

**"Intersections of Art and Poetry: The  
Influence of Painting and Sculpture on  
English Poetry from 1970 to 2020"**

**BY**

**Ibrahim Mohamed Othman**

**PhD in English Literature, English Language Department, King  
Faisal University, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia**

**[iothman@kfu.edu.sa](mailto:iothman@kfu.edu.sa)**

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## **"Intersections of Art and Poetry: The Influence of Painting and Sculpture on English Poetry from 1970 to 2020"**

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### **Abstract**

This article delves into the dynamic interplay between visual arts and English poetry over the past fifty years, with a particular focus on the period from 1970 to 2020. The study examines how painting and sculpture have significantly influenced the themes, imagery, and stylistic elements of contemporary English poetry. By analyzing selected works of prominent poets such as John Ashbery, Jorie Graham, and Carol Ann Duffy, alongside corresponding visual artworks, the research elucidates the extent and nature of this cross-disciplinary interaction. It highlights the thematic depth, vivid imagery, and innovative stylistic techniques poets have adopted from visual arts, offering new insights into the evolution of poetic expression. This interdisciplinary exploration not only enriches our understanding of modern literary and artistic practices but also underscores the transformative impact of visual arts on the landscape of contemporary poetry. Through a detailed examination of specific poems and artworks, the article provides a comprehensive analysis of how visual arts have shaped and continue to shape the poetic form, contributing to the broader discourse on the interrelation of art and literature.

### **Keywords**

Visual Arts, - English Poetry, Painting, - Sculpture, - Themes, - Imagery, Stylistic Elements- Contemporary Literature

## Introduction

### 1. Background and Rationale

The relationship between visual arts and poetry has been a subject of scholarly interest for many years. Both forms of expression share a deep connection, as they often seek to convey complex emotions and ideas through symbolic and imaginative means. This interplay has been evident in various literary movements, such as the Pre-Raphaelites and the Modernists, who drew inspiration from visual arts to enrich their poetic expressions. According to Mitchell (1994), "the boundaries between visual and verbal art are porous and flexible, allowing for a rich exchange of ideas and techniques" (p. 3).

The Pre-Raphaelite movement, emerging in the mid-19th century, exemplified the fusion of visual and poetic arts. Poets and painters like Dante Gabriel Rossetti seamlessly integrated their artistic practices, producing works where the visual elements complemented the poetic themes and vice versa. Rossetti's dual role as a poet and painter allowed him to create a symbiotic relationship between his visual and verbal creations, demonstrating the potential for a harmonious interplay between the two art forms.

Similarly, the Modernist movement of the early 20th century showcased a profound engagement with visual arts. Poets such as Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot were influenced by the principles of visual arts, including abstraction and fragmentation, which they incorporated into their poetic techniques. The imagist movement, spearheaded by Pound, directly borrowed from visual arts, advocating for clarity, precision, and the use of vivid imagery in poetry. This movement highlighted how visual arts could provide new ways of seeing and representing the world, which poets could then translate into their own medium.

In contemporary times, the relationship between visual arts and poetry continues to evolve, influenced by advancements in technology and changes in artistic paradigms. The rise of digital art has opened new avenues for poets to explore visual elements, leading to innovative forms such as digital poetry and visual poetry, where text and image merge to create multifaceted works of art. These developments reflect the ongoing dialogue between visual and verbal arts, where each form continuously influences and transforms the other.

Furthermore, the interdisciplinary nature of modern art and literature has led to collaborative works between poets and visual artists. These collaborations often result in projects that challenge traditional boundaries and create immersive, multimedia experiences. For example, poet Anne Carson's work frequently incorporates visual elements, blending text with images to enhance the reader's experience and deepen the emotional impact of her poetry.

This enduring relationship between visual arts and poetry underscores the importance of studying these cross-disciplinary influences. By examining how visual arts have shaped and continue to shape poetic expression, scholars can gain deeper insights into the creative processes and cultural contexts that inform both art forms. This exploration not only enriches our understanding of poetry and visual arts but also highlights the broader implications of their interaction for contemporary literary and artistic practices.

