DOI: 10.35515/zfa/asj.35/2021.08

Australian Studies Journal
Zeitschrift für Australienstudien
35 — 2021

Philip Mead

Kenneth Slessor, Film Writing, and Popular Culture

The prolific journalistic work of Kenneth Slessor (1901-1971) provides a valuable case study in the history of print culture in mid-twentieth century Australia, as well as a rich chronicle of the evolution of the cinema over the same period. It is also a significant aspect of the corpus of Slessor's writing that has gone largely unnoticed. Slessor's film writing is a record of a talented writer's role in mediating popular print culture's relations to adjacent cultural institutions of cinema, like live theatre, literature, music and visual art. All this writing was informed by an acute awareness of the new medium of cinema's relations to everyday life and by subjective considerations of national and international networks of film production, distribution and reception. Slessor's intermedial writing within the genres and production values of daily and weekly journalism was a way of representing and commenting on theatre performance, moving image and social life in a medium other than that in which they were experienced.

Slessor's working life as a journalist involved a constant and intense experience of modern Australian cultural life, typically in the city, from the 1920s to the 1940s at a time when newspapers were a dominant medium of orchestrating social, cultural and political life, with a large variety of genres and styles that would later shift into other media. This was an era when journalistic writing generally didn't use by-lines, except when certain privileged forms within the medium of the newspaper allowed the recognition of an authorial presence – 'special' writers. Slessor's journalism from the beginning of his career spanned the full range of anonymous and named or signed writing. The record of this writing is a copious archive of how cultural life was visualized, interpreted and translated through the medium of print in twentieth-century Australia.

While literary history has been relatively codified from early on, given its definitional usefulness to a nationalising culture, the history of journalism and film writing in Australia, though it is from a later era, has been much less systematic, often scattered and intermittent. Tom O'Regan and Huw Walmsley-Evans have usefully characterised the emergence of film criticism in Australia as a staged history, beginning with the moment of "independent commentary" from the late teens and 1920s, when the "discourse on film in daily newspapers broke with publicity and the incidental news item to create independent views and short comment upon films".[1]

This is the moment in which Slessor first starts to write about films for the newspapers where he worked – still the silent era of course. Slessor's chief period of film writing, though, belongs to what O'Regan and Walmsley-Evans describe as the following period or the 'film as film' moment when film criticism that "attended to film as a medium or art-form in its own right" emerged, and film

1 Tom O'Regan, Huw Walmsley-Evans: The Emergence of Australian Film Criticism, p. 297.

reviewing became a "more defined form of cultural expression requiring new tasks and competencies of journalists".[2] The coming of sound in 1929 was a defining aspect of this stage. This was also the case for film writing in the tradition of literary journalism, a more expansive journalistic style in terms of vocabulary, description and judgement associated with writing about books, art, theatre, and culture generally.[3] Film reviewers and critics who, roughly contemporaneous with Slessor and who have helped to establish this 'film as film' moment in Australia, included Lalie Seton Cray in 'The Triad', Erle Cox at 'The Argus', Josephine O'Neill at 'The Daily Telegraph', and Beatrice Tildesley writing for the 'Women's Weekly'. Slessor's film writing belongs to this under-recorded and still largely archival world of literary production.

While Slessor is one of the most prominent of Australian poets, with selected and collected poetry volumes as well as substantial scholarly and critical attention to his work, his film writing and other journalism has been of little interest to literary scholars. Indeed film writing, generally, of which there have been some outstanding practitioners in Australia has received next to no attention from literary historians and critics. Likewise, Slessor's extensive reviewing of film and coverage of the film industry and distribution, national and international, has hardly been noticed in the history of Australian journalism or in Media Studies and cinema history. Slessor's film writings reveal much more than the melancholy poet of Elizabeth Bay and Australia's maritime history; in his film writing he appears as a sparkling humourist, a satirist, a cultural omnivore, a master of irony, and as encyclopaedically knowledgeable about film genres and production, and about film's adaptations of literature, music and theatre. Perhaps most importantly he was also uniquely situated, historically, to witness first-hand the development of cinema in Australia, from its early silent beginnings to the advent of sound and the golden age of Hollywood movies, and the emergence of a national cinema.

