My Country

POEM TEXT

The love of field and coppice,
Of green and shaded lanes,
Of ordered woods and gardens
Is running in your veins—
Strong love of grey-blue distance,
Brown streams and soft dim skies—
I know but cannot share it,
My love is otherwise.

I love a sunburnt country,
A land of sweeping plains,
Of ragged mountain ranges,
Of droughts and flooding rains.
I love her far horizons,
I love her jewel-sea,
Her beauty and her terror—
The wide brown land for me!

The stark white ring-barked forests
All tragic to the moon,
The sapphire-misted mountains,
The hot gold hush of noon.
Green tangle of the brushes,
Where lithe lianas coil,
And orchid-laden tree ferns
Smother the crimson soil.

Core of my heart, my country!
Her pitiless blue sky,
When sick at heart, around us,
We see the cattle die—
But then the grey clouds gather,
And we can bless again
The drumming of an army,
The steady, soaking rain.

Core of my heart, my country!
Land of the Rainbow Gold,
For flood and fire and famine,
She pays us back threefold—
Over the thirsty paddocks,
Watch, after many days,
The filmy veil of greenness
That thickens as we gaze.

An opal-hearted country,
A wilful, lavish land—
All you who have not loved her,
You will not understand—
Though earth holds many splendours,
Wherever I may die,
I know to what brown country
My homing thoughts will fly.

SUMMARY

The love of fields, cultivated groves of trees, shady paths surrounded by greenery, and orderly woods and gardens is part of who you are. Your passion for grayish-blue vistas, brown streams, and muted skies is something I recognize but can't share. I love a different kind of landscape.

I love a country that's scorched by the sun—a land full of broad plains, jagged mountain ranges, droughts, and flood-causing rainstorms. I love that country's faraway horizons, its glittering ocean, its beautiful and terrifying features. That vast brown land (Australia) is the one for me!

That land features forests filled with bare white trees that look tragic in the moonlight; mountains covered in beautiful blue mist; and a hot, sunny silence in the middle of the day. It features dense green thickets where long vines climb in loops and tall ferns covered in orchids grow thickly from the red soil.

My country is the thing I love most! I love how her blue sky looks indifferent as cattle sicken and die around us (during droughts)—until rain clouds appear, and we again gratefully witness a steady rain shower that sounds like an army drumming.

My country is the thing I love most! It's like the mythical, gold-filled land at the end of the rainbow. It inflicts floods, fires, and famines on us, but repays us three times over for our suffering. Watch how, in the dry enclosed pastures, a misty green color slowly returns and deepens as we look on.

My country has a heart like opal (the gemstone it produces). It's unyielding, yet richly rewarding. Those of you who haven't loved her will never understand those of us who do. There are many glorious places on earth, but no matter where I die, I know that my dying thoughts will return to my brown country,

Australia.

THEMES

PATRIOTISM AND PRIDE

"My Country" is a patriotic poem celebrating Mackellar's native Australia. Addressed to someone who prefers a different country (implied to be England), the poem praises the unique "beauty" and "terror" of the Australian landscape. While acknowledging that this landscape is rugged, often harsh, and prone to volatile extremes, the poem's lush, romantic language treats even these challenges as a source of pride. Framing Australia as a place that no outsider can truly understand, the speaker calls the country the "Core of [the speaker's] heart" and the only place they'll ever consider home.

The poem celebrates the "sunburnt country" of Australia as one of wild and wonderful extremes. The speaker highlights the "beauty" of features such as the country's seas, forests, and mountains, but also the "terror" of features such as its fires, floods, and droughts. They recognize that the Australian wilderness can be dangerous and even punishing, yet they find romance and glory in these same qualities (as when they include "droughts and flooding rains" in the features they "love" about their country).

In fact, the speaker champions these extremes over the softer, tamer beauty of England, with its "ordered woods and gardens." In phrases such as "jewel-sea," "sapphire-misted mountains," and "opal-hearted country," the poem casts the speaker's homeland as a precious gem that's well worth whatever hardships it imposes on those who live there.

In the end, the poem implies that outsiders can't properly appreciate or even handle Australia, whereas an Australian can learn to love it like no other place. The speaker calls Australia the "Land of the Rainbow Gold," alluding to the fact that the country is geographically remote, like the mythical land at the end of the rainbow. This phrase also portrays Australia as a magical, fortunate place that most people can't reach or grasp. The speaker insists that "All [...] who have not loved" Australia "will not understand" the country. Yet, for Australians like the speaker, who do understand it, it's the greatest of all "splendours" on "earth."

Though the poem acknowledges some of the difficulties that come with such splendor, its overall stance is straightforwardly patriotic. It draws partly on the genre tradition of the "bush ballad"—poetry that celebrates the Australian wilderness—and is considered a classic statement of Australian national pride.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-48

WILDNESS VS. TAMENESS

"My Country" contrasts the tame, pretty, orderly landscape of England (where the families of many white Australians originated) with the wild, intense natural beauty of Australia. Personifying the Australian landscape as a kind of volatile goddess, the speaker welcomes the trials and dangers "She" poses, treating even the country's natural disasters as a kind of thrill. The poem portrays rugged wilderness as more demanding but, ultimately, far more rewarding and exciting than any tame, cozy countryside.

The poem begins by juxtaposing a quiet pastoral landscape with the Australian bush (or wilderness). Though the speaker doesn't mention England by name, the pastoral landscape they describe is conventionally English and emphasizes comfort and ease: there are "coppice[s]" (woodland cut down and managed by human beings), "shaded lanes," "ordered woods and gardens," a "soft" sky, etc.

And yet, the speaker loves a much different kind of landscape: rather than coziness, softness, and order, the speaker likes "sweeping" scale, ruggedness, and disorder. An adventurous spirit, the speaker prefers a setting where "terror," "trag[edy]," and death are part of the package. In fact, the speaker's personification of Australia casts the land itself as a kind of dangerous and temperamental goddess, one who constantly tests human beings but richly repays them for meeting the challenge.

Again, the speaker implies that there's an adventurous thrill in surviving these conditions. The poem praises the country's "pitiless blue sky," as if heaven were looking down on the land without mercy (and as if this were a good thing!). The speaker also describes a cattle-killing drought, followed by the "bless[ed]" relief of rain, in terms that evoke a divine plague and its cure. The speaker even claims that "For flood and fire and famine, / [Australia] pays us back threefold"—like a deity showering down three times as many blessings as curses. Ultimately, the poem depicts the country as "wilful," yet "lavish." In other words, though Australia is volatile and difficult to manage (like the moods of a deity), it's also generous in the rewards it gives.