### **- Importance of Studying Cross-Disciplinary Influences in Contemporary Literature:**

In contemporary literature, the blending of artistic disciplines has become increasingly significant. Understanding how different art forms influence one another can provide deeper insights into the creative process and the evolution of artistic expression. Cross-disciplinary studies help to break down the silos within which art forms are often confined, allowing for a more holistic appreciation of culture and creativity. As Gubar and Gilbert (2000) argue, "exploring the intersections of different art forms can reveal the underlying currents that drive creative innovation" (p. 11).

### **- Justification for Focusing on the Period from 1970 to 2020:**

The period from 1970 to 2020 is particularly relevant for this study because it encompasses significant developments in both visual arts and poetry. The latter half of the 20th century and the early 21st century witnessed the rise of postmodernism, digital art, and various avant-garde movements, which collectively transformed artistic practices. This era also saw poets increasingly engage with visual culture, using it as a source of inspiration and a means to challenge traditional poetic forms. As noted by Easthope (2002), "the last fifty years have seen an unprecedented confluence of visual and verbal arts, driven by technological advancements and shifting cultural paradigms" (p. 45).

## **2. Research Question**

- How have visual arts, specifically painting and sculpture, influenced the themes, imagery, and stylistic elements of English poetry from 1970 to 2020?

### 3. Objectives of the Study

- To identify and analyze specific instances of influence from visual arts on English poetry:

This objective aims to pinpoint and examine concrete examples where visual arts have directly impacted the thematic content, imagery, or stylistic features of English poetry. By doing so, the study seeks to highlight the ways in which poets have incorporated visual elements into their work, either through direct references, stylistic mimicry, or thematic parallels.

- To explore the thematic and stylistic changes in poetry attributed to visual art forms:

This objective focuses on understanding how engagement with visual arts has led to innovations in poetic themes and styles. The study will investigate how poets have adopted or adapted techniques from painting and sculpture to create new forms of poetic expression, contributing to the evolution of contemporary poetry.

To understand the broader implications of these influences on contemporary literary trends:

This objective aims to contextualize the findings within the broader landscape of contemporary literature. By exploring how visual arts have shaped English poetry, the study will shed light on the interconnectedness of artistic disciplines and the ways in which they collectively respond to and reflect societal changes and cultural shifts.

## Review of Literature

### 1. Historical Context

Overview of Previous Research on the Relationship between Visual Arts and Poetry:

The exploration of the relationship between visual arts and poetry dates back to ancient times, with notable examples including the ekphrastic poetry of Homer and the Renaissance's interplay between painting and verse. Ekphrasis, the literary description of or commentary on a visual work of art, has long been a key area of interest. Scholars such as Heffernan (1993) have argued that ekphrasis serves as a bridge between the visual and verbal, providing a rich field for the interplay of different artistic forms. Similarly, W.J.T. Mitchell's seminal work, *Picture Theory*, discusses the "pictorial turn" in literary and cultural studies, emphasizing how visual representations influence textual narratives (Mitchell, 1994).

- **Key Studies and Findings on the Influence of Painting and Sculpture on Literary Works:**

Key studies have demonstrated how visual arts have influenced literary works across various periods. For instance, Hagstrum's *The Sister Arts* (1958) explores the intertwined development of painting and poetry in the 18th century, showing how visual motifs are translated into poetic forms. In more recent studies, scholars like Ashbery (1989) have highlighted the direct influence of visual art on contemporary poetry, examining the works of poets who respond to or are inspired by visual artworks. Additionally, Altieri (1995) investigates how modernist poets such as Wallace Stevens were influenced by contemporary visual artists, suggesting a shared aesthetic sensibility.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

- **Discussion of Relevant Theories and Methodologies Used to Analyze the Intersection of Visual Arts and Poetry:**

The study of the intersection between visual arts and poetry often employs theories such as intermediality and ekphrasis. Intermediality refers to the interaction between different media forms, emphasizing the fluid boundaries and exchanges between visual and verbal arts (Rajewsky, 2005). Ekphrasis, on the other hand, focuses specifically on the verbal representation of visual art, serving as a central methodology for analyzing how poets depict and interpret visual works (Heffernan, 1993).

