her not as a courageous guardian of her virtue, but rather as a clever manipulator who strategically seeks the most advantageous outcome. Fielding's work, "*Shamela*," presents an alternative depiction, portraying its protagonist as a forthright woman who occasionally touts her "Vartue." Nonetheless, she inherently aligns with the lineage of profit-driven lovers in fiction, a lineage that extends to characters such as Scarlett O'Hara and Amber (Time, 1953).

Fielding employs a discerning magnifying lens akin to that of a detective to expose the concealed facets of Pamela's purported virtue. Employing the Richardsonian structure and adopting the epistolary form, Fielding raises doubts about the veracity of the letters. Unlike Richardson's novel, where the letters presented a singular perspective of the truth, Fielding's intention is to prompt readers to recognize Pamela's manipulation of her audience by selectively presenting letters that construct a favorable and virtuous narrative of her life. Shamela's perspective offers readers a revelation that Pamela's character is far from the virtuous portrayal showcased in Richardson's work. Within "*Shamela*," Pamela ceases to be an innocent and benevolent young girl, instead transformed into a malevolent former prostitute scheming to ensnare and marry her master.

In essence, Fielding's narrative aims to remind readers that Pamela's life contradicts the notion of flawlessness intrinsic to human existence. Real life comprises transgressions followed by repentance, mistakes intertwined with rectifications. The real world is characterized by oscillations along the spectrum of virtue, yet individuals tend to reveal only their virtuous facets to the public eye. Just as this phenomenon prevails in actuality, it is reasonable to assume its presence in Pamela's life. Consequently, her letters cannot solely unveil her impeccable attributes.

The exchange of letters between Shamela and her mother serves as a conduit for revealing the overarching scheme. The letters unveil a plot orchestrated by Shamela's mother, aiming to orchestrate a union between Shamela and Mr. Booby, the squire. For this stratagem to succeed, Shamela is advised to heed her mother's counsel and adopt a demeanor of unattainability. A particular letter emphasizes that the counsel to avoid yielding is an encouragement to secure advantageous terms in advance, rather than relying on promises that are often unfulfilled. This epistle underscores the concept that what may appear to be a moral lesson on virtue could be an integral part of a broader scheme for social advancement.

As an accomplished playwright of his era, Henry Fielding adopted the epistolary format to communicate his opposing perspective to Richardson's work effectively. Michael Orange's assessment of Fielding's Parodies to Richardson attests to Fielding's distinct voice emerging from the outset of his novelistic venture. The novel's form, distinct from theater, allows Fielding direct engagement as a narrator and affords the presentation of multifaceted personas in a theatrical manner. The epistolary framework serves as the gateway through which Fielding enters the discourse of anti-Pamela sentiment. Fielding capitalizes on this framework, allowing his narrative to function as a detective, uncovering Pamela's alternative imperfect side. Fielding, in his commitment to the counter-narrative against Pamela, consciously embraces the same literary device utilized by Richardson.

Dishonest form

The replication of Richardson's epistolary structure and the recreation of corresponding scenes in Fielding's work serves dual purposes. Initially, this approach establishes a connection between Fielding's narrative and Richardson's "Pamela." Moreover, it functions as an adept literary tool of adaptation, affording Fielding the opportunity to offer his own reflections on Richardson's work. The imitation of the epistolary form extends an invitation to readers to experience similar sensations to those elicited by Richardson's writing. This parallel imitation serves to bridge the two novels, facilitating the recollection of the experience of engaging with "Pamela." These parallels operate on a pragmatic level, evoking a sense of continuity and retelling within the discourse initiated by Pamela. This emulation of form thus lays the groundwork for Fielding to execute his critique and express commentary upon the original text.

Approaching this from the vantage point of adaptation and appropriation, the emulation of the form provides Fielding with a medium through which he can interject his commentary, modifications, and opposing viewpoints within the confines of the original text. By examining the adaptation process through the lens of Sanders's definition, adaptation is revealed as a vehicle frequently employed to offer insight into a source text. This is often achieved by presenting an altered perspective from the original, introducing hypothetical motivations, or vocalizing perspectives that have been marginalized or suppressed (Sanders,

2007, pp. 18-19). Through the utilization of Pamela's form as a vehicle for adaptation, Fielding finds himself strategically positioned to scrutinize, critique, and introduce alternative viewpoints to the discourse laid out in Pamela.

Fielding's portrayal of Pamela as a duplicitous and deceitful character is directed towards influencing Pamela's readership. This interpretation, known as the "Pamela-as-hypocrite" perspective, emerged concurrently with the publication of "Shamela" and found resonance in subsequent anti-Pamela works (Gooding, 1995, pp. 122). However, this raises the perplexing question of why a fictional character like Pamela could evoke such strong aversion. The popularity that Richardson's "Pamela" garnered upon its release is a key factor in this dynamic. A broader readership amplifies the scope of influence, potentially inducing a behavioral alignment with Pamela's narrative. As critics have demonstrated, a significant aspect of Pamela's influence lies in its didactic moral and virtuous teachings. As this didactic discourse gains greater traction, it prompts intellectuals to subject these moral principles to closer scrutiny. This, in turn, prompted Fielding's response with "Shamela," a work that initiated the trajectory followed by other anti-Pamela narratives.