"My Country" thus portrays Australia as the greatest place on earth not despite but *because of* its wild, rugged nature. The speaker isn't charmed by quiet, bucolic scenery, and instead finds both the lushness and the harshness of their country's terrain deeply appealing to their imagination.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-16
- Lines 26-32
- Lines 35-36
- Lines 41-44

LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

LINES 1-4

The love of field and coppice,
Of green and shaded lanes,
Of ordered woods and gardens
Is running in your veins—

The poem begins by addressing an unnamed person: the "your" referred to in line 4. This person, the speaker says, enjoys a particular kind of landscape: one that's tame, pretty, and bucolic. They love "field[s]" and "coppice[s]" (i.e., human-managed woodlands), "green and shaded lanes" of the type one might find in suburban or rural towns, and "ordered woods and gardens" that indicate human control of the environment. Their "love" of such landscapes is instinctive and perhaps inherited: it's "running in [their] veins."

The cozy scenery of this opening stanza is characteristic of the English countryside. (Though England isn't mentioned by name, the poet recalled that "My Country" was inspired by a conversation with a friend after the two had visited the UK.)

Subtle internal rhyme ("love of"/"Of"/"Of") and assonance ("shaded lanes") add pleasing musicality to this description of a pleasant landscape. These lines also establish a meter and rhyme scheme that will make it musical and memorable throughout:

The love | of field | and cop- | pice,
Of green | and sha- | ded lanes,

Each line contains three iambs, or metrical feet consisting of an unstressed followed by a stressed syllable; thus, the poem is set in iambic trimeter. The odd-numbered lines contain an extra unstressed syllable at the end: that is, they have "feminine endings." The even-numbered lines form rhyme pairs (here, "lanes"/"veins"), so that each stanza rhymes ABCBDEFE.

The "Of" that begins lines 2 and 3 (paralleling the "of" in line 1) is the poem's first example of anaphora, or repetition across the beginnings of lines, sentences, etc. The poet will use this device often, both to create rhythmic momentum and to build lists like the catalogue of landscape features in lines 1-3. In a device called asyndeton, the poet omits the conjunction ("and") that would normally fall between lines 2 and 3, preserving the metrical rhythm and making the list more concise.

LINES 5-8

Strong love of grey-blue distance,
Brown streams and soft dim skies—
I know but cannot share it,
My love is otherwise.

Lines 5-8 finish the description of the other person's ("your") favorite type of landscape, then emphasize that this is not the *speaker's* favorite type of landscape.

The person the speaker is addressing loves landscapes with muted colors and gentle, comforting features: "grey-blue distance," "Brown streams," and "soft dim skies." The speaker acknowledges ("know[s]") this preference, but they "cannot share it," because their "love is otherwise"—that is, the speaker's heart belongs to an entirely different kind of landscape.

Notice all the sibilance in lines 5-6:

Strong love of grey-blue distance,
Brown streams and soft dim skies—

These soft consonants reflect the "soft," gentle environment being described. At the same time, the imagery related to light and color ("grey-blue," "Brown," "dim") makes this environment sound a little dull!

Line 5 also contains the first significant variation in the poem's meter: it begins with a spondee (two stressed syllables in a row) rather than an iamb (an unstressed followed by a stressed syllable).:

Strong love [...]

The extra stress falls on the word "Strong"; thus, the meter helps emphasize the strength of the other person's "love."

LINES 9-12

I love a sunburnt country,
A land of sweeping plains,
Of ragged mountain ranges,
Of droughts and flooding rains.

All the details from the first stanza about the gentle, green English countryside are meant to set up a giant contrast. The speaker loves almost the *opposite* kind of landscape: the rugged wilderness found in the Australian bush or outback. That becomes clear in lines 9-12, which transition into praise of the poem's main subject: "My Country."

While the poem never actually mentions Australia by name, the poet's nationality, combined with the poem's many Australia-related details, makes the reference clear. This stanza, for example, alludes to the tropical and desert climates found throughout much of Australia. As the speaker notes, it's a "sunburnt country" that experiences major dry and rainy seasons: "droughts and flooding rains." The country is also a continent, one that features plenty of varied topography—from flatlands to rugged highlands, "sweeping plains" to "ragged mountain ranges."

The speaker declares that they "love" all these different parts of their homeland. The poem is a frank expression of patriotic pride, though it acknowledges many features of the country

that others might find unpleasant (such as the droughts and floods). It embraces even the most extreme or dangerous elements of Australia's natural landscape with an adventurous spirit.

Here as in the first stanza, anaphora (the repetition of "Of") and asyndeton (the omitted "and" between lines 11 and 12) help structure the list the speaker is reeling off. Alliteration ("ragged"/"ranges"/"rains") adds emphasis and gusto to the verse, as does the assonance in line 9: "I love a sunburnt country." This line has become the most quoted in the poem (it's big in Australia!), so clearly its vowel sounds have helped give it a memorable ring.

LINES 13-16

I love her far horizons,
I love her jewel-sea,
Her beauty and her terror—
The wide brown land for me!

Lines 13-16 list and celebrate more features of Australia, including:

- "her far horizons": a reference to Australia's size (it's a continent as well as a country!) and many open spaces: plains, deserts, etc.
- "her jewel-sea": a metaphor comparing the Indian and Pacific Oceans surrounding Australia to a bright, beautiful, glittering jewel.
- "Her beauty and her terror": refers to contrasting, or antithetical, elements of the Australian wilderness. It's stunningly beautiful but, at times, terrifyingly dangerous. The speaker seems to be something of an adventurer, so they love both of these qualities! (The way nature can be simultaneously beautiful and frightening was also a common theme in the Romantic poetry of the 19th century, a tradition Mackellar may be drawing on here.)

Once again, anaphora ("I love her"/"I love her") helps tie this list together.

Having begun the stanza with an affectionate description of Australia ("a sunburnt country"), the speaker ends the stanza with another one, exclaiming that "The wide brown land" is the one "for me!" "Wide" is another reference to the country's sheer size, while "brown" suggests that the land has been browned by the same sun that "burnt" it.