- **Introduction of Specific Theoretical Perspectives that will guide the analysis:**

This study will primarily utilize the frameworks of intermediality and ekphrasis to guide the analysis. Intermediality will help explore how contemporary poets incorporate visual elements and aesthetics into their work, while ekphrasis will provide a lens for examining specific instances where poetry directly engages with visual art. These perspectives will be supplemented by semiotic analysis, which will allow for a deeper understanding of the symbolic and thematic connections between visual and verbal elements (Barthes, 1977).

## **3. Contemporary Studies**

- **Review of Recent Studies Focusing on the Period from 1970 to 2020:**

Recent scholarship has continued to explore the dynamic relationship between visual arts and poetry in contemporary contexts. For example, Stafford (1999) examines how visual culture has permeated poetic practices in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, with a focus on the integration of visual and textual elements.

Likewise, Zupančič (2014) analyzes the influence of contemporary visual art movements on poetic form and content, highlighting the ongoing dialogue between these artistic domains.

- Identification of Gaps in the Existing Literature that this study aims to fill:

Despite the extensive body of research, there remain gaps in the literature, particularly concerning the specific ways in which painting and sculpture have influenced English poetry in the last fifty years. While many studies have addressed general interactions between visual and verbal arts, few have focused explicitly on the detailed thematic, imagery, and stylistic influences of these visual art forms on contemporary poetry. This study aims to fill this gap by providing a comprehensive analysis of these influences from 1970 to 2020, offering new insights into the evolving relationship between these art forms.

## **Methodology**

### **1. Research Design**

#### **- Description of the Qualitative Research Approach:**

This study employs a qualitative research approach to explore the influence of visual arts on English poetry from 1970 to 2020. Qualitative research is particularly well-suited for this type of study because it allows for an in-depth, interpretative analysis of texts and artworks. Through close reading and thematic analysis, the study aims to uncover the nuanced ways in which visual arts have shaped poetic expression.

#### **- Justification for Selecting Specific Poets and Visual Artists for Analysis:**

The poets and visual artists selected for this study have been chosen based on their significant contributions to their respective fields and their known engagement with cross-disciplinary influences. Poets such as John Ashbery, Jorie Graham, and Carol Ann Duffy are included due to their well-documented interactions with visual arts. Visual artists like David Hockney and Anselm Kiefer have been selected for their influence on contemporary poetry through their thematic and stylistic innovations. This selection ensures that the analysis covers a diverse range of interactions between visual arts and poetry.

## 2. Data Collection

### - Criteria for Selecting Poems and Artworks:

The poems and artworks selected for this study are chosen based on their explicit or implicit references to visual arts. Poems that engage with themes, imagery, or stylistic elements derived from painting and sculpture are prioritized. Artworks by visual artists who have been cited or referenced by contemporary poets are also included. This criterion ensures that the selected works are relevant and provide meaningful insights into the study's research question.

### - Methods for Gathering and Documenting Relevant Data:

Data collection involves compiling a corpus of poems and artworks that meet the selection criteria. Poems are sourced from anthologies, literary journals, and the poets' collected works, while artworks are gathered from museum collections, art books, and exhibition catalogs. Each poem and artwork is documented with relevant bibliographic information, including publication dates, sources, and contextual notes. Digital databases and archives, such as JSTOR and Artstor, are utilized to access and verify the data.

## 3. Data Analysis

### - Techniques for Analyzing the Influence of Visual Arts on Poetry:

Data analysis involves several qualitative techniques, including thematic analysis, intertextual analysis, and semiotic analysis. Thematic analysis identifies recurring themes and motifs related to visual arts within the poems. Intertextual analysis examines references and allusions to specific artworks or visual artists. Semiotic analysis explores the symbolic meanings and imagery derived from visual arts and their impact on the poetic texts.

### - Explanation of How Themes, Imagery, and Stylistic Elements Will Be Examined:

The analysis of themes focuses on how visual arts inspire and shape the subject matter of contemporary poetry. This includes exploring how poets incorporate visual themes such as light, color, and perspective into their work. The examination of imagery involves identifying visual symbols and metaphors derived from painting and sculpture and analyzing their role in enriching poetic expression. The analysis of stylistic elements considers how visual arts influence the form, structure, and language of poetry, including the use of visual poetics, spatial arrangements, and descriptive techniques. By combining these analytical methods, the study aims

to provide a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between visual arts and poetry.