'Smith's Weekly''s, where Slessor concentrates on writing about film, had a unique place over its life as a newspaper, from 1919 to 1950, in Australia and New Zealand, as a weekly paper with a genuine Australasian distribution. Styling itself as the 'diggers' paper' it was often racist, sexist and xenophobic, but it also valued good writing, supported the work of many black-and-white artists and offered lively discussions of politics, theatre, horse-racing, boxing, publishing, and issues of relevance to returned service men. And Slessor's comprehensive and insightful writing for 'Smith's' about film was a highlight of that newspaper's chronicling of the media, nationally. It represents one of the most vital and complex documents of mid-twentieth century Australian culture by a writer who was recognized as one of Australia's most accomplished poets, but who was also completely at home in the medium of an unashamedly popular newspaper. Its value lies in the power and quality of Slessor's writing, in its weekly chronicling of the experience of moviegoing, and annual documenting of movie production

2 Ibid., p. 302.
3 Ibid., p. 303.

in its formative century, and in the distinctively Australian experience and development of a popular cultural form.

Slessor began his working life as a journalist as a cadet on the Sydney 'Sun' in 1918, having left school, at the age of 17, after completing his Leaving Certificate. He was clearly attracted to the world of journalism, also enrolling that year in a shorthand course at the Sydney Metropolitan Business College.[4] He was already an established poet, having published poems as a schoolboy in the 'Bulletin' in July 1917 and in 1918, a poem "France – 1918", that won the international 'Victoria League' poetry prize. Slessor learnt his trade as a journalist on the 'Sun', an evening broadsheet paper, notable for its technological innovations in design and production and its coverage of crime, human interest and entertainment. Slessor covered rounds of all kinds, but also contributed signed columns about a range of topics such as city life, suburbia, mythology, and in a variety of styles, sometimes serious, sometimes satirical, as well as original poems. Some of these poems, like "Threatenings" and "Two Nocturnes", were later included in his first collection, 'Thief of the Moon', published in 1924 – "In sphery Morse, the little planets wink" ("Two Nocturnes"). Over this period when Slessor was working at the 'Sun' it published weekly (Sunday) columns about books of the day and a page of film features, film reviews and news of Sydney theatre attractions. This section of the paper was headed, referencing Edward Fitzgerald's translation of Omar Khayyam, 'The Moving Row of Magic Shadow Shapes'.[5] Slessor is likely to have written for both these book columns and film pages. It is also worth noting that Slessor was mentored by Frank Marien, his editor at the 'Sun' and later at 'Smith's', until his unexpected death in July 1936 when he was editor at 'Smith's'. Marien was obsessed with film and had a wide circle of friends and colleagues in the Sydney film world. As a "skilled mechanical engineer" Marien built an 80-seat theatrette, including full-sized picture projector and sound equipment at his home in Miranda, south of Sydney where he held regular screenings.[6]

In this period of Slessor's life, when he married Noela Senior (1922), and was establishing himself as an accomplished journalist, he was also actively involved in the Sydney literary and artistic world. He was connected to Sidney Ure Smith's 'Art in Australia' and also belonged to a literary Bohemian set around Norman Lindsay, including his son Jack, Robert D. FitzGerald and Hugh McCrae. With Jack Lindsay and Frank C. Johnson, Slessor edited the four issues of 'Vision: A Literary Quarterly' from 1923 to 1924. This journal was mainly a vehicle for Norman Lindsay's art and ideas but also included an interview with Lindsay where Slessor introduced the idea of an Australian film industry.[7]

4 Geoffrey Dutton: Kenneth Slessor. A Biography, p. 27.
5 The full stanza from Fitzgerald's 'Rubaiyat of Omar Kayyam' reads: We are no other than a row | Of Magic Shadow-shapes that come and go | Round with the Sun-illumined Lantern held | In Midnight by the Master of the Show.
6 Slessor mentions this cinematic enthusiasm of Marien's in his obituary in 'Smith's' on 25 July 1936, p. 2; his rhetorical control in this obituary is typical of his skill, as well as learning: "I did not think that at any time I should write an article like this about Frank Marien. The role of a Bossuet is as distasteful to most newspapermen as that of a Boswell. A calling which systematises the simulation of public emotion makes the discussion of personal emotion the more painful".
7 See Kenneth Slessor: An Interview with Norman Lindsay, pp. 8-19.

