

Slessor's poetry continues to engage readers through its poetic treatment of universal concerns. To what extent does this perspective align with your own interpretation of Slessor's poetry. In your response make detailed references to at least TWO of the poems set for study.

The poetic treatment of universal concerns in Kenneth Slessor's poetry continues to engage readers. The literary critic, Terry Sturm's assessment of Slessor's poetry resonates with my opinion, 'In the work of Slessor, Australian poetry found its first authentically modernist voice'. Slessor's use of modernist techniques conveys his bleak perspective on life and nihilistic vision. The poems 'Beach Burial' (1942) and 'Out of Time' explore the themes of time and memory as well as questioning the purpose of human existence and are therefore of continued relevance to my world due to their timeless universal nature.

'Beach Burial' is a powerful anti-war poem. Terry Sturm's perspective is insightful and reflects my understanding of the poem, "... much of the elegiac intensity and restrained pathos is generated by the rhythmic pattern of each stanza ... evoking an active world of flux and dissolution ... as it registers the human facts of loss and death." Australia's involvement in international conflict and the continuous slaughter of human life allows the poem to maintain its relevance, despite being written in 1942.

The poem is written as an elegy in the form of five quatrains with pararhyme occurring in the third line of each quatrain. Slessor focuses on the helplessness of humanity in the face of war and its outcomes. The poem explores the notion of death as an equaliser that strips man of his identity and his ultimate anonymity in death renders our existence meaningless. The introductory line 'Softly and humbly' consists of gentle consonant sounds which subvert the typical image of war. Man's anonymity is expressed in the use of a collective noun and metaphor, 'The convoys of dead sailors'. The further use of assonance and alliteration in 'sway and wander in the waters down under' envisions the movement of their lifeless bodies as 'morning rolls them in'. The morning being symbolic of a new day is used to create pathos for their powerless forms and the waste of human life.

The second stanza begins with the use of onomatopoeia and personification, 'Between the sobbing and clubbing of the gunfire' which reinforces the brutality of war through the harsh consonant 'B' sound. The use of a collective noun, 'pluck them from the shallows and bury them in burrows' highlights their lack of identity in death while harsh sounding alliteration and assonance captures the hasty nature of their burial. The impersonal burial is further shown in the crudely-made 'stake of tidewood' which symbolises the absence of post-mortem rituals that may have given meaning to their lost life. The final stanza of the poem reveals Slessor's philosophical side as it is concerned with questioning the purpose of war and life. The use of metaphors and emotive language, "Dead seamen, gone in search of the same landfall" suggests that they battled for death. This stanza emphasises that every one, no matter what nationality, suffers the same fate in war as they are 'Enlisted on the other front'. 'Beach Burial' continues to be relevant to me due to the ever present wars that characterise my context.

'Out of Time' is one of Kenneth Slessor's more nihilistic poems. T. Inglis Moore's assessment of the poem reflects my opinion, "Slessor insists on facing, with an inflexible realism, the reduction of life to nothingness by the twin powers of Time and Death who are symbolised by the ever-flowing, irresistible sea". The poem is an expression of the nature of time specifically its power and destructive force.

The poem is narrated in first-person in the form of three sonnets interlocked through repetition. Each sonnet is made up of three quatrains and a rhyming couplet. The final line of the poem reflects the first line. The cyclical structure gives the poem a balanced and steady rhythm which represents the free flowing nature of time that we have no control over. Slessor attempts to capture a 'moment' in time, however cannot do so due to the invincibility of Time. This is evident in the repetition of 'moment' in each sonnet: 'this lovely moment', 'I and the moment laugh', 'the moment's world it was'. That 'moment' metaphorically represents the brevity of our existence in comparison to Time's continuity, 'He keeps appointments with a million years'. The juxtaposition of 'moment' and 'million' reinforces the brevity of our life.

The capitalisation of 'Time' makes it read as a proper noun, reinforcing its power and control through personification. The affect of time is described through the accumulation of verbs, 'piercing', 'thrusting', 'drills me' and the metaphoric description of time as 'the wave' and 'the bony knife' paints a picture of Time as a ruthless and cruel figure. Time is further described in the repetition and listing of personal pronouns, 'Vilely, continuously, stupidly, / Time takes me, drills me, drives me through bone and vein', which emphasises the impact of time on the individual. This is then juxtaposed with the third person reference, 'He keeps appointments' which suggests that time is impersonal and does not discriminate.

Alliteration and assonance are used throughout the poem to maintain rhythm, 'So water bends the seaweeds in the sea', thereby expressing the movement of the sea and time, which are forces that cannot be slowed. The constant images of Sydney Harbour highlight its importance in Slessor's life, shown through the continuous reference to the sea: 'time flowing like the hundred yacht's', time is a 'wave', time is the 'slats' of sunlight piercing the water. The power of Time is represented metaphorically by the sea, 'So time, the wave, enfolds me in its bed' which highlights the significance of time in our short lives as time is but a wave that engulfs life. The poem's final line echoes the first, 'The gulls go down, the body dies and rots, / And Time flows past them like a hundred yachts'. This verse voices Slessor's nihilistic perspective and reinforces the notion that death is unavoidable. The final mood of the poem is that despite our resistance, time inevitably drags us to our death. This poem is especially relevant to me because of its universal and timeless themes.

In conclusion, Kenneth Slessor's poetry continues to engage readers through its poetic treatment of universal concerns. 'Beach Burial' and 'Out of Time' are especially relevant to my world due to their timeless and universal quality.