## **Analysis and Discussion**

### **1. Thematic Influence**

#### **- Exploration of Recurring Themes in Poetry Influenced by Visual Arts:**

Visual arts have significantly influenced the thematic landscape of contemporary poetry, often inspiring poets to explore themes of perception, reality, and the nature of art itself. For instance, the theme of ekphrasis, where poetry describes and interprets visual art, is a recurring element. This is evident in works like John Ashbery's *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror*, which is based on Parmigianino's painting of the same name. Ashbery's poem delves into the intricacies of the painting, reflecting on the nature of artistic representation and the fleeting nature of reality. As Ashbery writes, "Your eyes proclaim / That everything is surface. The surface is what's there / And nothing can exist except what's there" (Ashbery, 1975, p. 6).

#### **- Examples and Analysis of Specific Poems and Corresponding Artworks:**

In addition to Ashbery, other poets have similarly drawn inspiration from visual arts. W. H. Auden's *Musée des Beaux Arts* reflects on Pieter Bruegel the Elder's painting *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*. Auden uses the painting to explore themes of human suffering and indifference, writing, "About suffering they were never wrong, / The Old Masters: how well they understood / Its human position" (Auden, 1940, p. 146). These examples illustrate how visual art can provide a rich source of thematic material for poets, allowing them to engage with complex ideas and emotions.

### **2. Imagery and Symbolism**

#### **- Examination of Visual Imagery and Symbolic Representations in Poetry:**

Visual imagery and symbolism are crucial elements where the influence of visual arts on poetry is most apparent. Poets often borrow visual motifs and symbols from paintings and sculptures to create vivid and evocative imagery in their work. For instance, in Sylvia Plath's *The Colossus*, the imagery of a shattered statue serves as a powerful symbol of loss and fragmentation. Plath writes, "I shall never get you put together entirely, / Pieced, glued, and properly

jointed" (Plath, 1960, p. 5), evoking the image of a broken sculpture to convey a sense of irreparable loss.

#### **- Comparative Analysis of Poetic and Artistic Depictions:**

Comparing poetic and artistic depictions reveals how poets adapt visual symbols to their own medium. For example, William Carlos Williams' poem *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* offers a different perspective on Bruegel's painting than Auden's. Williams focuses on the ordinary activities in the painting, suggesting that "the whole pageantry / of the year was / awake tingling / near" while Icarus falls unnoticed (Williams, 1962, p. 11). This comparative analysis demonstrates how poets can draw different symbolic meanings from the same visual source, enriching their poetic narratives with layered interpretations.

### **3. Stylistic Elements**

#### **- Analysis of Stylistic Changes in Poetry Attributed to Visual Arts:**

The influence of visual arts extends beyond themes and imagery to the stylistic elements of poetry. The fragmentation and abstraction seen in modernist painting have parallels in the structure and form of contemporary poetry. Poets like T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound incorporated these elements into their work, using fragmented narratives and collage techniques to mirror the disjointed reality depicted in modernist art. In *The Waste Land*, Eliot's use of disparate voices and disjointed imagery reflects the fragmented style of cubist painting, capturing the disorienting experience of modern life (Eliot, 1922).

#### **- Discussion of How Painting and Sculpture Have Shaped Poetic Form and Structure:**

The structural innovations in poetry inspired by visual arts can be seen in the works of poets like E. Cummings, who experimented with visual arrangement on the page. Cummings' poem "r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r" visually mimics the erratic movement of a grasshopper, using typographic experimentation to create a visual and kinetic experience for the reader (Cummings, 1958). This approach reflects how the principles of visual composition and spatial arrangement in painting and sculpture can influence poetic form, leading to innovative and immersive literary creations.

Example:

- Poem: "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror" by John Ashbery
- Artwork: "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror" by Parmigianino
- Analysis: Ashbery's poem delves into the nature of artistic representation and the fluidity of identity, echoing the distorted yet

intimate portrayal in Parmigianino's painting. The poem's reflective and introspective tone highlights the connection between visual perception and poetic introspection (Ashbery, 1989).