LINES 17-20

The stark white ring-barked forests
All tragic to the moon,
The sapphire-misted mountains,
The hot gold hush of noon.

The sentence fragment of lines 17-20 celebrates more features of the Australian landscape, including one that's "tragic" as well as beautiful. The speaker mentions:

- "The stark white ring-barked forests": these are Australian forests that British colonists thinned or destroyed through *ring-barking*, a method of killing trees without cutting them down. The dead trees look "tragic" in the "moon[light]"—the poem's only hint of a more unsettling or violent history behind the country/landscape it celebrates.
- "The sapphire-misted mountains": that is, mountains wrapped in a beautiful blue (sapphire-colored) haze.
- "The hot gold hush of noon": that is, a sunny, "gold[en]" quiet around noon, when the intense heat reduces human and animal activity (and many workers break for lunch).

The list is structured around the anaphora of "The" at the beginning of lines 17, 19, and 20. The slant internal rhyme between "stark" and "barked" in line 17 has a rather harsh sound, subtly reflecting the unpleasantness of the image (a dead forest).

The alliteration in lines 19-20 of "moon," "misted," and "mountains" adds beauty and intensity to the poem's imagery. Also note how the alliterative syllables here all fall on stressed beats:

All tra- | gic to | the moon,
The sa- | pphire-mist- | ed mountains,

This alliteration thus emphasizes the rhythm of the poem's iambic (da-DUM) meter. The alliterative /h/ sounds in "hot" and "hush" (line 20) accentuate stressed syllables, too; they also sound breathy or hushed, again as if to reflect what the line describes.

LINES 21-24

Green tangle of the brushes,
Where lithe lianas coil,
And orchid-laden tree ferns
Smother the crimson soil.

Lines 21-24 consist of another sentence fragment (a sentence without a main verb) celebrating features of the Australian landscape. Here, the poet lovingly describes:

- "Green tangle of the brushes, / Where lithe lianas coil": in other words, the green snarl of the forest's underbrush, where long, slim vines coil around trees and other tall plants. "Lianas" are long, woody, twisting vines often found in tropical forests (such as those in Australia).
- "orchid-laden tree ferns [that] / Smother the crimson soil": tall ferns that are covered in orchid

flowers and cluster so thickly in the red soil that they seem to cut off its oxygen supply. (Thick plant growth may not literally "smother" soil, but it can deprive soil of certain nutrients.) "Tree ferns" have tall, tree-like trunks and are found in some Australian forests.

Notice the dense sound-play throughout this passage. There's an extra accented syllable in line 21, for example, which begins with a spondee (a metrical foot with two stresses in a row, rather than an iamb, a foot consisting of one unstressed and one stressed syllable):

Green tan- | gle of | the brushes,

The lush alliteration in "lithe," "lianas," and "laden" (combined with /l/ consonance in "coil" and "soil") also makes the passage a bit of a mouthful—a tongue-twister that suits the twisty, tangled plant life it's describing.

LINES 25-28

Core of my heart, my country!
Her pitiless blue sky,
When sick at heart, around us,
We see the cattle die—

Lines 25-28 begin with a patriotic exclamation: "Core of my heart, my country!" For the speaker, Australia lies at the very center of her identity and affections.

Readers might expect this tribute to be followed immediately by images of natural beauty or national glory, but instead, the following lines describe a cattle-killing drought:

Her pitiless blue sky,
When sick at heart, around us,
We see the cattle die—

The description of the sky as "pitiless" (as if heaven were looking down without mercy) suggests, at least momentarily, that the country the speaker loves doesn't show any love in return. It seems indifferent to the emotions and suffering of humans and animals alike. Evidently, this quality is part of the country's unexpected appeal: the adventurous speaker seems to love the unforgiving ruggedness of wild, or barely tamed, Australian landscapes. (However, the land isn't *totally* unforgiving: the second half of the stanza describes a "bless[ed]" rain that finally falls.)

Thanks to the grammatical ambiguity of this passage, "sick at heart" could apply either to the dying cattle or to the humans ("us") witnessing their deaths. Or maybe both! This small detail is yet another sign of the speaker's deep connection with the land and animals around them. Notice, too, how the alliteration between "Core" and "country" reinforces the strong connection between Australia and the *core* of the speaker's self.

LINES 29-32

But then the grey clouds gather,
And we can bless again
The drumming of an army,
The steady, soaking rain.

The second half of the fourth stanza describes the "steady, soaking" rain that finally arrives after the cattle-killing dry spell in lines 26-28. The speaker metaphorically compares this loud, intense rain to "The drumming of an army." Along with the consistent metrical rhythm, the alliteration in lines 29 ("grey," "gather") and 32 ("steady, soaking") helps evoke the steady gathering and driving intensity of the rainstorm.

In line 30, the speaker says the inhabitants of the land "can bless [this rain] again." The words "bless" and "again" are both important here. After the "pitiless" cruelty that the heavens seem to show during the drought (line 26), the rain arrives as a *blessing*. Moreover, it arrives "again" because these drought and rainy seasons are cyclical—part of the Australian climate.

Although the poem doesn't make any explicit religious or mythological allusions (aside from "Land of the Rainbow Gold" in line 34), it does personify Australia, and in this passage, the personified country seems to act like a moody, volatile deity. Sometimes "she" cruelly withholds rain and other blessings; sometimes she gives them in abundance. A similar characterization occurs in line 42, which describes the country as both "wilful" (stubborn, strong-willed) and "lavish" (extremely generous).

LINES 33-36

Core of my heart, my country!
Land of the Rainbow Gold,
For flood and fire and famine,
She pays us back threefold—

The fifth stanza of the poem parallels the fourth in many ways. It begins with the patriotic exclamation "Core of my heart, my country!"—then illustrates this sentiment with a surprisingly mixed description of the country's hardships and joys. Specifically, it indicates that the Australian landscape brings natural disasters that are followed, and redeemed, by outpourings of natural beauty and abundance.

Line 34 calls Australia "Land of the Rainbow Gold," alluding to the myth that a pot of gold lies in some magical realm at the end of each rainbow. This allusion suggests that Australia is both enchanting and distant (i.e, it's geographically remote from most of the inhabited world). It may imply, too, that there's something *elusive* about the country's character—something that's hard to grasp if you're not Australian (see lines 43-44).

