Kenneth Slessor: entry for Routledge Encyclopedia of Modernism

Kenneth Slessor (born Kenneth Adolphe Schloesser in East Orange, NSW on 27 March 1901, died 30 June 1971) was a major Australian poet, essayist, editor and journalist. He contributed to Australian letters on a number of fronts: he was a successful journalist, acting as Australia’s official war correspondent during the Second World War, and wrote a number of essays on social and literary topics. He edited the little magazines *Vision* with Jack Lindsay from 1923-24 and *Southerly* from 1956-61, collaborated with Jack and Norman Lindsay on the anthology *Poetry in Australia* (1923), and edited *The Penguin Book of Australian Verse* (1958). His poetry is characterised by experimentation, a focus on the concrete image, and an intensity of metaphors, features which have led him to be seen as one of the central figures in the development of poetic modernism in Australia. While turning away from the bush tradition of Paterson, Lawson and other ‘radical nationalists’, he did not abandon Australian settings and subjects, instead writing about these from a background of European culture and literature, with time, flux and death appearing as central preoccupations. “Five Bells” (1939) is considered his finest poem. The influence of Imagism may be seen in such poems as “William Street”, “Talbingo” and “Country Towns”, while critics have also discerned the influence of Symbolism in his work.

References and further reading

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