Fielding's manipulation of the epistolary format, functioning both as a bridge and as an adaptation, serves as a strategic tool in undermining Pamela's credibility. This is exemplified through his juxtaposition of scenes. Fielding meticulously identifies instances in which Pamela indulges in voyeurism, succumbs to Mr. B's sexual allure, and endures attempted sexual assault. These scenes within Richardson's narrative have faced considerable censure due to their conflict with the moral framework that underpins Pamela's discourse. Orange elucidates Richardson's subsequent editorial efforts aimed at mitigating the voyeuristic elements in later editions as a response to these concerns. This was achieved by reducing the emphasis on Pamela's nudity and curbing the frequency of Mr. B's intrusive actions (Orange, 2008, pp. 49).

Fielding capitalizes on Richardson's oversight to launch an assault on Pamela's portrayal as an exemplar of virtue, thereby revealing her underlying aspirations for social advancement. This strategic manipulation is particularly evident in "Shamela," where Fielding introduces a contrasting rendition of a scene where Pamela confides in her mother regarding Mr. B's sexual advances. However, Fielding ingeniously aligns this situation with the broader scheme orchestrated within the lower social strata. A juxtaposition of these two differing interpretations serves as an illustrative illustration. Pamela's letter to her mother reads as follows:

"My mother, to whom alone I reveal this appalling circumstance, how can I articulate my dismay and disorientation? In this terrible moment, the culpable individual positioned my left arm beneath his neck, while my right arm was restrained by the accomplice. Subsequently, he held me tightly around my waist and planted a kiss on me with terrifying intensity. His voice erupted as he declared, 'Pamela, the moment of retribution that I've warned of has arrived.' My screams for assistance went unanswered, my hands being confined" (Richardson & Keymer, 2008, p. 241).

Shamela recounts the unsettling event in her letter, stating:

“In a disturbing episode, he and Mrs. Jewkes each seized one of my arms, anchoring them as he got into bed beside me. Subsequently, he commenced to passionately kiss my chest. When I awoke to the situation, I began to resist, at which point Mrs. Jewkes goaded him, remarking that she had successfully restrained one of my arms and that he should be able to manage the rest. His behavior was extremely inappropriate, verging on assault. Thankfully, I recalled the guidance you, my mother, had given me on how to fend off such advances. Implementing those strategies, I was able to negotiate his withdrawal, and he agreed to exit the bed” (Haywood & Fielding, 2004, pp. 258-259).

Fielding explicitly scrutinizes the motives behind Pamela’s actions, highlighting the aspiration of those in lower socioeconomic strata for upward social movement. The guidance provided by the mother encourages the audience to reconsider, or at least approach with caution, the authenticity of Pamela’s account. Gooding reinforces this interpretation, emphasizing that a central concern among Pamela’s critics is the challenge the narrative poses to 18th-century societal hierarchies and relationships between different social classes and genders.

The skepticism towards Pamela, articulated by Gooding and those in the anti-Pamela camp, largely originates from the perception that Pamela’s story undermines the traditionally accepted dynamics of social interaction, which are generally seen as competitive and deceptive. This perspective lends credence to the accusation that Richardson’s work is ideologically subversive because it erodes established class demarcations through its educational message and challenges preconceived notions about inherent class traits (Gooding, 1995, pp. 123).

Gooding validates the notion held by Fielding and other anti-Pamela critics that Pamela serves as a misleading archetype. They worry that her story’s acclaim may legitimize manipulative dynamics between employers and domestic workers. In contrast, those who endorse Pamela focus solely on the instructional moral aspects of her tale, overlooking the potential risks it poses—namely, promoting unions between maids and their masters that could disrupt existing social norms.

Fielding broadens his critique of Pamela through his literary work, “Joseph Andrews,” which serves as both an extension and an interrogation of the themes Richardson presents in his narrative, particularly the societal double standards embedded within it. This supplementary narrative can be viewed as a literary descendant of Richardson’s “Pamela,” focusing on the journey of Pamela’s imagined sibling, Joseph. The narrative explicitly ties itself to Pamela, as evidenced by Fielding’s initial words: “Mr. Joseph Andrews, the central figure in our forthcoming tale, is considered the sole offspring of Gaffar and Gammer Andrews and the sibling to the renowned Pamela, currently celebrated for her virtue” (Fielding, 2004, Ch.II). This novel furthers Fielding’s satirical treatment of Richardson’s portrayal of virtue, perceived as hypocritical

“*Shamela*” seeks to deconstruct the Pamela character by highlighting her deceptive traits via the epistolary format. On the other hand, “*Joseph Andrews*” aims to challenge another core element of “*Pamela*”: the themes of purity and desire. In this alternative narrative, Joseph serves as a footman in Mrs. Booby’s household. Fielding upends the conventional dynamics by making Mrs. Booby the initiator of sexual overtures towards her servant, intensifying such advances following the demise of her husband, Mr. Booby. Ultimately, Mrs. Booby, devoid of clothing, summons Joseph to her room with the intention of seduction. Joseph, however, emulates the virtues espoused by his fictional sister, Pamela, and communicates the event to her through written correspondence.