Part of what makes the country hard to appreciate is suggested in the next line: living in Australia means dealing with "fire and

flood and famine." (Notice how the /f/ alliteration here—"fire," "flood," "famine"—makes these disasters seem more intense.) Yet the speaker insists that, for all these catastrophes, the country's natural landscape "pays us back threefold": that is, repays its inhabitants three times over for their suffering. In other words, living in Australia has its difficult moments, but they're well worth it.

LINES 37-40

Over the thirsty paddocks,
Watch, after many days,
The filmy veil of greenness
That thickens as we gaze.

The imagery in lines 37-40 comes from one of the experiences that inspired the poem. After a drought-ending rainstorm Mackellar witnessed in Australia, "[T]he land to the horizon became green." However, she recalled that she "would not have seen this by walking across the paddock"; the effect was so delicate that she could see it only from the higher vantage point of her porch. "That is why," she explained, "I called it a filmy veil."

In other words, these lines describe greenness slowly returning to the Australian landscape (including its "paddocks," or fenced livestock pastures) after a drought. This greenness is as faint, almost transparent, as a "filmy veil," but it seems to grow thicker under the "gaze" of the land's inhabitants. The land has been "thirsty" during the dry spell, but it's gradually reviving as moisture soaks in.

The command "Watch" (line 38) doesn't seem directed toward a particular person, such as the "you" addressed in the first stanza. Instead, it seems to be a mini-example of apostrophe, in which the speaker addresses an audience that's not literally present and/or can't respond. Basically, the speaker is talking to the general reader or anyone who visits the landscape being described. This small moment helps set up the final stanza, which addresses a broad audience (including "All you who have not loved [Australia]").

LINES 41-44

An opal-hearted country,
A wilful, lavish land—
All you who have not loved her,
You will not understand—

In the first stanza, the speaker addressed a limited second person, a "you" reportedly based on a friend with whom Mackellar visited England. In the final stanza, however, the implied audience expands. The speaker addresses "All you who have not loved [Australia]," claiming that outsiders "will not understand" this "opal-hearted country"—this "wilful, lavish land."

Implicitly, of course, the speaker is also signaling to insiders who *do* know and love Australia. These lines make the country sound like a place only its inhabitants can truly appreciate. (It's no accident that the poem has been most successful with Australian audiences!)

The metaphor "opal-hearted" perhaps suggests that the country is callous or stubborn (like a "stony-hearted" person), yet fundamentally beautiful and precious, like a gemstone. It also alludes to Australia's opal mining industry, which accounts for most of the world's opal production.

The adjectives in the next line develop this metaphor, calling Australia both "wilful" (stubborn, strong-willed) and "lavish" (sumptuous, rich, or generous). The alliteration of /l/ syllables ("lavish," "land," "loved") subtly reinforces the thematic link between the *land*, its *lavish* quality, and the speaker's *love* for it.

LINES 45-48

Though earth holds many splendours,
Wherever I may die,
I know to what brown country
My homing thoughts will fly.

The last four lines of the poem round out the speaker's praise—which has been lavish, but tempered by some brutally honest observations—with a final, wholehearted tribute to Australia.

Although "earth holds many splendours" (i.e., there are many wonderful places in the world), the speaker feels sure that, "Wherever [they] may die" (even if it's far away from home), their last thoughts will return to the place of their birth. Their "homing thoughts" will "fly" back, like a homing pigeon, to the "brown country" of Australia.

The phrase "brown country," of course, echoes "wide brown land" in line 16 and refers to the way the tropical/subtropical/desert sun has "browned" various areas of the continent. Notice, too, that this is the fifth line in the poem to end with the word "country"—not counting the title! The repeated emphasis on this word underscores the poem's patriotic themes.

These final lines don't claim that Australia is the best country on earth according to some objective measure. Rather, they suggest that the speaker is partial to Australia because it's *home*. The poem was partly inspired by a trip abroad to London (during which Mackellar drafted an early version), and it touches, here, on the theme of homesickness. Wherever the speaker goes in the world, the ending implies, they'll inevitably miss their native country.

SYMBOLS

THE HEART

The heart is a familiar symbol of love and emotions. It can also represent the essence of a person or thing. In "My Country," the speaker repeatedly describes Australia as the "Core of my heart," meaning both that it stirs the speaker's

deepest emotions and that it's central to the speaker's identity.

The speaker's heart is connected with their country in ways that go beyond patriotic pride. Grammatically, the phrase "sick at heart" in the fourth stanza could apply to the speaker, the cattle dying in drought, or both. In this moment, the feelings and experiences of the speaker seem intertwined with the well-being of Australia's animals and land.

Finally, the speaker describes the country itself as "opal-hearted," comparing its essence to that of the iridescent gemstone the landscape produces. (Australia accounts for the vast majority of the world's opal production.) Symbolically, this phrase suggests that the country is hard and tough—like a stony-hearted person—yet also beautiful and lavishly rewarding.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Line 25:** "Core of my heart, my country!"
- **Lines 27-28:** "When sick at heart, around us, / We see the cattle die—"
- **Line 33:** "Core of my heart, my country!"
- **Line 41:** "An opal-hearted country,"

POETIC DEVICES

METAPHOR

The poem contains a number of metaphors, some of which are obvious and some very subtle. Altogether, these metaphors paint a rich, vivid picture of Australia for the reader.

Here are a few of the more noticeable examples:

- In line 14, "jewel-sea" compares the ocean surrounding Australia to a jewel: that is, it's beautiful, glittering, precious, etc.
- Lines 31-32 compare the "steady, soaking rain" after a drought to "The drumming of an army." That is, the rain makes a loud, repetitive, percussive sound.
- Lines 39-40 compare the "greenness" that returns after a drought to a "filmy veil [...] that thickens" over the land.

And here are a few less obvious examples:

- "The love [...] Is running in your veins" (lines 1-4) is a *dead metaphor*, a metaphor that's become so common that it doesn't immediately read as figurative anymore. (A related term is cliché.) "Running in your veins" is a conventional way of saying that a trait is part of someone's identity or heritage.
- The word "ragged" (line 11) compares the jagged shape of mountain ranges to the tattered shape of rags.
- "Sapphire" and "gold" (lines 19-20) are color words describing shades of blue and yellow, respectively, but they also metaphorically compare Australia's mist to a gemstone and its noon sun to a precious metal (i.e., something beautiful, radiant, etc.).
- The word "Smother" (line 24) is loosely metaphorical; the tree ferns don't quite asphyxiate the "soil," though they do cluster thickly in it and soak up its nutrients.
- "Core of my heart" (lines 25, 33) is a twist on the conventional metaphor *heart of my heart*, which describes something central to one's affections or identity.
- Finally, there's a bird metaphor embedded in the last two lines. The speaker says that their "homing thoughts" will "fly" back to Australia, like a homing pigeon or other bird that reliably returns to its place of origin.