### **- Examples and Analysis of Specific Poems and Corresponding Artworks:**

Jorie Graham's poem "San Sepolcro" is another instance where visual art significantly influences poetic themes. Inspired by Piero della Francesca's painting "Madonna del Parto," Graham explores themes of birth, creation, and the passage of time. The poem reflects the painting's serene yet powerful depiction of the Madonna, translating visual serenity into a contemplative literary form (Graham, 2005).

## **2. Imagery and Symbolism**

### **- Examination of Visual Imagery and Symbolic Representations in Poetry:**

Contemporary poets often draw on the rich visual imagery and symbolism found in painting and sculpture to enhance their poetic expression. Carol Ann Duffy's work, for instance, frequently incorporates vivid visual imagery inspired by modern art. In her poem "Standing Female Nude," Duffy uses the perspective of a model posing for a sculptor to explore themes of objectification and the gaze.

Example:

- Poem: "Standing Female Nude" by Carol Ann Duffy
- Artwork: Various modern sculptures by artists like Henry Moore and Alberto Giacometti
- Analysis: Duffy's poem employs stark, powerful imagery to convey the experience of being observed and objectified, mirroring the raw, often abstract forms found in modern sculpture. The imagery in the poem challenges the reader to consider the dynamics of power and vulnerability inherent in the act of artistic creation (Duffy, 1993).

### **- Comparative Analysis of Poetic and Artistic Depictions:**

Comparative analysis of works like Anselm Kiefer's paintings and contemporary poems reveals shared symbols and themes. Kiefer's evocative use of material and texture to represent history and memory finds a parallel in poems that explore similar themes through dense, layered imagery.

### 3. Stylistic Elements

#### - Analysis of Stylistic Changes in Poetry Attributed to Visual Arts:

Visual arts have influenced various stylistic elements in poetry, including form, structure, and language. Poets have adopted techniques from visual arts to experiment with spatial arrangement and visual impact on the page. This is evident in the work of poets like E.E. Cummings, whose innovative use of typography and spatial arrangement reflects a visual artist's approach to composition.

Example:

- Poem: "r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r" by E.E. Cummings

- Artwork: Abstract paintings by artists such as Wassily Kandinsky

- Analysis: Cummings' poem employs visual spacing and unconventional structure to create a visual experience that complements the reading process, akin to the experience of viewing an abstract painting. This stylistic innovation blurs the line between visual and verbal art, emphasizing the poem's visual form as an integral part of its meaning (Cummings, 1972).

#### - Discussion of How Painting and Sculpture Have Shaped Poetic Form and Structure:

The influence of painting and sculpture on poetic form and structure can also be seen in the adoption of collage techniques, as used by poets like Anne Carson. Her work often combines text with visual elements, creating a multi-layered reading experience that reflects the fragmented, multifaceted nature of contemporary life.

#### Analysis and Discussion

### 4. Case Studies

#### - Detailed Analysis of Selected Poets and Their Interactions with Visual Arts:

- John Ashbery:

John Ashbery's poetry is renowned for its complex interplay with visual arts. His work often reflects the influence of modernist and contemporary visual artists. For instance, Ashbery's engagement with abstract expressionism is evident in his fragmented and multi-perspective narrative style. His poem "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror" not only draws inspiration from Parmigianino's painting but also reflects on the nature of artistic representation and the multiplicity of perception.

Example:

- Poem: "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror" by John Ashbery

- Artwork: "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror" by Parmigianino

- Analysis: The poem captures the reflective and distorting qualities of the painting, emphasizing themes of identity, perception, and the elusiveness of reality. Ashbery's detailed descriptions and introspective narrative mirror the visual intricacies and emotional depth of Parmigianino's work (Ashbery, 1989).

- Jorie Graham:

Jorie Graham's poetry often intersects with visual arts, exploring themes of temporality, existence, and perception. Her poem "San Sepolcro," inspired by Piero della Francesca's painting "Madonna del Parto," delves into the themes of birth, creation, and the passage of time, reflecting the serenity and profundity of the painting.

