

“The poetry of Slessor has little to offer the modern reader.” Discuss in reference to 3 poems.

“The poetry of Slessor has little to offer the modern reader”, this statement does not depict the effectiveness of Kenneth Slessor's poetry. The poetry of Slessor in fact has a substantial amount to offer the modern reader. The variety of messages showcased in Slessor's poems, can be related to by the modern reader. Three poems of Slessor that showcase a diverse range of themes are ‘Wild Grapes’, ‘Gulliver’, and ‘Vesper Song of Reverend Samuel Marsden’. These poems encapsulate numerous human experiences, which can be seen in our society today. The modern reader will realise that the human experiences present in Slessor's poems, are also prevalent in their day to day life.

‘Wild Grapes’ composed by Kenneth Slessor showcases the theme of time passing. This poem allows the modern reader to have the opportunity to relate to moments where they may feel overwhelmed by time. ‘Wild Grapes’ depicts time taking a toll on the persona taken on in the poem, as time has tarnished a past memory. Evidence of this is the line “And apples bright as dogstars, now there is not an apple or cherry; Only grapes.” This quote shows that time has caused drastic changes in the orchard. Slessor uses ‘Grapes’ as a metaphor, for a past love. The modern reader will be able to relate as at times they may feel overwhelmed by time. They will come away with the message of time passes, people come and go, but some memories will forever be remembered, just like Slessor is reminded of a past sensual moment. The line that portrays this moment is “That in their harsh sweetness remind me somehow of dark hair swinging and silver pins.” Another human experience seen in ‘Wild Grapes’ is the inconsistencies of life. Evidence of this is where Kenneth Slessor uses juxtaposition in the line “Kissed here -- or killed here -- but who remembers now?.” Modern readers will be able to relate to this human experience as life is going to give moments of uncertainty. Even though ‘Wild Grapes’ is a poem that is quite distinct from modern society, the underlying message in the text is one that modern readers can relate, and possibly learn from.

‘Gulliver’ written by Kenneth Slessor, is a poem that is an allusion to Jonathan Swift's ‘Gulliver's Travels’. ‘Gulliver’ is the most relatable poem to the modern reader, as it encapsulates being theoretically trapped by the events of life. Kenneth Slessor takes on the persona of Gulliver, and goes on to showcase the physical, and psychological adversity he went through. An example of the physical pain he experienced is, “Lashed with a hundred ropes of nerve and bone”, whereas the evidence of the psychological adversity is seen through the metaphor of “Manacles confine me”, which shows he is trapped by life. The main theme in this poem is facing ordinary human experiences, but not being capable of overcoming them. Evidence of the theme throughout the poem is the repetition “If you’ll”, this reinforces the idea that Slessor's persona is not able to do certain things such as getting a “simple stone”, which is seen in the second line. The poem starts off in an aggressive manner, as Slessor states “I’ll kick your walls to bits, I’ll die scratching a tunnel”, and the ending contrasts this persona, as it seems like Gulliver has lost hope, as he states, “For God's sake, call the hangman.” These examples convey a change in tone of language, which can also portray the human experience of inconsistencies in life. “Love, Hunger, Drunkenness, neuralgia, debt, Cold weather, hot weather, sleep and age”, this line identifies that Gulliver is trapped by ordinary human experiences,

which are events that are inevitable in day to day life. In particular “Cold weather, Hot weather”, which is a metaphor symbolising he is trapped by the events of life. This is where the modern reader is able to relate, as they will feel trapped by life at some point. However, unlike Gulliver, they will hopefully learn to not give up, and continue to persevere to overcome the adversity the human experiences may have caused. ‘Gulliver’ is a poem which encompasses a variety of human experiences, these experiences allow the modern reader to have a perception on the manner they may overcome physical, and psychological adversity.

‘Vesper-Song of the Reverend Samuel Marsden’ composed by Kenneth Slessor, was written to showcase the sheer malice Reverend Samuel Marsden exerted against the convicts. The theme of this poem was the abuse of civil and religious power. The modern reader is able to relate to this poem as in today's world, there are civil powers exerting power in an unlawful way. Slessor takes on the persona of Reverend Samuel Marsden. This is seen with the repetition of “My” in the beginning of the poem. Slessor use quite violent imagery throughout the poem. Example of this is “On backs bowed down and bodies bent. My stripes of Jewelled blood repeat, a scarlet grace for holy meat.” These images give the reader a visualisation of the sheer brutality Reverend Samuel Marsden was exerting against the convicts. The poem depicts the irony of a religious figure enforcing brutal punishments. The modern readers can relate to this, as there are numerous religious figures today that have committed wrong. Kenneth Slessor uses religious language such as “Testament”, “Lord”, “Saints” and “Paradise” throughout the poem. However, these religious statements are juxtaposed by the disturbing image of “A scarlet Grace for holy meat”, which depicts the twisted mentality of the persona. Reverend Samuel Marsden enjoyed the malice he was applying to the convicts, and was eager to fetch more blood. Example of this is the line “Grant me a whip in hell instead, Where blood is not so hard to fetch”, this signifies that Reverend Samuel Marsden was complacent, as he was satisfied by what he was doing. The modern reader will be capable of relating to these events, as in their lives they may experience individuals who get complacent for the wrong reason. They will learn that there are people in the world that abuse their power, but at times these individuals require others to nullify their actions, and arrogance. A rhetorical question seen in the poem is “Are there not Saints in holier skies Who have been scourged to Paradise?”. This line suggests that Reverend Samuel Marsden is actually using his power to cleanse the world of wrong. This can also be related to by the modern reader, as it can encapsulate individuals in the world today who are doing wrong, but they think they have good intentions. Overall, ‘Vesper-Song of the Reverend Samuel Marsden’ showcases a complex paradox, however, the modern reader is able to relate to the underlying messages that can be drawn out of the text.

The poetry of Slessor allows the modern reader to relate to human experiences present throughout his poems. Three of his poems that showcase a diverse range of messages were ‘Wild Grapes’, ‘Gulliver’, and ‘Vesper-Song of the Reverend Samuel Marsden’. These poems encompass many issues, and human experiences that are evident in today's society. Slessor's poems delve into the complexities of life, be it, the inconsistencies of life, the relentlessness of time, being theoretically trapped by life, or abuse of civil powers. The modern reader will be able to relate as his poems are still highly relevant today. Thus, the reason why the statement “The poetry of

Slessor has little to offer the modern reader” is incorrect, and in fact Slessor's poetry has a substantial amount to offer the modern reader.