Where Metaphor appears in the poem:

- **Lines 1-4:** "The love of field and coppice, / Of green and shaded lanes, / Of ordered woods and gardens / Is running in your veins—"
- **Line 11:** "Of ragged mountain ranges,"
- **Line 14:** "jewel-sea"
- **Lines 19-20:** "The sapphire-misted mountains, / The hot gold hush of noon."
- **Lines 23-24:** "And orchid-laden tree ferns / Smother the crimson soil."
- **Line 25:** "Core of my heart, my country!"
- **Lines 31-32:** "The drumming of an army, / The steady, soaking rain."
- **Line 33:** "Core of my heart, my country!"
- **Lines 39-40:** "The filmy veil of greenness / That thickens"
- **Lines 47-48:** "I know to what brown country / My homing thoughts will fly."

ANAPHORA

The poem contains many examples of anaphora. Generally, this anaphora gives the poem a list-like structure, as the speaker describes the qualities of a landscape they *don't* love, then recites the qualities of the country they *do* love.

The first taste of anaphora comes in lines 1-3: addressing a nameless *you*, the speaker acknowledges their love "of" fields and coppices, "[o]f" rural lanes, and "[o]f" other very English-sounding landscape features.

As the poem goes on, the speaker uses "I love" (lines 9 and 13-14), "of"/"Of" (lines 10-12), and "The" (lines 17, 19-20, and 31-32) to introduce several series of descriptions, all centered on their beloved Australia. Besides making the poem's structure easy to follow, this frequent anaphora gives the poem

an exhilarated tone—as if the speaker is almost getting carried away. The repetition of "I love," in particular, makes the speaker's patriotism sound impassioned.

Speaking of patriotism, the repetition of "Core of my heart, my country!" (lines 25 and 33) at the start of successive stanzas also counts as anaphora. It's as if the one exclamation isn't enough: the speaker is so hopped up on their love of Australia, they have to exclaim twice over.

Where Anaphora appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "of"
- **Line 2:** "Of"
- **Line 3:** "Of"
- **Line 9:** "I love"
- **Line 10:** "of"
- **Line 11:** "Of"
- **Line 12:** "Of"
- **Line 13:** "I love"
- **Line 14:** "I love"
- **Line 17:** "The"
- **Line 19:** "The"
- **Line 20:** "The"
- **Line 25:** "Core of my heart, my country!"
- **Line 31:** "The"
- **Line 32:** "The"
- **Line 33:** "Core of my heart, my country!"

ALLITERATION

"My Country" is full of alliteration. This makes it sound more musical (which makes sense for a poem in the ballad tradition) and often reinforces the poem's meaning as well.

For example, the three /s/ words in line 6 (all of which coincide with stressed syllables) give the line a gentle, muted sound: "Brown streams and soft dim skies." This sound, of course, fits right in with the "soft[ness]" the line is describing. (Alliteration of /s/, /sh/, and /z/ sounds has a special name: sibilance.)

Here are a few other examples of alliteration reinforcing meaning in the poem:

- The breathy /h/ sounds in line 20 ("hot"/"hush") make the line itself sound more "hush[ed]."
- The /l/ alliteration and consonance in line 22 ("Where lithe lianas coil") make the line a bit of a tongue-twister, evoking the twisty vines the speaker is describing.
- The alliterative link between "Core" and "country" mirrors the link the speaker is drawing between Australia and the *core* of their being.
- The repeated /s/ sounds in line 32 ("steady, soaking") and /f/ sounds in line 35 ("For flood"/"fire"/"famine") mirror the relentlessness of the weather and natural disasters being described.
- The /l/ words in lines 42-43 ("lavish land"/"loved") subtly link together the speaker's love, the country they love, and one of the qualities they love it for (its *lavishness*, i.e., sumptuousness or generosity).

Where Alliteration appears in the poem:

- **Line 6:** "streams," "soft," "skies"
- **Line 9:** "love," "sunburnt"
- **Line 10:** "land," "sweeping"
- **Line 11:** "ragged," "ranges"
- **Line 12:** "rains"
- **Line 13:** "her," "horizons"
- **Line 18:** "moon"
- **Line 19:** "misted," "mountains"
- **Line 20:** "hot," "hush"
- **Line 22:** "lithe lianas"
- **Line 24:** "Smother," "soil"
- **Line 25:** "Core," "country"
- **Line 26:** "sky"
- **Line 27:** "sick"
- **Line 28:** "see"
- **Line 29:** "grey," "gather"
- **Line 32:** "steady, soaking"
- **Line 33:** "Core," "country"
- **Line 35:** "For flood," "fire," "famine"
- **Line 39:** "greenness"
- **Line 40:** "gaze"
- **Line 42:** "lavish land"
- **Line 43:** "loved"

ASSONANCE

The poem contains far more alliteration than assonance, but assonance (as well as its close cousin, internal rhyme) does appear in a few notable phrases.

Assonance adds pleasing musicality to the pleasant image of "shaded lanes" (line 2), for example, whereas the imperfect internal rhyme between "stark" and "barked" sounds somewhat jarring and harsh, in keeping with the "tragic" image of "ring-barked forests." (Ring-barking is a method of killing trees without chopping them down.) A long /o/ vowel appears in the same position (second syllable) of the last two lines of the poem, combining with end rhyme ("die"/"fly") to give the poem a crisp sense of closure:

> I know to what brown country
> My homing thoughts will fly.

Finally, assonance appears in what has become the most quoted line in the poem: "I love a sunburnt country" (line 9). One of the functions of sound effects like assonance is to make a phrase more memorable; in this case, it seems to have worked!