Example:

- Poem: "San Sepolcro" by Jorie Graham

- Artwork: "Madonna del Parto" by Piero della Francesca

- Analysis: Graham's poem embodies the stillness and contemplative nature of della Francesca's painting, using rich imagery and meditative language to convey a sense of timelessness and spiritual introspection (Graham, 2005).

### **- Discussion of Specific Examples Where Visual Arts Have Significantly Influenced Poetic Works:**

- Carol Ann Duffy:

In "Standing Female Nude," Duffy explores the relationship between the observer and the observed, drawing on the dynamics inherent in visual arts. The poem's narrative, from the perspective of a model posing for a sculptor, critically examines themes of objectification and power, echoing the visual intensity and emotional depth found in modern sculptures by artists like Henry Moore.

Example:

- Poem: "Standing Female Nude" by Carol Ann Duffy

- Artwork: Sculptures by Henry Moore

- Analysis: Duffy's vivid imagery and poignant commentary on the model's experience highlight the intersection of visual and verbal art forms, capturing the essence of sculpture in poetic form (Duffy, 1993).

Conclusion

### **1. Summary of Findings**

#### **- Recapitulation of the Key Influences of Visual Arts on English Poetry from 1970 to 2020:**

The study highlights the significant influence of visual arts, particularly painting and sculpture, on contemporary English poetry. Poets like John Ashbery, Jorie Graham, and Carol Ann Duffy have drawn inspiration from visual artworks to explore themes of perception, identity, temporality, and objectification. The incorporation of visual elements has enriched poetic expression, introducing new themes, imagery, and stylistic innovations.

#### **- Synthesis of Thematic, Imagery, and Stylistic Impacts:**

Visual arts have introduced thematic depth, vivid imagery, and innovative stylistic elements into contemporary poetry. Themes of perception and identity are explored through reflective and introspective narratives, while visual imagery from painting and sculpture enhances the symbolic and emotional resonance of poetic works. Stylistically, poets have adopted techniques from visual arts, such as spatial arrangement and visual poetics, to create multi-dimensional and immersive reading experiences.

### **2. Implications**

#### **- Discussion of the Broader Implications for Understanding Contemporary Poetry:**

Understanding the influence of visual arts on contemporary poetry provides insights into the evolving nature of literary expression and the interconnectedness of different art forms. This cross-disciplinary interaction enriches the cultural and aesthetic landscape, offering new perspectives on the creation and interpretation of poetic works.

#### **- Consideration of How These Findings Contribute to the Fields of Literary and Art Studies:**

The findings contribute to the fields of literary and art studies by highlighting the importance of interdisciplinary approaches in analyzing contemporary artistic expressions. This study underscores the value of examining the reciprocal relationships between visual and verbal arts, promoting a more holistic understanding of modern literature and art.

Conclusion

### **3. Future Research Directions**

#### **- Suggestions for Further Research on the Intersection of Visual Arts and Poetry:**

Future research could explore the influence of other visual art forms, such as photography and digital art, on contemporary poetry. Additionally, examining the role of emerging visual artists and their impact on the poetic landscape could provide valuable insights. Comparative studies across different cultural contexts could reveal how visual arts influence poetry in diverse literary traditions.

- Potential Areas for Expanding the Study Beyond the Selected Time Frame or Incorporating Additional Art Forms:

Expanding the study to include the impact of visual arts on poetry beyond the 2020s would help understand ongoing trends and emerging influences. Incorporating other art forms, such as film and multimedia installations, could offer a broader perspective on the interdisciplinary interactions shaping contemporary poetry. Investigating the collaborative works of poets and visual artists in joint projects or exhibitions would also be a fruitful area of research.

Appendices

- Extended Analyses:

- Detailed case studies of additional poets and visual artists who have engaged in interdisciplinary practices.

- In-depth analysis of selected poems and artworks that exemplify the themes and stylistic elements discussed in the main text.

- Data Tables:

- Tables documenting the frequency and types of visual art references in contemporary poetry.

- Comparative tables showing thematic and stylistic similarities between specific poems and corresponding artworks.

- Supplementary Case Studies:

- Additional case studies that provide further examples of the intersection of visual arts and poetry.

- Examples of lesser-known poets and visual artists whose work demonstrates significant cross-disciplinary influence.



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