In late 1924 the newly appointed editor of Melbourne 'Punch', John Bede Dalley, invited Slessor to join the newspaper as chief sub-editor.[8] Slessor went to live in Melbourne and to work for a paper that had been running since 1855, originally one of the most successful colonial imitations of London 'Punch'. Dalley's revived 'Punch' advertised itself around the country as a newspaper of national scope. For this paper, Slessor wrote about and reviewed, on the 'Plays, Music and Art' page, and often very amusingly, the range of Melbourne theatrical and musical events, as well as reviews, melodramas, and films. Slessor's immersion in the world of Melbourne theatrical culture includes attention to genre, representation of character, knowledge of music and musical performance, the hackneyed done well, and a keen awareness of the audience's reactions, all of which he carried over into his writing about the cinema for 'Smith's Weekly'. There is also an instance of Slessor's serious literary interests reflected in the publication in 'Punch' of a paper he delivered to the Melbourne University Literary Society. This paper, on "The Great Australian Mausoleums" was about the "menace of the orthodox" in Australian poetry, epitomized for him in anthologies like the 'Oxford Book of Australian Verse', edited by Walter Murdoch, and Bertram Stevens's 'An Anthology of Australian Verse'.[9] In this serious literary vein Slessor also published an initialled review in the Christmas Day issue of 'Punch' for 1924 of Sir Robert Garran's translation of Heine's poetry, 'Heine's Book of Songs'.[10] In this review Slessor displayed not just his admiration of Heine's poetry but also his familiarity with Heine scholarship and translation, with mention of the "creditable, standard" translations of Heine by Thomas Brooksbank and Margaret Armour. Slessor's own poem "Heine in Paris" was written in this year and included in his second collection of poems 'Earth-Visitors' (1926). As a sub-editor, Slessor would have undoubtedly worked closely with these aspects of the paper's production and the film and theatre pages certainly represented a serious and detailed coverage of film and theatre by 'Punch'. It also included articles like C. J. Dennis's long feature of 21 May 1925 "Australia and the Films", about the economics of production and exhibition, and Australian vs American movie production companies.

By early August 1926, though, Slessor was back in Sydney, working at the 'Sun', and within a year he had moved to 'Smith's Weekly', in the latter half of 1927. Before Slessor became heavily involved in film reviewing he wrote a feature article "Round Australia with the Bestsellers",[11] a partly comic geographizing of national readership, and the first appearance of this kind of cultural notice in the newspaper. Slessor describes Australia's "zones of reading":

> If an expert were asked to draw up a list of the favourite reading of the various State capitals, it would amount to something like this: Sydney: Guide to Form, telephone directories, railway time-tables, "The Income Tax Explained" and Edgar Wallace; Melbourne: "The Quiver," "The Sunday at Home," "The Rearing of Guinea-pigs," "Collected Sermons by the Rev. Dundreary," and "Fifty Tours Out

8 Geoffrey Dutton: Kenneth Slessor. A Biography, p. 88.
9 Kenneth Slessor: The Great Australian Mausoleums, p. 32.
10 Kenneth Slessor: Heine's Music, p. 52.
11 Kenneth Slessor: Round Australia with the Bestsellers, p. 12.

of Melbourne"; Adelaide: "Marius the Epicurean," "Behaviour in Polite Society," "Hints on Etiquette," "The Complete Letter Writer," and "Memoirs of a Dean".[12]

Slessor though didn't go on to curate a books page for 'Smith's', which wasn't a literary publication in the way the 'Bulletin' or the 'Australian Journal' was, but he did write a couple of serious features on both Australian publishing and censorship in 1933.[13] Although Slessor's coverage of a national cultural industry and its component parts would be adapted for his film pages. It wasn't till after World War II, and at a different newspaper, the Sydney 'Daily Telegraph', that Slessor would return to the kind of literary journalism that he wrote briefly at the beginning of his time at 'Smith's'.