Where Assonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** “shaded lanes”
- **Line 9:** “love,” “sunburnt country”
- **Line 17:** “stark,” “barked”
- **Line 47:** “know”
- **Line 48:** “homing”

ANTITHESIS

The poem uses antithesis throughout the second stanza as a way of highlighting the extremes of the Australian environment. The speaker notes that:

- Australia is a land of both "sweeping plains" and "ragged mountain ranges" (lines 10-11): that is, it contains vast stretches of flatland and rugged highland.
- It's a land of both "droughts" and "flooding rains" (line 12), or extreme dry seasons and extreme rainy seasons.
- It's a land of both "beauty" and "terror" (line 15), two sharply contrasting (if not technically opposite) qualities.

The contrast between the tame (implicitly, English) countryside in the first stanza and the daunting Australian wilderness in the second stanza—in fact, throughout the rest of the poem—isn't technically antithesis (which refers to a single figure of speech), but the related device juxtaposition. The speaker juxtaposes these two landscapes in order to draw out stark differences between them. (And, more subtly, to suggest differences between the personalities that prefer one or the other.) Similarly, the fourth stanza presents a loose antithesis contrasting the "pitiless blue sky," which brings drought conditions, with the "grey clouds [that] gather" to bring a "bless[ed]" rain shower.

Where Antithesis appears in the poem:

- **Lines 10-11:** “A land of sweeping plains, / Of ragged mountain ranges,”
- **Line 12:** “Of droughts and flooding rains.”
- **Line 15:** “Her beauty and her terror—”
- **Line 26:** “Her pitiless blue sky,”
- **Line 29:** “But then the grey clouds gather,”

REPETITION

The poem contains many types of repetition (including the type known as anaphora, discussed elsewhere in this guide). Frequent repetition makes the speaker's love for Australia seem all the more powerful and emphatic.

This is a poem about patriotism, or love of country. It's no surprise, then, that it repeats "love" many times over: three times in the first stanza, three in the second, and once (the variant "loved") in the final stanza. The word "country" also gets a workout. Not only does it appear in the title, it also shows up as the final word in lines 9, 25, 33, 41, and 47. In two of these cases, it's part of a repeated phrase—"Core of my heart, my country!"—that sums up the speaker's (or poet's) patriotic joy.

The repetition of "and" in line 35 involves a different kind of repetition called polysyndeton: the insertion of coordinating conjunctions ("and," "or," etc.) in places where they're technically unnecessary, usually for rhythmic effect. It would be more concise here to say "flood, fire, and famine," but the speaker inserts an extra "and" ("flood and fire and famine"). This creates a piling-on effect—a sense of all the potential catastrophes building up. Readers get the sense that no matter how many environmental hardships Australia throws at the speaker, their love for their homeland won't change.

Where Repetition appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** “love,” “of”
- **Line 2:** “Of”
- **Line 3:** “Of”
- **Line 5:** “love,” “of”
- **Line 8:** “love”
- **Line 9:** “I love,” “country”
- **Line 10:** “of”
- **Line 11:** “Of”
- **Line 12:** “Of”
- **Line 13:** “I love her”
- **Line 14:** “I love her”
- **Line 15:** “Her,” “her”
- **Line 17:** “The”
- **Line 19:** “The”
- **Line 20:** “The”
- **Line 25:** “Core of my heart, my country!”
- **Line 33:** “Core of my heart, my country!”
- **Line 35:** “and,” “and”
- **Line 41:** “country”
- **Line 42:** “wilful”
- **Line 43:** “loved”
- **Line 44:** “will”
- **Line 47:** “country”

ASYNDETON

At several moments, the poem uses the device called asyndeton.

On one level, this just helps keep the poem's meter steady. Ordinarily, for example, one would expect an "and" to fall between the clauses in lines 2 and 3: "Of green and shaded lanes, and of ordered woods and gardens." This extra syllable would spoil the metrical rhythm, however, so the poet omits it. Remember that the meter here is iambic trimeter—it goes da-DUM da-DUM da-DUM:

Of green and shaded lanes,
Of ordered woods [...]

Were that second line to start "And of ordered," things wouldn't sound quite so metrically smooth. The same thing happens in lines 11-12 and lines 19-20: in each of these cases, too, one would expect an "and" to link the clauses. Omitting it makes the verse more crisp, concise, and rhythmically pleasing.

At the same time, asyndeton makes it feel like the speaker could go on and on with these lists—that there are endless elements of Australia that the speaker could highlight here. In this way, asyndeton helps just how vast and impressive Australia is in the speaker's mind.

Notice that the poem uses the opposite device—polysyndeton—in line 35. Rather than "flood, fire, and famine," the speaker inserts an extra, technically unnecessary "and": "flood and fire and famine." Here, the *addition* of a conjunction creates the sense of a listing piling up and up.

Where Asyndeton appears in the poem:

- **Lines 2-3:** "Of green and shaded lanes, / Of ordered woods and gardens"
- **Lines 11-12:** "Of ragged mountain ranges, / Of droughts and flooding rains."
- **Lines 19-20:** "The sapphire-misted mountains, / The hot gold hush of noon."

PERSONIFICATION

The poem personifies its subject: the country of Australia. The speaker calls the country "she" or "her," following an old convention of referring to countries by feminine pronouns, and expresses *patriotic* love as if it were *interpersonal* love (that is, a love between two people; notice the difference between a phrase like "loved her," in line 43, and the more impersonal "loved it").

The poem also ascribes human characteristics and behavior to the country, especially its natural environment. The speaker calls the Australian sky "pitiless" and imagines the rain after a drought as "The drumming of an army" (a metaphor involving personification). The speaker also claims that Australia "pays us back threefold" for the disasters it inflicts on people, as if the country felt guilt or some other change of heart. The last stanza calls Australia "opal-hearted," "wilful," and "lavish," as if the country had a personality combining hard-heartedness, inner beauty, stubbornness, and generosity. (One could add that the speaker seems to imagine the country as mercurial: sometimes harsh and sometimes kind, sometimes withholding and sometimes giving.)

When the speaker describes the sky as "pitiless," the land as "wilful," etc., they're using a specific kind of personification called the pathetic fallacy, which involves the attribution of human *emotions* to non-human things. The sky doesn't actually feel cruelly indifferent, and the land doesn't actually feel stubborn—they don't feel anything at all. But these emotional traits seem to correspond to the way they act. (The phrase "thirsty paddocks" in line 37 *looks* like an example of the pathetic fallacy, but doesn't quite count because thirst or dehydration is a physical state that vegetation can experience.)

