

Throughout my evaluation of Slessor's poetry, I've observed the concept of Time as possessing an immense thematic and symbolic prominence throughout his oeuvre. Shaped by the festering miasma of World War II and his own personal experiences with death, I've interpreted *Five Bells* as embodying Slessor's desperate interrogation of the human existence; an eager quest seeking life's purpose, which for Slessor, ultimately remains unresolved; a product of adamant secularism. Similarly, I believe *Out of Time* represents Slessor's animosity towards time, catalysed by his nihilistic acknowledgement of the inevitable human mortality; a harrowing recognition of our transience in the face of time's infinite expanse. Despite their structural disparities, my critical analysis of Slessor's oeuvre has revealed to me how his skilful manipulation of poetic language and consistent use of linguistic techniques have combined to convey his insights into what I perceive as his most overwhelming thematic concern: time.

Five Bells revolves around Slessor's recurring anamnesis of his deceased friend. Joe Lynch is the catalyst which sparks Slessor's desire to derive meaning and purpose for the perceived triviality of humanity's existence. The second stanza conveys a desolate image of a night so lifeless that, the Southern "Cross hangs up-side down in the water," and "night and water pour to one rip of darkness." Reflecting on these lines, I perceived an atmosphere of complete oblivion being established, accentuated by the deathly tone of the "Five bells, coldly rung out in a machine's voice,"; a scene which renders Lynch's existence virtually insignificant.

The environment depicted is dismissively bleak, and reinforcing of the fact that no one and nothing mourns or acknowledges the presence of Lynch's bones in the harbour. After analysing Slessor's *Beach Burial*, I've observed that, contrasting with the dead soldiers at El Alamein, Lynch never has the dignity of being, "plucked from the shallows," and buried. Instead, Lynch's "body dies and rots," and Time simply flows past him, like the "hundred yachts." This hollow pathetic fallacy returned me to Slessor's underlying existential inquisitorial, "Why do I think of you, dead man?"

I interpreted Slessor's *Out of Time*, as exploring the duality of time; an engineer of, "lovely moments," sustaining and "eager to quench and ripen," "enfolding." Similarly, my reflection on *Sensuality*, revealed to me how the beautiful sensations of life are vividly expressed, and how their eloquence is elucidated through the myriad of kinaesthetic and olfactory imagery, "Time in a kiss, tasting, laughter like flame, holding... cedar and sweat, smelling," which in my opinion, unanimously refutes critic Paul Kane's claim that Slessor is simply a "nihilist."

Conversely, I've also observed time as being malevolently personified in *Out of Time* as a silent assailant, a "bony knife," that runs us through. The repetition of the "ly" sound in the adverbs, "Vilely, continuously, stupidly," and the alliteration of the forceful "d" consonant in, "drills me," and "drives me," evinces time's killing capacity. This onomatopoeic image of a heartbeat gradually slowing was evoked in my mind; an image which ultimately leads to time's abandonment of our "lovely" moment known as life, "at his back."

But in my opinion, Slessor's overwhelming question is still unresolved. What is the ultimate meaning of life if all that remains are the remnants of Slessor's memories of Lynch? What is the point of Lynch having lived a life at all, if as Slessor expresses, these memories are metaphorically as "profitless," as the floating debris that catches in the "flukes" of the warship's anchor? Thus, I believe *Five Bells* as

ending with Slessor returning to where he began; devoid of a sense of purpose and thirsty for an answer as hollow tone of the "Five bells. Five bells coldly ring out."

During my study of *Out of Time*, I perceived the poem as representing an extended metaphor for Slessor's acceptance of our inevitable, impending mortality, conveyed through exploration of the entity of time itself. In the final stanza, I felt like Slessor created an atmosphere of youthful carelessness through the weightless sibilance of the repeated, "less," sound in, "fleshless and ageless, changeless." In my view, Slessor's personification of the present in, "I and the moment laugh, and let him go," relegates time to a powerless dimension able to be terminated at command.

Slessor's antagonism towards time and his desire to be, "Out of Time," is evident in the disdainful tone of his cries, "You must cry farewell... and leave this moment at your back!," supporting critic Julian Croft's statement that, "the desire to escape the limits of normal time and the inability to do so constitutes an unresolved obsession." This belligerence towards time became even more evident during my analysis of *Sleep*, where I interpreted time as being personified as a pair of "remorseless forceps," and in *Five Bells*, where the gruesome imagery of time, pushing its, "black thumb-balls," into Joe's skull reveals Slessor's murderous perceptions of time.

However Slessor's desire to escape time and the human attempt at chronicling time as I perceived it during my analysis of *Five Bells*, is mocked through the larger image of humanity and its moments, "leaning" powerlessly against time's, "golden undertow." The fifth stanza reinforces this, through the human failure to "anchor" even a moment, juxtaposed with the ability of time to, "keep appointments with a million years." Humanity's attempt at monitoring time through chronological contraptions is further mocked as a, "bumpkin calculus," in *Five Bells*; the absurd juxtaposition of an uncivilised person with the complex mathematical study of change.

Both *Out of Time* and *Five Bells* end how they began; unresolved. Slessor is left disillusioned, without a purpose and yearning to escape the physical domain, in which the tide of time erodes and erases. In contrast to *Five Bells*, which I've observed as evincing Slessor's frantic search for meaning, *Out of Time* in my opinion represents the ultimate demise of Slessor's hope and search for purpose. The nihilism which so many critics observe, is epitomised in the last line of *Out of Time*, "The gulls go down, the body dies and rots, And Time flows past them like a hundred yachts."

Beach Burial (extra paragraph)

Beach Burial embodies a manifestation of Slessor's repulsion of war; a suicidal exercise that ultimately catalyses time's extermination of humanity. During the poem's onset, the repetition of the "ly" sound in the adverbs, "softly and humbly," and the tranquil kinaesthetic imagery, "But morning rolls them in the foam," starkly contrasts with the inherent characteristics of war and the inexorable, violent nature of time reflected in *Five Bells*. This contrast ironically but effectively communicates Slessor's warning towards humanity; that time does not need to be actively eroding humanity, if humanity is actively destroying itself.

Despite critic Adrian Caesar's optimistic perspective that the aftermath of war is a period where, "parting is lamented," "sorrow is tempered by consolation," and celebrations of "the bond of humanity," are facilitated, in my opinion, Slessor's true perspective is thoroughly antithetical. The inscription, "Unknown seaman," and the monotonous tone of the words, "wavers and fades," elucidates the deterioration of the soldiers' existence to such an extent that they are unidentifiable. The only remaining resemblances that the deceased soldiers at El Alamein share, are that they are human.

The lines "Whether as enemies they fought," "the sand joins them together, Enlisted on the other front," reflect that despite the conflicts that occur in the domain of the living over their differences, in death people share a sole similarity; that they were humans. Thus, Slessor's final lines coalesce his opposition of war as a futile, senseless removal of life that inevitably leads to the "same landfall," in which all are "Unknown" and forgotten.

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