Over 1929 'Smith's' marks various aspects of the full arrival of the talkies, beginning with the part-sound film and progressing to the full talking picture. In his first signed feature for 1930, "That Movie Kiss. The Stage Takes the Knock", Slessor described the beginning of the talkies era: "Softly and stealthily, the Revolution came. One day, it was a theory, a dream of men in a laboratory; next morning, before the world could rub its eyes, it was a fact".[14] And again at the beginning of 1931 in his article "A Flashback for 1931 – Looking Over the Talkie-year – Analysis of "Smith's" Barometer" he wrote more hyperbolically about the talkie revolution in the media. In this article, looking back at life B. C. (Before Cinesound), he writes about the broader epochal change he has lived through:

> Another reel has gone into the darkness. We sit in the theatre and look back. By the magic of that little bit of crystal in the camera's eye, the modern Roc's egg, we have gone flying into gulfs and valleys, into tenements and opera-houses, over the spires of cities and the sand of deserts. This is the most charming of all pastimes – looking back. The pleasure is added to when we survey 1930, by the significance of something in the film-world which can only be compared to a sort of French Revolution – the upsetting of accepted standards, and the enthronement of strange gods.
>
> Historically the year that has just passed will be a source of delving, and brow-scratching to professors long after the projection-machines of our period have been stored away in museums with zoetropes and magic-lanterns. After ten years of torpor, the Sleeping Beauties of the film woke up and stretched themselves in 1929. That was a time of conjecture and experiment, of panic-stricken readjustment and fabulous prophecy. By this time last year, the changes of sheer mechanism had been more or less perfected. What followed in 1930 were the changes of thought and style, the gradual concessions of an antique dumb-show to the demands of a new and organic art.
>
> Think of the early films of this year, and compare them with the pictures reviewed in "Smith's Weekly" this month, and you begin to realise the gulf that has been bridged. It is no exaggeration to say that in the last twelve months there have been more sweeping metamorphoses, more daring experiments, than have been attempted since the days when Edison amused himself with a kinematograph. After 12 months, theories have settled down. The talkie, from being the sport

12 Ibid.

13 For example, "Made in Australia. Publications that Challenge the World. Reasons Behind This Tide of Australian Books. Publishing in Our Own Country has Grown Up" (15 July, 1933, p. 14); "New Australian Books. Publishers Who Are Doing Wonders. Fresh Impulse in National Book-Shops Examined" (22 July 1933, p. 5); "How the Censor Tried to Kick "Bounty" Film": "Had pure-minded Mr Cresswell O'Reilly deliberately set out to exterminate Australian pictures, he could not have done anything more arbitrary or despotic than his efforts to cripple "The Bounty"" (11 March 1933, p. 10).

14 Kenneth Slessor: That Movie Kiss. The Stage Takes the Knock, p. 17.

> of technicians and incendiaries, has become a vehicle almost as orthodox as the sonata. Boundaries have been ruled, laws laid down, an established code of drama has been framed. Perhaps the most noticeable of all these amendments has been the curtailment of dialogue.
>
> Intoxicated with their new-found powers, directors of the early talkies indulged in an orgy of conversation. The trend to-day is towards the minimum of sound; unessential voices, unnecessary speech, superfluous words have been eliminated. Audiences are spared the bombardment of dissonance which gave them a headache in that era of exuberance. A capitulation of the history which has been made in 1930 affords a surprising sidelight on the strides of the microphone.[15]