Where Personification appears in the poem:

- **Lines 13-15:** "I love her far horizons, / I love her jewel-sea, / Her beauty and her terror—"
- **Line 26:** "Her pitiless blue sky,"
- **Lines 31-32:** "The drumming of an army, / The steady, soaking rain."
- **Lines 35-36:** "For flood and fire and famine, / She pays us back threefold—"
- **Lines 41-44:** "An opal-hearted country, / A wilful, lavish land— / All you who have not loved her, / You will not understand—"

VOCABULARY

Coppice (Line 1) - Woodland that's cropped and managed by human beings. (*Coppicing* is a process of cutting down trees and letting them regrow.)

Otherwise (Line 8) - Of a different nature.

Sweeping (Line 10) - Very broad or vast.

Jewel-sea (Line 14) - A metaphor describing a sea that's as glittering and beautiful as a jewel.

Ring-barked (Line 17) - Ring-barking means removing a strip of bark from around a tree branch or tree trunk. The area above the removed bark will die off. Ring-barking can be done naturally by animals or artificially by humans, as part of various cultivation or deforestation methods.

Sapphire-misted (Line 19) - Surrounded by mist that's blue and beautiful, like a sapphire.

Brushes (Line 21) - Thickets or areas of undergrowth in a forest. Also known as brushwood, underbrush, etc.

Lithe (Line 22) - Slim, graceful, and/or agile.

Lianas (Line 22) - Long, woody vines that climb up trees and are often found in tropical forests.

Orchid-laden (Line 23) - Covered in or weighed down by orchid flowers.

Tree ferns (Line 23) - Large ferns with tree-like trunks.

Rainbow Gold (Line 34) - The mythical gold found at the end of a rainbow. Here, "Land of the Rainbow Gold" suggests both the magical qualities and the geographical remoteness of Australia, a country found "at the ends of the earth," so to speak.

Threefold (Line 36) - Three times over.

Paddocks (Line 37) - Enclosed pastures for horses or other livestock.

Filmy (Line 39) - Thin, misty, or transparent.

Opal-hearted (Line 41) - Having a heart like an opal (a whitish, iridescent gem mined in Australia).

Wilful (Line 42) - Alternative spelling of *willful*, meaning stubborn and unyielding.

Lavish (Line 42) - Sumptuous and/or generous.

Homing (Line 48) - Heading homeward (like a homing pigeon).

FORM, METER, & RHYME

FORM

"My Country" consists of six octaves (eight-line stanzas) whose lines follow a strict iambic (da-DUM) meter and an ABCBDEFE rhyme scheme (even-numbered lines rhyme with each other, but odd-numbered lines do not).

The poem's meter and rhyme scheme place it within the ballad tradition:

- Ballads are most commonly written in quatrains, but some, like "My Country," use octaves (as if each stanza were two quatrains glued together).
- Ballads also typically *alternate* between lines of iambic tetrameter and iambic trimeter, but all-trimeter (or all-tetrameter) patterns are traditional, too. (More on what this means in the Meter section of this guide.)

The ballad is a popular form often found in folk verse, children's verse, song lyrics, and the like. In Australia, it features in a particular genre tradition called the "bush ballad," meaning poetry that celebrates the country's wilderness, history, and culture. "My Country" uses language that's less folksy and more "literary" than the average bush ballad, and unlike many bush ballads, it doesn't contain a narrative (it's a lyric poem). Still, it draws on this tradition and echoes its themes of Australian pride.

The combination of song-like form and patriotic content also makes "My Country" sound a bit like an anthem. Australia's actual national anthem, "Advance Australia Fair," also uses a variation of the ballad form.

METER

The poem uses iambic trimeter throughout. In other words, its lines typically contain three iambs (metrical feet consisting of an unstressed followed by a stressed syllable), giving them a "da-DUM, da-DUM, da-DUM" rhythm. There are occasional variations thrown into the mix, but for the most part, the meter remains very steady—perhaps reflecting the speaker's steadfast national pride.

The odd-numbered lines in the poem also have something called "feminine endings," meaning they contain an extra unstressed syllable (such as the "-pice" in "coppice"). This contrasts with the "masculine endings" of the even-numbered lines. Here's how all this sounds in lines 1-4:

> The love | of field | and cop- | pice,
> Of green | and sha- | ded lanes,
> Of or- | dered woods | and gar- | dens
> Is run- | ning in | your veins—

These first four lines follow the iambic trimeter pattern exactly, with no variations. The first variation appears in line 5:

> Strong love | of grey- | blue dis- | tance,

Notice that there's an extra stressed syllable here: "Strong." The extra stress helps evoke the *strength* of the love being described!

Metrical variations don't always correspond directly to meaning in this way; sometimes they just keep a poem's rhythm from becoming too predictable. But some of the other variations in the poem also reinforce meaning, as in lines 25 and 33:

> Core of | my heart, | my coun- | try!

Here, the line begins with a trochee (a foot consisting of a stressed followed by an unstressed syllable) rather than an iamb. This switch places strong stress on "Core," as if emphasizing that the speaker's country lies at the very *core*, the very center, of their identity.

RHYME SCHEME

The odd-numbered lines in "My Country" are unrhymed, while the even-numbered lines rhyme in pairs. The rhyme scheme of each stanza is:

ABCBDEFE

Readers can think of the poem's octaves, or eight-line stanzas, as being made up of two ballad quatrains (which typically rhyme ABCB) stuck together.

All the rhymes in the poem are exact; there are no imperfect or slant rhymes. Even "again" and "rain" (lines 30 and 32) rhyme perfectly in the poet's native accent, as readers can hear in recordings.

Like the steady meter, the poem's smooth, consistent rhyming seems to echo the speaker's steadfast patriotism. (The poem's formal regularity is also partly a product of its era; "My Country" was first published in 1908, shortly before the

"modernist" movement that made formal experimentation more common in English-language poetry.)

SPEAKER

The speaker of "My Country" is a proud Australian very much like the poet herself. The poem is written in the first person, but at times, the "I" seems to speak on behalf of all Australians—the "us" or "we" mentioned in lines 27, 30, 36, and 40. One could say, then, that the voice of the poem is both Dorothea Mackellar *and* a kind of generic Australian.