In “*Joseph Andrews*,” Fielding portrays a commendable model of a lower-class servant, establishing a clear parallel with the sexual overtures between master and servant depicted in Richardson’s narrative. Contrary to Pamela’s emotionally laden accounts of her encounters with Mr. B, Joseph’s letters to his sister adopt a more neutral, factual tone, indicative of his deference towards his employer. For instance, as Joseph recounts the salacious incident with Mrs. Booby, his guilt is palpable - not for his involvement in the incident, but for disclosing the happenings within his employer’s household. This underscores his commitment to upholding moral standards and virtues. The internal conflict he experiences, torn between the imperative to inform his sister and the ethical obligation of a servant to maintain the confidentiality of the household, is evident in his correspondence:

In a confidential letter addressed to his sister, Pamela Andrews, who resides with Squire Booby, Joseph conveys an event he’d rather keep within the family, emphasizing the importance of not disclosing the details to others. He hints at Mrs. Booby’s surprising behavior towards him, likening it to romantic stage plays he’s seen in Covent Garden. In his account, he shares that Mrs. Booby, who was unclothed in bed at the time, instructed him to sit beside her. Holding his hand, her dialogue resembled what one would expect from a woman trying to seduce her lover in a theatrical performance. His narrative subtly implies the inappropriate nature of the encounter, yet he insists on keeping the incident a secret, revealing his ambivalence about sharing even with his sister (Haywood & Fielding, 2004, Ch.VI)

Joseph exemplifies traits of innocence, moral integrity, and sexual abstemiousness. He shows a strong sense of loyalty and honesty in his role as a footman to his employer, Mrs. Booby. A comparative reading of the letters—Pamela’s to her mother and Joseph’s to his sister—reveals intriguing differences. Both siblings direct their correspondence to figures they consider mentors and exemplars of moral virtue. However, Pamela appears to derive a certain pleasure from the inappropriate advances she receives, possibly seeing them as steps toward social ascension. Conversely, Joseph, while confiding deeply in his sister, remains discreet about the specifics of his encounter, perhaps seeking from her additional inspiration for moral fortitude and chastity.

David Toise, commenting on the contrasting themes of sexual restraint and moral integrity, posits that “Pamela, as perceived by Fielding, ostensibly advocates chastity but surreptitiously succumbs to desire. In ‘Joseph Andrews,’ Fielding employs the narrative voice as a potent instrument to assail Richardson’s portrayal of emotional fervor” (Toise, 1996, pp. 410). According to Toise, Joseph’s naive demeanor offers a genuine representation of chastity and moral purity, serving as an oblique critique of Pamela’s disingenuous characterizations of virtue.

Distorted Portrayals of Chastity

One final illustration of Fielding’s veiled critique of Pamela’s moral inconsistencies can be seen in Joseph’s recurring desire to emulate his sister. In a letter to Pamela, Joseph divulges his quandary, stating,

Dear Sister Pamela, with hopes that you are in good health, I have alarming news to share. My mistress has developed what the elite term as ‘feelings’ for me—essentially, she seeks to compromise my integrity. Nevertheless, I aspire to mirror your conduct and that of my biblical namesake by holding steadfastly to my virtues amidst such trials (Haywood & Fielding, 2004, Ch.X).

In this excerpt, Fielding sketches an allegorical representation of confession to a spiritual guide. Joseph appears comforted by confessing his mistress’s inappropriate advances. Intriguingly, Pamela, the confessional figure here, is implicated in similar moral complexities, thereby ironizing the dynamic.

Conclusion

To summarize, this paper asserts that Henry Fielding executes a nuanced yet methodical counter-narrative against the exalted depiction of Pamela. As David Lodge articulates, Fielding’s works “are sardonically referential rather than mimetic; their primary function is to highlight the conceptual and technical shortcomings of ‘Pamela’” (Lodge, 1967, pp. 317). The adulation and broad readership that “Pamela” received upon its release incited various thinkers to challenge and preserve existing social hierarchies between the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy.

The paper delineates Fielding’s distinctive style of derision, irony, and satire to debunk Richardson’s “Pamela.” It outlines that Fielding’s counter-story is systematic, from its structural likeness to Richardson’s text to its thematic resonances. Fielding offers examples of how the epistolary form may be inherently deceptive rather than reliable. He then scrutinizes the character Pamela, portraying her as someone who takes pleasure in her master’s inappropriate attention, thereby undermining her proclaimed virtues. Lastly, Fielding introduces an alternative universe in “Joseph Andrews,” presenting what he considers to be a genuine representation of an 18th-century servant’s morality.

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