It is also at this point that Slessor's light verse, in poems like "It, If and Also", "Tete-à-Tete" and "The Girl on the Corner", changes to reflect the way in which cinema and the possibilities for enchantment and fantasy that it offers, has become part of people's everyday lives. The other side of the story of the success of the sound film is depicted in "Goodbye – Chorus Lady!" where Slessor dramatises the loss of employment and opportunity for theatre workers, like chorus girls, now that the "Vitaphone bellow[s], | and Only the Magnavox howls".[16] In "Passed by Mr. Cressy O'Reilly" Slessor addresses the issue of state censorship of the movies in a satirical piece about the cutting of a song from the movie 'Paris'.[17] This marks the beginning of Slessor's and 'Smith's' long and personal campaign against Cresswell O'Reilly, the Commonwealth Film Censor in 1925 and then as Chief Censor from 1928 to 1942.[18] Nineteen-thirty also sees the Screenery (sometimes Screen'ry) page of 'Smith's' begin to take on the style and content of the later 'Through 'Smith's' Private Projector' page 'Conducted by Kenneth Slessor.'

What also happens in 1930, at the same time as reviewing is beginning to take its new form, is that an awareness of the possibilities for and obstacles facing local movie production emerges. Reviews sometimes criticised films for their style or narrative, but always bore in mind the audience's responses. The review of 'Common Clay', for example, referred to it as "the best sob-drama in months", but also recognized that it "held its first-night audience from the word go".[19] 'Smith's' also noticed the films of UFA, "the famous German film corporation, which in the days of silent pictures gave Australia many remarkable reels", but what the reviewer draws attention to is UFA's technologies of sound, recognizing German "mechanical superiority" in this regard.[20] For all the often racist elements in 'Smith's' nevertheless Paramount's 1930 film 'The Silent Enemy', about the Ojibwa nation and pre-white settlement of Canada, and using Indigenous actors, is an instance of a review of a silent film which recognizes both its technical and political value: "A slice of primitive life, interpreted by redskins [sic], here is another of the occasional achievements which reveal the amazing scope of the

15 Kenneth Slessor: A Flashback for 1931, p. 21. In this article Slessor goes on to list the other "landmarks of the year" [1930]: "Fox's amalgamation with Hoyt's", the "return of vaudeville and orchestras to the theatres", the "advent of F.W. Thring as a first Australian film producer on a really important scale", the appearance of "many new stars new to the screen", and a long list of "individual scenes that clung to the memory" (ibid.).
16 Kenneth Slessor: Slessor, Kenneth. Goodbye – Chorus Lady!, p. 8.
17 Kenneth Slessor, Passed by Mr. Cressy O'Reilly, p. 7.
18 Ironically, Slessor agreed to an appointment to the National Literature Board of Review (a Commonwealth government censorship board) established in 1967.
19 Kenneth Slessor: Review of Common Clay, p. 7.
20 Ibid.

screen [...] Dialogue has no part in the picture, but none is needed. It is essentially a silent film and a first-class one".[21]

Nineteen-thirty is the year in which Slessor's profile as 'Smith's' leading film reviewer becomes established, in terms of recognition in one of the banners used interchangeably from mid 1930 for the screen page and by the increasingly extended film reviews whose preoccupations, phrases and words were shared with later reviews signed by Slessor. By October 1930 the film page's content and orientation had been stabilised in terms of review length, iconography of ratings, accompanying stories and use of black and white art. Furthermore filmmakers such as Ken Hall referred to Slessor's 'Screenery' reviews from this period before the more formal recognition afforded by the change of banner to "Through 'Smith's' Private Projector conducted by Kenneth Slessor". This reorganisation in March 1931 signals Slessor's role as the principal writer and curating influence behind the film pages. In his reviews Slessor discusses a wide range of formal aspects of film viewing and film making. He is always aware of the genres of film as they are developing over the years of his reviewing, referring to both familiar (the Western) and longstanding genres (melodrama) and at other times to emerging groups of films that he calls film series, such as films set in hotels, on a boat, or train, etc. His reviews also reveal his predilections and foibles in relation to genres, such as his dislike of Westerns and his liking for the Marx Brothers and screwball comedies, and his long-term interest in the musical. This is his review of 'The Saddle Buster' (11 June 1932): "Better name would have been 'Brain Buster' or 'Heartbreaker'. This must be the decrepit last of a series which we had hoped was extinct. Yes, it's another of those broncho-operas, full of the inanities and idiocies which disfigured the screen 20 years ago. The poor old phantom totters on to celluloid again. Last appearance, by request".[22] He also discusses the oeuvres of directors – a favourite is Frank Capra – and his sense of what acting and performance for the sound cinema is – for his favourites are Charles Laughton and Greta Garbo. This is his review of 'Grand Hotel' (MGM) from 8 October 1932:

> 'Grand Hotel' has accomplished the impossible – it has lived up to everything the advertisements have said about it. It is real entertainment revolving around Greta Garbo though most of the honors go to a masterpiece of character acting by Lionel Barrymore. Nothing as good as his portrait of the suburban clerk, elderly and dying, who decides to live in the real sense the last few hours before death has been seen in Australia. Much to his own surprise, however, he finishes up not by dying, but by taking the pretty typist (Joan Crawford) off to Paris, in circumstances which make us rather doubt his innocence.
>
> Greta Garbo excels herself in this picture. She has rarely been more convincing, and whereas in the past she has more or less been accepted as a phase in screen-fashions, she readily demonstrates here that she is an actress of a quality that will endure. She rises to supreme heights: and by contrast, Joan Crawford, splendid though she is as the sophisticated typist, becomes merely a good super. Incidentally, this picture reveals Greta Garbo as being exceptionally tall. One did not really appreciate that fact before.

21 Kenneth Slessor: Review of Silent Enemy, p. 7.
22 Kenneth Slessor: Review of The Saddle Buster, p. 21.

> 'Grand Hotel' is merely a page torn out of the book of life. Its charm is in its truth. Nothing is strained to 'get effect'; it is convincing to the last degree. By all means see it.[23]

Slessor is also interested in film adaptations of literary texts throughout his career as a film critic. From 21 March 1931 through to 25 June 1938 Slessor appears as 'Smith's' film pages' editor variously under the heading "Conducted by Kenneth Slessor" or "by Kenneth Slessor". In various versions of the masthead over these years Slessor also appears as a black-and-white illustrated portrait. Sometimes in these film pages the initials K.S. would appear at the end of these reviews. This is the case for some 90 reviews between 28th March 1931 (the first instance of the new masthead "Through Smith's Private Projector Conducted by Kenneth Slessor") and 1938 (the last). In these reviews Slessor often, but not always, used the personal pronoun 'I'. This 'I' was not only to indicate personal views sometimes at odds with the ratings to a film being assigned (based on assessments of enjoyment, popularity and box office potential) but seems often to be used to mix things up in the review format or to 'make acceptable' some interest in the film quite apart from its story. Sometimes whimsical, sometimes acerbic, sometimes simply economical, the 'I' seems to have introduced a more personal touch. But mostly Slessor's reviews on the pages headed "conducted by" or "by" Kenneth Slessor were not signed.

There are noticeable, important aspects of how the film pages change and develop over the decades of Slessor's film reviewing, another reason why it is so useful to see Slessor's signed writing within the journalistic milieu of his unsigned work and the writing of other authors on the pages. The calculus of these changes is in response not only to Slessor's development as a thinker and writer about film, but to external responses by readers and audiences to 'Smith's' project of film commentary. There is a strong residual sense of play-writing and stage performance in Slessor's early 1930s reviewing of film, for example, not surprisingly given his immersion in those cultural forms from his first days as a journalist. One example: "here at last is a motion-talking film ['The Big Trail'] that is something more than a mere photograph stage-show, or a collection of circus riders disguised as cowboys doing picturesque but futile stunts".[24] But this residual reliance on comparisons with stage drops away in favour of recognition of the motion picture series. In the earlier period there is a very strong reliance on judgement and critical acumen, reflected in the constant use of the 'Smith's' Barometer, while in later reviews he seems to develop a more interactive, nuanced relationship to film audiences. A good film, for example, may not be a popular film and he articulates why audiences should appreciate such films. This is about 'Marie Walewska' (1938): "as entertainment it is possibly too good to be what is known as a 'box-office winner' [...] it is sufficiently out of its class and particularly in acting to make us suspect the general public won't go as mad about it as they have over so many MGM films of less absolute worth".[25] It is also noticeable that the film page includes some gradually longer reviews as it develops, allowing

23 Kenneth Slessor: Review of Grand Hotel, p. 18.
24 Kenneth Slessor: Review of The Big Trail, p. 7.
25 Kenneth Slessor: Review of Marie Walewska, p. 23.