The speaker is extremely proud of their country and of its stunning natural landscapes in particular. They recognize that the climate and terrain of Australia can be harsh, but for them, that harshness is part of the country's charm. They embrace their homeland in all its "beauty" *and* its "terror," and they lovingly describe its features throughout the poem.

In the first stanza, the speaker also addresses a "you" who prefers a more tame, "ordered" landscape—like the countryside found in the United Kingdom. ("My Country" was inspired by a conversation Mackellar had with a friend after a trip to England.) The speaker "cannot share" the other person's love of such cozy countryside; by implication, they prefer Australia, where they were born, over the UK, where most white Australians' ancestors were born.

In the last stanza, the speaker addresses a wider audience, taking a proudly defiant attitude toward "All you who have not loved [Australia]." Of course, by thumbing their nose at people who don't "understand" their country, the speaker also implicitly courts readers who *do* understand it. Unsurprisingly, the poem has proved a popular favorite in Australia!

SETTING

The poem's title introduces its setting: "My Country" is Australia, where the poet, Dorothea Mackellar, was born and spent most of her life.

The speaker describes this setting in lush language and loving tones, devoting special attention to Australia's rugged, beautiful natural landscape. The poem describes this environment from "plains" to "mountain ranges," from "sky" to "jewel-sea." It barely even hints at a human presence, aside from the "ring-barked forests" (forests in which people have killed trees as a form of land management) in lines 17-18 and the "paddocks" (enclosed livestock pastures) in line 37. The emphasis throughout is on Australia's wildness—in contrast with the tame English-style countryside ("shaded lanes," "ordered woods," etc.) described in the first stanza.

Unlike the UK—where the families of Mackellar and most other white Australians originated—Australia has desert and tropical regions and an often extreme climate. The poem repeatedly emphasizes this aspect of the country, which it calls "sunburnt" and "brown" with heat. It refers to the "hot gold hush of noon" and mentions the "droughts and flooding rains" that appear cyclically, causing "cattle [to] die" and their paddocks to grow "thirsty" before rain and "greenness" return. At its most intense, the country is like a "wilful" but "lavish" deity, sending Australians "fire and flood and famine" but "pay[ing] us back threefold" with wondrous beauty. At its most enchanting, the country is like the mythical land at the end of the "Rainbow."

Despite the occasional hardships it imposes, then, Australia is the speaker's favorite setting in the world—the "Core of [their] heart" and the greatest of all the "splendours" the "earth holds."

CONTEXT

LITERARY CONTEXT

Dorothea Mackellar wrote the first draft of "My Country" when she was just 19 and published the first version (titled "Core of My Heart") when she was 23. The poem had at least two direct sources of inspiration. One was a conversation Mackellar had with a friend (the unnamed "your" in the first stanza), contrasting England and Australia after the two had visited the UK. The other was a rainstorm that ended a drought and caused the "greenness" mentioned in the fifth stanza. In 1965, the poet recalled:

> [T]he land to the horizon became green. I would not have seen this by walking across the paddock, but from the veranda looking to the horizon I could see this taking place. It was actually becoming green. That is why I called it a filmy veil.

The poem was first published in the *London Spectator* in 1908, then quickly picked up by newspapers in Australia, where it became an instant hit. Mackellar subsequently republished it in her collections *The Closed Door, and Other Verses* (1911) and *The Witch-Maid, and Other Verses* (1914), changing the title and some wording in the third stanza in the process.

(As a result, the text of the poem varies slightly from edition to edition, with the third stanza sometimes beginning "The tragic ring-barked forests / Stark white beneath the moon" and ending "And orchids deck the tree-tops, / And ferns the warm dark soil." The text in this guide uses the title "My Country" but otherwise preserves the wording of the original 1908 version.)

With its patriotic fervor and its adaptation of the ballad form, "My Country" draws on the genre traditions of both the anthem and the Australian "bush ballad." The latter is a tradition of folk verse and popular songs celebrating Australia's history, culture, and natural environment (in Australia, "the bush" means the backwoods or wilderness). Much of

Mackellar's work falls generally within the tradition of bush balladry or bush poetry. "My Country" remains her most famous poem; "I love a sunburnt country," in particular, is a much-quoted statement of Australian pride.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

At the time the poem was published (1908), Australia had only recently achieved nationhood within the British Empire. Its British colonies united to become the Commonwealth of Australia in 1901 and formally gained self-governing "dominion" status in 1907. Thus, "My Country" celebrates a country whose (relative) independence was still brand new.

The poem's declared preference for Australian wilderness over tame English countryside might be read as a political statement: an assertion of national pride in the face of Australia's former imperial rulers. It could also be a way of implying that Australians are tougher and more rugged than UK residents, who are accustomed to their "ordered," "soft" environment.

Mackellar's ancestors, like those of most white Australians, came from the UK. Britain initially colonized what became Australia in the 18th century, establishing a prison colony in modern-day New South Wales. As it colonized the rest of the continent over the following century, it displaced the continent's Aboriginal peoples and killed many thousands through armed conflict and disease. It also asserted control over the continent's natural resources, including timber, gold, and opal.

Mackellar's patriotic poem omits most of this grim history, though it does mention the continent's "tragic"-looking "ring-barked forests." British colonists used ring-barking—stripping off rings of bark in order to kill trees without felling them—as a method of deforestation and land management. This practice left forests of dead trees standing in the southeast and other areas of the country.

MORE RESOURCES

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- The Poet Reads the Poem — Listen to "My Country" recited by Dorothea Mackellar. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o5bNhQrKay0)
- The Poet's Life — A biography of Mackellar, courtesy of the Australian Dictionary of Biography. (https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/mackellar-isobel-marion-dorothea-7383)
- A Film About the Poet — A short film about Mackellar, via the State Library of New South Wales. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uQK3XEGI4pc)
- An Interview with the Poet — A 1965 interview in which Mackellar recalls the writing of "My Country." (https://www.smh.com.au/national/from-the-archives-1965-why-i-wrote-my-country-20200306-p547k9.html)
- The Land of "My Country" — An article by Mackellar's biographer arguing for protection of the natural landscape that inspired "My Country." (https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2020/may/29/if-we-love-our-sunburnt-country-we-should-be-protecting-its-heritage-not-exploding-it-)
- The Poet's Literary Legacy — Visit the official website of the Dorothea Mackellar Poetry Awards, which includes further information and resources related to the poet. (https://www.dorothea.com.au/)

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