Slessor's page to differentiate itself from other reviewing venues (like the 'Sydney Morning Herald'). From 1932 for example, it's not unusual to see reviews of 600-1,000 words, along with reviews of other varying lengths. The greater length of these feature reviews allows films to be highlighted, with extended coverage, in contrast to shorter notices, industry or exhibition news, or reader comments.

How do we understand a cultural artefact from the 1920s, 1930s and into the 1940s? We can't experience that artefact in the way movie-goers and readers of the 'Sun', 'Punch', the 'Herald' and 'Smith's Weekly' might have in those decades as film and the cinema were evolving in Australia. We can only read the archive of its traces. But it is an important and unique archive because it is about the first decades of the sound cinema and the new role of the film critic who was making sense of this first decade and anticipating its possibilities – being both provoked and disappointed. As a journalist and film writer Slessor was deeply immersed in, and affected by, the experience of film, and he relished the critical and educational function of the film reviewer in that era. In his encounter with the sound film Slessor was able to bring to bear his extensive knowledge of literature, theatre (classical and musical), and popular song, as film created and redefined its relation to adjacent cultural forms. Methods of research and selection are part of our understanding of cultural artefacts of the past. Slessor's writing about film for popular newspapers, as someone involved every day in the medium in multiple and layered ways, and with complex relations to the culture within which he worked, provides a unique chronicle of one of the prehistories of contemporary media culture.

References

Dutton, Geoffrey: Kenneth Slessor. A Biography. Ringwood: Penguin 1991.

O'Regan, Tom, Huw Walmsley-Evans: The Emergence of Australian Film Criticism. In: Historical Journal of Film Radio and Television, 38, 2018, 2, pp. 296-321. doi: 10.1080/01439685.2017.1300409.

Slessor, Kenneth: A Flashback for 1931– Looking Over the Talkie-year – Analysis of "Smith's" Barometer'. In: Smith's Weekly, 3 January 1931, p. 21.

——: An Interview with Norman Lindsay. In: Art in Australia, Norman Lindsay Number, Third Series, 35, December 1930, pp. 8-19.

——: Frank Marien Is Dead. In: Smith's Weekly, 25 July 1936, p. 2, http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article235828932 (accessed 17 August 2021).

——: Goodbye – Chorus Lady! In: Smith's Weekly, 23 August 1930, p. 8.

——: Passed by Mr. Cressy O'Reilly. In: Smith's Weekly, 22 February 1930, p. 7.

——: Round Australia with the Bestsellers. In: Smith's Weekly, 31 December 1928, p. 12.

——: That Movie Kiss. The Stage Takes the Knock. In: Smith's Weekly, 4 January 1930, p. 17.

——: The Great Australian Mausoleums. In: Punch, 22 October 1925, p. 32.

——: Earth-Visitors. London: Fanfrolico Press 1926.

——: Thief of the Moon. Sydney: Hand press of J. T. Kirtley 1924.

——: Heine's Music. In: Punch, 25 December 1924, p. 52.

——: Review of Common Clay. In: Smith's Weekly, 4 October 1930, p. 7.

——: Review of Grand Hotel. In: Smith's Weekly, 8 October 1932, p. 18.

——: Review of Marie Walewska. In: Smith's Weekly, 1 January 1938, p. 23.

——: Review of The Big Trail. Smith's Weekly, 31 January 1931, p. 7.

——: Review of The Saddle Buster. In: Smith's Weekly, 11 June 1932, p. 21.

——: Review of The Silent Enemy. In: Smith's Weekly, 11 October 1930, p. 7.